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**An archaeological and epigraphical overview
of some inscriptions found in the Cult Center
of the city of Knossos (Anetaki plot)**

**Athanasia Kanta, Dimitri Nakassis,
Thomas G. Palaima, Massimo Perna**

The archaeological evidence
By A. Kanta*

In an important study Peter Day and David Wilson¹ consider Knossos as a place of memory where the character of habitation is connected with diachronic religious cult. The excavations of the Anetaki plot confirmed this character. The religious center of the city of Knossos was uncovered in this plot, characterized exactly by diachronic cult from the Protopalatial period to the 2nd century AD and beyond.²

The excavation started as a rescue dig on a plot in the modern upper village of Knossos (Fig. 1). Under this village extends part of the ancient city of Knossos, which has been inhabited continuously until today. Nearby is the well-known palace of Knossos.

A few aspects of the excavation are presented here, as they are part of a wider frame of cultic character also involving the inscribed objects

* This excavation and the study of the material, which still continues, would not have been possible without the very generous backing of the Institute for Aegean Prehistory. I am very grateful to Dr. Malcolm Wiener, founder of INSTAP, Professor Phillip Betancourt, Executive Director of INSTAP, and Dr. Tom Brogan, director of the INSTAP Study Center in Crete, for their unflinching and continuous support during the years of the work at Knossos. I am also grateful to the director of the Heraklion Ephorate Dr. Vasso Sythiakaki, and section leader Ioanna Serpetsidaki, for their help and support, also, to the conservators of the Heraklion Ephorate, the guard Stavros Amanakis, and the Anetaki excavation and study team of our archaeologists and technicians.

¹ DAY & WILSON 2002.

² KANTA 2018, 250-264, 334-340.

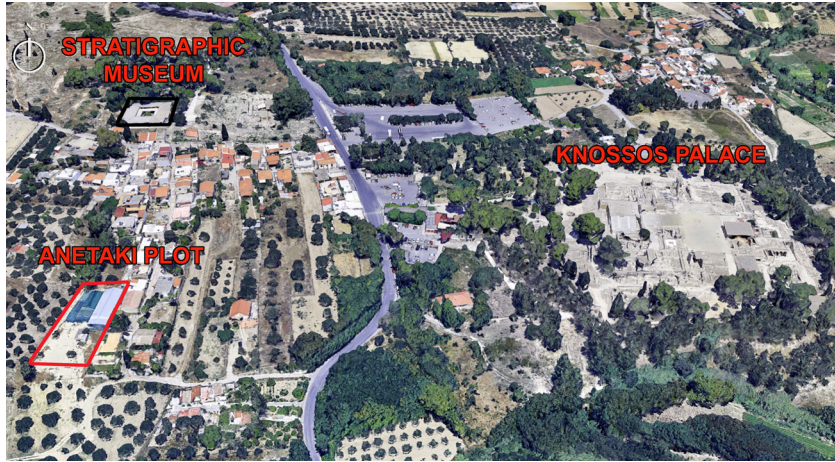


Fig. 1. Palace of Knossos and the surrounding area.
Location of Anetaki plot (adjusted from Google Maps).

presented here. The excavation started in 2011 and 2012, and continued from 2013 onwards until 2017. 525sq.m have been excavated so far, to the bedrock, at a greatest depth of 8m. Next to this plot, the BSA excavated part of a Greek sanctuary in 1974 and called it the Glaucos sanctuary.³ The stratigraphy of the plot is very complicated and fragmented because of robbed walls, pits and wells cut into previous strata.

In the northern part of the Anetaki plot a Roman *temenos* wall with two viewing steps (Fig. 2, B), an arrangement known from various Greek temples, was found.⁴

The *temenos* contained a double temple dedicated to Artemis and Zeus. The northern temple had a bench for placement of sculpture and an *eschara*. The discovered sculpture and figures were of high quality. Under the floors of the Roman temples there mainly were Hellenistic walls of structures which seem to be dedicated to cult.

