

AN INSCRIPTION IN THE HIEROGLYPHIC SCRIPT FROM  
THE SYME SANCTUARY, CRETE (SY Hf 01)

I. The Inscription\*

The tablet (Pl. 1 and Fig. 1) is of a well-known type, described in French as ‘lame à deux faces’ and attested at Malia, both at the palace<sup>1</sup> and in Quartier Mu<sup>2</sup>, but not at Knossos. Measured vertically, i.e. in suspended position, its dimensions are as follows: width 3.6 cm.; preserved height 3.7 cm.; thickness 1.0 cm. Its restored height would be ca. 10 cm.<sup>3</sup> The tablet was slightly larger than the largest ‘lame à deux faces’ from Quartier Mu (CHIC #089), which measures 2.5 x 8.3 x 0.8 cm., but very close to the size of the largest ‘lame’ from the palace (CHIC #109), of which only the upper part remains, with preserved dimensions of 2.6 x 6.1 x 0.9 cm.

Since this type of document was always perforated at the top, a suspension hole can also be restored in this case. In addition it can

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\* I would like to express my gratitude to Dr T. McGeorge for her English translation of the French text, and to Dr P. Muhly for her skilfull ‘cleaning’ of the final version.

<sup>1</sup> Six examples in the *Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae* (edited by J.-P. Olivier and L. Godart with the collaboration of J.-Cl. Poursat, Paris, 1995; henceforth CHIC), #105–110 (= H. 16, 15, 18, 17, 14 and 19 in F. Chapouthier, *Les écritures minoennes au palais de Mallia*, Paris, 1930).

<sup>2</sup> Ten examples, CHIC #085–094 (= nos. 7, 3, 6, 4, 1 and 5 in L. Godart and J.-P. Olivier, “Écriture hiéroglyphique crétoise”, in J.-Cl. Poursat, *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia. Le Quartier Mu*, vol. I, Paris, 1978; and nos. 317, 320, 318 and 319 in J.-P. Olivier, “Écriture hiéroglyphique crétoise: Addenda”, in J.-Cl. Poursat, *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia. Le Quartier Mu*, vol. III. *Artisans minoens. Les maisons-ateliers du Quartier Mu* [in press]).

<sup>3</sup> The state of preservation of this accidentally fired piece of clay is quite good. Some traces of erases as well as an intentional, but probably meaningless, small hole made by the stylus are visible on the bottom register.

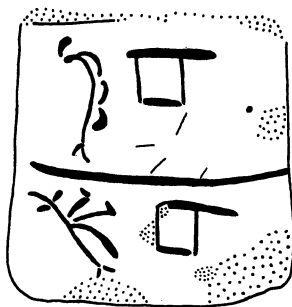


Fig. 1 SY Hf 01 (1:1)



Fig. 2 Logogram \*171



Fig. 3 Logogram \*159

be assumed that the text began as usual from this hole. The fragment preserves therefore only the end of the inscription.

On the surviving fragment only one face carries signs, but it is possible that the missing top of the other face was also inscribed.<sup>4</sup> Four signs are clearly visible and the trace of a fifth can be detected at the break. The two bottom signs are separated from the top two by a deeply incised, horizontal dividing line, so that each group of two signs constitutes a separate entry. This is a phenomenon attested

<sup>4</sup> Five opisthographic examples from Quartier Mu and three from the palace are known.

three times at Quartier Mu (CHIC #089.a, #089.b, #092.b) and once at the palace (CHIC #109.a). The inscription began below the suspension hole but was incised with the hole on the right of the scribe as, for instance, on CHIC #089, a completely preserved opisthographic tablet from Quartier Mu, which has a dividing line on each face.<sup>5</sup>

Two of the four preserved signs are different and two are identical.<sup>6</sup> Their identification has not been easy and I shall not ask for blind acceptance. Nevertheless, given that in the Aegean world clay tablets are always economic documents, what we can logically expect at the end of an entry – and this is the case twice in this tablet – is a logogram (representing a commodity) followed by an indication of quantity (a number or a ‘fraction’). Fortunately the first of the two differing signs corresponds fairly closely to a logogram (\*171 of CHIC) attested both at Knossos and at Malia (Fig. 2).<sup>7</sup>

The second of the two differing signs could, with a little imagination, recall the sign \*159 that precedes \*171 on the bar from Malia (Fig. 3). I confess, however, that this association is more a matter of proximity than of formal similarity, and I am prepared to accept a new logogram here.<sup>8</sup> In any case the bars #067 and #118, where \*171 appears, deal only with agricultural commodities. The logograms for WINE, WHEAT, FIGS and for several types of VASES, whose contents were represented by ‘branches’, are readily identifiable along with others, which, being unique, are still obscure in meaning but must also represent agricultural products.

