

for John  
with best wishes  
Opuscula Atheniensi XIX:9, 1992  
-Paul

# MINOAN VESSELS WITH FIGURE-EIGHT SHIELDS

ANTECEDENTS TO THE KNOSSOS THRONE ROOM ALABASTRA

BY

PAUL REHAK

## Abstract

The multiple LM II-III A stone alabaster with figure-eight shield bosses, probably used for an anointing ceremony in the throneroom of the palace at Knossos, have been discussed recently in this journal by R. Hägg (*OpAth* 17, 1988, 99-105). The present article focuses specifically on the iconography of the figure-eight shield bosses, and suggests that the shield may be connected with the cult practiced in the throneroom. Although the shape of the stone alabaster has been interpreted as an indication of Mycenaean influence or presence on Crete, the shield as a boss or painted decoration can be traced on Minoan cult vessels beginning with the MM III B "Temple Repositories" of the West Wing. The shield thus may be connected with a major Minoan goddess associated with the realm of nature, and its presence on the alabaster need not be solely a Mycenaean mannerism in the latter half of the fifteenth century B.C.

The function of the throneroom of the Knossos palace, from its inception in the MM II period to its fourth and final phase of architectural development in LM III A2, continues to be the focus of scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> In a recent article, R. Hägg has called renewed attention to the stone alabaster and lids of probable LM II-III A1 manufacture decorated with running spirals and figure-eight shields, in use at the time the throneroom of the Knossos palace was destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps as many as twelve such vessels were in use during the final ceremony held in the throneroom, probably as containers for perfumed oil or unguent which could have been used in anointing.<sup>3</sup> Hägg noted that the figure-eight shield bosses are too small to have been used for lifting, even though they might have served as points of attachment for the lids, some of which are also decorated with shield bosses.<sup>4</sup> The shield thus appears important in its own right as an iconographic device, and should be taken into account in any evaluation of the use of the throneroom.

This paper is part of a larger study (in preparation) on the figure-eight shield in Aegean iconography, and was written at the American School of Classical Studies in the summer of 1990. I am indebted to Dr. M.J. Mellink, who kindly read and commented on a draft of this study, and to Dr. E. French, who discussed a variety of Mycenaean matters with me. Special thanks go to S. Smith of Loyola's Center for Instructional Design, for providing the photographs with the exception of *Figure 12*, which was generously provided by the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada. Line drawings are by the author. Any errors are, of course, my own.

The following non-standard abbreviations have been used:

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| APG                     | S. Hood, <i>The arts in Prehistoric Greece</i> , Harmondsworth 1978.   |
| CM                      | S. Marinatos & M. Hirmer, <i>Crete and Mycenae</i> , London 1960.  |
| Keos III                | W. Cummer & E. Schefold <i>et al.</i> , <i>Keos III: Ayia Irini, House A</i> , Mainz on Rhine 1984.                    |
| KTMH                    | S. Marinatos & M. Hirmer, <i>Kreta, Thera und das mykenische Hellas</i> , Munich 1973.                                 |
| 'Last ceremony'         | R. Hägg, 'The last ceremony in the Throne Room at Knossos', <i>OpAth</i> 17, 1988, 99-105.                             |
| L'iconographie minoenne | <i>L'iconographie minoenne</i> (BCH Suppl. 11), Paris 1985.  |
| Minoan Palaces          | R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, eds., <i>The function of the Minoan palaces</i> (ActaAth-4°, 35), Stockholm 1987.              |
| Minoan Thalassocracy    | R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, eds., <i>The Minoan Thalassocracy: myth and reality</i> (ActaAth-4°, 32), Stockholm 1984.      |
| Minoan Society          | O. Krzyszkowska & L. Nixon, eds., <i>Minoan Society, Proceedings of the 1981 Symposium</i> , Bristol 1983.             |
| MSV                     | P. Warren, <i>Minoan stone vases</i> , Cambridge 1969.   |
| Mycenaean World         | <i>The Mycenaean world. Five centuries of early Greek culture, 1600-1100 B.C.</i> , K. Demakopoulou, ed., Athens 1988. |
| PGC                     | H.-G. Buchholz & V. Karageorghis, <i>Prehistoric Greece and Cyprus</i> , London 1973.                                  |
| Problems in Prehistory  | <i>Problems in Greek prehistory</i> , E. French & K. Wardle, eds., Bristol 1988.                                       |
| SC                      | R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, eds., <i>Sanctuaries and cults in the Aegean Bronze Age</i> (ActaAth-4°, 28), Stockholm 1981.  |

