

MITTEILUNGEN

ON THE PAINTED LINEAR SIGN FROM A WALL AT KNOSSOS

This fragment is described and illustrated by Mark A. S. Cameron in *Kadmos* 4, 1965, 12–15, plate 10. It comes from the “Area of the Toreador Frescoes”, pieces of which were found in the Court of the Stone Spout deposited with LM II pottery and debris from the collapse of adjacent upper floor rooms.¹

Cameron remarks of it that “only one painted example of a mural inscription, ‘graffito’ or special symbolic sign is yet known from the entire corpus of Aegean Bronze Age frescoes”.² Elsewhere he says: “Writing in any form was rarely attempted on Minoan wall paintings. This seems particularly true of *painted* inscriptions, of which it appears we have only one definite example — that found in the Palace at Knossos in the ‘Area of the Toreador Frescoes’: that piece, therefore, warrants particular attention” (*Kadmos* 7, 1968, 59). Cameron dates the fragment on stylistic grounds to the LM I period.³ If therefore it is a Linear B sign, it may have special interest for the dating of this script at Knossos.

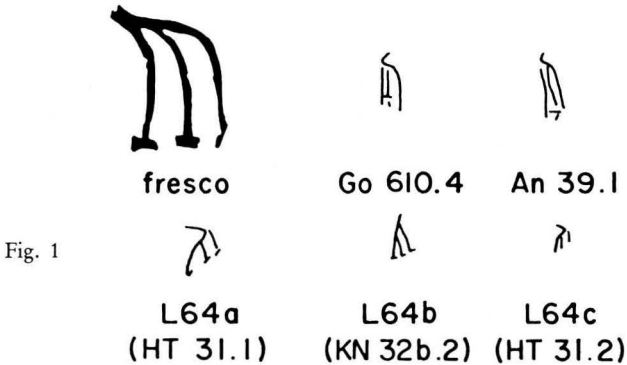


Fig. 1

¹ For the details see J. Boardman, *The Date of the Knossos Tablets*, in *On the Knossos Tablets*, Oxford, 1963, 52; and A. J. Evans, *Knossos Excavations 1902*, BSA 8, 1902, 9.

² *Kadmos* 18, 1979, 43. Cameron examines possible mural inscriptions in two articles, *Kadmos* 4, 1965, 7–15; *Kadmos* 7, 1968, 45–64.

³ *Kadmos* 4, 1965, 13–14. Yet Cameron’s stylistic argument follows upon his attribution of the inscription to Linear A.

There is no doubt about the identification of the sign (Fig. 1) as L64 (Linear A) or *50 $\rho\mu$ (Linear B) reversed. The problem is that it is common to both the Linear Scripts A and B. Evans, noting this, assigned the fragment to a date when Linear B was already coming into vogue (PM I, 637). Brice indicated doubt on the identification of the sign by means of a dot in subscript (ILA V 10). Cameron, who uses his ascription to date the fragment (above, note 3) attributes the sign to Linear A because its form is reversed, a phenomenon which he claims "is characteristic of signs in Linear A but does not occur in Linear B" (Kadmos 4, 1965, 13). This, however, is not entirely correct; in fact, the one phonetic sign that is found in reversed form in Linear B is *50 $\rho\mu$, on MY Go 610.4 and PY An 39.1.

We have no information concerning the exact stratigraphical context of the fragment. Evans obviously decided that it was contemporary with the Toreador frescoes which he initially thought were either LM Ia or LM Ib. This explains his ascription of the fragment to a phase transitional between Linear A and Linear B at Knossos. Later, however, he came to regard the Toreador fragments as possibly LM II.⁴ These dates are significant, for if the fragment is ascribed to LM II it becomes either the sole evidence for the use of Linear A at Knossos after the LM I period or, more likely, a unique example of a painted mural inscription in Linear B.

Cameron uses his identification of the fragment as Linear A as a first criterion for dating. That aside, he classifies the fragment as Late Minoan on stylistic grounds, and more precisely as LM I, on the basis of the sepia colour used below the sign. In his opinion this colour is not found on Minoan frescoes assigned to periods later than LM Ib. At the same time he suggests that the Toreador frescoes be dated later than LM Ib, and consequently has to dissociate the inscribed fragment from the fresco fragments with which it was found (Kadmos 4, 1965, 14 n. 22). However, the criterion of the sepia colour cannot be decisive for dating since we have few later wall-paintings at the Palace of Knossos for purposes of comparison, and in any case colours are subject to change from external influences (BSA 72, 1977, 126).

In their *Index Transnuméré du linéaire A* (Louvain 1977), J. Raison and M. Pope show that the shapes of signs in Linear A vary noticeably more than those in Linear B. This results not only from the greater number of sites that have yielded Linear A inscriptions but also from the greater range of materials upon which Linear A is written. Linear A evidently served purposes other than those of record-keeping, so that the use of script by wall-painters would not seem out of place.

The occurrence of signs in reversed form is well-attested, though only four examples occur on tablets: 21 a' (HT 16.4), 53 c (PH 2.1), 103 f (HT 93 a.2), 103 h (PH, TY, ZA). This implies that the reason for variation may have been

⁴ M. A. S. Cameron and S. Hood, *Catalogue of Plates in Sir Arthur Evans' Knossos Fresco Atlas*, London 1967, 38.

the difficulty of writing signs on awkward surfaces, or the unfamiliarity of the writer with the script. Both these possibilities would suit an ascription of the fresco fragment to Linear A.