A unique Bronze Age shrine with cult arrangements and objects *in situ* was placed underneath the Roman temple (Fig. 2, A). We named it the Fetish Shrine, in analogy to the Fetish Shrine excavated by Sir Arthur Evans in the Little Palace. Underneath the Fetish Shrine there was a

³ CALLAGHAN 1978.

⁴ KANTA 2018, 252-253; 2020.

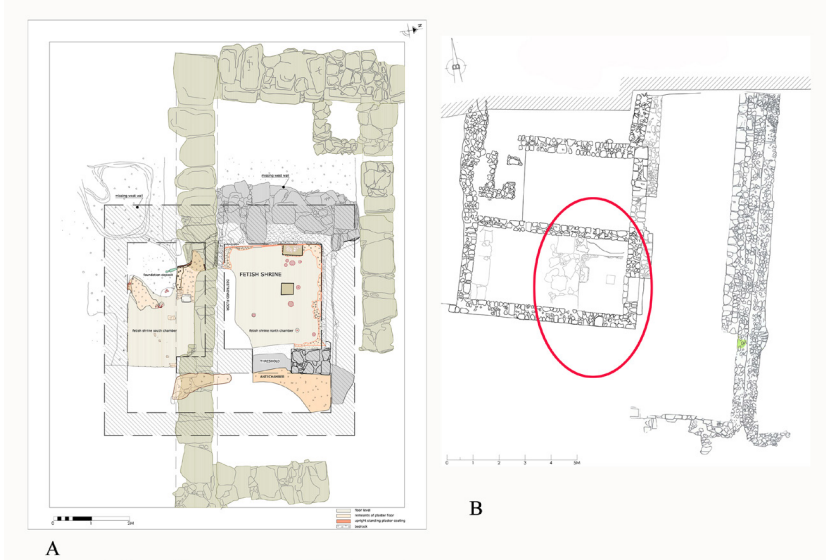


Fig. 2. A. Location of the Fetish Shrine over Neopalatial Room 1, B. The double Roman temple and *temenos* wall. The North Cella of Fetish Shrine is visible (Excavator's archive).

large Neopalatial building of a cultic character. In one of its rooms, after its destruction and abandonment, the Fetish Shrine was built. It was a three-room shrine consisting of two inter-communicating rooms with a common antechamber. For building material they re-used stones from the Neopalatial building.

The Anetaki site was full of sacred repositories and foundation deposits. Some belong to the Protopalatial period (1800-1700 BC). Over the bedrock, a Neopalatial building (1700-1450 BC), of a character unique to date, has come to light (Fig. 3). The main walls of this building are built with ashlar masonry bearing a great number of mason's marks. It is clear from the way some walls are built that the building material is second-hand. In other words, building material from an earlier building of Protopalatial date (1800-1700 BC) has been used. Several important elements of this early building have been found. They are all related to cult, and show Protopalatial building activity in this area. The diachronic, religious use of this site begins with these. They are the following:

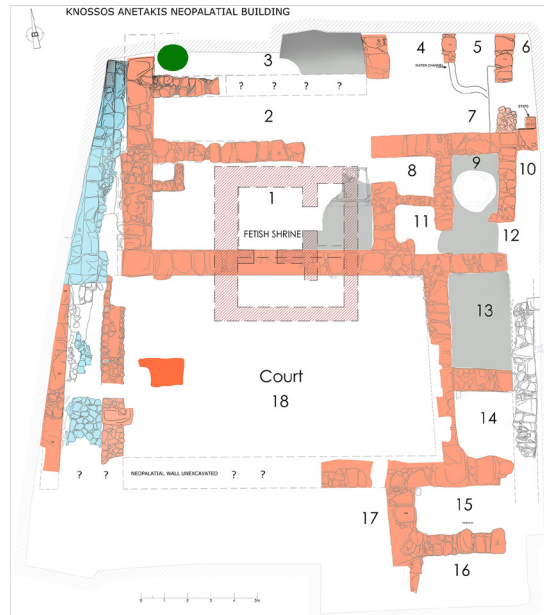


Fig. 3. Neopalatial building (1700-1450 BC) ground plan. Grey areas: burnt destruction. Green dot: Foundation Deposit of Room. Walls with hatched lines: Fetish Shrine (Excavator's archive).

