

A NEW LINEAR B TABLET FROM PETSAS HOUSE, MYCENAE

THE EXCAVATION

Located on the lower slope of the hill to the NW of the citadel of Mycenae, in what was presumably the main settlement, are the remains of a building complex known as Petsas House.¹ The area was partially investigated by Papadimitriou and Petsas in 1950 and 1951 and only preliminary reports were published.² The building, as first cleared, consisted of two parallel rows of rooms situated along a terraced slope. Most of these areas were used as storerooms for new (unused) pottery vessels, which were found in smashed piles having fallen from shelves where they were originally arranged by shape and size. More than 500 decorated vases and 150 figurines were recovered, dating the building's final use and destruction by fire to the LH IIIA 2 period (later 14th c. BCE).

New excavations were initiated in 2000 with six seasons of work having been undertaken at the site so far.³ In addition to the complete clearing of two rooms from the original project (Alpha and Gamma), the new excavation has revealed much more of the building plan, including an extensive entrance, several ground floor rooms, one with a deep well and an upper level set on bedrock, with a large semi-subterranean room. The material remains have added significantly to our knowledge of the settlement and its relationship to the citadel. The ceramic evidence from the disintegrated mudbrick of the walls indicates that the structure was built during the Late Helladic (LH) IIIA 1 period, or perhaps in a very early phase of LH IIIA 2. The pottery found in destruction contexts and post-destruction clearing provide support for an end date sometime in the latter part of the same period. The quantity, character and organization of the pottery suggest a ceramic warehouse as one function of the building, while evidence is mounting to support the reconstruction of a workshop as well.⁴

¹ The current project was initiated in 2000 on behalf of the Archaeological Society of Athens as part of their excavations at Mycenae under the general direction of Dr Spyros Iakovidis. Initial reports on the work and some important finds can be found in *Ergon* for the relevant years. Lengthier reports, but equally as preliminary, will appear in forthcoming volumes of *Praktika* (see most recently vols. 2000 and 2001).

² *Praktika* 1950, pp. 203-233 and 1951, pp. 192-196. In every room, the original excavators had left significant portions of the fill unexcavated and nowhere were exterior wall faces revealed. One of the primary goals of this project is to complete the excavation begun in the 1950s in order to recognize the architectural makeup of the site and to more fully understand the mass of unpublished material currently under study.

³ *Ergon* 2000-2005.

⁴ Evidence for on-site production includes deposits of clay, malformed and misfired vases ('wasters'), kiln props and the possible identification of a kiln nearby through subsurface magnetometer survey (2004).

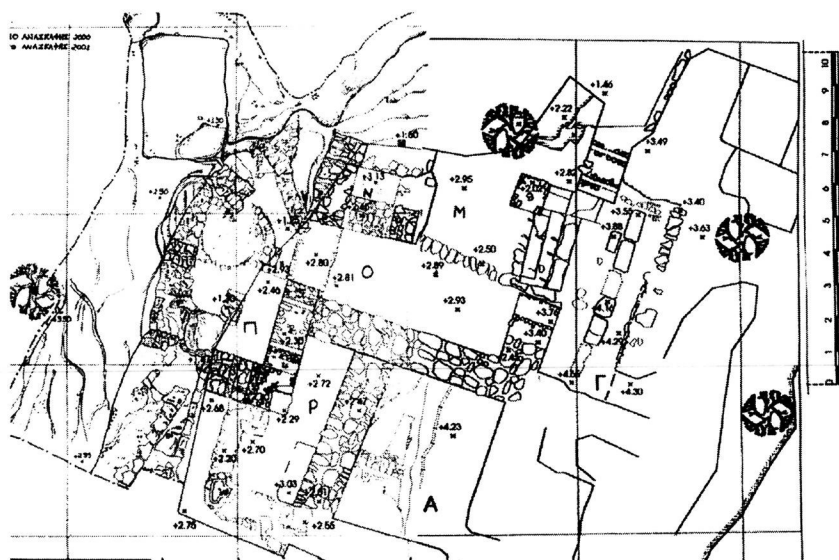


Figure 1: *Plan of Petsas House excavations following the 2001 season. North is towards the bottom of the plan (after M. Xypritou)*

