

WOLF-DIETRICH NIEMEIER

## A LINEAR A INSCRIPTION FROM MILETUS (MIL Zb 1)

### Introduction

In 1994, excavations in the Bronze Age levels at Miletus were resumed by a team led by the present writer<sup>1</sup>. One of the main goals of this project is to settle the character of the 'Minoanization' detectable in the so-called first building period at Miletus<sup>2</sup>, which has an evident bearing on the controversial question of the Minoan 'thalassocracy' in the Aegean and its historical reality. Were Minoans living at Miletus during the time of the 'first building period'<sup>3</sup>, and, if so, which of Keith Branigan's three models of Minoan 'colonies' ('Governed Colony', 'Settlement Colony', 'Community Colony')<sup>4</sup> applies to the 'first building period' at Miletus; or are the Minoan features at Miletus due to cultural diffusion and acculturation rather than to Minoan 'colonialism'? The evidence so far collected for answering these questions is, at the close of only the second season of the new excavations, naturally still incomplete. Among the Minoan features ascertained during the new excavations in the level of the 'first building period' are: great quantities of locally-produced Minoan domes-

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank V. von Graeve, the director of the Miletus excavation of the German Archaeological Institute, for inviting me to start a new project on Bronze Age Miletus. To the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, New York, I am most grateful for having generously financed the first two seasons in 1994 and 1995.

<sup>2</sup> As to the definition of this period and finds from its level made during the earlier excavations cf. Weickert 1939, 328–328, Pl. 24; id. 1955, 109–110, 117–118, pls. 28–30; Hommel 1960, 31–33, 43–49, pls. 32–36; Schiering 1960, 4–8, 25–28, pls. 6–10; Mee 1978, 134–135. There is evidence from other areas that human settlement existed at Miletus since the late Chalcolithic period (cf. Parzinger 1989). During the 1995 season we found some evidence that the site at the temple of Athena also was already settled earlier than the 'first building period' (cf. Niemeier & Niemeier, in print).

<sup>3</sup> As believed by Huxley 1968, 8; Cadogan 1984, 14; Wiener 1984, especially p. 18; Niemeier 1986, especially p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> Branigan 1981.

<sup>5</sup> As argued by Melas 1988a, especially p. 59; id. 1988b, 144. 118; id., 1991.

tic ware (conical cups, bowls, tripod cooking pots, firestands, scuttles, discoid loomweights of the Minoan standard type, etc. – Pl. 1a), imports of fine decorated Minoan pottery, fragments of representational wall frescoes of Minoan technique and style, and fragments of Minoan-type stone vessels<sup>6</sup>.

The explanation of the import of fine decorated pottery and stone vessels, and of the execution of the Minoan wall-paintings, could be that “elites may have sought to raise the standards of their ‘symbols of excellence’, by increasing the quality and by renewing the repertoire of imported items and ideas”<sup>7</sup>. However, the abundance of Minoan-type domestic pottery cannot in my opinion be explained by acculturation, and is, to say the least, “very suggestive” of the actual presence of Minoans<sup>8</sup>. According to our preliminary estimate, more than 95% of the pottery excavated by us in the level of the ‘first building period’ is of Minoan type, and only a very small percentage is of western Anatolian character, although western Anatolia had a strong indigenous pottery tradition<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, Miletus of the ‘first’ and the ‘second building periods’ (in the latter, Minoan pottery was replaced by Mycenaean pottery, in the fine decorated vases as well as in the domestic ware) differs distinctly from other western Anatolian Bronze Age sites further to the north where local Anatolian wares form the great majority of the pottery material and only few Aegean imports occur<sup>10</sup>. In this connection the first secure

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<sup>6</sup> See Gates 1996, 302–303, figs. 16 (domestic pottery), 17 (fresco fragment); Niemeier & Niemeier, in print.

<sup>7</sup> Quotation from Melas 1991, 188. Cf., for instance, the imports of Minoan stone vessels in the Greek mainland (Warren 1967; Niemeier 1986, 249, fig. 13), those of fine Minoan pottery in the Levant and in Egypt (Niemeier 1986, 250, figs. 19, 21) or the Aegean fresco-paintings in palaces of the Hyksos period in the Levant and in Egypt (Niemeier 1991, 1995, Bietak 1995, Morgan 1995).