1. A cist under Neopalatial Room 1.
2. A cistern dug out of the soft bedrock in the NE part of the plot.
3. A repository under the floor of Neopalatial Room 14.

From the Neopalatial building, which replaced the Protopalatial one, 18 spaces have been excavated so far. The finds clearly show that this building also had a cult use.

From the spaces of the Neopalatial building, relevant to this paper is Room 1, which contained the Ivory Repository (Fig. 4).

This is a semi-subterranean, long room, 3.70 by 9.50m in dimensions, which communicated with spaces 7 and 8. It is built against the slope of the hill, which have a west-to-east downward slope. Its entrances to both Rooms 7 and 8 have been destroyed by later pits. However, its floor clearly went over a Protopalatial cist. Room 1 and the Protopalatial cist under it have not been completely excavated, because the north *cella* of

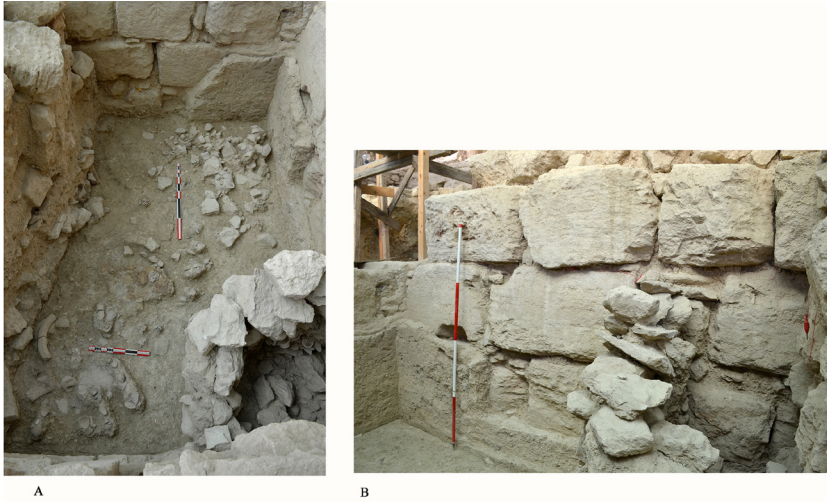


Fig. 4. Neopalatial building, Room 1: A. Floor deposit and repository, B. Ashlar wall and repository wall against it (Excavator's archive).

the Fetish Shrine was fitted into them. In the southeast corner of Room 1 was a burnt layer full of small vases: miniature jugs, cups, conical cups and braziers. The western part of the Room, which was not affected by the construction of the Fetish Shrine, had some important finds, which show the character of the destroyed first floor of this building.

Two large fragments of gypsum slabs belonged to the dado of the walls. There were also fragments of wall paintings, unfortunately in a fragmentary state. They were white, black, blue, red and yellowish in colour. They were found together with fragments of charcoal, probably belonging to the superstructure of the walls and ceiling. Some vases were found on the floor or just above it. Fallen from the floor above, was a painted pithos decorated with relief ornamental bands.