<sup>1</sup> W.-D. Niemeier, 'On the function of the 'Throne Room' in the Palace at Knossos', *Minoan Palaces*, 163-168; *idem*, in amplified form, 'Zur Deutung des 'Thronraumes' im Palast von Knossos', *AM* 101, 1986, 63-95. He gives the phases as:

1. MM II-MM III/LM I?
2. + 3. LM I?-LM III A 1/2
4. LM III A 2-LM III B

On the most recent excavations conducted by the British School beneath the floors of the service rooms, see H. Catling, 'Archaeology in Greece', *AR* 34, 1988, 68.

<sup>2</sup> Whether this destruction took place in LM III A2 or III B is debated. R. Hägg, 'Last ceremony'. Cf. also M. Popham, 'The use of the Palace at Knossos at the time of its destruction, ca. 1400 B.C.', *Minoan Palaces*, 297-299. H. Waterhouse, 'The flat alabastron and the last ritual in the Knossos throne room', *OJA* 7, 1988, 361-367. Her article only recently came to my attention.

<sup>3</sup> Evans' published reconstructions of the findspots are contradictory: 'Last ceremony', 99, 102, cf. plans on 100f., figs. 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> 'Last ceremony', 103.

The vessels have been considered one possible sign of Mycenaean occupation, since the alabastron shape is nearly identical in mainland and Minoan pottery between LH II B/LM II and LH/LM III A1.<sup>5</sup> While the increasingly militaristic atmosphere of Knossos in the last half of the fifteenth century B.C. is not in doubt, this article examines instead the earlier Minoan use of the shield device on vessels, and suggests that the shield device on the throneroom alabastra actually represents a continuation of a Minoan tradition.

Similar stone alabastra with figure-eight shield handles are rare, as Hägg emphasized, though such bosses occasionally serve as handles on other stone vessels or their precious counterparts in ivory.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the possible twelve alabastra concentrated in the Knossos throneroom, only four other examples of this shape are known. Of these, a single serpentine example from Sellopoulo tomb 2 near Knossos comes from a Minoan context.<sup>7</sup> Three others of gypsum (like the throneroom examples) were found in chamber tombs at Mycenae,<sup>8</sup> but associated finds imply that the vessels were imported from Crete, and I would suggest that they were taken specifically from the Knossos palace.<sup>9</sup>

For the shield iconography on stone vessels, one should also add the fragment of a conical rhyton decorated with figure-eight shields which Warren dated to LM II–III A, like the throneroom alabastra, on the basis of the shield dec-

oration; the fragment probably came from the Knossos palace, but is without an exact provenience (*Fig. 1*).<sup>10</sup> Since a large pithos was found in the throneroom near the alabastra, but no other vessels were discovered, such a rhyton could have been used for transferring liquid from the larger to the smaller vessels.<sup>11</sup>

Although the manufacture of the throneroom alabastra in the LM II–III A1 period belongs to a period of possible Mycenaean control of Crete,<sup>12</sup> figure-eight shield shaped bosses appear earlier in a purely Minoan religious context in the West Wing of the palace as five separate shields inlays (*Fig. 2*) and as bosses on a small faience bowl (*Fig. 3*) from the MM III B "Temple Repositories", a context which predates any question of mainland influence on the island of Crete.<sup>13</sup> Finds from the "Temple Repositories" have been connected with the cult of a Minoan nature goddess with a wide range of functions and concerns, and the shape of the bowl has been compared to similar stone vessels (which lack shield bosses, however) found at the peak sanctuary on Mt. Juktas.<sup>14</sup> Supporting evidence that the shield was already associated with females in a sacral connection in the MM III B period is indicated by the female figures on four brown glazed faience plaques from a MM III B cist in the South Propylon, who wear necklaces of figure-eight shields and hold their hands to their breasts, a gesture which obviously refers to fertility (*Fig. 4*).<sup>15</sup> Recent studies of the West Wing have noted its continuing sacral associations,<sup>16</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A. Furumark, *The Mycenaean pottery. Analysis and classification*. Stockholm 1941 (repr. 1972), 39–43, type 82 (LH II B) and 84 (LH III A1); P. Betancourt, *The history of Minoan pottery*, Princeton 1985, 152, fig. 112: squat alabastron (LM II); P. Mountjoy, *Mycenaean decorated pottery: a guide to identification* (SIMA, 73), Göteborg 1986, 40–42, 57.