The more than probable presence of logogram \*171 at Syme and the possible presence of logogram \*159 make it quite likely that this

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<sup>5</sup> This line was traced vertically but ‘read’ horizontally, at least when the object was suspended. This is the reading followed in CHIC as well as in the present edition. We possess too little comparative evidence to formulate a ‘rule’ concerning this practice.

<sup>6</sup> If slight differences are discernible in the latter on the photograph and the drawing, they are due to the presence of two pebbles that deflected the normal path of the stylus.

<sup>7</sup> On the rectangular clay bars KN #067.a (= P. 113 in A. J. Evans, *Scripta Minoa*, vol. I. The Hieroglyphic and Primitive Linear Classes, Oxford, 1909, and MA #118.a (= H. 20 in F. Chapouthier [supra n. 1]).

<sup>8</sup> After all only 33 of them can be identified as opposed to 121 in Linear B and 84 in Linear A, counting in both cases only the simple forms while excluding the sexed animal forms and the logograms in ligature in which the simple form was included.

document was a list of agricultural products like those found on the small, unperforated rectangular bars from Knossos<sup>9</sup> and on the unique unperforated, rectangular bar from the palace at Malia, which definitely constitute a coherent group.<sup>10</sup>

Since it is certain that the sign repeated twice on the Syme tablet is not a number, it must be a ‘fraction’. The ‘agricultural product’ \*171 is followed at Knossos by the numeral ‘100’, whose reading is doubtful, and at Malia by the numeral ‘1’.<sup>11</sup> The logogram \*159 is followed at Malia by the numeral ‘10’ and the fraction 304/Λ. There exists a possible resemblance between the fraction Λ (Fig. 4) and the sign that appears twice on SY Hf 01.

Since fractions are so rare in the Cretan Hieroglyphic script that the range of variation of a given sign is impossible to ascertain,<sup>12</sup>

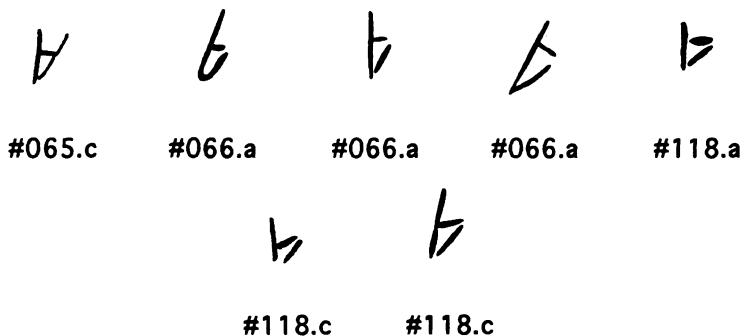


Fig. 4 Fraction 304/Λ



Fig. 5 Fraction 308/Q

<sup>9</sup> CHIC #065–067 (= P. 111+114, 112 and 113 in Evans [supra n. 7]).

<sup>10</sup> CHIC #118 (= H. 20 in F. Chapouthier [supra n. 1]).

<sup>11</sup> The number itself is followed by the ‘pseudo-fraction’ 301/Γ.

<sup>12</sup> A maximum of 41 signs for fractions is attested as opposed to more than 500 in Linear A and more than 1700 signs for fractional measures in Linear B.

I am not proposing that the identical signs on the Syme tablet are variants of 304/Δ. Instead I shall draw a parallel between the signs on the Syme tablet and the fraction 308/Ω (Fig. 5), which is attested on three hieroglyphic documents of another kind, i.e. on sealstones (#206, #291 and #292 in CHIC).

