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The Linear B tablets from the North Entrance Passage at Knossos: a preliminary account of an interdisciplinary approach

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The holistic study integrating archaeological, pinacological, epigraphic, linguistic and textual approaches conducted by Jan Driessen in the 1990's opened the way to recognize a potential diachronicity and the possibility that a succession of tablets deposits within the Knossos archives existed, perhaps corresponding to distinct periods of the Linear B administration in the palace.[1] In his study, Driessen argued that the deposit of the Room of the Chariot Tablets [henceforth: RCT] constituted an early stage of the Linear B administration. While the basic principles of this hypothesis are now widely accepted, the precise sequence and internal chronology of the various Knossian palatial deposits still needs to be thoroughly evaluated.

As a follow-up of this initial study, I attempted to approach another large collection of tablets from within the palace, that of the North Entrance Passage [henceforth: NEP], following a similar interdisciplinary perspective.[2] A number of detailed analyses allows, I believe, to situate the NEP deposit more convincingly in terms of its chronological relations to the RCT and other Knossian deposits. In this preliminary account paper, I highlight some of the main results of my doctoral research starting with a reappraisal of the archaeological context of the NEP deposit, followed by a brief overview of some of the pinacological,

[1] Driessen 1999.
[2] Mouthuy 2020.

epigraphical and palaeographical features that can be used as potential chronological markers for the deposit.

Archaeological context

A large and initial part of my research was taken up by the study of the archaeological context of the NEP. It was my aim to review both the circumstances of discovery during the excavations conducted by Arthur Evans at the beginning of the 20th century, and the stratigraphy. This allowed to propose a probable reconstruction of the architectural context of the North Entrance complex through the different phases of the Bronze Age.[3] During the Neopalatial period (ca. 1700-1450 BC), this area of the building was characterized by a monumental entrance. During the Postpalatial period (ca. 1300-1200 BC), however, at the end of its use life, the area witnessed some important architectural modifications: the main passage was blocked to the north and its floor level was raised about 1.20m, following the levelling of destruction debris.

This evaluation of the archaeological context of the NEP deposit also included a broader taphonomic approach which focused on the processes that led to the particular deposition of the tablets. To do so, original excavation data were reinvestigated through the notebooks and notes of Evans, Duncan Mackenzie, and Theodore Fyfe in order to compensate for some of the oversimplified interpretations found in later publications. The material associated with the tablets in the destruction layers was also re-evaluated in an attempt to better identify the circumstances of discovery and provide clues for dating. This approach made it possible to consider all possible scenarios that could convincingly explain the depositional processes of the tablets forming the NEP deposit.[4]

Taphonomy of the deposit

"A curious feature was that in the same deposit as the inscriptions as many as six large plain couple-amphoras were brought out in a pale yellow clay. Some of these were whole or complete though fragmented."[5]

From the moment of the discovery of the deposit, the ca. 550 Linear B

[3] Mouthuy 2020, 22-77.

[4] Mouthuy 2020, 47-63, 78-86.

[5] *DB*, 9 May 1900.

tablets from the NEP were found mixed with roughly 40 double vases.[6] This immediately caught the attention of the excavators, who described this assemblage as 'curious.' Indeed, taken together, a certain number of elements are difficult to explain.

Firstly, the tablets were burnt and broken, sometimes recorded as being in very poor conditions of preservation, while the vases were almost completely intact (they only show a few fresh breaks) and not burnt at all. Moreover, there is also a variety of precise findspots, since at the time of the excavations the tablets of the NEP were collected in the following locations (Fig. 1):

- along the length of the three West Bastions, from the south-west corner of Bastion C (2.00-3.00m below the surface), but not on the east side;
- a little further to the south, at the level of the Room of Spiral Cornice [henceforth: RSC], but higher in the stratigraphy (0.90-1.20m below the surface);
- in the south-western corner of the northern compartment of the RSC, where the tablets were found in a deposit of wood ash (0.50m below the surface), in an extremely fragmentary state. In the same location, fresco fragments were found above and below the fragments of inscriptions.

