

L. KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU – TH. PAPADOPOULOS – G. OWENS

A POSSIBLE LINEAR SIGN FROM ITHAKI (AB09 ‘SE’)?

Ithaki, in the Ionian islands, near the Peloponnese, was important in the Bronze Age for Minoan and Mycenaean trade¹. There is evidence for both Minoan and Mycenaean presence on the island, demonstrated most recently by the find of the Minoan idol in the 2001 excavations². It is of note and of interest that a Minoan idol was also found at Kafkania near Olympia in the Peloponnese along with the controversial Linear inscribed pebble³. Also it is of note that a Minoan idol and a Masons’ Mark have also been found at Pylos⁴. It is interesting to see the connection between Pylos, Olympia and Ithaki

¹ See Th. Papadopoulos and L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou, Minoan Relations with West Greece and the Ionian Islands in the Late Bronze Age, (in Greek), Proceedings of the 8th Cretological Congress (Heraklion, September 1996), 2000, Volume A2, 519–530 and G. Owens, Linear A in the Aegean: The Further Travels of the Minoan Script. A Study of the 30+extra-Cretan Minoan Inscriptions, *Aegaeum* 20, 1999, 583–598.

² See L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou, Searching for the Homeric Ithaca, Recent Archaeological Excavations (1994–2000), *ERANOS*, Proceedings of the 9th International Symposium on the Odyssey, 2–7 September 2000, 317–330 (in Greek), L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou and Th. Papadopoulos, Excavation of the University of Ioannina in North Ithaki 1994–2000, (in Greek), *CORPUS*, June 2001, 65–75 for a report on the excavations and finds with full bibliography. See also L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou, Ithaki, (in Greek), in *CORPUS* Special Edition, *Archaeology in Greece*, 2002, 147–151 for an even more recent discussion. Further finds, such as the Minoan idol discovered in 2001, continue to come to light at this important site. For Minoan comparanda with the recently discovered idol see G. Rethymiotakis, Minoan Clay Idols, *Archaeological Society of Athens* 218, 2001, MH 15146 from Gortyna Mesaras (p. 4 fig. 5, p. 6 fig. 9) and MH 21809 from Kalou Pediados (p. 13 fig. 18).

³ See G. Owens 1999, (fn. 1 above), especially Olympia OL Za 1, 585–578, and P. Arapogianni, J. Ramback et L. Godart, L’inscription en linéaire B de Kafkania-Olympie (OL Zh 1), *Acts of the Xth Mycenaean Colloquium* (Salzburg, May 1995), 1999, 39–44 for very different Minoan and/or Mycenaean interpretations of this intriguing Linear inscription from West Greece. See also P. Themelis, Minoan Finds from Olympia, (in Greek), *AAA*, 1969, 248–256.

⁴ See L. Kontorli-Papadopoulou and Th. Papadopoulos 2000, (fn. 1 above), for Minoan finds from Pylos, such as the Masons’ Marks and the female idol from the nearby tholos of Peristeri.

in West Greece. The same geographical connection is also testified to in the Late Bronze Age by both Minoan and/or Mycenaean finds related to trade and cult and possibly scribal matters.

After studying the finds and the detailed photographs of the finds from the University of Ioannina excavations at the “School of Homer”, which the excavators were kind enough to make available, it is possible to make the following observations⁵. From the waterlogged Tholos Tomb, at the “School of Homer”, on the clay object in question (possibly a badly-preserved tablet c. 10–11 cm in length, c. 6–7 cm in height and c. 2 cm thick) there are a number of features including what may be a possible Linear sign. It would appear to be AB 09, which in the syllabic scripts has the syllabic sound value ‘SE’⁶. Of course, one sign does not an inscription make⁷.

The excavators have now also reported finding other clay objects, (possibly other badly preserved tablets), in the waterlogged Tholos Tomb at the “School of Homer” which may bear signs and which are currently being studied⁸.

It will be instructive to look at possible comparanda within the corpus of Minoan and Mycenaean scripts of the Bronze Age Aegean⁹.

Minoan Linear A

AB09 is found approximately 60 times in Minoan Linear A at places such as Hagia Triada and Zakros, as well as Khania, Arkhanes,

⁵ The reader is referred to the ERANOS and CORPUS articles, 2001 and 2002 in fn. 2 above, for preliminary reports on the excavations and finds from Stavros, Pilikata, Treis Lagades, Ag. Athanassios and the “School of Homer”, all in North Ithaki, with copious references and illustrations.

⁶ The Linear A sign-groups are transliterated according to Linear B sound values, with the frequently expressed caveat that this is extremely likely but not yet definitely proved for every sign. See D. Packard, *Minoan Linear A*, 1974; L. Godart, *Du Linéaire A au Linéaire B*, in *Hommages à Henri van Effenterre*, 1984, 121–128, J.-P. Olivier, ‘Lire’ le Linéaire A, in *Le Monde Grec*, 1975, 441–449 and Y. Duhoux, *Le Linéaire A: Problèmes de Déchiffrement*, in *Problems in Decipherment*, BCILL 49, 59–119. Godart and Duhoux accept the transliteration of AB09 from Linear B to Linear A as SE.

⁷ It should be noted that the inscribed ostrakon “Tessons inscrits du palais de Pilikata à Ithaque” enthusiastically presented by Paul Faure in Nestor, based upon BSA 35 (1934/5) pl. 7 figs. 80 and 81, is not an inscription and neither can any other Linear signs be recognized yet with absolute certainty on material from Ithaki.

⁸ See G. Owens, *Re-Discovered Fragments of Linear B Tablets from Knossos now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*, *Talanta* 30–31 (1998–99) (1999), 155–158 for similar pieces.

⁹ It is not possible to draw certain parallels with Masons’ Marks or Potters’ Marks nor with the “Cretan Hieroglyphic” script, therefore comparanda will be considered with Minoan Linear A and Mycenaean Linear B.

Prassa, Phaistos, Knossos and Gournia¹⁰. On 2 occasions AB09 is standing as an abbreviation on its own at LM IB Haghia Triada HT Wc 3004b and 3005 (GORILA 2, 1979, p. 73). The closest palaeographic examples in Minoan Linear A also seem to be from Haghia Triada in the Mesara in Crete.

Mycenaean Linear B

AB09 is also found many times in Linear B at Knossos (c. 1400 B.C.) and Pylos (c. 1200 B.C.), as well as on a few occasions at Mycenae and Thebes (c. 1300–1200 B.C.) but not yet in the very few records from Khania and Tiryns (c. 1300–1200 B.C.)¹¹. This is a very common sign and there are no immediate comparanda which can be made other than to say that this sign AB09 found on Linear B tablets can be found in Crete, Peloponnese and Boeotia, i.e., throughout Mycenaean Greece.

In conclusion it is intriguing to ask whether this is a Linear sign with special significance for Ithaki.



Fig. 1 Photograph of inscribed object from Ithaki

¹⁰ See GORILA 5, 1985, p. 165–166.

¹¹ See J.-P. Olivier, *Les scribes de Cnossos*, 1967, and T. G. Palaima, *The Scribes of Pylos*, 1988, for palaeographic similarities with Mycenaean Linear B AB09.



Fig. 2 Drawing of inscribed object from Ithaki



Fig. 3 Drawing of sign AB09 from Ithaki