<sup>8</sup> As stated by Schofield 1983, 298–299; cf. Wiener 1984, 19–22; id. 1990, 135–140; Niemeier 1986, 249.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kull 1988, 42–96; ead. 1989, 53–65; Mellaart – Murray 1995, 99–109.

<sup>10</sup> At Troy, the only known neopalatial Minoan imports are three stone vases – s. Warren 1967, 39. 43. 51. Further to the south, between Troy and Miletus, hitherto no Minoan imports are known. A similar situation as at Miletus may exist at Iasos, but so far no statements about the quantitative relations between Minoan and local Anatolian pottery have been published (cf. Laviosa 1973). Later, in the time of the second and third building periods of the Bronze Age settlement at Miletus, the situation is similar: ca. 98% of the pottery at Miletus shows Mycenaean characteristics, whereas at Troy V1 1–2% of the pottery is Mycenaean (s. Blegen 1953, 16; Mee 1978, 146), and at Menemen-Panaztepe only 0.6% (s. Ünal 1991,

Linear A inscription found on the Anatolian mainland<sup>11</sup> is of special interest.

MIL Zb 1 (Excavation nos.: MIL-AT 94.159, 95.282)

Figs. 1–2, Pl. 1b<sup>12</sup>

### Description of fragments

The inscription was incised on the belly of a large vessel of undefinable shape of which three joining sherds carrying the inscription have been identified. The fragment is 0.072 m high, 0.09 m wide, and 0.007 m thick. It has an almost straight wall. The turning marks on the inner side are rather faint. The light-brown clay of a rather soft consistency is grit-tempered and highly micaceous. This fabric is characteristic of the locally-produced Minoan domestic ware at Miletus<sup>13</sup>.

### Context

The sherds were found in 1994 and 1995 in square 94/29 within a destruction deposit, together with several hundreds of domestic vessels, some fine decorated pottery, fresco fragments, burnt mudbricks,

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24, based on information by A. Erkanal). H. Erkanal confirmed these differences between Miletus on the one hand and Menemen-Panaztepe as well as Klazomenai-Limantepe on the other hand during a visit to Miletus in summer 1995.

<sup>11</sup> As to the inscribed terracotta figurine of a ram or horned sheep acquired by Sayce at Samsun and now in the Ashmolean Museum (Evans 1935, 768–769 figs. 749–750; Brice 1961, Taf. 19, V 3) nothing is known about its find circumstances. Moreover, the inscription was not included in their corpus of the Linear A inscriptions by Godart & Olivier 1976–1985.

<sup>12</sup> Supervisors of square 94/29 in which the sherds with the inscription were found were in 1994 G. Albers, in 1995 I. Kaiser. The rather rare sign L 102/AB 47 of the sherd MIL-AT 94.159 was not recognized by us in 1994 as a Linear A sign but designated as a 'graffito'. The signs on the two joining sherds MIL-AT 95.282 were discerned in 1995 by I. Münch and J. Tauschwitz during washing and sorting the pottery and immediately identified by us as Linear A signs. On a list of the Linear A signs sent by fax to Miletus from Heidelberg after our request we identified the 1994 'graffito' as Linear sign L 102/AB 47 and found that it joins the other two sherds. The drawings in this paper are by B. Niemeier, the photographs by the author. I would like to thank Th. G. Palaima for reading a draft of this paper and for providing valuable suggestions and information.

<sup>13</sup> It is planned to analyse the fragment – together with a representative selection of Bronze Age pottery from Miletus – in the near future by Neutron Activation Analysis as well as by Optical Emission Spectrography.