<sup>6</sup> A stone pyxis from the Temple Tomb at Knossos has three shield handles: PM IV.2, 1007, 1009, fig. 960j<sup>1</sup>. Another, from Siteia in E. Crete, has shield handles on the sides and lid: L. von Matt *et al.*, *Ancient Crete*, London 1968, 144, no. 162, pl. 162 (color). An alabaster pyxis found in Achaea and now in the Patras Museum (Inv. no. 1052) has shield handles and is decorated with friezes of nautili: T. Papadopoulos, *Mycenaean Achaea* (SIMA, 55) vol. 1, Gothenburg 1979, 151; 2, 1978, 277, fig. 301 a, b; 309, fig. 333; *Mycenaean World*, 111, no. 43 and col. fig. The vessel in Patras is similar to a tiny ivory pyxis from a LH III A context in Athens: T. Shear, 'Campaign of 1939', *Hesperia* 9, 1940, 287, 288, fig. 30 (lower left), 289, fig. 31. An early ivory pyxis (LH II A) with shield handles was found in tholos 2 at Routsis near Pylos: CM, pl. 223; *KTMH*, pl. 274 (left); W. Taylour, *The Mycenaeans*, rev. ed., London 1983, fig. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Heraklion Museum. Cf. S. Hood & D. Smyth, *Archaeological survey of the Knossos area* (BSA Suppl., 14), Athens & London 1981, 36, no. 28; 'Last ceremony', 102 and n. 15.

<sup>8</sup> 'Last ceremony', 102 and n. 16, 103 and n. 25. One was found in chamber tomb 88, another was found in the excavation of 1887/8, a third is unpublished. See A. Xenaki-Sakellariou, *Les tombes à chambre de Mycènes. Fouilles de Chr. Tsountas (1887–1898)*, Paris 1985, pl. 56, no. 2769.

<sup>9</sup> Opinion on the date of the final use of the Knossos palace remains controversial. See, e.g., W.-D. Niemeier, 'The character of the Knossian palace society in the second half of the fifteenth century B.C.: Mycenaean or Minoan?', in *Minoan Society*, 217–236, where the varying opinions are summarized in chart form (p. 221). Cf. also J. Hooker, 'Minoan religion in the Late Palace period', in *Minoan Society*, 137–142.

It seems worth noting that the alabastron from tomb 88 at Mycenae was found with a number of objects with parallels on Crete,

including two stone lamps on pedestals and one without, as well as another stone vessel: Xenaki-Sakellariou (supra n. 8), 243–251, pls. 117–121, esp. pl. 121, nos. 3159–3162; *Mycenaean World*, 241, no. 247 and col. fig. (Inv. 3161). Warren (*MSV*, 5f.) and Hood (*APG*, 151) characterize these stone lamps as Cretan products exported to the mainland. A stone lamp newly discovered in the palatial building at Archanes appears nearly identical to one from chamber tomb 102 at Mycenae: cf. *Ergon* 1989, fig. 135 and Xenaki-Sakellariou (supra n. 8), pl. 141, no. 4924.

<sup>10</sup> *MSV*, 85f., P 478, pl. 478.

<sup>11</sup> R.B. Koehl, 'The functions of Aegean Bronze Age rhyta', *SC*, 179–188.

<sup>12</sup> Niemeier (supra n. 9).

<sup>13</sup> On the "Temple Repositories", see PM I, 468–523, 498, fig. 536 (bowl); K. Foster, *Aegean faience of the Bronze Age*, Yale 1979, 96, 94, fig. 25 (inlay); 66, fig. 8 (bowl). Evans published two examples of figure-eight shields from Crete which he assigned to the EM period, but this dating is controversial: PM II:1, 52 and fig. 25 a, b 1 and 2. On the question of foreign influences in the "Temple Repositories", see J. MacGillivray, 'Cycladic jars from MM III contexts at Knossos', in *Minoan Thalassocracy* 153–157.

<sup>14</sup> G. Gesell, 'The place of the goddess in Minoan society', in *Minoan Society*, 93–100; A. Karetsoy *et al.*, 'Inscriptions en linéaire A du sanctuaire de sommet minoen du Mont Iouktas', *Kadmos* 24:2, 1985, 89–147, esp. 105, 106, fig. 7b.