AREA GAMMA

In the first days of the new excavation it was recognized that the clearing of room/area Gamma had not been completed in 1951, primarily due to the existence of a large post-Mycenaean terrace wall constructed diagonally over the SE portion of the room.⁵ In the intervening years between the two projects, several large stones from the terrace wall face had fallen back into the excavated area revealing a segment of undisturbed Mycenaean period fill with visible destruction debris, including significant portions of several undecorated carinated kylikes.⁶ With further observation, several unusual features were noticed in what had been interpreted and planned in 1951 as a Bronze Age basement storeroom.⁷ First of all, the room was very long and narrow (app. 4.00 x 2.00 m) with a sloping floor that descended from south to north. Set on the floor in a line were a series of poros stone slabs.⁸ Also, a very irregular nature of construction was observed in the south end of the room's east wall, with a 'tumble' of stones and loose fill rather than the expected dry-stone masonry of a foundation wall face, as in the northern half of the same wall.

The area that had been interpreted as the south end of Gamma during the old excavation was obviously not, since nowhere, was there a built wall other than the post-Mycenaean terrace wall.⁹ There existed, rather, the fill from the later

⁵ *Praktika* 1951, pp. 194-196. The excavators, however, did not realize the date of the terrace wall and believed it to be part of the west and south walls of Gamma.

⁶ FS 267 in shape. The majority of the pottery found in 1950 and 1951 in Gamma was also of this shape together with a number of shallow carinated bowls (FS 295), always produced as undecorated fineware.

⁷ *Praktika* 1950, p. 213 and fig. 2; 1951, pp. 195-196 and pl. III.

⁸ *Praktika* 1951, p. 195 and fig. 5.

⁹ *Praktika* 1951, pl. III –on this plan, the architect, Theocharis, has indicated at the south end of Gamma a rough undulating line of fill (?) turning E from a very rough-

terrace wall on top of a thin layer of destruction debris from the Mycenaean period, under which ran the continuation of the line of poros slabs. Following the removal of the remaining boulders of the terrace facing, no wall of the Mycenaean structure was discovered. Rather, to the south, the room communicated directly with an open area of exposed bedrock, an approach to the structure. The line of five poros slabs form a type of raised ramp descending from the south to the enclosed area at the north. The raised line of stone slabs was flanked by a paving of smaller flat irregular shaped stones for a distance of 4.50 m. A single slab sits to the east of the others at the base of the staircase and it is still uncertain whether it has been moved or if it was originally placed here as a 'step' from ramp to stairs. Beyond the slabs to the south appear a number of small stones as packing for app. 1.00 m followed by a surface on bedrock.

The problems were addressed in two areas, beginning with the E wall that was partially built of stone and mud in a fairly canonical manner at its N end while at the S end, the impression was one of mixed fill, at the base of which were two long rectangular blocks of stone. These were first considered as the base of the foundation indicating the line of the original inner wall face, but a structural characteristic unique to that spot. The area was excavated from above to identify the outer face of the wall and its connection to a large section of stone and mudbrick wall preserved to a height of over 1 m at the SW corner of Gamma. Rather than the continuation of the E wall, uncovered was a wide staircase of stone (2.10 m) leading from Gamma up to Room Mi, and which had been covered with debris during the destruction of the building. The two long rectangular blocks visible since the old excavation are the lowest step of four, which are 0.45-0.55 m deep with a riser height of 0.22-0.25 m. The soil covering the stairs contained a large amount of ash suggesting that the steps may have been wood covered, or at least the wall directly to the S, which had been baked hard, was dressed with wood and may have fallen on the stairs during the destruction. Overall, the plan and nature of Gamma indicates that this is the entrance to the building or building complex with a ramp for 'wheeled' traffic and a rather grand staircase to the apparent first floor. From the small amount of undisturbed destruction fill in Gamma itself were recovered a fair number of undecorated kylikes and a few figurines, the same type of finds from the old excavation, presenting a perplexing picture for the use of this area.¹⁰

faced west wall and a dashed line extending west from the east wall of the room, drawn as if there is a solid/secure wall (but see text above). No actual observation of constructed masonry was made at that time or actually indicated on the plan.