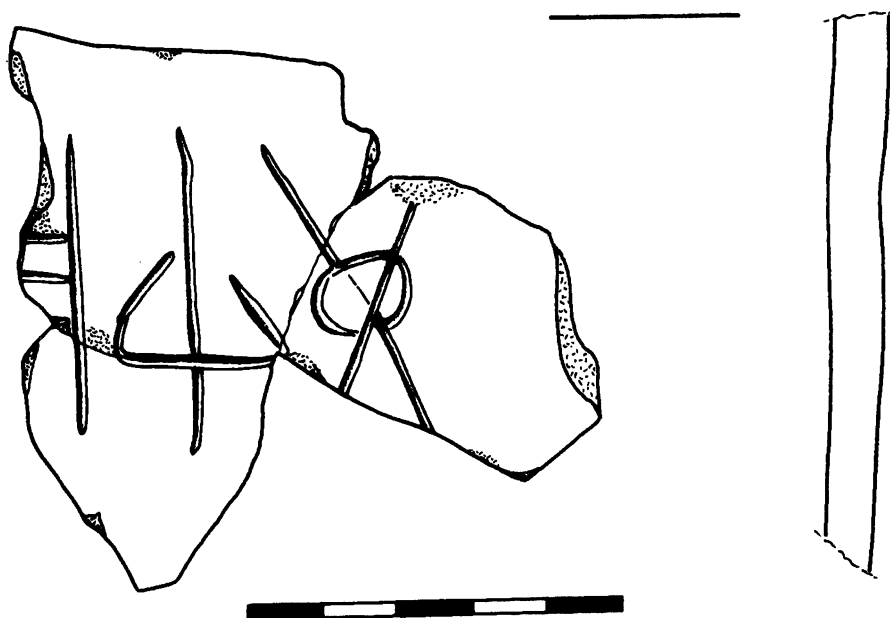


Fig. 1: Miletus, Fragment of vessel with Linear A Inscription MIL Zb 1, scale 1:1.

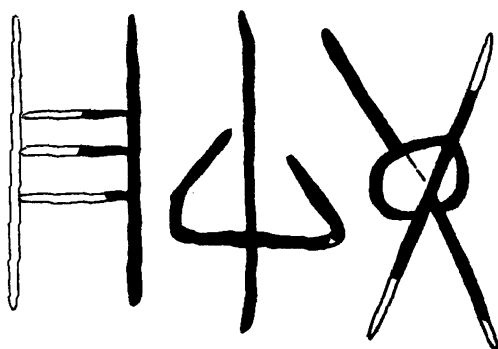


Fig. 2: Miletus, Linear A Inscription MIL Zb 1 restored, scale 1:1.

and lots of charcoal. The date of the deposit is final LM IB or transitional LM IB/II, in absolute terms ca. 1425 B. C. according to the Aegean low chronology or ca. 1490/70 according to the Aegean high chronology to which the present author tends<sup>14</sup>.

### Inscription


The signs, apparently inscribed on the vessel in a single line, are well preserved. They were incised into the surface of the vessel, prior to firing, with a relatively sturdy instrument. Because of the breaks, the left-hand portion of the first sign (reading from left to right) and the lowermost part of the third are not preserved. The signs vary in height from ca. 4.0 to 4.4 cms. where the full height is preserved. Whereas the third sign definitely forms the end of the inscription, it is not clear if there were more signs before the first preserved sign.

Although the first and the third sign are not completely preserved, the identification of all three signs is certain. They are, according to the different systems:

Pugliese Caratelli: L 1 – L 57 – L 102<sup>15</sup>

Godart & Olivier: AB 56 – AB 41 – AB 47<sup>16</sup>.

### The Individual Signs

Sign 1: L 1 / AB 56 . Although the left vertical stroke of this sign is missing, the identification of this sign is secure. It is not very common. It occurs a recorded total of 29 times and has been found as a solitary sign, as well as in the initial, medial and terminal positions in words or sign-groups<sup>17</sup>. It is known from tablets, stone vessels and pottery. The sign, which looks like a ladder with three rungs, shows little variation. In the inscription on a MM III stone vessel from Apodhoulou it has four instead of three 'rungs'<sup>18</sup>; sometimes the 'rungs' are inclined to one side<sup>19</sup>. Our example is of the usual type with three horizontal 'rungs'.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the pottery may be of early LM II date; cf. Niemeier & Niemeier, in print. As to the absolute dating cf. Warren & Hankey 1989, 138–146 for the low chronology and Manning 1995, 217, 220–226 for the high chronology.


<sup>15</sup> Pugliese Caratelli 1945, 463–474.


<sup>16</sup> Godart & Olivier 1985, xxii.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 226–227.

<sup>18</sup> Godart & Olivier 1982, 4–5, ZA 2.1.

<sup>19</sup> For instance: Godart & Olivier 1976a, 260, KN 22b.