The double vases were found exclusively along the West Bastions with the tablets, but the deposit of vases stopped between Bastions B and C, while tablets continued to be found until the middle of Bastion A. Furthermore, no tablets were found inside the vases. The overall morphology of the vessels is quite typically LM IIIB, but their duplication is rather unique. All vases seem to have resulted from an identical firing process, and due to the absence of wear, we may hypothesize that they were never used and seemingly freshly produced.

About 50 additional tablets were collected from the rooms immediately west of the passage (Fig. 1). These were also found mixed with stirrup jars and vases similar to the amphorae of the passage. Almost all

[6] A preliminary study of these vases, in collaboration with Charlotte Langohr, was supported by a permit granted by the Heraklion Museum in June 2018, and I thank Georgia Flouda for her kind assistance on behalf of the museum. Ten double vases were found in the storerooms, while one double vase is displayed in the museum's exhibition windows.

the stirrup jars found in the Room of the Stirrup Jars [henceforth: RSJ] are intact or reported to be fragmentary but complete.[7] They were found on a clay surface and can also be dated to the Post-palatial period, i.e. LM IIIB. Tablets were also collected along the western wall of the same room, both on and in a very clayish soil matrix.[8] As a result, they were in a very poor state of preservation, sometimes close to disintegration. In contrast, some tablets were collected at a much lower level on the other side of the northern mud wall of the room.[9]

In the Room of Saffron Gatherer [henceforth: RSG], tablets appeared during the first excavation campaign on the last floor. However, as no wall was identified between the RSG and the RSJ at the time of the excavation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the tablets from the two rooms; it is likely that the great majority of the tablets actually came from the RSJ. In the RSG no vases are recorded but only other finds such as stone lamps. In 1901 some tablets were discovered during a test beneath the last floor level. When collected, these tablets were very friable.[10]

The obvious differences in terms of state of preservation between the tablets and the double vases are puzzling, especially considering that they were found clustered together, although the tablets were clearly more extensively dispersed than the vases.[11] As mentioned, the former were clearly burnt whereas the latter did not show any traces of fire. Furthermore, the tablets were badly broken and almost certainly in a

[7] *DB*, 8 May 1900: "[…] as many as five vases whole or in fragments were found lying on the floor which is covered with a tough deposit of clay […]."

[8] *DB*, 8 May 1900: "[…] badly preserved inscriptions […] continue to appear on the floor along the West wall;" Evans 1900-1901, 35, notes: "a few centimetres below the floor level with which this wall (=N mud wall) was connected, another Mycenaean pavement came to light and some inscribed tablets resting upon it." In this description it can be inferred that the tablets were in a clay layer above the earlier tarazza floor. Evans keeps this idea in Evans 1935, 733-734: "the chamber in which the tablets lay, covered by a shallow accumulation of soil."

[9] *DB* inked, 6 April 1901: "At the foot of the N face of the N wall of this room and beneath the level of the floor was found yesterday several fragments of inscriptions suggesting deposit, two being whole […] The mud N wall [* .80 to floor] had collapsed and this accident had facilitated the search for inscriptions."

[10] *DB*, 8 April 1901: "[…] an earlier floor level made its appearance. Part of this new floor was cement, part consisted of a large slab. Above this floor were found some fragments of inscription tablets in a very soft condition."

[11] For discussions about the dating of the tablets, see, for example, Driessen 1999; Firth 2000-2001; Palmer & Boardman 1963; Raison 1988; Woodard 1972.