¹⁰ Especially interesting is the large number of figurines found primarily at the N end of the room that should probably be viewed as a shipment either coming in or going out, rather than in storage or in a shrine. See *Praktika* 1950, pp. 213-214; 1951, p. 195 and K. Shelton, «The figurines from Petsas House and other find-spots at Mycenae», *Cultic Space and Mycenaean Figurines*, Acta of the Swedish Institute at Athens (in press).

THE NEW TABLET

From the destruction fill between the third and fourth steps of the stairs (depth c.-2.20m from datum), on the two long rectangular blocks that made up the lowest of the four steps, was a layer of 0.10-0.15 m of dark grey ashy soil with strong signs of burning including bits of charcoal. Within the level were many small sherds and a fragment of tablet inscribed in Linear B script, burnt very hard from the fire of the destruction at this point in the structure.

Description:

MycMus MM 2062, BE 29239, (20) 00/03,007¹¹

Tablet with Linear B inscription

Clay: red-brown semi-coarse with smoothed surface, accidentally 'baked' by exposure to high level of heat/fire

Fragment: pres L. 0.041 m, H. 0.021 m, W. 0.007 m; unknown length of tablet missing from right edge (drawing after L. Godart).

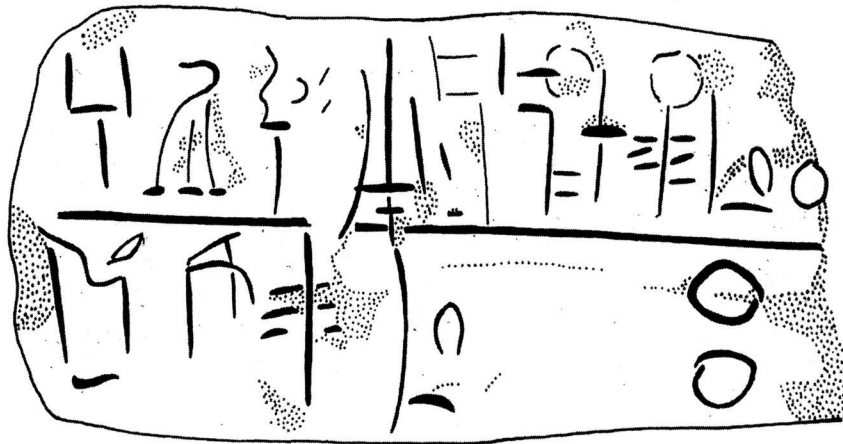
*Inscription: Ui 2*

PLATE XIX.A

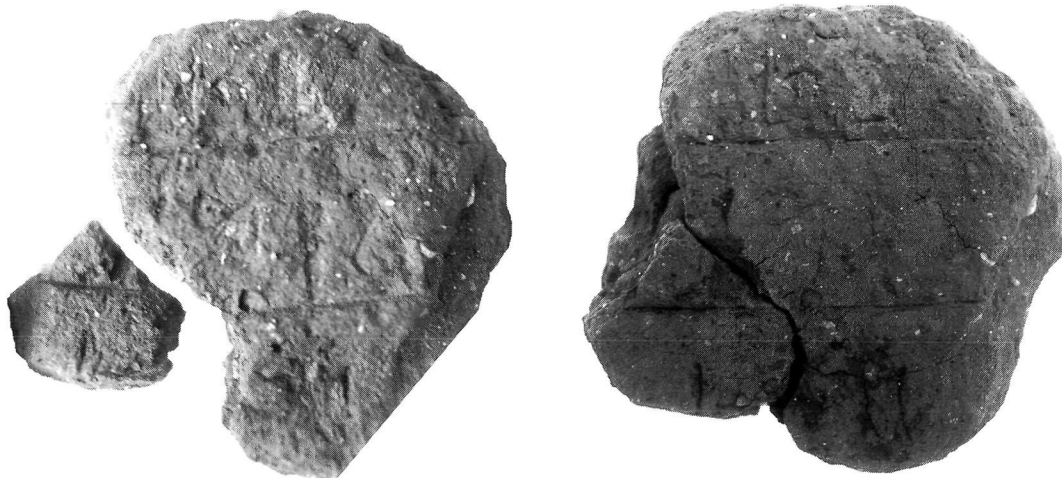
- .1 a-pu-do-si , po-ro-te-ra *vest.* [
 .2 o-u-te-ra 200 [
 .1: *si* , *po-ro-te* over erasure; [*po-te* 200]; *vest.*: ΛΑΝΑ possible, but 100 not excluded.
 .2: 200 probably complete.
- .1: */apudosis proterā/* [ΛΑΝΑ or 100
 .2: */hō(s) (h)usterā/* 200 [