In the North-West corner of Room 1 was a repository (Fig. 5), which started as a pit cut into the soft bedrock (0.50-0.60m. depth) and was built up with flimsy walls, partly against the N and W walls of the room. It had the following dimensions: preserved height 1.60-1.70m.; interior dimensions 1.10 by 0.80m.; exterior dimensions 1.50 by 1.20m. One of the most important testimonials of the Minoan script, Linear A, came to light in this repository, in a fragmentary condition (Fig. 6, A). It is a religious object made out of elephant ivory and probably meant for display

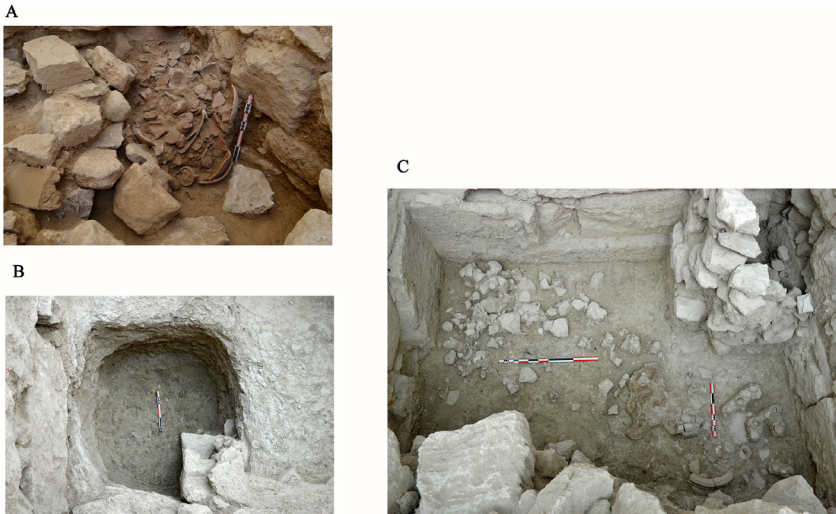


Fig. 5. The Ivory Repository: A. Mass of pottery inside. B. Pit dug out of bedrock. C. Repository wall and floor of Room 1 with destruction deposit (Excavator's archive).

only, because it is now, as it also was originally, fragile in nature (Fig. 6, B). It consists of a circle of ivory open on one side. A handle was fitted into this opening. When it was displayed, it was held from this handle, which has a typical handle shape, widening towards the top. This object and its handle were found in the same layer of the narrow repository.

When the inscribed ivory object was mended, it became clear that in the middle of it there was a component of perishable material, which was kept in place by rods, also of perishable material, inserted into holes bored into the ivory circle. All sides of the ivory circle and the handle were covered by writing in the Linear A script. I have provisionally called this object 'a religious scepter,' to emphasize its cultic character and the fact that it was held by its handle.

The Linear A writing incised on the soft ivory has a calligraphic character not found on the clay Linear A tablets.

Although this object is so far unique, it seems to be depicted on various glyptic objects, e.g. on a roughly contemporary gold ring found in the Griffin Warrior Tomb from Pylos.⁵ On this ring the Goddess is holding an object which has been interpreted by the excavators as a mirror.

⁵ DAVIS & STOCKER 2016, 85, no. 4, 627-655.



Fig. 6. The Ivory Repository: A. The ivory scepter during excavation.
B. The ivory scepter after mending (Excavator's archive).

However, it clearly has a circular component in its middle which cannot be part of a mirror, as Bronze Age mirrors are made of a highly polished bronze disk without a circular component in their middle.

Together with the 'scepter,' an intriguing faience object, roughly of similar dimensions, was found. It was also circular with a hole in the middle. Its preservation does not allow us to know if it was comparable in shape to the ivory 'scepter.' Unfortunately, it is only partly preserved. A spectacular object, also found in the same repository, is a bowl of banded marble, grey and white in colour, made in two separate pieces. Its shape is unique so far in the bibliography. The Ivory Repository, apart from pottery, also contained six bronze hinges and an offertory bronze blade. The hinges may have belonged to a wooden box or a writing tablet.

The pottery of the repository is in the process of mending and publication.⁶ The complete vases, at present, suggest an early Neopalatial character. When the mending, processing and study of the material are completed, we will have a clear idea of when the repository started being used and for how long.