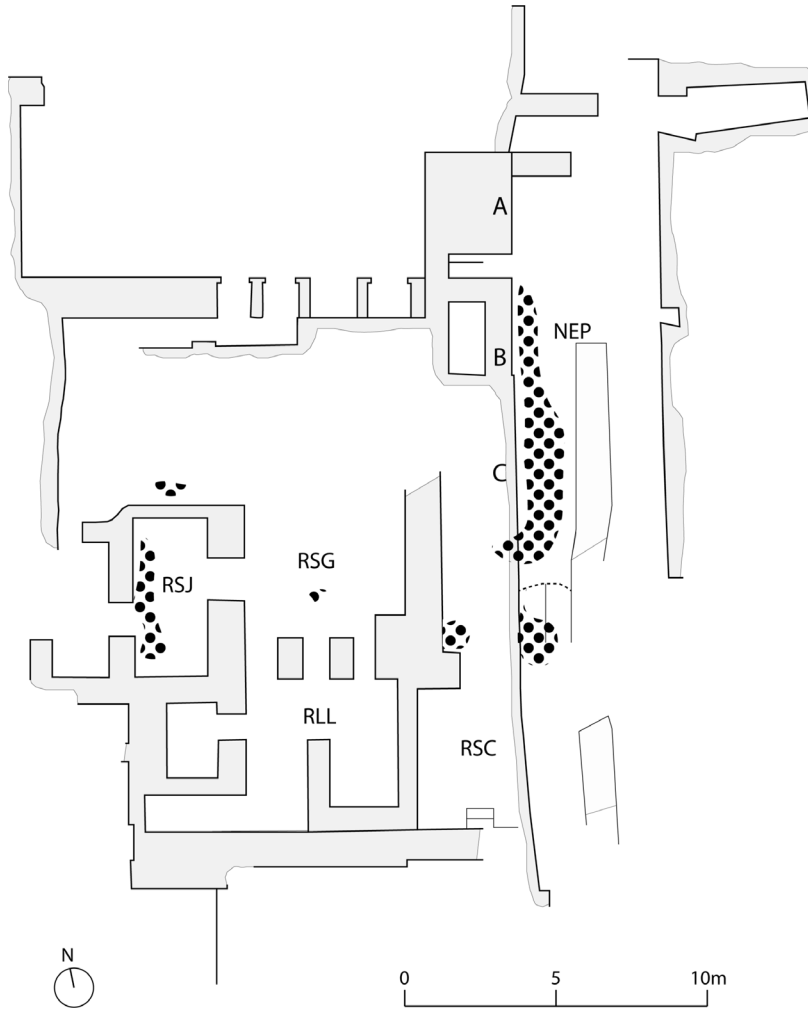

Fig. 1. Reconstruction of the find-places of the NEP tablets.

secondary position whereas the vases were intact and clearly abandoned in their original position. While different potential depositional scenarios that could explain this particular stratigraphy were explored, here, I only focus on what I think is the most likely sequence of events (Fig. 2).[12]

[12] See Mouthuy 2020, 79-84 for other potential scenarios.

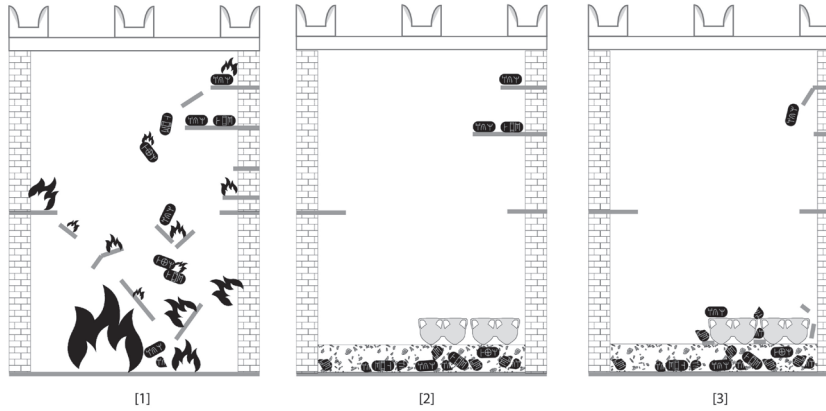

Fig. 2. Potential depositional sequence.

According to this scenario, the tablets were originally stored on the upper floor of the NEP – as was the case for most of the tablets in the palace at Knossos[13] – and were caught in a fire that ravaged the entire northern sector (Fig. 2, [1]). This destruction caused the floor/ceiling to collapse partially into the passage, still used as in the Neopalatial period as the main entrance to the palace. The majority of the tablets hence ended up on the ground floor, but some probably remained at higher level. After a possible phase of abandonment, the entrance area was reoccupied, but the upper floor remained abandoned probably because it was too much ruined (Fig. 2, [2]). As William Woodard already suggested, the destruction debris, including all tablets, were swept up and levelled over in the old passage.[14] The area was then used as a storage room in which the double vases would have been standing up to the abandonment of this part of the palace in LM IIIB1. After the final abandonment of the area, some of the tablets that were somehow still in position on the upper floor eventually fell down, mingling with the vases (Fig. 2, [3]).