In fact this rather homogeneous group of seals<sup>13</sup> presents some curious problems. What are 'logograms' and 'fractions' doing on seals? What is the relationship between these 'archival signs' and the 'formula' A-SA-/SA-etc. that appears on #292? What about the unique 'stepped' form of the small faces of #291 and #292? Being unable to answer these questions, I shall give here only the text of these objects according to CHIC<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 6) and offer a brief commentary.

1) #206.α: 308/Ω with the fractions 302/Δ, 307/Σ and 309/λ, each inscribed on a quarter of the surface and delimited by two lines crossing at right angles; on the other face (β) the logograms for FIGS and WINE separated by a line.<sup>15</sup>

2) #292.δ: 308/Ω on one of the steps and the fraction 302/Δ on the other; on the other small face (β) the fractions 307/Σ and 309/λ;<sup>16</sup> on the two large faces (α and γ) the formula A-SA-/SA-etc.

3) #291.β: 308/Ω is dotted because, according to our interpretation, it was carefully drawn in the form of the sign 038 (which is not too different in shape) due to a 'misunderstanding' on the part of the engraver or on the part of the designer of the model that the engraver was copying; on the other step of the same face the representation of a cylindrical receptacle with a curved handle and a conical lid, which recalls closely the sign \*123 of Linear B;<sup>17</sup> on the two

<sup>13</sup> Homogeneous not only because of the signs they bear but in the case of the last two because of the 'stepped' form of their small faces, which, to my knowledge, is unique.

<sup>14</sup> Seal #206 (from the Giamalakis Collection) was previously unpublished. We thank Mrs. A. Sakellariou, who kindly gave us permission to reproduce it in CHIC.

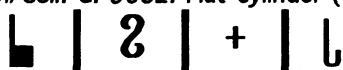
<sup>15</sup> Taken as a whole the seal would perhaps 'symbolize' these two commodities and some of the signs used for measuring them.


<sup>16</sup> The 'sum' of the small faces of this seal is the same as that of face α of #206 (and of faces δ + 1/2 of β + 1/2 of γ of #291), which cannot be accidental. In so far as the 'text' of the two large faces of this seal is concerned, it records part of the famous 'libation formula' A-SA-/SA-etc., a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> This sign is not a logogram *sensu stricto* but the main unit of 'dry commodities' (usually 'spices', hence the transcription as AROM). In #291.β it was interpreted as a logogram on the one hand because of the parallel with face γ of the same

**#206 [2] CR S (2/2) 01 / CMS III, •.**

HM/Coll. G. 3082. Flat cylinder (1,3 x 1,8 cm). Onyx.

$\alpha$  

$\beta$  

$\alpha$   $\varphi \mid \gamma \mid \Sigma \mid \Delta$

$\beta$   $*155 \mid *156$

**#291 [5] CR S (3/4) 01 / CMS II, 2, 315.**

HM 1269. Four-sided prism (0,8-0,7 x 1,7 cm). Black steatite.

$\beta$  

$\gamma$  

$\delta$  

$\beta$   $*157 \mid \varphi$

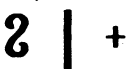
$\gamma$   $*155 \mid \Sigma$

$\delta$   $\Delta \mid \gamma$

**#292 [1] GOUVES S (4/4) 01 / CMS II, 2, 217.**

HM 1868. Four-sided prism (1-0,6 x 1,4 cm). White-yellow marble.

$\alpha$  

$\beta$  

$\gamma$  

$\delta$  

$\alpha$  042-019

$\beta$   $\gamma \mid \Sigma$

$\gamma$  019-095-052

$\delta$   $\varphi \mid \Delta$

Fig. 6 Seals #206, #291, and #292 (after CHIC)

steps of the other small face ( $\delta$ ) the fractions  $302/\Delta$  and  $309/\lambda$ ; on face  $\alpha$  a representation of a 'lizard', about which nothing need be said here;<sup>18</sup> on face  $\gamma$  the logogram for FIGS on the first register and a sign we read as the fraction  $307/\Sigma$  on the second. Beside the latter fraction there is something that we cannot identify but which is perhaps not a mere decorative motif.

Whatever their overall interpretation may be, these seals, even if they do not comprise a completely coherent group, are sufficiently similar to allow the fairly certain assumption that the sign appearing twice on SY Hf 01 is the fraction  $308/Q$ ;<sup>19</sup> this is the main point of interest in the context of this study.