<sup>15</sup> Associated finds included part of a bronze sword, a bronze male figurine, and a stone rhyton fragment carved with a prostrate bull in an architectonic setting: PM I, 688, fig. 507; II:2, 702, fig. 440; Foster (supra n. 13), 78 and n. 92, fig. 11. For "East Entrance" on p. 78, read "South Entrance". The gesture is paralleled later on a terracotta figurine (Inv. 68.1577) and glass plaques (Inv. 68.1549) from the Cult Center at Mycenae discussed by A. Moore, *The Cult rooms from the "Citadel House" excavations at Mycenae*, Univ. of Manchester diss., 1988. I am grateful to Drs. A. Moore and E. French for making a copy of this work available to me at the British School in Athens, and I am informed that the author is preparing this important text for publication.

<sup>16</sup> The importance of the West Wing is reflected in a series of

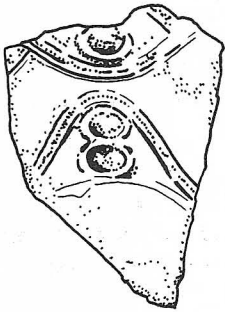


Fig. 1. LM II-III A1 conical rhyton fragment with figure-eight shields. Drawing after MSV, pl. P 478.

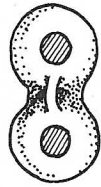


Fig. 2. MM III B shield inlays from the "Temple Repositories". After Karetsou (supra n. 14), 107, fig. 7 b.

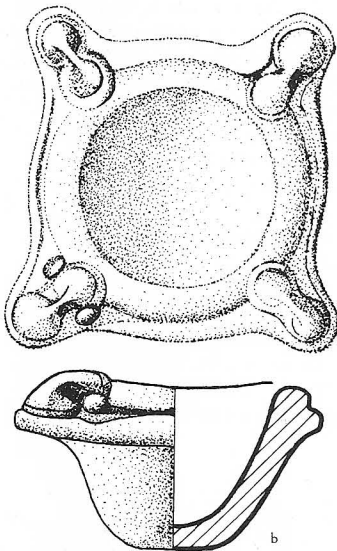


Fig. 3. MM III B faience bowl with shield bosses from the "Temple Repositories".

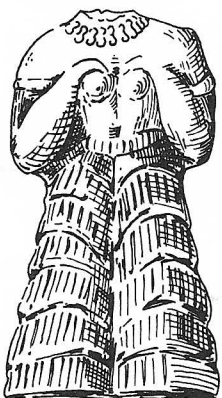


Fig. 4. MM III B faience plaques with females from the South Propylon, Knossos.

and have emphasized the relatively conservative nature of architectural changes to the throneroom itself. Thus, the suggestion that the throneroom reflects a Mycenaean "intrusion" at Knossos seems overstated. The location of the throne at the right side of the room may have influenced, for example, the positioning of the throne in subsequent Mycenaean megara, as the recent discovery of a LH III A dais in the earliest phase of the throneroom at Tiryns now suggests.<sup>17</sup>

No LM I A pottery decorated with shields has been found on Crete to my knowledge, but this may be fortuitous, since a pair of imported LM I A three-handled jugs was found in Xeste III, a Cretan influenced ashlar building at Akrotiri on Thera used at least partially for religious purposes (the same structure contained an adyton or "lustral basin" of Minoan type) (Fig. 5).<sup>18</sup> A LM I B jug (Fig. 6) of slightly different shape from the Thera examples was found in a LM I B destruction context in the recently discovered "Cult Basement" at Knossos, where the associated children's bones have sparked a heated controversy over interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Frescoed garlands from another room in this complex may suggest a connection with nature rites.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps most unusual in the decoration of the vase from the "Cult Basement" is the appearance of a primitive "gorgoneion"<sup>21</sup> and unidentified ovoid objects (gourds? squills? baskets?) topped by a plumelike tuft and alternating with free-

articles appearing in *Minoan Palaces*: G. Gesell, 'The Minoan palace and public cult', 123-128; R. Hägg, 'On the reconstruction of the west facade of the palace at Knossos', 129-134; N. Marinatos, 'Public festivals in the west courts of the palaces', 135-143; E. Davis, 'The Knossos Miniature Frescoes and the function of the central courts', 163-168; E. Hallager, 'A "Harvest Festival Room" in the Minoan palaces? An architectural study of the Pillar Crypt Area at Knossos', 169-177; I. Begg, 'Continuity in the West Wing at Knossos', 179-184.