Sign 2: L 57 / AB 41 . This sign is almost completely preserved, only the very right end of the horizontal stroke being broken away. It is a very common sign, with 117 examples currently known, and has been found as a solitary sign, as well as in the initial, medial and terminal positions in words or sign-groups<sup>20</sup>. It occurs on tablets, nodules, roundels, stone vessels, and pottery, as well as on an ashlar block, a gold ring, and a silver pin. The sign shows some variation<sup>21</sup>. The closest parallels to our version of the sign, with the vertical stroke rising above the almost closed triangle, are to be found on a clay vessel from Knossos<sup>22</sup>, the rim of a pithos from Thera<sup>23</sup> and a clay lamp from Keos.<sup>24</sup>

Sign 3: L 102 / AB 47 . Although the lower ends of the two diagonal strokes running through the central circle are missing, the identification of this sign is secure. It is very rare, with only eight examples currently known, occurring on tablets and on a silver pin. It has been found as a solitary sign, in the initial and medial positions, but hitherto not in a terminal position as on our fragment. With MIL Zb 1 this sign appears for the first time in an inscription on a clay vessel. The sign does not show much variation<sup>25</sup>. On tablets from Ayia Triada<sup>26</sup> and Zakros<sup>27</sup> the diagonal lines are curved. Those of MIL Zb 1 are straighter, as in the majority of the examples of this sign on tablets from Mallia<sup>28</sup> and Arkhanes<sup>29</sup> as well as on a silver pin from Knossos<sup>30</sup>.

As to the combination of these three signs, in no previous instance have the three signs of MIL ZB 1, or even two of them, been noted together.

### Discussion

MIL Zb 1 is the first secure Linear A inscription found on the Anatolian mainland. It thus forms an important addition to the cor-

<sup>20</sup> Godart & Olivier 1985, 207–210.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, xxxv. Microfiches.

<sup>22</sup> Godart & Olivier 1982, 76, KN Zb 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 101, THE Zb 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 72, KE Zb 4.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Godart & Olivier 1985, xxxvi. Microfiches.

<sup>26</sup> Godart & Olivier 1976a, 188–189, HT 115a.1; *ibid.*, 218–219, HT 127a.3.

<sup>27</sup> Godart & Olivier 1976c, 182–183, Za 15a.1.

<sup>28</sup> Godart & Olivier 1976a, 268–269, MA 1.

<sup>29</sup> Godart & Olivier 1976c, 12–13, ARKH 4a.4, 4b.3.

<sup>30</sup> Godart & Olivier 1982, 154–155, KN Zf 31.

pus of Linear A inscriptions found outside Crete (Fig. 3)<sup>31</sup>. Those in the Cyclades have been briefly mentioned by J. T. Hooker as evidence for the picture “of Minoan colonists and traders taking their script with them and using it for commercial purposes”<sup>32</sup>, and systematically discussed by Th. G. Palaima<sup>33</sup>. According to the latter scholar, the Linear A tablets found at Ayia Irini on Keos and Phylakopi on Melos (and add now also Akrotiri on Thera<sup>34</sup>) constitute proof of the use of this script locally for bureaucratic reasons. The inscriptions on locally-produced vessels are seen by Palaima as evidence of an active use of Linear A for commercial purposes at those sites<sup>35</sup>.

The latter interpretation applies also to MIL Zb 1. It was incised into a vessel of local clay before firing and thus bears witness to the active use of Linear A during the ‘first building period’ of the Bronze Age settlement near the temple of Athena at Miletus. The occurrence of the rare sign no. 3 (L 102/AB 47), hitherto only known in eight examples from Knossos, Arkhanes, Ayia Triada and Zakros, demonstrates that the conventions of Linear A were well known at Miletus. In this connection it appears of great interest that sign no. 1 (L 1/AB 56) occurs infrequently also in Mycenaean Greek Linear B, but in a pattern of alternative spellings which clearly shows that the sign was retained by the Mycenaean scribes to render, in precise spellings, Minoan anthroponyms, theonyms, toponyms, and two Minoan loan words for a special kind of vessel and a particular colour used in dyeing textiles<sup>36</sup>. As such, AB 56 (along with AB 22 and

<sup>31</sup> For an update on Linear A finds in the last decade cf. the reports on inscriptional finds by Olivier 1992, 443–456 and id., forthcoming. Of particular interest are the possible Linear A inscription on a nodulus from Mikro Vouni, Samothrace (Matsas 1995, 240–242; Godart & Olivier 1995, 18) either of MM II or of MM III date (the date in the second half of the 18th century B. C. suggested by Matsas 1995, 236 corresponds to MM II according to the low chronology – cf. Warren & Hankey 1989, 131–135, 169 – and to MM III according to the high chronology – cf. Manning 1995, 217–218), the inscribed ladle (KY Za 2) from the MM III – LM I peak sanctuary on Kythera and the possible inscription before firing on a pithos fragment from Tel Haror, Israel (Oren – Olivier – Goren – Betancourt – Myer – Yellin 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Hooker 1979, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Palaima 1982.