The chief difficulty in viewing the sign as Linear A L64 is that it is not found reversed on Linear A texts. Furthermore, formal comparison between the fresco sign and the general variant types of L64 reveals a distinct difference in treatment. The three legs of L64, particularly when finished off with horizontal feet, rise in order from left to right; whereas the fresco sign has three legs of relatively equal length on the same level. In this respect the sign resembles more closely the Linear B version *50 μ^5 (Fig. 1). One should observe however that the sign on the fresco is painted parallel to a lower border in the form of a straight band. This may well have influenced the wall-painter to alter the typical Linear A form for the sake of a neat symmetrical appearance. In like manner the sign develops this same shape on those Linear B tablets with closely spaced, parallel ruling lines. The reversal of signs in Linear B is less common. Significantly we do find several examples in the painted vase inscriptions: *36 *jo* (TH Z839), *42 *\omega\phi* (TH Z855), *75 *we* (TI Z27). These are all painted signs, and probably Cretan; for the Theban examples, at least, now seem to have been manufactured in western Crete.⁶

Regarding Linear B *50 μ , I have mentioned above that its shape closely matches that of the fresco sign. This applies particularly to the versions of *50 used by identifiable scribes at Knossos in the period (LM II) of the Toreador fragments among which was found the inscribed fragment.⁷

Finally, the reversed form of *50 on MY Go 610.4 and PY An 39.1 (Fig. 1) is a strong argument for ascribing the fresco sign to Linear B.⁸ The scribe who wrote An 39.1–5 has no other identifiable work in the corpus of tablets from Pylos. The sign is the first written on the tablet. One could, therefore, attribute the variant to the scribe's lack of skill or training. This Pylos variant, however, resembles in all significant details the form found on MY Go 610.4: reversal, uniform length of legs, and the substitution of a single horizontal stroke intersecting the middle leg for the more common three separate horizontal feet. The scribe of Go 610 (Scribe 57) has seven other tablets to his credit. These are all written with moderate care and without any mistakes in the forms of signs. Unfortunately neither scribe gives us another example of sign *50. Yet the close similarity of these two versions as well as the relatively accomplished skills of

⁵ See my forthcoming *Observations on Pylian Epigraphy*, SMEA.

⁶ L. R. Palmer, 'Mycenaean Inscribed Vases II', *Kadmos* 11, 1972, 27–46; H. W. Catling and R. E. Jones, 'A Reinvestigation of Jars found at Thebes', *Archaeometry*, 19, 1977, 137–146.

⁷ J.-P. Olivier, *Les Scribes de Cnossos*, Inc. Graeca 17.

⁸ For MY Go 610 see A. Sacconi, *Corpus di Micene*, Inc. Graeca 58, p. 59 and Pl. XXV–XXVI; E. L. Bennett, *MT II*, 72–73. PY An 39 has not yet been published as a photograph. For scribal hands see Sacconi, 145–46; *MT II*, 91; and Bennett, Olivier, *PTT II*, 20.

Scribe 57 make it possible that these are not mistakes but examples of an identifiable variant tradition. These two examples and the vase inscriptions fall in the LH IIIb period.⁹

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THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SANCTUARIES AND CULTS IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE

This was held on May 12th and 13th, 1980, at the Swedish Institute in Athens, and was organized by the Director, Dr. Robin Hägg. It was the first colloquium devoted to prehistoric religion in Greece, and following many new discoveries in this field it evidently met a widely-felt need.

Three papers dealt with broad issues. J. van Leuven undertook a general survey of the prehellenic sanctuaries; they shared a basic tradition, and could be explained by theological principles. C. Renfrew, who referred to new finds at Phylakopi on Melos, examined the evolution of the 'Minoan-Mycenaean' religion, and its regional variation which was possibly due to political circumstances. R. Hägg distinguished between 'official' and 'popular' cults, which may have merged in late worship.

It became apparent during discussion that there was general acceptance of a recognisable prehellenic religion which varied with time, place and social level. This religion of the Aegean Bronze Age could be compared with Neolithic and historic worship in the same area, and with contemporary beliefs in Cyprus and the Near East.

There followed reports from particular cult-places, mostly of Late Bronze-Age date. Unpublished evidence was presented from Asine (R. Hägg) and from the peak-sanctuaries at Epidauros (V. Lambrinoudakis), Juktas (A. Karetsou) and Kalapodi (R. Felsch). We heard of puzzling changes in the ceremonials at Ayia Irini on Keos (M. Caskey), of the possibility of ritual cannibalism at Knossos (P. Warren), and of conspicuous evidence of worship on the fringes of the citadels at Mycenae (E. French), Phylakopi (C. Renfrew) and Tiryns (K. Kilian), as well as at the heart of a small settlement at Pyrgos/Myrtou (G. Cadogan).

There was discussion on the interpretation of the statuary from the temple at Arkhanes (excavated by J. and E. Sakellarakis); on the evidence of sanctuaries in the Linear B records (S. Hiller); and on the function – not necessarily

⁹ Th. Spyropoulos, *TT II*, *Minos Suppl.* 4, 53–71; J. Raison, *Les Vases . . . peintes*, 54–60.

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