⁶ KANTA forthcoming.

*The Linear A inscriptions on the Ivory Ring (KN Zg 57)
and on the ivory handle (KN Zg 58)
by D. Nakassis, T. G. Palaima & M. Perna***

The Linear A inscription on the Ivory Ring (KN Zg 57)

As we have seen, Athanasia Kanta considers the two ivory objects as forming part of a scepter or a religious instrument, and defines the two parts that compose it as a 'ring' and 'handle.' We will use the same words to mention the supports of the two different inscriptions.

The Ring and the handle do not fit together perfectly, because small pieces of ivory from the Ring are missing (c. 0.7cm). The Ring is made from a 'slice' of an elephant tusk (Fig. 7).

The outer diameter measures c. 13.5 to 14cm (5.4-5.6in), and the inner diameter between c. 10 and 10.3cm. (4-4.1in). The Ring, like the tusk from which it was cut, is not exactly circular, but a little bit elliptical.

The height of the 'exterior' face of the Ring (Face C) is c. 1.2cm (roughly ½ inch), and the height of the 'interior' face (Face D) is 1.8cm (roughly ¾ inch). This difference in height between the internal and external thickness of the Ring creates a slope on the upper face (Face A). By contrast, the lower or bottom face (Face B) is flat.

Two holes of c. 1cm in diameter cross the Ring from side to side, and two hollows, which do not completely perforate the outer surface of the Ring (Face C), are disposed along an axis that is perpendicular to the axis of the two holes.

There are many depictions of objects that resemble our so far unique ivory object, especially on some well-known seals. In the scene on the ring seal CMS XI, 030 (Fig. 8), for example, there is a circular object with a handle, which has a spherical element that appears to be in its center. It is held by a seated female. But also a Cretan Hieroglyphic nodule from

**We would like to underline the great importance of the work done by the restorers Kathy Hall, Erasmia Arvaniti, Georgia Pachaki, Manolis Chatzimanolis, and Alekos Nikakis. These skilled technicians devoted their full skills to reconstructing these documents starting from dozens of fragments. We are indebted to D. Nakassis, Ph. Sapirstein and A. Greco for providing us with images that have been crucial for our detailed study and presentation of the inscriptions and for our understanding of the skill of the hand that created these masterpieces. Tom Palaima, Dimitri Nakassis and Massimo Perna are extremely grateful to Athanasia Kanta for having entrusted them with the epigraphic publication of these documents, which are destined to write a new chapter in the history of Minoan writing systems. Our great thanks to Malcolm Wiener for his personal interest in seeing to the scientific publication of these great discoveries.



Fig. 7. The Ivory Ring and the ivory handle (Photo Ph. Sapirstein).

Knossos seems to show a ring (with a handle) that has a spherical element in the center (Fig. 9).

The presence of the two holes and two hollows on our Ring led us to think that a small object could be held in suspension in the center of the Ring. It could be a small object supported by one continuous cylindrical support (or two half supports meeting at the object) that fit into the two holes. To prevent the inevitable tilting that might happen if the object were suspended along only one axis, the object may have been fixed along a perpendicular axis in the same way with one continuous cylindrical support (or, again, two half supports), which was fitted into the two hollows that do not perforate the outer surface of the Ring.

The Ring has a long inscription in Linear A,⁷ clearly carved on three of its faces, and probably on all four. These are the top face (Face A), the bottom (Face B), the external face (Face C), and the internal face (Face D) that preserves almost no original ‘surface.’

We start with Face A, the top face. The figures incised into the ivory are placed into separate spaces, marked to the left and to the right by incised vertical lines; above and below, the space is limited by the natural upper and lower edges of the particular faces. Influenced by the visual effects of these segments, especially when the incised images are true-to-life, we call each of such demarcated spaces a *metope*. On the left half of Face A, when the Ring is oriented with the gap in the Ring downward roughly at 6 o'clock on old circular time pieces, there is a series of 12 quadruped animals, each in its own *metope*. These animal *metopes* take up almost precisely half of the available space on Face A. The iconography of the animals will be discussed in the forthcoming, final publi-



Fig. 8. Detail of the cast of the ring seal CMS XI, 030.