<sup>34</sup> French 1993/94, 69.

<sup>35</sup> The stone weight (?) with Linear A inscription found at Ayios Stephanos in Laconia (Godart & Olivier 1985, 16, HS Zg 1) may be imported from Crete (cf. Niemeier 1986, 248) and thus does not give evidence for the active use of Linear A at Ayios Stephanos.

<sup>36</sup> As pointed out to me by Th. G. Palaima, to whom I also owe the reference in the following note.

AB 29) are closely connected with the peculiarities of the Minoan language<sup>37</sup>. This makes it nearly certain that the Linear A on MIL Zb 1 represents a Minoan word. Unfortunately, we do not yet have other contemporary written documents from western Anatolia. However, according to the communis opinio, the language spoken (and written?) at this time in western Anatolia was Luwian<sup>38</sup>.

I have problems in explaining the existence of the Minoan script and language at Miletus on M. Melas' assumption that "the superior cultural achievements of palatial Crete gradually asserted themselves in local import and copying of various artefacts and perhaps also aspects of technology and bureaucratic organization"<sup>39</sup>. Our knowledge of western Anatolia at the time in question is still rather incomplete. However, there is evidence that it had its own cultural achievements not inferior to those of the Minoan civilization. The palace of Beycesultan level V, for instance, is comparable in size and furnishing to the Minoan palaces<sup>40</sup>. Palaima has pointed out that the later Greek colonial powers planted, as metropoleis, not only colonies, but also colonial versions of their mother-scripts, and thinks that this is "what the Minoans did, although perhaps less directly, in Melos, Thera and Keos"<sup>41</sup>. In Kythera, unanimously identified as a Minoan settlement colony<sup>42</sup>, and possibly in Miletus of the first building period, which appears to be a Minoan settlement, they probably colonized in the direct way.

In my opinion, MIL Zb 1 bears witness, together with the other abundant Minoan finds, to the actual presence of Minoans at Miletus, the start and exact character of which will be further clarified in the continuation of the new excavations at Bronze Age Miletus.

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<sup>37</sup> See Melena 1987, 217. 223–226.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mellaart 1959, 32 (surface find of a sherd with the Hieroglyphic-Luwian sign for 'scribe' on the hill of Civril Höyük near Beycesultan); id. 1974, 494; Watkins 1986; Mallory 1989, 24–26, fig. 14. Watkins' hypothesis, according to which the Trojans spoke (and wrote) Luwian, is now supported by a biconical bronze seal inscribed in Luwian found in the 1995 excavations at Troy in a level of the second half of the 12th century B. C. (Hawkins & Easton 1996).