The presence of the tablets in the upper layer of the abandonment level could then potentially be related to their original position within an upper room. One may conjecture that they were not lying on the floor, but stored on shelves against the side walls, which did not imme

[13] Driessen 1997, 111. The only exception is formed by the tablets from the Room of Column Base.
[14] Woodard 1972.

diately collapse when the ceiling gave in during the first destruction, and that this happened only later. It may be worth noting that Mackenzie mentions finding fragments of miniature frescoes both slightly above and beneath some of the tablet fragments in the RSC.[15] This seems to indicate that the wall decoration of the upper floor was partially destroyed with the initial collapse while other parts of it came down later, after the remaining tablets had fallen. This event implies that the ceilings would have been preserved, at least to some extent, after a major destruction. Moreover, the tablets that stayed on the upper floor would have been reasonably well protected as long as they remained in their original position.

During excavation, because the floor surface was of trodden earth, it is possible that the interface between the actual destruction debris and the level on which the double vases stood was missed. Consequently, the vessels and inscriptions fragments were collected together and considered a single deposit.

Although this scenario seems to fit the evidence, it should be remembered that John Boardman, in his early study of the area, suggested that the late floor of the passage could present traces of burning.[16] Another objection that could be made relates to the recognizable internal order of the tablets as recorded by Evans. As Richard Firth has argued, this could indicate the limited nature of the dispersal of the inscribed material.[17] Usually, when tablets are found in high concentrations, we tend to assume that they are relatively close to their primary position.[18] This said, we know that tablets were occasionally stored in perishable containers. If this was the case of the NEP deposit, this might have affected not only their overall distribution, but also their state of preservation after the collapse of the upper floor. The discovery, in the southeast angle of the RSC, of charred wood remains together with the tablets is evidently worth mentioning in this regard.

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[15] *DB* inked, 2 May 1900: "[…] at a point xx [SW corner of Compartment] just above the flooring, large numbers of fragments of inscriptions [mainly small (*DB* pencil)] in a crumbling condition began to appear. Later at (x) .50 down and just above the floor was found a large piece of fresco with plant decoration. Beneath appeared further fragments of the inscriptions." *DB* inked, 3 May 1900: "The fragments of inscriptions underneath and about the fresco were then recovered."

[16] Palmer & Boardman 1963, 49.

[17] Firth 1996-1997, 58.

[18] Driessen 1997, 119.

This hypothetical scenario implying a twofold process, i.e. the destruction of an upper floor preceding the final abandonment of the palace, but creating mixed assemblages, can also be proposed for the RSJ. There, during the excavations, tablets were found on or within a thick clay matrix, on which several LM IIIB stirrup jars were standing.[19] Two observations match well with the potential scenario evoked above. Firstly, although the tablets were burnt and fragmentary, the vessels were very well preserved and showed no traces of burning. Furthermore, the excavators argued that these inscription fragments were in a poorer state of preservation than those of the passage due to their contact with the clayish sediment. This could suggest that the fragments actually stayed in contact with the soil matrix for a relatively extended period of time. Secondly, tablet fragments of the same deposit were also found beyond the RSJ and at a lower level during the second year of excavations.[20] This is revealing, because it suggests that the tablets not found in the clayish level were indeed better preserved, but it also indicates that they may have fallen from above, therefore explaining their wider distribution over the area.

It is also important to consider the mud or simple clay wall discovered to the north of the RSJ in 1901. This wall partly disintegrated during excavation, meaning it was probably not exposed to fire that would probably have solidified its construction.[21] It is highly probable, then, that this clay wall was constructed at the same time as the clay floor containing the tablets. Its state of preservation would be indicative of the final abandonment of the area after the baking of the tablets, which are the result of destruction by fire.

In the rest of the sector, the cleaning after the destruction appears to have been more meticulous, and a plaster floor was installed.