⁷ Henceforth, all Linear A documents and sign numbers refer to the editions of *GORILA I-V*.

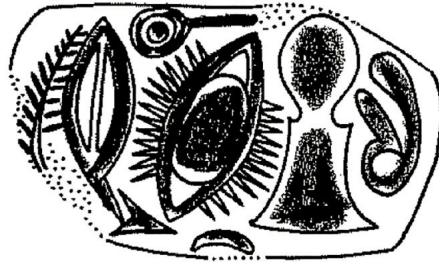
cation.⁸ All the animals are oriented facing to the left.

Face A on its right half, moving clockwise from 12 o'clock to six o'clock, contains 16 whole or partially preserved signs, each in a *metope*. Considering the space available, at least two other signs may have been incised. At least 18 signs, therefore, were originally present. The only sign that can give us an indication for the direction of the writing is the 'rhyton' (Linear A sign A 664), which in its only attestation in Linear A on tablet PH 8a.3, is oriented facing to the right.

As we have seen with the animals, the Linear A signs are 'framed' on all four faces, in rectangular *metopes* formed by two vertical lines and by the upper and lower edges of the Ring, according to a practice that closely resembles the inscription on the outer faceted surface of the stone libation table from Iouktas (IO Za 2). The arrangement of the signs with this circular pattern leads us to think the two painted inscriptions inside cups from Knossos (KN Zc 6; KN Zc 7) and of the ring of Mavro Spelio (KN Zf 13). We would also compare the inscription on the Phaistos Disk, where the groups of signs, albeit stamped, are, as in this case, contained in *metopes*. This arrangement of the signs with *metopes* is also found on many seals and sealings in Cretan Hieroglyphic script.⁹

Stylistically, the signs of our inscription remind us of the Linear A inscriptions not only of Knossos and Iouktas, but also of Phaistos. In particular, from a paleographic point of view, some of the signs look similar to those engraved on metal objects like the silver pin from Knossos (KN Zf 31). See, for example, the signs AB 60 (RA), AB 28 (I), AB 24 (NE) and AB 09 (SE).

The signs are engraved and carved with the same technique and accuracy as most of the Cretan Hieroglyphic inscriptions on seals. But few Linear A inscriptions, even those that are very accurate, like the inscrip-



CHIC #145 / CMS II,8,78

Fig. 9. Drawing of nodule #145 (CHIC, 196).

⁸ KANTA forthcoming.

⁹ Henceforth, all references to Cretan Hieroglyphic documents and signs refer to CHIC.

tions on dedicatory libation tables or on precious metals, have signs that are so ‘lifelike,’ artistic, and close to three-dimensional.

On the right half of Face A, at least ten vases are engraved. They are carved in an extremely iconographic manner. Some vases have a syllabic sign, placed above in ligature, emerging upward from the mouths of the vases. In all likelihood, each sign in ligature (VAS+PA, VAS+RU, etc.) provides further details about each vase or its contents. It is probably not a coincidence, in fact, that the signs for the rhyton and the tripod are the two vase signs on the Ring that do not have an associated syllabogram.

If the syllabograms were used here to specify the types of vases, they would be absent from these two vases, the identities of which are conspicuous from the unmistakable shapes of the ideograms (see HT 31). Six vases recorded on the Ring share an identical typology, that of an amphora.

Until now, our only examples of non-linearized Linear A occur infrequently on clay tablets, nodules, roundels, and vases; or, as we have seen, more frequently when carved on metal objects or on libation tables. By contrast, the signs of Cretan Hieroglyphic are very iconographic/calligraphic, especially those incised on seals. Linear A, with some very rare exceptions, was not used on seals. Here, for the first time, we are dealing with a Linear A inscription incised predominantly in a calligraphic style. This is a key new feature, important for ongoing palaeographical studies.