In summary, the bottom part of this 'lame à deux faces' bears an inscription, in the Cretan Hieroglyphic script, which registers small, identical amounts of two agricultural commodities of the same kind as those recorded on the unperforated rectangular bars from Knossos (three examples, two of them incomplete) and from the palace at Malia (one complete example). The small quantities implied by the fractions would suggest the distribution rather than the receipt of goods.

In view of the paucity of Hieroglyphic documents it is fortunate that parallels have been found for this unique and fragmentary tablet from Syme. Not only does it belong to a well-known and coherent series of documents, but the nature of its contents can be identified in a reasonably secure fashion. The most interesting aspect of the document, its historical importance, will be discussed in the second section of this paper.

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document and on the other because of the parallel with the whole of #206. The syllabogram A123, for its part, is attested seven times in the tablets from Haghia Triada, Chania and Zakros. Recently it has also appeared on a libation table from the peak sanctuary of Iouktas (IO Za 16, in press) at the end of a sign group preceding the group A-SA-SA-etc. This is, of course, a mere coincidence.

<sup>18</sup> See however below, n. 19.

<sup>19</sup> I stress that this is only a hypothesis, but one resting on strong evidence. The same reasoning applied to the representation of the lizard or to A-SA-/SA-etc. would, at least in my opinion, be nonsensical.

## II. The Find Context and Historical Significance of SY Hf 01

The excavation of the sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite near the village of Kato Syme (District of Viannos) began in 1972 and was brought to a close in 1993, having exposed only part of the site, which, as geomorphology and surface traces indicate, covered at least 17000 m.<sup>2</sup><sup>20</sup> Although sixteen seasons have been devoted to its exploration, the unexpected finds made at Syme seem inexhaustible. The fragmentary tablet published here must count as one of these surprises, since such documents are hitherto unknown from Minoan or Mycenaean sanctuaries located outside settlements.<sup>21</sup>

When three Linear A inscriptions from Syme incised on stone libation tables were published in the 1984 issue of this journal,<sup>22</sup> the evidence for the earliest cult activity at the site was limited to a few vases and sherds dating to the Old Palace period.<sup>23</sup> The situation has since changed dramatically. As a result of more recent discoveries the Old Palace period at Syme can now be seen as one of the most important phases in the history of this long-lived site, which continued to function without interruption in the transition from the second millennium to the first, and was not forgotten until the early Christian era.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For preliminary reports see A. Lebessi, *Praktika* 1972, 193-203; 1973, 188-199; 1974, 222-227; 1975, 322-329; 1976, 400-407; 1977, 403-418; 1981, 350-396; 1983, 348-366; 1984, 440-463; 1985, 263-285; 1986, 241-242; 1987, 269-289; 1988, 244-263; 1991-1993 (in press). For the 1991 and 1992 seasons see the brief accounts in *Ergon* 1991, 103-109; 1992, 93-99. See also A. Lebessi and P. Muhly, "The Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Syme, Crete", *National Geographic Research* 3, 1987, 102-113.

<sup>21</sup> The fragment (HM 1683) was identified by A. Kanta during the sorting of the sherds from the 1991 season. The signs were provisionally identified as belonging to an early stage of Linear A (*Ergon* 1992, 97-98, fig. 125). The photograph on Pl. 1.1 is by G. Xylouris of Herakleion, Crete; those on Pl. 1.2, 3 and the drawings of Figs. 1-6 are by J.-P. Olivier.

<sup>22</sup> P. Metaxa Muhly, "Linear A from Kato Syme", *Kadmos* 23, 1984, 124-135; idem, "Οἱ ἐνεπίγραφες τράπεζες προσφορῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Σύμης τῆς Βιάννου", in *Studies in Honor of G. E. Mylonas*, A, Athens, 1986, 272-283.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Kanta, "Cult, Continuity and the Evidence of Pottery at the Sanctuary of Syme Viannou, Crete", in D. Musti et al., eds., *La transizione dal Miceneo all'Alto Archaismo – Dal palazzo al città*, Roma, 1991, 485-487, figs. 1-7.