Date of the deposit

The architectural phasing proposed here shows that there were several episodes and potential destructions in the passage during the Final and

[19] See above, n. 8.

[20] *DB*, 6 April 1901: "At the foot of the N face of the N wall of this room and beneath the level of the floor was found yesterday several fragments of inscriptions suggesting deposit, two being whole."

[21] *DB*, 17 April 1901: "The mud N wall of this room having collapsed it was decided to take advantage of the fact towards getting down beneath the floor level."

Post-palatial period, between LM II and LM IIIB.[22] But it is certain that during one of these episodes a violent fire destruction took place, which affected the whole of NEP. In each of these episodes, the area was modified and repaired, both through the installation of floors or the addition of walls.

The violent fire destruction is probably the one observed by Woodard on the walls of the East Bastions during his visit in 1967.[23] He mentions that some traces of burning at 0.70 m above the paving were still visible at the time. Boardman, too, noticed traces through the LM IIIB floor of the passage.[24] Thanks to the witness baulk left along the West Bastions, this destruction can be dated to LM IIIA1/A2 at the time when the paved passage was fully in service.[25] In the rooms west of the passage, similar fire marks were identified both on the floor and on gypsum thresholds.[26]

The second episode is formed by the abandonment and the time of use of the last earth floor, on which the double vases and some of the tablets were found. At this moment, walls blocking the passage were built, transforming the space into a room, the access to which was potentially more easily controlled, and within which goods were stored.

The tablets must form part of one of these two episodes. Considering the potential scenario discussed above, the most likely hypothesis would be that the tablets belong to the most violent destruction of LM IIIA1/A2, and that they would become only later associated with the vases. This scenario seems to correspond most closely with the archaeological data.

Chronologically speaking, if this depositional history can be considered reliable, it means that the tablets should almost certainly predate the final abandonment of the palace of Knossos. In other words, if the deposit of Linear B inscriptions came from an upper floor destroyed by fire before the reoccupation of the ground level, it may even be suggested that LM IIIB early formed its *terminus ante quem*.

In my doctoral research, this scenario was confronted with a series of pinacological, epigraphic, palaeographic and textual analyses in an at-

[22] Mouthuy 2020, 63-73.

[23] Woodard 1972, 116.

[24] Palmer & Boardman 1963, 49.

[25] Evely 1976.

[26] Woodard 1972, 116.

tempt to support or refute the depositional processes highlighted above and to provide chronological information.

A brief overview of the interdisciplinary analysis

A general framework exists for the phasing of Linear B archives in Crete and on the mainland. According to Driessen, there were three main 'moments' in Mycenaean administration, represented by multiple features found in particular palatial deposits (Fig. 3). The RCT deposit would represent the earliest phase of the palace administration, that of the NEP an intermediate phase, and those of the West and East Wings the most advanced stage.[27] It is precisely this general scheme that I have tried to consider in the light of an interdisciplinary analysis of the NEP deposit. Because of space limitations, only some of the results that provide the most valuable information in terms of chronology, principally where pinacology and palaeography are concerned, are discussed here.

Fig. 3. Three main 'moments' of Mycenaean administration.

Pinacological and epigraphic evidence

It is the colour of the clay resulting from their firing, combined with the preservation condition of the documents, which provides the best indication to corroborate the taphonomic hypothesis. A physical analysis (i.e. pinacology) of the tablets from the NEP through autopsy shows that they are often well-fired and in a relatively good state of preservation. Their condition could hence confirm that they were originally stored on the floor from which they fell during a destruction. Moreover, the physical, intra-serial homogeneity indicates that they were probably arranged in sets before the fire. On the contrary, the disparities sometimes observed between the different series and sets can be explained by the respective position of these groups of tablets before the destruction. It is possible to imagine that the tablets were organized by topics on different

[27] Driessen 2000, 151-152.

levels of a shelf, and perhaps also gathered in perishable containers such as baskets, wooden boxes, etc. The differences in the parts that were damaged, which can be observed on some of the tablets when they fell, also converge towards the hypothesis of a kind of storage at different levels, and seem to fit well with the depositional process suggested above.

