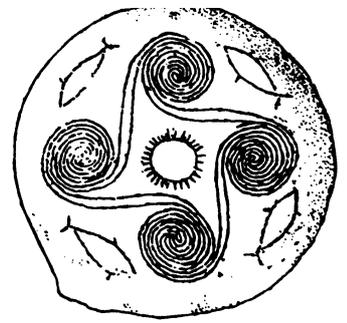




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Sheffield Centre for Aegean Archaeology

Round Table 16 – 18 January 2008

Writing & Non-Writing in the Bronze Age Aegean

Programme

&

Abstracts

Sheffield Centre for Aegean Archaeology Round Table 16 – 18 January 2008

'Writing & Non-Writing in the Bronze Age Aegean'

Final Programme & Abstracts

Friday 16 January

- 17:00 *Participants arrive, Dept Archaeology*
- 18:00 John Bennet (Sheffield) Welcome & introductory lecture: Looking Back — Looking Forward: *Scripta Minoa* I a century on
- 19:00 *Reception*

Saturday 17 January — morning sessions

Writing & Literacy, chaired by John Bennet

- 09:30 Cynthia Shelmerdine (Texas) Hierarchies of Literacy in Linear B Administration

In the Mycenaean Greek era, 1400-1200 BC, political states kept written records on matters of economic administration. The evidence suggests that literacy was quite restricted, but just how restricted it was remains under debate. No inscribed tablets have been found at sites other than palatial centres (until a report this Fall of three tablets at an apparently non-palatial site in Laconia). Briefer documents in the form of inscribed sealings (lumps of clay, stamped with a sealstone) are also found at palatial sites but seem to have originated elsewhere. I suggest that the evidence points to a hierarchy of literacy, and shall try to define what capacity to read, and write, existed at different levels of the administrative chain of authority. At the top is a category of excessive literacy—use of words when symbols would suffice, and of redundancy—restricted to a very few palatial scribes. At the bottom is a level of local officials who were required to deal with written material without, perhaps, being able to understand more than a few basic logograms.

- 10:10 Torsten Meissner (Cambridge) Who used the Linear B script?

Traditionally, scholarly opinion is sharply divided about the question as to how widespread literacy in Linear B was. The views are typically polarised: one group of scholars maintains that LB was a purely administrative script and that literacy was limited to a small number of officials writing administrative documents. At the other extreme, some scholars claim that writing LB was much more widespread and that the script was used not just for writing administrative documents on clay but even literature on papyrus.

In this paper I attempt to weigh up the arguments for and against, beginning with a survey of recently found or discussed inscriptions from non-palatial sites and then taking into account evidence from within the administrative documents as well as more circumstantial points.

It is concluded that while literacy may have been a little more widespread than was evident before, the changes we have to make to our assumptions are small; there still is no evidence that LB was used outside an administrative context and, based on current knowledge, it is unlikely that it was used for literary purposes.

- 10:50 *Coffee*

Marking Practices, chaired by Roger Doonan

11:10 Sue Sherratt
(Sheffield) Pondering potmarks
Abstract

11:50 Sarah Finlayson
(Sheffield) (Re)Defining Writing in the Bronze Age Aegean

The presence of writing is key to our understanding of the Aegean Bronze Age, not only for the economic, social and religious data derived from the written documents, but also for writing's status as a signifier of the presence of a bureaucratic state, of 'civilisation'. However, what constitutes writing, both to us who classify and interrogate the artefacts, and to those who once created and interacted with them, is rarely explicitly defined, more often by what it is not; not potter's marks, not solitary signs, not signs on seals.

I discuss how writing can most productively be defined for this period; questions to consider include whether there is a single entity 'writing' in use during the Bronze Age or multiple, shifting possibilities, how this meshes with speech and drawing, and also how modern assumptions about the importance of writing colour the way we approach the evidence. By redefining Bronze Age writing(s), I hope to be able to offer an alternative view into how and why writing was used, how this changed through time, and how important writing was to those who made it or came into contact with it.

12:30 Discussion

12:45 *Lunch*

Saturday 17 January — afternoon sessions**Sealing Practices in Crete & Egypt**, chaired by Paul Halstead

14:00 Diamantis
Panagiotopoulos
(Heidelberg) Minoan Typewriting: Seals, Script(s) and the Emergence of
Cretan Bureaucracy

This paper seeks to explore the interface between sealing and writing during the formative period of Minoan palatial culture (late Prepalatial and Protopalatial). Special emphasis will be given to the cognitive aspects of this process, trying to offer a plausible historical scenario for the emergence of a new system of communication. The main body of argument refers to the earliest testimonies of Minoan writing, which evidently represented a sort of typewriting, ascribing its appearance to the deep impact of sealing practices. The trajectory of this development will be traced by defining and describing three of its decisive stages: a) the rapid growth of a seal imagery invested with both indexical and iconic qualities, b) the transition from impressed pictures to impressed signs and c) the appearance of impressed 'proto-texts'. The paper will close with a brief comparative look at similar phenomena in Egypt and Mesopotamia which may help us to comprehend the idiosyncratic – and thus indigenous – character of the Cretan development.