The tablet is a fragmentary 'leaf' type tablet with two parallel horizontal registers. The horizontal line is very straight and deeply/sharply incised. The tablet is of course not fully preserved at its right edge and the logogram that would likely have appeared here, at least in the first line, is now missing. The

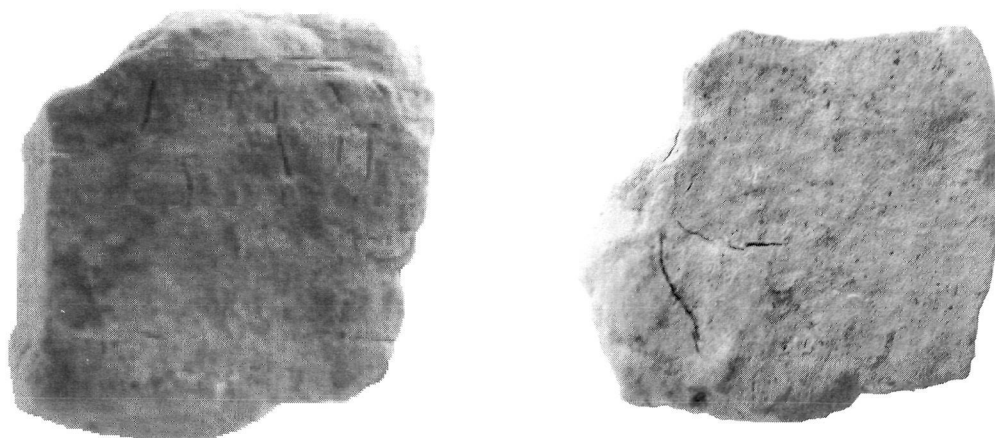
¹¹ These numbers are the Mycenae Museum (MM) catalogue/exhibition number, the Mycenae Museum storage accession number (BE) and the excavation artifact number (20) = small find 20 from excavation year 2000 (00) and trench 03 = [Γ] Room Gamma, zembili/unit/context 007. Classificatory numbers follow the sequence of find-spot.



A. *Ui 2 Tablet from 2000, Room Gamma, stairs (MM 2062, BE 29239, (20) 00/03,007) Scale 2:1*



B.C. *Tablet X 3 from 2004, Room Pi, well deposit (BE 31741, (78) 04/16,315).*



recto

verso

D.E. *Label Wq 4 from 2001, Room Pi, black soil dump (BE 30461, (29) 01/16,027).*

two lines very likely refer to the same item or commodity and the logogram may not have been repeated in the second register as superfluous. The upper line is less well preserved due to two factors. First of all, the second and third signs have been pressed on, both on the front of the tablet and from above on the tablet's edge where there is a decisive impression and visible fingerprint. Second, much if not all of the first line was erased and re-written with several of the original signs still being legible underneath and between the definitive signs. The inscription records clearly an */apudosis/*, a 'delivery'¹² or a 'payment'¹³ of an unknown commodity/material, measured in number, however, rather than weight (unless *LANA* is meant in the break of the first line). The second word of the first line (written twice perhaps to correct the omitted sign *ro* in the first text) is clearly an adjective in **-tero-* in agreement with the feminine *a-pu-do-si*: an interpretation */proterā/* is then likely, 'the first of two' or 'in the first place (of a pair)', followed by the remains of a single sign. If the numeral 100 is at the break, this could represent an amount of at least two hundred since the extant 'hundred' is at the bottom of the register, so ≥ 200 must be the reconstructed amount. It does seem to be unusual, however, to have numerals without a logogram on the entire tablet. We would expect that the commodity being recorded would be identified by logogram at least in the first line. So it is likely that instead of 100 the circular incision may be part of a fragmentary logogram and the shape of the break would suggest *LANA*.¹⁴ The interpretation of the second entry is eased by the interpretation of *po-ro-te-ra*. As opposed to the first 'payment' of two, *o-u-te-ra* interprets itself as *-ὕστερα* a 'later payment' or delivered at a later stage, followed by the numeral 200, which is probably complete. The preceding *o-* remains problematic: Y. Duhoux thinks of an *o*-grade of PIE **ud-*,¹⁵ but it is likely that we are dealing with an adverbial */hō(s)/* and, due to the early date of the record (see below), it would be possible to propose an old instrumental of the demonstrative theme rather than the relative. If so, this *o-* is to be related to the Mycenaean series *o-a₂*, *o-da-a₂*, *o-de-qa-a₂*, rather than the alternating *o-/jo-*.