<sup>17</sup> *Mycenaean World*, 100, no. 29 and col. fig. (Athens Nat. Museum, Inv. 1737-1743). See also K. Kilian, 'Die "Thronfolge" in Tiryns', *AM* 103, 1988, 1-9; T. Schultz, 'Die Rekonstruktion des Thronpodestes im ersten großen Megaron von Tiryns', *ibid.*, 11-23. There was also a throne with canopy in the E. wing of the Knossos palace: *PM* III, 333-338.

<sup>18</sup> H. Catling, 'Archaeology in Greece, 1980-1981', *AR* 27, 1981, 38 and fig. 67. See also C. Doumas, *Thera. Pompeii of the Ancient Aegean*, London 1983, 49, 51, fig. 7 (plan); N. Marinatos, *Art and religion in Thera*, Athens 1984, ch. VI; N. Marinatos & R. Hägg, 'On the ceremonial function of the Minoan polythyron', *OpAth* 16, 1986, 57-73. See also the comments on the building by R. Barber, *The Cyclades in the Bronze Age*, Univ. of Iowa Press 1987, 204-206.

<sup>19</sup> P. Warren, 'Knossos: Stratigraphical Museum Excavations, 1978-1980. Part I', *AR* 27, 1980-1981, 79-92; *idem*, 'Minoan Crete and ecstatic religion. Preliminary observations on the 1979 excavations at Knossos', *SC* 155-166; *idem*, 'Knossos: new excavations and discoveries', *Archaeology* 37:4, 1984, 48-55; S. Wall, *et al.*, 'Human bones from a Late Minoan I B House at Knossos', *BSA* 81, 1986, 333-388.

<sup>20</sup> P. Warren, 'The fresco of the garlands from Knossos', in *L'Iconographie minoenne*, 187-207.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the gorgoneion on a MM II pithos from Mallia: J.-C. Poursat, 'Iconographie minoenne: continuités et ruptures', *L'Iconographie minoenne*, 52, 53, fig. 3. For the later association of the gorgon with Athena, see W. Burkert, *Greek religion*, Harvard Univ. Press 1985, 140.

floating figure-eight shields.<sup>22</sup> It is also noteworthy that the shields have stippled surfaces, perhaps representing a furry pelt, rather than the dots or patches used elsewhere to suggest dappled bull's hide.<sup>23</sup> The shields on a pithoid amphora with internal cone, also from the deposit in the "Cult Basement" (Fig. 7),<sup>24</sup> can be compared to those on the LM I A jugs from Akrotiri.

An important feature of the LM I A shields from Akrotiri and the LM I B shields from the pottery of the "Cult Basement" is that they have a curved line at the top which accurately reproduces the strap (*telamon*) by which the shield was suspended around the necks of warriors or hunters on a niello dagger<sup>25</sup> and a silver relief vessel,<sup>26</sup> both of LM/LH I A date from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae, which were probably produced by Minoan or Minoan-trained artists for a Mycenaean clientele.<sup>27</sup> Already on the "Cult Basement" vessels, the strap has a point at its apex, apparently indicating that the shields are hanging, as against a wall when not in use. Subsequently, in shields painted in the LM I B "Alternating Style", the *telamon* becomes increasingly stylized into an arcuated shape which has sometimes been confused with the representation of a head or a helmet.<sup>28</sup> Finally, in Mycenaean fresco painting, the strap is abstracted into two curved lines which are attached to an ornamental rosette.<sup>29</sup>

The LM I A, and B pots are important, moreover, because they already show the repetitive use of the shield set carefully in a horizontal frieze. On the Thera jugs, details of the shields are picked out in added white, creating a polychrome effect like that of a simplified wall painting. Although a surviving shield fresco restored to the Loggia of the Grand Staircase of the "Domestic Quarter" in the East Wing of the Knossos palace is probably of LM III A date,<sup>30</sup> and mainland shield frescoes are somewhat later,<sup>31</sup> the vases can be taken as support for the hypothesis that the

Knossos wall paintings in their latest manifestation simply renew a preexisting motif.<sup>32</sup>

Excavation evidence from a number of Minoan colonies

<sup>22</sup> W.-D. Niemeier, *Die Palaststilkeramik von Knossos* (Archäologische Forschungen, 13), Berlin 1985, 125 and fig. 60.1, lists this shape as a possible helmet, which I find unlikely. More convincing is P. Warren, 'Of squills', in *Aux origines de l'hellénisme, La Crète et la Grèce, Hommage à Henri van Effenterre*, Paris 1984, 17-24. Cf. L. Morgan, 'A Minoan larnax from Knossos', *BSA* 82, 1987, 171-200.