As mentioned above, 12 animals are also contained each one in its own *metope*. Although we are not in the presence of a familiar type of Linear A inscription *stricto sensu*, these images of animals convey an aesthetic and even ‘ideational’ meaning, e.g. as in the Parthenon friezes, which tell their story in images. Their numbers and species might relate to animals that would be sacrificed in ritual feasting. Likewise for the vessels that occupy the right half of Face A: tripods, rhyta and amphorae have clear ritual functions. As we have mentioned above, Face A also has evidence for 17 other extant signs, simple or in ligature, and there is room for two more signs.

In this inscription, and in particular in Face A, the iconography and the writing are part of the same message and of the same narration. This feature is unique to date for Linear A inscriptions.

We could conclude that the aim of the creator of Face A was to record, with pure iconography, the animals and then, in their most realis-

tic forms, using the repertory of Linear A logograms, the vases, the textiles and the hides with the help of what would seem to be acrophonic signs that were considered indispensable for identifying the particular varieties, treatments or contents of these entries. The iconography and the writing are integrated together into the same 'message,' the same narrative. It may describe the components of a ceremony or religious festival, or, as with Hittite records that prescribe what should be done in particular rituals, serve here as a kind of mnemonic text.

So again, taken together in this way, we have a superbly executed 'record' of all the elements necessary for a ritual feasting ceremony, with well-known counterparts in the Linear B tablets. Here, however, we have a counterpart of the 'ingredients' in this communal ritual ceremony also attested in a Linear A tablet, as will be discussed in our final publication.¹⁰

Face B, the bottom face, is flat and has a Linear A inscription with groups of signs, but also single syllabograms and logograms. Also on Face B, groups of signs and individual signs are contained in *metopes*. As we have just seen, we have no such phonetic sign groups on Face A. The text of face B has many *lacunae* (missing signs) due to the damage to the surface layer of the ivory or even deeper. The direction of reading the inscription would seem to be left-to-right, judging by the orientation of AB 81 (KU), AB 40 (WI) and AB 60 (RA) signs. Since a good part of the text is eroded, it is not possible to establish the beginning of the inscription.

The text of Face B presents six groups of signs that are well-preserved and perfectly recognizable, followed by three ideograms/logograms. The three ideograms/logograms in Linear B have the value GRA, probably FAR and OLIV. Each occupies its own *metope*. Again, there are no accompanying numbers or fractional signs.

Face C, the external face on the outer circumference of the Ring, contains a Linear A inscription composed of groups of signs and individual or ligatured signs that, also on this face, are contained within *metopes*. At least 40% of Face C has extensive surface damage leaving no traces of signs. We can recognize at least nine groups of signs and five logograms for different types of textiles differing from each other by the number of fringes. One textile sign is ligatured with the sign AB 77 (KA)

¹⁰ KANTA forthcoming.

inside it. The direction of writing is from left-to-right, as is made clear by the orientation of some signs, such as AB 60 (RA), AB 01 (TA), AB 81 (KU), etc.

Face D, the inner face of the Ring, is extremely damaged. It seems to show almost exclusively a long sequence of about nine signs for animal hide, none entirely preserved, each in a *metope*. In one case, there is a trace of a sign that seems to be ligatured with the hide ideogram (AB 180). The ligatured sign can be restored as the upper curved portion of syllabogram AB 77 (KA), AB 78 (QE), or AB 70 (KO). The best parallel for the form of the hide ideogram is found in the Phaistos Linear A tablets.

In total there are approximately 84 signs completely or partially preserved, and 35 in small traces or probably present in the space available. The total number then is about 119 signs.

