

## AN INSCRIBED HANDLE FROM PALAIKASTRO (PK Zb 25)

During the summer of 2000, an inscribed handle (00/4831/17) was found by chance at Palaikastro<sup>1</sup>. The handle is made of coarse red clay, tempered with large inclusions of schist and quartz. It is not complete but the attachment suggests that it may have belonged to an amphora (l. 8.5 cm, d. 4.8 x 3.8 cm, th. at end 2.1 cm). Three signs are inscribed from left to right on its upper side (PK Zb 25).

The new inscription may be identified as Linear A for several reasons. Its palaeography is characteristic of Linear A, although all three signs are attested in Linear A and Linear B but not in Cretan Hieroglyphic, but Linear B is almost never incised on vases and occurs usually painted on stirrup jars and a few other vessel types. Moreover, no Linear B inscriptions have as yet been found east of Malia. This is the first Linear A inscription on the handle of a vessel and usually Linear A can be found on the shoulder or body of small, medium-sized and large storage vessels. There are, however, examples of Cretan Hieroglyphic inscriptions on handles<sup>2</sup>.

### THE INSCRIPTION

The signs are deeply incised with a relatively thick tool (FIG. 1). The first two signs pose no problems of identification and can be identified as AB 73 and AB 01, which applying the Linear B phonetic values read *MI-DA*. The palaeography of AB 73 is very simple and recalls the way this sign is written on HT Wc 3006a and HT 29.4. Sign AB 01 does not allow for any palaeographic variation because of its simple *tracé*. The third sign consists of a vertical trait with to its right an oblique trait forming an angle. It may tentatively be read as AB 60/RA, although its *tracé* presents some idiosyncrasies. Not only is there no horizontal lower bar linking vertical and oblique traits but the righthand part of AB 60/RA usually presents a curved line, which is not the case here. It is possible that constraint in available space determined the odd shape of the sign.

<sup>1</sup> The inscription was discovered by L. Petersson at the gate to the new excavations at Roussolakkos. We thank Delia Riccardi-Percy for the drawing and J.A. MacGillivray for the photograph. We also thank J.A. MacGillivray, L.H. Sackett and the British School for permission to publish this inscription.

<sup>2</sup> Cretan Hieroglyphic signs are found on handles (J.-P. Olivier - L. Godart, *Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae* (ÉtCrét 31) 1996, pp. 316-317 and I. Schoep, «A New Cretan Hieroglyphic Inscription from Malia (MA/V Yb 03)», *Kadmos* 34, 1995, pp. 78-80).

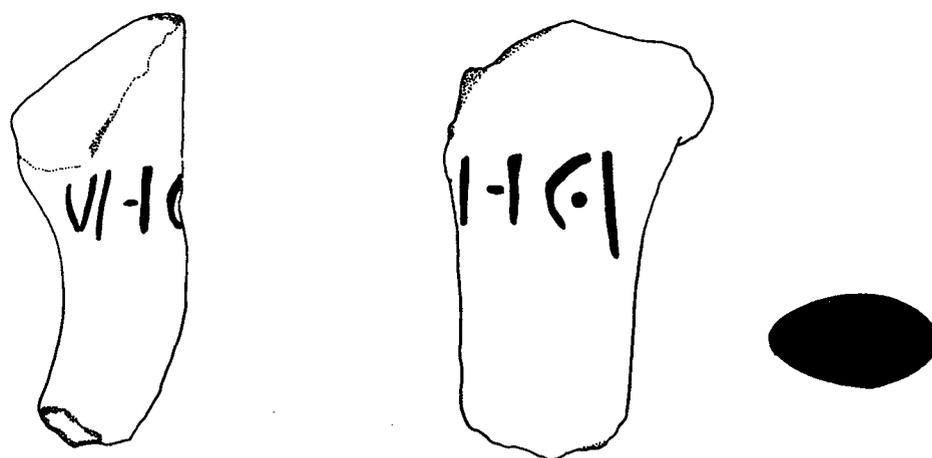


Figure 1: PK Zb 25 (after a drawing by D. Riccardi-Percy)

The sign-group AB 73-01-60/MI-DA-RA is a hapax and its meaning is unknown. Linear A inscriptions are quite common at Palaikastro and the discovery of the handle (PK Zb 25) brings the total number of Linear A inscriptions to 19, of which five occur on clay vessels (PK Zb 19, 21, 24 and PK Zc 13)<sup>3</sup>. The other inscriptions are found on stone vases (PK Za 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 20) and administrative documents, such as a page-shaped tablet (PK 1) from House B, and a round and perforated object (PK Wy 23), which was also a chance find recovered from the area of the old excavations. Wy 23 and Zb 25 show that Palaikastro did not always behave in the same way as other literate centres on the island. The purpose of the present inscription remains similarly problematic<sup>4</sup>.

Depending on their components, Linear A inscriptions on clay vessels fall into three different groups. These categories of inscription probably convey information of a different kind and must have been inscribed for different purposes.