14:40 John Baines
(Oxford) Sealing practice and the spread of writing in Middle Kingdom
Egypt (ca. 1950 – 1650)

From about 3200 to 2000, and contrary to common perceptions, Egyptian hieroglyphic writing was restricted to uses within building complexes or in special locations such as the necropolis. The only known exception is on cylinder seals, but usage of these is poorly attested and might not have been widespread. This pattern, which maintained the hieroglyphic script as a domain of elite sacred and mortuary culture, changed with the introduction of the scarab amulet in the late 3rd millennium. In the 12th and 13th dynasties (ca. 1950–1650), scarabs inscribed in hieroglyphs with individual names and titles were used on a large scale for administration, alongside other scarabs bearing only patterns on the one hand, and larger inscribed seal types on the other hand. These usages were introduced during a wider transformation of the written sphere—both hieroglyphic and cursive—in which new genres appeared, including several that are now seen as central to a literate high culture. Among questions arising from this development that can have comparative implications are: does the use of name scarabs betoken a change in symbolic hierarchies or in the rise of a bureaucratic group? How far did the increased presence of writing outside restricted institutions affect the non-literate majority?

15:20

Tea

Looking Behind the Texts, chaired by John Moreland

15:40 Rupert Thompson (Cambridge) Scribes and Dialect: what can we say about LBA language from the Linear B documentary evidence?

In this paper I examine the theoretical and methodological background to the investigation of the dialectal situation of Mycenaean Greece. What evidence do we see for linguistic variation between sites and between scribes at a single site, and how should we interpret that evidence? I claim that the much-vaunted uniformity of the language of the tablets is probably an illusion, and largely the result of the inadequacy of the script to render Greek accurately. The five classic isoglosses which have been alleged to support the identification of two dialects, especially at Pylos, (raising of /e/ to /i/; metathesis of liquid + short vowel; o vs. a in the reflex of syllabic nasals; /-ei/ vs. /-i/ in the C-stem dat. sg.; and retention of /ti/) are examined from a methodological perspective, and it is argued that they do not allow any such conclusions to be drawn. In particular, it is argued that phenomena which are restricted to loanwords and proper names offer no basis for commenting on the linguistic behaviour of the scribes, and that modern understanding of the nature and mechanism of language change offers better explanations for some of the other phenomena. Finally the conclusion is drawn that the existence of linguistic variation on the tablets argues against the view that Mycenaean is a fossilized or artificial administrative idiom.

16:20 Paul Halstead & Michele Forte (Sheffield) Unreliable evidence? Gathering and interpreting quantitative data for ancient economies

According to Moses Finley, one important characteristic of the ancient (i.e., Graeco-Roman) economy is the extreme paucity of reliable quantitative data on population, property, production or exchange. The paucity of such 'political arithmetic' is at once an obstacle to formalist economic analysis and revealing of how different was the ancient economy from the modern.

We examine some modern (early 19th to late 20th century) examples of quantitative demographic and economic data from Greece and Italy to argue that such 'statistics' may be far more problematic than is sometimes recognised (not least by ancient historians who extrapolate such information to fill in gaps in our evidence for classical antiquity). Once again, the unreliability of these data poses a problem for modern historians, but at the same time highlights some broad characteristics of the mobilisation strategies of modern European states.

In conclusion, we briefly discuss the Linear B evidence for Mycenaean economy, in terms of its reliability and of what this may reveal about palatial strategies of mobilisation.

17:00 Lisa Bendall (Oxford) Not living on a budget: literacy, oral tradition and expenditure records in the Mycenaean palace archives

In this paper I examine the expenditure records of Mycenaean palaces, as attested in the Linear B documents. When read carefully, it emerges that many transactions appear to be invisible in the documents, suggesting that many more were oral than we sometimes suppose. The logical conclusion, therefore, appears to be that, although the Mycenaean had access to writing, they used it very selectively.