Context and Chronology

Unlike the majority of the architectural remains excavated so far at Mycenae, both within and outside the citadel, which date to the LH IIIB period (13th c. BCE), Petsas House represents a period to which few 'physical' remains can be assigned. The construction techniques are so far unlike those of the other

¹² ἀπύδοσις Nom. sing. 'amount delivered as opposed to assessment', cf. Ventris and Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, 2nd edition, Cambridge 1973, p. 533.

¹³ F. Aura Jorro, *Diccionario Griego-Español* II, Madrid 1993, pp. 88-89.

¹⁴ As suggested by J. L. Melena, e-mail of 15.6.2001, *apud* A. Bartoněk, *Handbuch des mykenischen Griechischen*, Heidelberg 2003, p. 531f., where the tablet is classified as Oe 2.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, quoting the *e*-grade first members in Cypriot compounds.

buildings outside the citadel.¹⁶ The ceramic evidence from the disintegrated mudbrick of the walls indicates that the structure was built during the LH IIIA 1 period, or perhaps in a very early phase of LH IIIA 2. The pottery found in destruction contexts, including the 500 + whole vases from Room Alpha,¹⁷ the material that filled the rooms during their destruction by fire (especially M, O and Γ) and the post-destruction clearing give an end-date sometime in the latter part of the LH IIIA 2 period. From Room Gamma specifically, a few decorated examples of fine LH IIIA 2 vases¹⁸ were found in the early excavations of 1950 and 1951 together with the chronologically characteristic figurines¹⁹ while from the new excavation further large deposits of pottery were uncovered, some containing significant quantities of undecorated fine ware that can be dated by context to LH IIIA 2, including many of the ubiquitous carinated kylix (FS 267) together with sherds, decorated and plain from the same period. The ashy destruction stratum on the stairway, in which was found tablet Ui 2, dates to the same (and only) destruction of the remainder of the structure, without doubt in LH IIIA 2.

THE 1950 TABLET²⁰: X 1

.1]ta-na , a-ti-ja , [

.2] *vacat* [

.1: Perhaps]-ta-na; trace at right.

The first tablet ever to be discovered at Mycenae was found during the salvage excavation of 1950 at Petsas House. It should be emphasized that the partial leaf tablet was found on the unexcavated surface of a field approximately 20 m to the south of Room Gamma.²¹ There is no certain connection to the building itself, its chronological position or of course, to the tablet discovered in the destruction context in 2000. Moreover, it is clearly written in a different hand.

¹⁶ For the latest description and dating of features at Mycenae see *The Archaeological Atlas of Mycenae*, Iakovidis and French, eds. 2003; similar structures of LH IIIB date and with a few tablets are the so-called Ivory Houses, see I. Tournavitou, *The "Ivory Houses" at Mycenae*, suppl. *BSA* 24, 1995.¹⁷ *PAE* 1950, pp. 205-211 and 222-228; 2000 and 2001.

¹⁸ *PAE* 1951, p. 196 and fig. 6.

¹⁹ *PAE* 1950, pp. 213-214, figs. 16-17 and 1951, p. 195

²⁰ MM 2045, BE 29158, formerly Nauplion Museum 26702. *PAE* 1950, pp. 214-215, fig. 18; E. L. Bennett, Jr., *The Mycenae Tablets II*, *Trans. Amer. Philisophical Soc.* 45, 87, 112; A. Sacconi, *Corpus delle Iscrizioni in Lineare B di Micene, Incunabula Graeca* LVIII, Rome 1974, 1; J. L. Melena and J.-P. Olivier, *TITHEMY. The tablets and nodules in Linear B from Tiryns, Thebes and Mycenae*. suppl. *Minos* 12, Salamanca 1991, p. 75.