#### 1. Inscriptions consisting of a single or ligatured sign

When the single signs can be identified as logograms, as for example AB 131 WINE or A 302 OIL (eg. KN Zb 34), it is possible that they convey information

<sup>3</sup> For PK Zb 19 (J. Driessen, «A New Linear A Inscription», in J.A. MacGillivray *et al.*, «Excavations at Palaikastro, 1986», *BSA* 82, 1987, p. 153) and Zb 21 (J. Driessen, «The inscribed Pithos Zb 21», in J.A. MacGillivray *et al.*, «Excavations at Palaikastro, 1990», *BSA* 86, 1991, pp. 146-147); For Zb 23 and Zb 24 see I. Schoep, «A Note on the Inscribed Material of the 1994 Excavations», in J.A. MacGillivray *et al.*, «Excavations at Palaikastro, 1994 and 1996», *BSA* 93, 1998, pp. 264-268.

<sup>4</sup> A half preserved disc-shaped loom weight was a surface find in trench EM 84 of Area 6. The clay is coarse, tempered with quartz and schist inclusions and was heavily reduced when fired (8.0 x 4.3 cm). A badly preserved incision of an oblique stroke departing from a longer vertical stroke (AB 20/ZO?) may be recognised in the centre of the loomweight.

about what was stored in the container. In some cases, the single signs cannot be identified as logograms (e.g. KE Zb 3) and then their meaning is not clear<sup>5</sup>.

2. *Inscriptions consisting of sign-group(s), which are accompanied by logogram(s) and number(s)*

Examples of this type of inscription can be found on KN Zb 27 and ZA Zb 3. Considering the quantities of wine involved in these two inscriptions, it is unlikely that they refer to the contents of the containers on which they occur. Instead, the context in which both were found suggests that the inscriptions could refer to a certain event. ZA Zb 3 contains six sign-groups and the logogram for wine (AB 131a), followed by a quantity of 32 units. Two of the sign-groups are paralleled elsewhere: AB 0859-28-301-45-77/A-TA-1-301-DE-KA is a variation of the so-called primary libation formula<sup>6</sup>, whereas AB 37-37-81/TI-TI-KU is attested on a tablet from Ayia Triada (HT 35), where it occurs on a tablet which books mixed commodities. The 32 units of wine, which correspond to ca. 921.6 litres, would be sufficient to fill six pithoi of the size of ZA Zb 3, which coincides with the number of pithoi found in magazine θ. It would then seem that the inscription on this pithos does not simply refer to its contents, but perhaps to a special occasion (ritual?) involving a batch of pithoi<sup>7</sup>. The same may be suggested for the sign-group on KN Zb 27, where the wine logogram is followed by 107 units, or ca. 3369.6 litres of wine<sup>8</sup>. KN Zb 27 comes from the Temple Repositories and in this case as well, a large number of other vases were found with it.

3. *Inscriptions consisting of independent sign-groups*

The Zb inscriptions which consist of sign-groups only are most difficult to interpret, since the words are mostly hapaxes (e.g. KN Zb 5, KN Zb 52, PK Zb 19, PK Zb 21) and may denote anthroponyms, toponyms or other words. The

<sup>5</sup> The sign 011 KE Zb 3 (AB 67/KI) depicts a one-handled cup and thus mimicks the vessel on which it was inscribed.

<sup>6</sup> This formula is also attested on stone vases from the peak sanctuaries of Iouktas and Petsofas and from Prassa and Apodoulou (A. Karetsou, J.-P. Olivier & L. Godart, «Inscriptions en linéaire A du sanctuaire de sommet du Mont Iouktas», *Kadmos* 24, 1985, pp. 89-147; I. Schoep, «Ritual Politics and Script», *Aegean Archaeology* I, 1994, pp. 15-16).

<sup>7</sup> T. G. Palaima, «Seal-Users and Script-Users», in P. Ferioli, E. Fiandra G. Giacomo Fissore M. Frangipane eds., *Archives before Writing. Proceedings of the International Colloquium Oriolo Romano, October 23-25, 1991*, Rome 1994, pp. 307-337.

<sup>8</sup> The reading of 17 units (J.-P. Olivier & L. Godart, *Recueil des inscriptions en linéaire A = GORILA* IV, p. 78) has been revised recently and the horizontal stroke (ten) is now read as part of a circle (hundred) (J.-P. Olivier, «Rapport sur les textes en hiéroglyphique crétois en linéaire A et en linéaire B», in J.-P. Olivier ed., *Mykenaiika. Actes du IXe Colloque international sur les textes mycéniens et égéens (Athènes, 9-6 octobre 1990)*, Paris 1994, p. 446).

newly discovered inscription clearly falls into this category. A good example of a toponym the second case is HT Zb 158.b, which lists the sign-group *SU-KI-RI-TE-I-JA*. This word may be related to AB 58-67-53-59/*SU-KI-RI-TA* on PH Wa 38. We may tentatively identify *SU-KI-RI-TA* as the toponym Σύβριτα<sup>9</sup> and *SU-KI-RI-TE-I-JA* as a word relating to this sign-group. Although the ending of the sign-group on PK Zb 25 in AB 02/*RA* is common (see *GORILA*), is not possible to determine whether *Ml-DA-RA* on PK 25 is an anthroponym or a toponym<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Sakellarakis & Olivier (*supra* n. 8), p. 351 (note 34).

<sup>10</sup> At least 29 are listed in *GORILA* V, 1985, pp. 240-241.