17:30

Response & Discussion [John Moreland]

19.30

Dinner (at John Bennet & Debi Harlan's 4 Thornsett Road, Kenwood)

Sunday 18 January — morning sessions

Other Writing Systems, chaired by John Barrett

9:30 Artemis Karnava (Rethymno) Picture-writing and phoneticism after *Scripta Minoa I*

Scripta Minoa I (1909) is a monumental volume, in the sense that it is still, to this day, viewed and handled with awe, like one would do with a 'monument'. It constitutes both a corpus of the Cretan Hieroglyphic script (the documents known at the time, i.e. from the Knossos Hieroglyphic Deposit mainly) as well as a synthetic study on this particular writing system and of writing in general. Therefore it continues to appear irreplaceable.

All monuments, however, do not stand on the most solid *crepis*. Evans, for instance, treats the Phaistos script and the Cretan Hieroglyphic as belonging to the same step in the evolutionary process of writing, namely the 'hieroglyphic'. As far as Evans is concerned, it is understandable how he was inspired: based on his evolutionary belief that writing emerged from picture-writing, he considered all 'pictography' as the most primitive and ancient form of writing, wavering between art and writing.

But, is it so? Here, we try to explore whether Evans' assertion, that first came the pictures and then writing, holds some truth to it.

10:10 Silvia Ferrara (Oxford) Multilingualism in LBA Cyprus? The Cypro-Minoan 'scripts' in context

The Cypro-Minoan script stands divided into four subcategories of the same writing system: 'Archaic' CM, CM1, CM2, and CM3. This classification was established by E. Masson on the basis of the observable palaeographic variations in the script, thought to have been related to, and engendered by, linguistic differentiation.

While surveying the overall evidence that led to these conclusions, this contribution aims to frame the issue from a broader perspective than the purely palaeographic, to gain a fuller picture of the implications of Masson's proposition, when considered from different contextual angles (epigraphic, chronological, geographical).

Whether we accept Masson's subdivisions wholly as they are, or decide further to question their validity, the palaeographic variation in the script remains an obvious, evident reality. Such a conclusion ramifies into, on the one hand, the relationship between script and language on Cyprus at the end of the Late Bronze Age, together with the possibility of positing multilingualism in the second millennium, and on the other, it needs to be reconciled with several discordant implications that arise from the analysis of the archaeological record.

10:50 *Coffee*

Integration: the Larger Picture, chaired by Jane Rempel

11:10 Ilse Schoep (Leuven) Revisiting 'Tablets and Territories'

It has become very clear in the past decade that different regions followed very different trajectories and suffered different fates in the Neopalatial period. The traditional horizon of emerging palaces in MM IB can no longer be maintained, and the same applies for the horizon of Neopalatial palaces, supposed to be flourishing in this period. In fact new findings have made clear to what degree the different palaces (and the regions in which they were situated) had different fates. The traditional palatial model does not take into account the fragmentation of the Neopalatial landscape and I consider a number of issues that were not tackled in my 'Tablets and territories' 1999 article and that are raised by new discoveries and recent research.

- 1) A new framework replacing the traditional palatial framework with its top-down explicitly hierarchical perspective. This sheds new light on the distribution pattern of Linear A written and sealed documents.
- 2) An alternative framework also implies that the Linear B model of administration, which was clearly centralised and hierarchical and centred upon the palace of Knossos, may not be entirely appropriate for the earlier administrative documents.
- 3) The possibility that Minoan writing and seal-use may not have been driven by economic need and efficiency, as is traditionally assumed, but had an important social aspect to it, previously underestimated.
- 4) Literacy and the impact of the technology of writing as an exclusionary strategy.

11:50 John Bennet Palatial entanglements: Visual, textual and material cultures in
 (Sheffield) the Late Bronze Age Aegean

Study of the Bronze Age Aegean suffers from modern disciplinary divisions that separate analyses of different categories of material. This disciplinary division goes beyond the divide between text and archaeology that began to break down in the 1980s. Unlike Evans in *Scripta Minoa* I, who took a 'total' view of writing and society, therefore, we tend to produce research that is not only narrowly focused in our own terms, but also runs the serious risk of mis-categorising areas of practice in the societies we seek to understand.

In this paper, I draw on a series of practices that, as I and others have previously argued, defined the palace's institutional identity, in order to suggest how we might rethink the way people acted in the Aegean Late Bronze Age.

Crucially, I seek to move beyond the categories 'literate' or 'illiterate (oral)', suggesting that we need to accept that social actors were knowledgeable across a range of interconnecting palatial practices, as possessing 'literacy' (so to speak) in visual, textual and material cultures.

12:30

Response & Discussion [Jane Rempel]

13:00

Closing Discussion