We are dealing, therefore, with the longest known Linear A inscription. It is considerably longer than the opisthographic Linear A tablet **HT 123**, which has 105 signs. But more than 40% of the signs on **HT 123** are routine numerals and marks of separation. By eliminating these, only some 60 phonetic or logographic/ideographic signs are left. By significant contrast, our inscription contains no numerals at all on any of its faces. As such, it aligns itself with stone libation vessels and divorces itself from accounting records. The use of the *metope* feature on the Ring eliminates the need for marks of separation, commonly known as ‘word-dividers.’ Finally, we must stress that there are few parallels of the sign-groups on the Ring with sign-groups on extant Linear A texts.

The Linear A inscription on the ivory handle (KN Zg 58)

The inscription on the ivory handle (Fig. 7) is the first Linear A economic document coming from a cult building and the second within the Minoan cultural sphere, considering the small fragment of the *lame à deux faces* in the Cretan Hieroglyphic script from the sanctuary of Kato Syme Viannou as the other example.¹¹

The handle has a quadrangular section and measures c. 13cm in length, and has a maximum thickness of 1.6cm. The signs measure between 0.5 and 0.9cm, so they are smaller than those of the Ring.

We decided to consider the Ring and the handle as separate carriers of inscriptions and to study the two independently for several reasons.

¹¹ LEBESSI *et al.* 1995.

First of all, the inscription on the handle is an accounting text, as determined by the presence of numerical and fractional signs. By contrast, the text on the Ring, although it shows animals, agricultural products, and man-made objects and materials indicated by single logograms, it does not testify to any quantities indicated by numerals or fractions. Secondly, the ductus of the writing on the handle is different from that on the Ring. If we concentrate on the signs that occur more than once on the Ring, namely signs AB 08 (A), AB 81 (KU), AB 07 (DI) and AB 77 (KA), we can see that on the Ring they are incised always in the same way and in a very calligraphic manner. On the contrary, on the handle the shape of the sign AB 08 (A) is linearized and the shape of the sign AB 77 (KA) has a different orientation of the internal strokes. Third, the same two signs AB 08 (A) and AB 77 (KA) appear ligatured on the Ring and on the handle, but on the Ring the sign AB 08 is above AB 77, but on the handle the sign AB 08 is below AB 77. In other words, these elements of the inscribed texts seem to demonstrate the presence of two different hands of the scribe/incisor.

On Face α of the handle, two probable vases, each ligatured with a phonetic sign, are recorded followed by a sign for ten. After these appears a probable new sign in the Linear A sign repertory. This sign is followed by two signs attested in the Hieroglyphic script: *180 and *181. These two signs are very rare, and this document demonstrates that they were also used in Linear A. On Face β of the handle, at the right end, a sequence of four signs is recorded. Only the first sign is doubtful, because it is very damaged. On the left half of this face there is likely a sign for an animal hide that recalls the same sign in the Phaistos tablets, and also the signs incised on the internal Face D of the Ivory Ring. On Face γ signs for a boar and probably a pig are recorded, but without numerals. On Face δ two vases, with a sign above in ligature, are followed by units, and also by fractions.

This sequence of fractions is a most important aspect of this document. Six different signs for fractions are recorded in sequence. This might provide us with the relative values of these fractions (although not the absolute values). The significant news is that this sequence of fractions provides us with a different sequence of values than those suggested until now.¹² This is a discovery of great importance considering

¹² More recently, see also CORAZZA *et al.* 2021, with lengthy bibliography on the topic.

how many papers have been dedicated to the fractional system of Linear A.

This succinct presentation of the new inscriptions in this article can only give an idea of the new information that these two documents provide for scholars of Cretan scripts. The publication of the volume¹³ dedicated to the archaeological context based on the associated material remains and to these extraordinary Linear A documents will furnish fuller details and describe more thoroughly the historical and cultural framework for interpreting these exceptional finds.

¹³ KANTA forthcoming.

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