²¹ *PAE* 1950, p. 214 and fig. 1 where the star indicates the approximate location of the find in relation to the then known extent of Room Gamma, ie. its north end.

FURTHER DISCOVERIES

Another tablet fragment was found on the surface in 2000 (MycMus BE 28604, (2) 00/00,002) at about 10 m to the west of Room Alpha on the slope below the building in the track cut by the wheel barrow. The fragment is a tablet corner with a small segment of smoothed and flattened surface preserved on one side only; no signs are preserved but fingerprints appear 'pinching' on both sides at the corner.

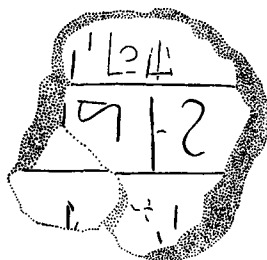
Additional evidence for the use of Linear B at Petsas House prior to its destruction came in 2004 with the discovery of three joining fragments that make up a small portion of a tablet, probably of the page type.²² The fragments come from a deposit of destruction debris dumped in a well in the south end of Room Pi, in an attempt to clean up the building immediately post-destruction. The deposit consists of 1000s of vases, primarily carinated kylikes and bowls, together with terra cotta figurines and small finds of ivory, glass and stone, and also contains elements of the building including burned timbers, mudbrick and fresco fragments. The tablet fragment was found at approximately 6.0 m below the floor level of the room and the mouth opening of the well, which appears to have been about 1.0 m below the water level in the well at the time of deposition. The tablet is very soft and fragile and has a significant amount of small pebble inclusions. The surface has been almost chipped away. An attempt has not yet been made to clean the inscription, therefore much of it is obscured and not yet restorable. What is visible is transcribed here, following the brief physical description:

MycMus BE 31741, (78) 04/16,315

Tablet with Linear B tablet inscription

Clay: red-brown semi-coarse with five gravelly inclusions, accidentally 'baked' by exposure to high level of heat/fire

Fragment: pres L. 0.023-0.0015 m, H. 0.028 m, W. 0.009 m; unknown area of tablet missing from all edges; soft and fragile condition.



X 3

PLATE XIX.B.C

supra mutila

- .1]•-ra-•[
- .2]qi-pa-we [
- .3] *vestigia* [

infra mutila

- .1]•-ra-pi[not impossible.
- .2]qi-pe-we not impossible.
- .3 *vestigia*:]pe VIR ! [not impossible.

²² *Ergon* 2004.

On the back of the fragment there is preserved a single horizontal line inscribed from one broken edge to the other and a few marks that may indicate the existence of signs, now obscured.

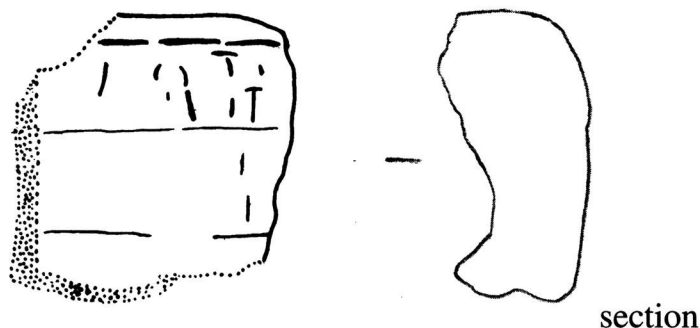
Another interesting find was made in 2001 within a deposit dumped over Room Pi where the well is also located. The deposit here is related to that of the well, also consisting of destruction debris dumped here when the well was full and overflowing. This additional material was subsequently burned, probably to consolidate the pile of vases and other debris. Among this material was found a piece of clay that is inscribed on the front with at least two registers of signs, while the back of the piece preserves the imprint of textile, probably an edge with 'finishing'. This inscription would seem to be a label. The clay is very fine and light green in color. It is a typical potting clay, especially for undecorated fine ware and was in use at this site as exhibited by lumps of the raw clay found in the well deposit described above. The very fine nature of the clay and perhaps its use on a 'soft' background, not to mention the circumstances of destruction, have caused the front surface to be severely compressed –leaving the writing incisions visible but the signs unrecognizable.