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to B.J. Ziminski for this observation. This treatment of the surface is unique among depictions of the shield currently known.

<sup>24</sup> Warren 1980-1981 (supra n. 19), 84, fig. 35.

<sup>25</sup> *PGC*, 56, no. 682, pl. 682.

<sup>26</sup> E. Davis, *The Vapheio cups and Aegean gold and silver ware*, London 1977, 222-227, no. 86, figs. 176-177.

<sup>27</sup> It is often overlooked in discussion of the figure-eight shield that it is almost restricted to objects in SG IV, and that it appears primarily on prestige works of valuable metals, which may not be of Mycenaean manufacture. Examples include: a) sword with line of shields on the midrib flanked by running spirals: *PGC*, 56f., no. 686; b) silver shield-shaped rhyton: Davis (supra n. 26), 230-235, no. 88, figs. 181-184; c) niello dagger (supra n. 25); d) silver relief vessel (supra n. 26); e) silver siege rhyton: Davis (supra n. 26), 227-230, no. 87, figs. 179, 180. The contemporary Grave III included two seals with representations of male combatants wearing figure-eight shields (*CMS* I, 22f., nos. 11-12), although the tomb contained the bodies of three women and two children.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., by T. Small, 'A possible 'Shield Goddess' from Crete', *Kadmos* 5, 1966, 103-107.

<sup>29</sup> S. Immerwahr, *Aegean painting in the Bronze Age*, University Park & London 1990, 140.

<sup>30</sup> Immerwahr (supra n. 29), 177, catalog Kn no. 33, pl. 49. For location, see plan on p. 86: "Shield Fresco".

<sup>31</sup> From Thebes, Tiryns, and Mycenae. See catalog entries in Immerwahr (supra n. 29), 201, Th no. 5; 203, Ti no. 10; 193, My nos. 14, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Evans originally dated the fresco to LM I: *PM* III, 307.



Fig. 5. LM I A three-handled jug from Xeste III, Akrotiri, Thera.

Fig. 6. LM I B jug from the "Cult Basement", Knossos.





Fig. 7. LM I B pithoid amphora from the "Cult Basement", Knossos.

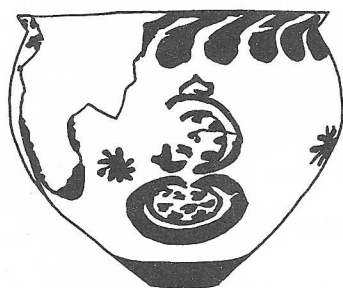


Fig. 8. LM I B open jar, House A, Ayia Irini, Kea.

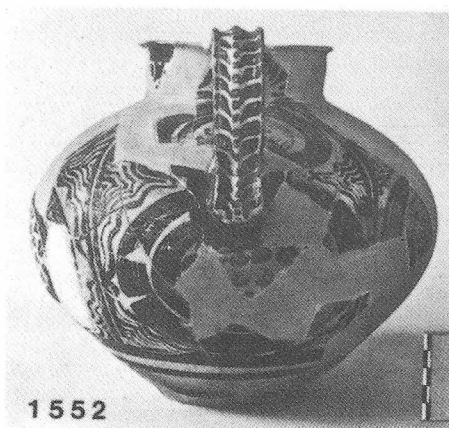


Fig. 9. LM I B bridge spouted jar, House A, Ayia Irini, Kea.



Fig. 10. LM I B stirrup jar from Chalkis-Trypha.



Fig. 11. LM I B pitcher from Vari, Attika.