<sup>24</sup> For a summary account of the historical development of the sanctuary based on the evidence from 1972-1978 see A. Lebessi, "Ἡ συνέχεια τῆς κρητομυκηναϊκῆς λατρείας. Ἐπιβιώσεις καὶ ἀναβιώσεις", *Ephemeris* 1981 [1983], 1-24. For the discovery of material from the fourth-sixth centuries A.D. see *Ergon* 1992, 93.



In 1987–88 excavation in the center of the sanctuary brought to light parts of a structure (Building V) under the south wing of an extensive Minoan building (Building U), which until that time had been the earliest structure known at Syme (Fig. 7). The best preserved parts of Building V – part of its thick and elaborately built exterior wall and an impressive stretch of pavement – showed that this had been a large and unusually well-constructed building. Additional evidence for its architectural sophistication was provided by a series of column bases and L-shaped elements of serpentinite, which had been re-used as building blocks in the walls of its successor, Building U.

The last season of excavation at Syme, in 1993, has provided new evidence not only for the architectural elaboration of Building V but also for its size, which – at least in one direction – was comparable with, if not greater than, that of its successor. A series of deep probes under the north wing of Building U has uncovered two limestone column bases of uneven size set within an extensive pavement (19.20 m.<sup>2</sup>), which rested on stereo. Proximity and stratigraphic position indicate that the new pavement, which is very similar to that associated with the walls of V, constitutes another part of this building, whose visible length on the north-south axis can be reconstructed as having been at least 21 metres (Fig. 7). Direct evidence for dating Building V is lacking, since there was practically no ceramic evidence associated with its remains in either of the areas investigated.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the indirect evidence garnered in 1993 has important implications for the date of this building.

The excavation of the north wing of Building U, the successor of V, has provided much evidence for the violent destruction of this building, during which the upper courses of its north wall collapsed inward, while the lower courses remained bonded together but leaning at an almost impossible angle. The material found on the floors suggests that the north wing of Building U was devoted to storage and food processing. In the northeast corner of Room 18, however, among the coarse domestic vases that were smashed by the collapse of the north wall, was a delicate cup of egg-shell ware, decorated with impressed and polychrome motifs, a typical product of the MM IIB period. This find not only confirms that both early buildings at

<sup>25</sup> See *Praktika* 1987, 277–281, figs. 6–8; 1988, 247–249, fig. 2, for the absence of undisturbed levels of the Old Palace period and the problems of dating Building V. See also A. Lebessi and P. Muhly, “Aspects of Minoan Cult. Sacred Enclosures. The Evidence from the Syme Sanctuary”, *AA* 1990, 315–336, 319.