MycMus BE 30461, (29) 01/16,027

Object (label) with Linear B inscription

Clay: very fine poros in light green buff, accidentally 'baked' by exposure to high level of heat/fire, some light signs of burning.

Fragmentary: 0.034 m x 0.030 m x 0.013 m.



Wq 4

- .1] *vestigia*
 .2] *vestigia*
 .3] *vestigia*
 infra mutila
 Margin *supra*.

PLATE XIX.D.E

IMPLICATIONS FOR USE AND DATING

It is only fitting that from the area where the first tablet ever was found at Mycenae, also comes the earliest dateable tablet, not only at Mycenae but on the Mainland. The discovery of Ui 2 in 2000 on the stairs of Room Gamma, firmly within the undisturbed destruction deposit of the building means that it was deposited there during the last moments that the building and its entrance stairs

were in use. That moment is firmly dated by ceramic evidence to the Late Helladic IIIA 2 period. This suggests that not only was Linear B in use on the Mainland in the later 14th century BCE but it argues for the existence of a fully evolved palatial administrative system using this recording medium at that time, a century before it can be documented at the other palatial centers. It also fills the obvious and wide chronological gap between the dates of the Knossos tablets in early LH IIIA and the LH IIIB tablets of the remainder on the Mainland, whether Thebes, Pylos or other examples from Mycenae.²³ In six seasons of excavation at Petsas House so far, the date for the destruction of the building has been reconfirmed over and over again –the later LH IIIA 2 period. The other two examples of Linear B inscription on the site also date to the same destruction but were removed from their original context and deposited secondarily together with a dump of destruction debris. Here too though, the ceramic evidence dates this action to the same period late in the 14th century BCE.

Relationship of settlement and palace

Another important point of the discovery of tablets from Petsas House within the settlement of Mycenae is the suggestion of a relationship between the Palace and the settlement in LH IIIA 2. However, the industrial nature of this building complex, as well as its rather high-level of wealth and sophistication (architectural design, organization of space, special accommodations for industry), highlight that it is no ordinary building. In other words, this was not a simple habitation corresponding with the Palace. Rather we have high-level industrial craftsmen producing a very important commodity for subsistence, cultural maintenance as well as trade that certainly was part of the interest of the palace²³ but produced on a more local level. At Petsas House there has been recovered too much pottery and of too good quality to be only a ‘cottage industry.’ Although this case illustrates the use of a recording mechanism outside of exclusively the citadel in LH IIIA 2 it still does not exclude the possibility that only scribes working for the palace were responsible and capable of producing and distributing the tablets. The best comparison here is with the tablets from the Ivory Houses although obviously a century separates the use and destruction dates of the buildings and the deposition dates of the relevant tablets. It just goes to show that the complex central administrative system of the Mainland palaces recorded in Linear B on clay tablets was not a phenomenon only of the later part

²³ E. L. Bennett and J.-P. Olivier, *The Pylos Tablets Transcribed I: Text and notes*, Rome 1973; J. T. Killen and J.-P. Olivier, *The Knossos Tablets. Fifth edition. Suppl. Minos* 11, Salamanca 1989; J. L. Melena and J.-P. Olivier, *TITHEMY cit.*; V. Aravantinos, L. Godart and A. Sacconi, *Thèbes: Fouilles de la Cadmée 1: Les tablettes en linéaire B de la Odos Pelopidou, édition et commentaire*, Rome 2001; Palaima, *The Scribes of Pylos*, Rome 1988; «‘Archives’ and ‘Scribes’ and Information Hierarchy in Mycenaean Greek Linear B Records», *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record Keeping in the Ancient World*, Oxford 2003, pp. 153-194.

of the palatial period in the 13th century BCE but was a longer lived tradition dating back at least to the later 14th century BCE if not (as is most likely) to the use of Linear B tablets at Knossos when it was destroyed early in that same century.

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