The study of various characteristics related to the materiality of the tablets also provide some interesting results in terms of chronology. Of the seven palmprints found on the NEP tablets, links with other deposits can be made via two kneaders (Table 1). The first, R YPSILON, is identified on the tablet **C 5734** (scribe 233) as well as on tablet **Dv 7219** (scribe 117) found in the E-W Corridor (J1). Nonetheless, the state of preservation of this tablet is quite bad since there are no readable signs. The second kneader, L DELTA, may have left his palmprint on tablet **Ch 7065** (scribe 110). The same kneader is attested on three tablets of the **Fh**-series of scribe 141 found in the Room of Column Bases [henceforth: RCB].[28]

Kneader	NEP	E-W Corridor	RCB
R NY	**Ak(3) 782** **Uf(2) 837**		
R XI	**Vf 1002**, **1004**		
L THETA	**Bo 5752**, **7035**		
L ETA	**Bo 5749** **Dk 5758?**		
R TAU	**Vf 756** **L 758** **K(2) 773**, **774**, **776**		
R YPSILON	**C 5734**	**Dv 7219**	
L DELTA	**Ch 7065?**		**Fh 360**, **372**, **5450**

Table 1. Palmprints identified in the NEP and elsewhere.

[28] Mouthuy 2020, 111-113.

Furthermore, if we look at the format of the tablets, we can note some peculiarities which tend to suggest that the record-keeping within the various deposits used different media. What distinguishes the deposits is the proportion of page-shaped and palm-leaf shaped tablets (Table 2).[29] These variations in preferred media could have chronological implications for record-keeping.

Format	RCT	NEP	CoST	Pylos
Palm-leaf tablets	+/- 600	+/- 545	+/- 32	+/- 900
Page tablets	+/- 1	+/- 50	+/- 6	+/- 126
(+cards)	(+/- 31)	(+/- 8)	(+/- 2)	
Ratio	1 : 14	1 : 10	1 : 4	1 : 7

Table 2. Proportion of page-shaped and palm-leaf shaped tablets in different deposits [CoST = Corridor of Sword Tablets].

The same can be said about the cutting of tablets (Table 3). It may be worth mentioning that there are nine examples in the RCT of tablets that were cut on both sides, but only a single one in the NEP, and two from the RCB.[30] The differences in cutting seem statistically quite relevant between the different deposits.

Cutting	RCT	NEP	Other deposits
Palm-leaf: left OR right	117	75	127
Palm-leaf: left AND right	9	1	2
Page: top or bottom	1	7	11
TOTAL	127	83	138
	20 %	16.5 %	4.7 %

Table 3. Cutting of the tablets in the RCT, NEP and other Knossian deposits.

Apart from the physical aspects of the medium, the study of the materiality of the inscription itself (i.e. epigraphy) can also contribute to refine

[29] Mouthuy 2020, 102, 383.

[30] Mouthuy 2020, 114-117; Sjöquist & Åström 1991.

the chronological approach. In this regard, the organization of the information on the tablet is an important element. In general, it seems that the scribes of the NEP attached more importance to the layout of their texts than those of the RCT, where the texts are rather short and the information is very succinct. And although the same may be observed in the NEP, some new ways of structuring the generally more abundant information have emerged. In the other deposits, however, such as those of the West and East Wings, tablets with more sophisticated texts and a more rigorous organization are encountered, and this applies both to the page-shaped tablets – which are even larger – and to the palm-leaf shaped tablets. Generally speaking, we can observe a close relationship between the quantity and the structuring of information. This observation seems again to underline that the RCT and NEP deposits cluster somewhat together while being relatively distinct from those of other areas of the Knossian palace.

Scribal evidence

As appears to be the norm at Knossos, the majority of scribes carried out their activities in a single location, but some scribal cross-references can be made between the NEP and other deposits in the palace, and particularly those of the West Magazines (Table 4).

NEP scribe	West- Magazine	West wing	Area of clay signet Room	CoST	E-W corridor	Arsenal
102a		X				
102b			X	X		
106	X?					
118	X					
120	X					
136	X	X			X	
206						X
207	X	X?				
217	X					

Table 4. Scribal cross-references between the NEP and other Knossian deposits.