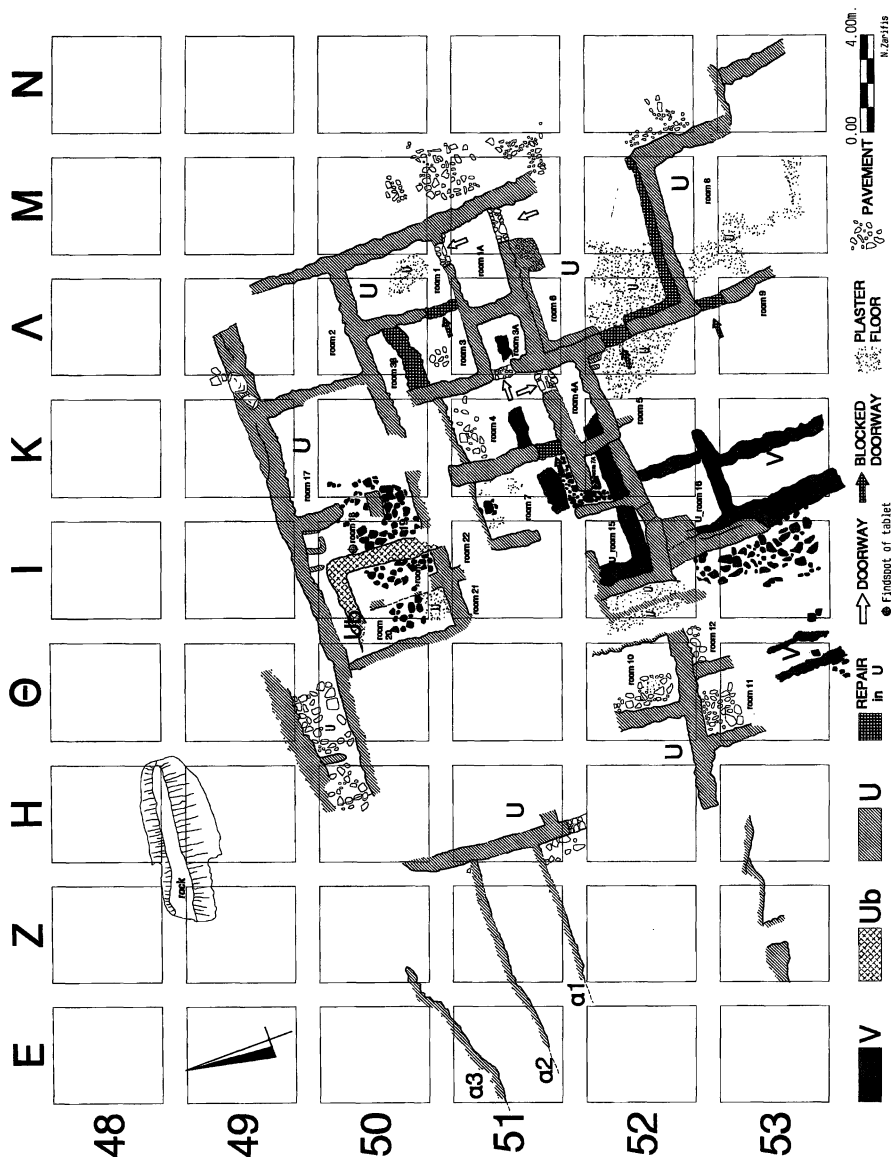


Fig. 7 Syme Sanctuary. Plan of Buildings V, U and Ub

Syme date to the Old Palace period but also implies that the first, Building V, had been built at an early stage of that period.

The fragmentary tablet SY Hf 01 was also found in Room 18 of Building U, but in the destruction debris rather than on the floor. In the area where the fragment was found the destruction fill had been disturbed during the building of a later structure (Structure Ub), a small open-air enclosure erected within the ruins of Building U shortly after the latter's destruction (Fig. 7). Within the space occupied by Ub the destruction debris was cleared out of the rooms of U, their walls were dismantled down to the foundation course or totally demolished and their contents discarded beyond the enclosure. Discarded material, including handleless cups, lamps and small trays, was found on both sides of the spot where the tablet was recovered. It is therefore likely that the tablet had been kept in one of the rooms of Building U and was thrown away together with the rest of their contents. At the same time, one cannot completely rule out the possibility that this small piece came from an earlier context and had been incorporated in the fabric of the dismantled or destroyed walls of this building, which have yielded much miscellaneous material (pot-sherds, bits of stone objects and fragments of plaster, animal bones or carbonized wood) in the course of conservation work. Whatever the case, the tablet cannot date any later than the MM IIB period.<sup>26</sup>

Any discussion of the Syme tablet must take into account the incomplete nature of the contextual evidence and the lack of certainty in the identification of its contents, but these factors do not affect the historical significance of this document. This is the first time that a sanctuary has provided evidence for a type of record-keeping known only from palaces and settlements.<sup>27</sup> Considering that Hieroglyphic economic documents are known only from two palaces, it seems improbable that a remote and isolated cult place like Syme should possess accounts as detailed as those kept by palatial administration. Yet the close similarity of SY Hf 01 to the 'lames à deux faces' from Malia and the rectangular bars from Malia and Knossos im-

<sup>26</sup> In the south part of Building U, where there is much evidence of remodelling operations, the material found in situ in two rooms seems to suggest that this part of the building was re-used and finally destroyed at a later time than the north part. This discrepancy, which has yet to be resolved, is not relevant to the date of the tablet.

<sup>27</sup> J.-P. Olivier, "Structure des archives palatiales en linéaire A et en linéaire B", in E. Lévy, ed., *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 19-22 juin 1985*, Strasbourg, 1987, 227-235, esp. 231.

plies that the administrative system employed in the palaces was also used in at least some cult places. With all due consideration given to the imponderables of preservation, this small scrap of clay must add another dimension to the study of the historical development of the Syme sanctuary and raise new questions concerning its relationship to secular authority.