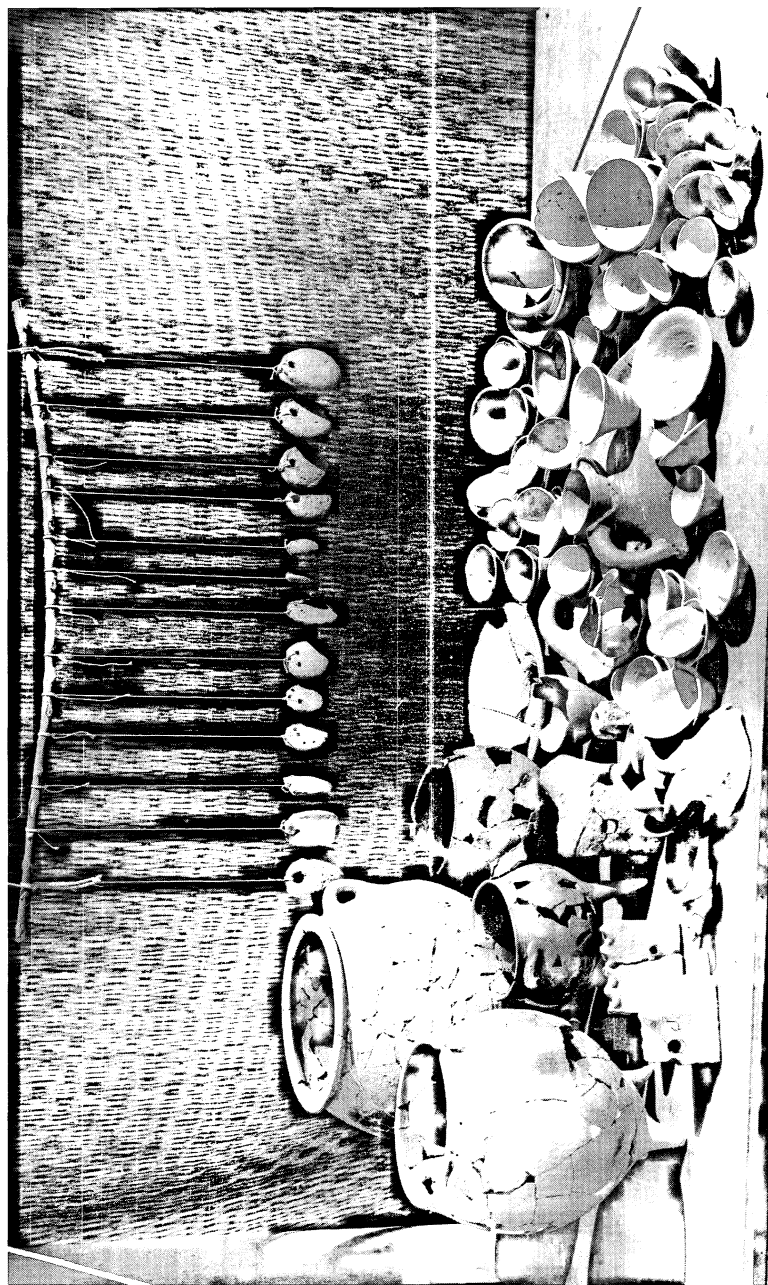
<sup>39</sup> Melas 1991, 181.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyd & Mellaart 1965, 3–34. Graham 1964, 203–209, has convincingly argued against a close architectural relationship between Crete and Beycesultan as seen by the excavators.

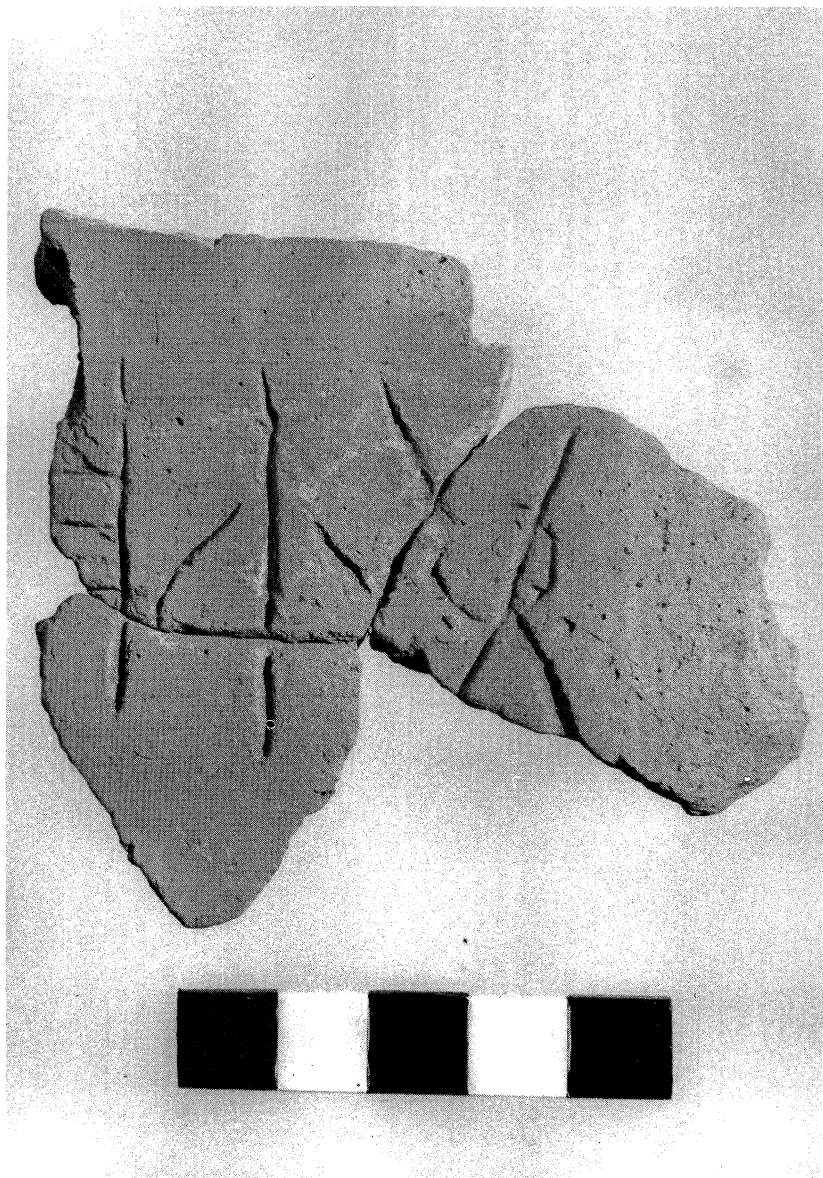
<sup>41</sup> Palaima 1990, 89.

