

ILSE SCHOEP

A NEW CRETAN HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTION
FROM MALIA (MA/V Yb 03)

During the 1993 excavations of “Quartier Nu” at Malia, directed by A. Farnoux and J. Driessen, a fragment of a handle with a Cretan Hieroglyphic inscription was found (inv. no. MA 93.0540.28) (Pl. 1).¹ Situated immediately north of the “Atelier de Sceaux” and north-west of the palace, “Quartier Nu” is an important Late Bronze Age building complex which comprises three wings around the sides of a court and knew two main architectural phases, LM III A2–B1 and LM III B2.² Earlier remains found underneath this LM III building are an extensive Middle Minoan II building with paved and plaster floors widely destroyed by a MM III–LM I construction, some walls of which were even re-used in the LM III period.

The object in question was not found *in situ* but during the study of the pottery. The *zembil* with the inscribed handle contained pottery collected from what may have been a rubbish area, east of the east façade of the LM III building, near its main entrance. The majority of the sherds dates to LM III A–B1.

In Malia, Cretan Hieroglyphic inscriptions have hitherto been found in the MM II B “Quartier Mu” and the MM III B “Dépôt hiéroglyphique” in the palace (Room III8).³ It is most probable that

¹ I would like to express my warmest thanks to A. Farnoux and J. Driessen for permission to publish this inscription and for their continuous advice. Further I especially want to thank J.-P. Olivier for reading the manuscript and giving advice.

² For preliminary reports on “Quartier Nu” see BCH 113 (1989), 762–767; BCH 114 (1990), 912–919; BCH 115 (1991), 735–741; BCH 116 (1992), 733–742; A. Farnoux, “Malia à la fin du bronze récent”, in: *Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia* 28–29 (1989–1990), 25–34; id., “Malia et la Crète à l’époque mycénienne”, in: *Revue Archéologique* 1992, 201–216; J. Driessen – A. Farnoux, “Mycenaeans at Malia?”, in: *Aegean Archaeology* (in press).

³ Dated by O. Pelon to MM III A, see “L’épée à l’acrobate et la chronologie maliote”, in: BCH 106 (1982), 189–190, and for a MM III B date see id., “L’épée à l’acrobate et la chronologie maliote (II)”, in: BCH 107 (1983), 701–702.

the inscribed handle originally comes from the MM II building underneath “Quartier Nu”. It is not, however, the first time that Cretan Hieroglyphic inscriptions were encountered in a LM III context: in 1988, three tablet fragments were found in the earth dump from A. Desenne’s 1956 excavations, south-west of “Quartier Nu” and immediately north of the “Atelier de Sceaux”.⁴

Description of Inscribed Object

The object measures 4.20 (height) by 3.40 cm. (width including the rim) and has a diameter of 3.00 cm. It represents the fragment of a rim to which the handle was attached. It suggests an open vessel, type “pot à bec”, which was manufactured in fine, well purified, buff clay with small dark and red inclusions. On the upper part of the vertical handle two signs are incised, but, since the handle is broken, the inscription may originally have been longer (Fig. 1). The signs are carefully executed and deeply incised (ca. 3 mm.), with grooves of ca. 3 to 4 mm. wide. The inscription must have been incised before the firing of the vase.

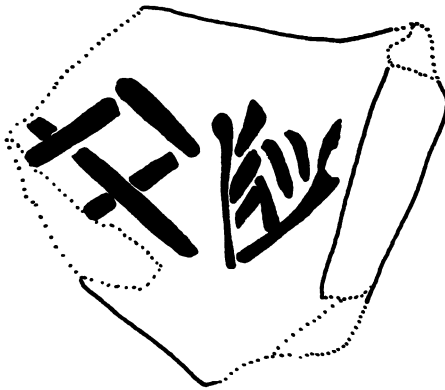


Fig. 1 Drawing of inscribed handle (1.5:1)

⁴ A. Farnoux – J.-P. Olivier, “Trois nouveaux fragments de tablettes en écriture crétoise à Malia”, in: BCH 113 (1989), 97–100.

Inscription

The inscription consists of two signs:

JP 36-P 99 or CHIC⁵ J042-028

The first sign consists of an obliquely placed rectangle, divided into two halves by a stroke running parallel to the upper and lower short side of the rectangle. The handle is broken at the point where the lower side of the rectangle originally lay, but traces of it can still be discerned. The sign may perhaps be identified as P 36 (CHIC 042), “the double axe sign”. A close parallel occurs on a “médaillon” from “Quartier Mu”, where P 36 has the same shape and orientation as on our handle, except for the oblique dividing line which in this case extends beyond the left long side of the rectangle.⁶ On the “médaillon” the double axe sign is the fourth of the inscription.

The second sign (CHIC 028), the “double rameau”, which consists of two divergent twigs, each with three branches, is clear. It is frequent on Cretan Hieroglyphic documents from “Quartier Mu” and the palace at Malia, as well as at Knossos⁷.

The inscription on the Malia handle was written from left to right and its reading is thus dextroverse.

The sequence 042-028 is only once attested, on an unedited seal from the Giamalakis collection (HM G. 3336), where it appears in the sign group 042-028-005, which reading, however, is uncertain.⁸

The inscribed handle brings the number of documents in the Cretan Hieroglyphic script from Malia to 106.⁹ Its importance lies in its being only the second example of an inscription of more than one sign, on the handle of a vessel. The first inscription on this type of non-archival document appeared during the 1990 survey in the Malia area when an inscribed handle of an amphora was discovered.¹⁰ Although 82 “pots à bec” carry potters’ marks and six are stamped, the newly found fragment is the first to bear an inscription.¹¹

⁵ *Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae*, edited by J.-P. Olivier and L. Godart with the collaboration of J.-Cl. Poursat, Paris 1995.

⁶ See L. Godart – J.-P. Olivier, “Le Quartier Mu I. Écriture hiéroglyphique crétoise (*Études Crétoises* XXIII), Paris 1978, n. 10 (HM 1656), 73–74.

⁷ See A. Evans, *Scripta Minoa I*, Oxford 1909, 163–178.

⁸ This information was very kindly communicated to me by J.-P. Olivier.

⁹ This number is reached in CHIC and includes 52 archival documents, 14 sealings, 25 seals and 15 “other” documents, under which also MA/V Yb 03.

¹⁰ S. Müller – J.-P. Olivier, “Deux documents hiéroglyphiques à Malia”, in: BCH 115 (1991), 65–70.

¹¹ L. Godart – J.-P. Olivier (*supra* n. 6), 44, 46: in contrast to these coarse ware “pots à bec”, the clay of the fragment under discussion is rather fine.



Pl. 1. Photograph of inscribed handle (scale 1.5 : 1). Photo P. Collet.