These scribal connections are relatively weak compared to the number of tablets preserved and the high percentage of scribal identifications in the deposit. They are often based on a single tablet by a scribe working in the NEP that was found elsewhere (102a?, 106, 118, 120, 206), or a single tablet found in the NEP by a scribe whose main production has been found elsewhere (206, 207, 217). In a single case, the link is via two tablets of scribe 136, while in the case of scribe 102b three different locations have each yielded a single tablet. It is interesting to note that for these particular cases, the NEP tablets occasionally indicate totals or recapitulations.[31]

In this regard, the absence of a link between the NEP and the RCT confirms its special position, while the same observation can be made for the RCB. From a chronological perspective, it is important to keep in mind that the same scribe may have worked for a relatively long period of time. In other words, these scribal parallels do not necessarily invalidate the phasing mentioned above.

Palaeographic evidence

Where palaeography is concerned, it was shown that graphic features of Linear A were much more evident among the conservative scribes of the RCT than in the other Knossian deposits.[32] We would therefore witness a stylistic simplification between the RCT and the later tablets, where a progressive style can be observed that is also found on the mainland. The analysis of some diagnostic signs attested in the NEP has shown that its graphic repertoire includes forms closer to the conservative style, although some scribes show more progressive tendencies.[33] If we give this information the chronological value argued for by Driessen, we can infer that the NEP tradition is therefore part of a style that is later than the RCT style but earlier than most of the other progressive scribal deposits, particularly those of the West Magazines and the East Wing.

Considering the various cross-references between the deposits, we may suggest that the different phases of scribal traditions correspond to different chronological periods.[34] In this respect, it is essentially the

[31] Mouthuy 2020, 218, 369, 392.

[32] Driessen 2000, 151; Olivier 1967, Pl. I-LXVII.

[33] Mouthuy 2020, 231-235.

[34] Driessen 2000, 150-157. For a full analysis of the cross-references between the NEP and the other deposits, see Mouthuy 2020, 87-155 (pinacology and epigraphy), 155-266 (scribes and linguistics), 267-376 (textual analysis and linguistics).

palaeographic approach that allows us to refine these chronological limits, insofar as we can include data from the tablets from the mainland, which are more easily dated on the basis of their archaeological context. It is indeed now relatively clear, thanks to the vast majority of LM IIIB administrative material discovered on the mainland, in parallel with the study of the tablets found in the earlier phases of the Mycenaean sites of Pylos or Mycenae[35], that a general chronological sequence can be proposed, which roughly echoes the phasing of the Cretan deposits.[36] It may be represented as follows, and has reached wide scholarly acceptance, barring some exceptions (Fig. 4):

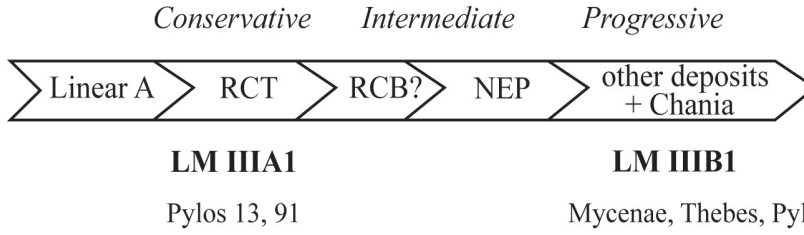

Fig. 4. Phasing of the Cretan deposits and Mycenaean parallels (after Driessen 2000, 157, Fig. 3.35)

In his study of the RCT, Driessen concluded that the deposit belonged to the LM II/IIIA1 ceramic phase. Recent studies by Firth and Skelton and the parallels they draw with continental tablets would allow to suggest a more precise date, around LM IIIA1.[37] At the other end of the chronological spectrum, the stratified deposits at Chania and the study of the continental material respectively indicate the LM IIIB1 or LH IIIB1/2 phase. Because of their palaeographic proximity to the Chaniote material, some of the Knossian tablets – those of the so-called progressive style – also seem to be related to the LM IIIB1 ceramic phase.