The extent and architectural complexity of Building V suggest that Syme was already a flourishing concern at some early stage of the Old Palace period, but this building, because of its fragmentary preservation, provides no information regarding the function and organization of the site at that time. Such evidence must come from a later stage of this period, represented by the much better preserved Building U, which, as mentioned above, is also the most likely source of the tablet. This building, albeit less elaborate architecturally than its predecessor, clearly belongs to a phase during which much care and effort were expended on the spatial organization of the site. The result was the orderly juxtaposition of a roofed and an unroofed area, both large and carefully planned. The roofed section, Building U, of which twenty-two rooms have been completely or partially exposed, must have housed a variety of activities. Its north wing contained areas devoted to storage and food preparation, while the south wing included a spacious compartment provided with benches (Room 6), an appropriate gathering place. An adjacent compartment (Room 5) was used for the storage of cultic equipment, of the same types as those employed in the rituals that took place in the open area immediately west of the building – an originally steep slope that had been converted into three terraces and a level area (a square?) by means of retaining walls. Building U communicated with the ‘square’ through a wide doorway set in its west wall. As the arrangement of the walls retaining the ‘square’ suggests, visitors may have approached the sanctuary from the west by means of a ramp (Fig. 7).

The material recovered from the building and the open-air cult area provides some evidence for the existence of at least one workshop, which was engaged in the manufacture of stone vessels, and confirms that the specialized cult vessels of stone and clay, so amply attested in Neopalatial times, were already in use during the Old Palace period. All of this evidence contributes to the overall impression of a large and well-organized cult place, but does not necessarily make obvious the need for such detailed record-keeping as that implied by the short notations preserved on SY Hf 01.

Building U may well be the largest roofed structure known from a Minoan cult place, but its size is hardly comparable to that of a palace.<sup>28</sup> The storage vessels, coarse ware containers, cups, querns, grinders and pounders excavated in its north wing are relatively few and the compartments in which they were used hardly spacious. This evidence indicates that the resident personnel of the sanctuary could not have been very numerous. In addition the harsh weather conditions that prevail at this altitude (1,130 m.) in the winter make it very likely that, unlike secular centers that operated year-round, the sanctuary functioned on a seasonal basis. It seems therefore unlikely that the every-day activities in such an establishment would be complex enough to warrant the meticulous documentation required by palatial administration.

On the other hand, there is ample archaeological evidence that, in addition to several ambitious building projects implemented at the site during the Minoan period, remodelling operations on a lesser scale were carried out at frequent intervals. Building U in particular has preserved much evidence of internal re-arrangements and of extensive maintenance operations on walls and floors. For such work skilled workmen, hired on a daily or short-term basis, may well have been required. Furthermore, given the size and complexity of its plan, the sanctuary in this phase must have expected to receive many visitors. If seasonal festivals occasioned the arrival of large groups of pilgrims, additional personnel may have been employed during these periods of intensified cult activity. It seems more likely that it was such periodic transactions rather than the regular activities of the residents that had to be recorded.<sup>29</sup>

Although it would be of great interest to discover what had been recorded at Syme, it is surely more significant to determine why such records were kept. To whom was the sanctuary accountable? Does the application of palatial bureaucratic procedure at a cult site also mean the exercise of palatial control over its affairs?

<sup>28</sup> The excavated parts of Building U cover an area of 650 m.<sup>2</sup>; the Knossos palace extends over 13,000 m.<sup>2</sup>, while Zakros, the smallest of the Minoan palaces, covers an area of 3,600 m.<sup>2</sup> See C. Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilisation*, London, 1972, Table 14.V.

<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that the expenditures recorded in sanctuary accounts in the Classical and Hellenistic periods also fall within the same broad categories, i.e. the upkeep of the sanctuary and the needs of the cult. For an overview see T. Linders, "Sacred Finances: Some Observations", in T. Linders and B. Alroth, eds., *Economics of Cult, Proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium, 1990, Uppsala, 1992* (= *Boreas* 21), 9–13, especially 10.