<sup>42</sup> See Coldstream & Huxley 1984.





Pl. 1 a: Miletus, selection of Minoan-type domestic pottery from the level of the 'first building period', 1994 and 1995 seasons



Pl. 1 b: Miletus, Fragment of Vessel with Linear A Inscription MIL Zb 1

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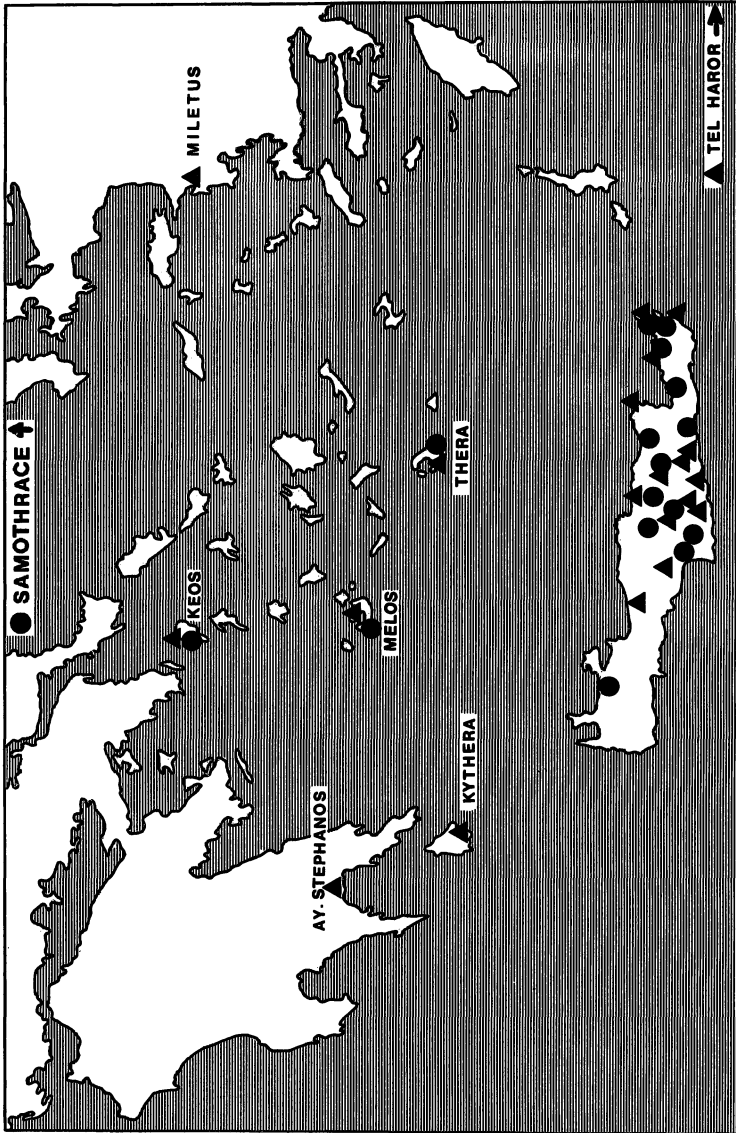


Fig. 3: Map of the Aegean, showing finds of Linear A. The solid circles indicate sites with Linear A administrative documents, the solid triangles other items inscribed in Linear A (after Bennet 1987, 308, fig. 2; Dickinson 1994, 195, fig. 5.43, with additions).