[35] Two Pylian Hands (91 and 13) have been attributed to a small group of tablets from an earlier context, dated to LH IIIA. These tablets show signs with conservative features more in line with the conservative scribes of Knossos, as well as linguistic features different from the other Pylos tablets. Some tablets from Mycenae and Iklaina could potentially be attached to this group. Cf. Driessen 2000, 154-156.

[36] The tablets recently unearthed in the LH IIIB1 context of Agios Vasileios can now be added, see Vasilogamvrou *et al.*, this volume.

[37] Firth & Skelton 2016; Skelton 2008. According to their phylogenetic analysis, the LH IIIA Pylos tablets inscribed by scribes 13 and 91 would be the oldest attestations of Linear B.

If we now consider, as illustrated above, that the NEP deposit is probably part of an intermediate phase, it is reasonable to assume that its relative chronological position must be comprised between LM IIIA1 (*terminus post quem*) and LM IIIB1 (*terminus ante quem*). This is consistent with the archaeological analysis.

Conclusion

An interdisciplinary approach, as proposed here, provides detailed information both on the taphonomy and on the chronology of the NEP deposit. The NEP deposit was created by depositional processes characterized by two successive but temporally spaced episodes (destruction by fire and subsequent collapse of the remains), which have complicated its understanding. When all the different methods of analysis are considered together, they clearly confirm: 1) that the tablets found in the RCT, the NEP and the other deposits actually corresponded to three distinct phases or 'moments' of the Knossian administration, and 2) an intermediate (chronological) position for the NEP deposit creation. The reappraisal of the archaeological context and stratigraphy supported by the interdisciplinary analyses points towards LM IIIB early as a terminus *ante quem* for the tablets. Furthermore, these results also suggest that the tablets of the NEP must be connected to a major fire destruction, presumably in the course of the LM IIIA2 ceramic phase.

Furthermore, these different approaches also tend to suggest that the NEP deposit meets all the conditions for considering the northern sector as a kind of 'central (pre-)archive' of the Palace of Knossos, similar to what existed at Pylos. A full discussion is reserved for elsewhere, but we can notice the following conditions:

1) the area in question was ideally situated for archival activities of a certain scale near a main entrance;[38]
2) the textual analysis showed a wide range of subjects in the deposit, especially in comparison with the low thematic heterogeneity of the other deposits;[39]
3) the organization of the documents into coherent groups. In this respect, it can be shown that the documents were classified by subject

[38] Mouthuy 2020, 77, 391.

[39] Mouthuy 2020, 275-336, 391.

at the time of the fire. It can also be underlined that the officials of the NEP were distinguished by a division of responsibilities according to economic and geographical interests;[40]

4) several documents, though limited in number, contain lists, summaries, counts and totals;[41]
5) the notable proportion of page-sized tablets within the deposit is also worth mentioning. Indeed, the tablets being larger at the time of the NEP, they would suit well for the compilation operations that would have taken place before the final recording on perishable materials;[42]
6) the NEP deposit contains tablets written by 33 different scribes, out of a total of 75 at Knossos. Moreover, some tablets include contributions by several scribes, which tends to indicate that revised and amended tablets were centralized here;[43]
7) the prosopographical analysis of the NEP tablets illustrates a much wider variety of titles and functions than elsewhere, which could underline the central archive status of the NEP. It indeed seems relatively plausible that a wider variety of officials would be mobilized in this context.[44]

All these elements tend to indicate that the NEP deposit represents the remains of a collection of administrative data that was gathered in order to be permanently compiled on perishable material.

To conclude, although an exhaustive study of the NEP deposit has an intrinsic value, it is mostly through comparisons with the results of the RCT analysis that new insights are forthcoming on important chronological and operational issues concerning the Knossian palatial administration. While a proper assessment of the documents from the other Knossian deposits is the next step, the analysis of the NEP material, briefly reviewed in this paper, provides a firmer ground to continue refining the chronology of the Knossian Linear B administration.

[40] Mouthuy 2020, 120-122, 152-154, 219-220, 391.
[41] Mouthuy 2020, 218, 369, 392.
[42] Mouthuy 2020, 101-102, 393.
[43] Mouthuy 2020, 214-215, 393.
[44] Mouthuy 2020, 214-215, 375-377.

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