The question of possible connections between Syme and secular authority has been raised before<sup>30</sup> and considered by the present authors with particular reference to the theory of a palace-peak shrine ‘nexus’, formulated by J. Cherry,<sup>31</sup> a construct, which, modified and given a different chronological frame, has become a much discussed and widely accepted model.<sup>32</sup> The only point that needs to be reiterated here is that this relationship between specific centers of secular authority and of religious activity assumes the geographical proximity of the relevant sites. Since a palace or large settlement have yet to be discovered in the area around Syme, it remains an open question whether this theory is relevant to the history and development of the sanctuary.

In so far as Syme is concerned, the discovery of SY Hf 01 in an Old Palace context throws new doubt on another postulate of this theory, according to which the palaces assumed control of religious activity in the Neopalatial period by centralizing and organizing the ‘popular’ cults that had developed on the local level during the Old Palace period. There is no need to invoke the tablet in order to assert that Buildings V or U could not have been built merely to serve the religious needs of farmers or pastoralists, however prosperous some of them might have been. SY Hf 01 makes this point unmistakably clear, but could it mean that already in this early period some as yet unidentified center of authority kept track of transactions at Syme from afar?

In the first millennium the votive objects, far more eloquent than those of the Minoan period, give no hint that Syme was dependent on a particular Cretan city-state. The epigraphic evidence from the Hellenistic period indicates that the sanctuary was visited by pilgrims, often of elite status, from several important cities of central and eastern Crete. On the basis of this evidence as well as its remote location and Minoan past, Hellenistic Syme has been plausibly assigned to a group of Cretan cult places, endowed with lands and other goods, which had only loose and periodic connections with

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<sup>30</sup> Lebessi and Muhly (supra n. 25) 334–335.

<sup>31</sup> J. F. Cherry, “Politics and Palaces: Some Problems in Minoan State Formation”, in C. Renfrew and J. F. Cherry, *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-political Change*, Cambridge, 1986, 19–45, 31.

<sup>32</sup> For a recent discussion see A. Peatfield, “Minoan Peak Sanctuaries: History and Society”, *Op. Ath.* 18, 1990, 117–131, esp. 126–131, with references to earlier bibliography. For the impact of this theory on more general treatments of Minoan religion see N. Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, Columbia, S.C., 1993, 116.

secular authority.<sup>33</sup> There is no firm evidence in this respect from Minoan Syme, although some ceramic forms and motifs as well as a few votive objects suggest at times connections with one or another palatial center. These associations, which have yet to be documented in detail, may simply reflect the vagaries of the archaeological record; or, they may be indications that Syme in palatial times enjoyed the semi-autonomous status which it was probably accorded in later periods.

Whatever the case, the obvious importance of the Syme sanctuary throughout the palatial period must lie in the nature of the cult practised during that time. In the first half of the first millennium the thematic, iconographic and stylistic analysis of the main categories of votives indicates that cult activity comprised maturation rituals with participants from the upper social strata of many Cretan cities and communities.<sup>34</sup> Although other kinds of rituals may have also taken place, it is this specialized function that accounts for the wealth and importance of the sanctuary in this period. There is very little that can be said at this point concerning the nature of the cult practised in the period of the old and new palaces, beyond that it attracted large numbers of participants and employed specific types of equipment. The radical change in the plan of the site which was effected at the beginning (?) of the Neopalatial period with the building of the grandiose Sacred Enclosure complex must reflect the increasing importance of the sanctuary; whether it also signals some modifications in ritual practice is not readily apparent.

The detailed study of the excavated remains will probably provide more information on all aspects of the function and organization of the Minoan sanctuary at Syme. Meanwhile this short discussion should serve as a preliminary attempt to consider the unexpected discovery of administrative records at a cult place within the context of religious practice rather than within the context of the bureaucratic practices familiar from secular centers.

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<sup>33</sup> A. Chaniotis, "Habgierige Götter, habgierige Städte", *Ktema* 1988, 21–39, esp. 33–34.

<sup>34</sup> See A. Lebessi, "Τὸ ἱερό τοῦ Ἑρμῆ καὶ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης στὴ Σύμη Βιάννου, I.1. Χάλκινα κρητικὰ τορεύματα", Athens, 1985, 188–198 and "Οἱ λόγοι ἀκτινοβολίας ἐνὸς κρητικοῦ ἱεροῦ", *Enemerotiko Deltio, He en Athenais Archaialogike Hetaireia* 18, 1991, 160–165.