Fig. 12. LM I B/LH II alabastron, Royal Ontario Museum no. 960.38.1.

or heavily 'minoanized' sites demonstrates that the shield was a popular vasepainting device in the LM I B "Alternating Style" which had a wide distribution,<sup>33</sup> though the nature of most of these examples (religious or merely decorative) is not immediately apparent and must be carefully judged by context and related finds. Many vessels painted with shields, now represented both by whole vessels and sherds, were exported from Crete to the Minoan colony at Kastri on Kythera, suggesting a specific mechanism by which shield iconography may have been introduced to the Mycenaean (e.g. at Vapheio in Lakonia and around Pylos in Messenia), following an earlier period of mainland interest in the shield virtually restricted to two of the Shaft Graves of Circle A at Mycenae.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, Minoan or heavily minoanized sites (Kastri, Phylakopi, Akrotiri, Ayia Irini) tend to include pottery with shields in habitation levels, whereas the earliest representations of shields on the mainland tend to occur in tombs, on objects which may have been included as prestige burial gifts. Thus, for example, a Minoan open jar (Fig. 8) and a bridge-spouted jar (Fig. 9) painted with shields were found in House A of the town of Ayia Irini on Kea, and a sherd was found at Phylakopi.<sup>35</sup> From tombs instead came a stirrup jar found at Chalkis Trypha (Fig. 10)<sup>36</sup> and a pitcher from Vari (Fig. 11).<sup>37</sup>

Although Warren emphasized that the stone alabastra on Crete are close to a mainland Mycenaean pottery shape, both the use of bosses or appliques on vessels and the creation of fancy stone vessels are more a Minoan than a Mycenaean tradition, and the throneroom alabastra are so limp and baggy that they may even suggest a prototype in leather rather than in clay.<sup>38</sup> One early clay alabastron (LH II A/LM I B) of unknown provenience now in Ontario illustrates the difficulty in identifying whether the pedigree for this shape should be considered Mycenaean or Minoan (Fig. 12).<sup>39</sup> N. Leipen, who published the vase, identified it as a Mycenaean product, but the painted decoration is heavily indebted to the LM I B 'Alternating Style', with shields painted around the sides in a metopal arrangement which the disposition of the handles interrupts. The shields are surrounded by floral vegetation—palm trees and 'sacral ivy' leaves—growing from rocky mounds (the "tricurved arch" motif), interspersed with curvilinear ornaments like those on the vases from the Knossos "Cult Basement" (above) and the "Unexplored Mansion" (discussed below).<sup>40</sup> The vessel in Ontario thus appears to be of direct Minoan inspiration, particularly in setting the shield in a flowering landscape with palm trees, even if of mainland manufacture.

The widespread Minoan destructions at the end of LM I B are presumed by many scholars to coincide with the arrival of Mycenaeans at Knossos, but a number of vessels from Knossos and its environs continue to use the shield motif in ways which suggest direct continuity with an earlier tradition. A LM II painted jug from the "Unexplored Mansion" at Knossos is significant (Fig. 13a, b),<sup>41</sup> because it may be approximately contemporary with the manufacture of the throneroom alabastra, and because the scene painted around the body of the vessel again suggests a setting in the

realm of nature. In another landscape scene, on a LM I A/B gold ring from the Vapheio tholos, two shields are actually present: one in profile at the side of the scene, and another impressed on the skirt of the central figure (Fig. 14).<sup>42</sup>

At the front of the jug from the "Unexplored Mansion", underneath the pouring spout, is a pair of horns of consecration<sup>43</sup> set atop a small altar which resembles the construction seen on an earlier (LM I A) fresco from Amnisos<sup>44</sup> and inlaid in niello on a contemporary (Minoan)

<sup>33</sup> On the "Alternating Style", see Betancourt (supra n. 5), 140, 142f., 156.

<sup>34</sup> A gold shield bead was discovered in a LH II tholos near Pylos: *PGC* 111, no. 1348, pl. 1348; the Vapheio tholos contained an ax with a silver shield-boss on the heel and a sealstone with a combat scene involving the shield (*CMS* I, 261, no. 228). On the international flavor of the contents of the Vapheio tholos, see discussion by E. Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age*, Chicago 1972, 127-130.

J. Coldstream & G. Huxley, *Kythera*, London 1972, 301. Cf. J. Coldstream, 'The Minoans of Kythera', in *Minoan Thalassocracy*, 107-110, in response to comments by P. Warren in review of *Kythera*, *Antiquity* 47, 1973, 322. Best known example is an askos, Minoan import. Athens, NM no. 6232. Staïs, *ArchDelt* 1915, 193, fig. 2; Furumark (supra n. 5), 44, figs. 12, 195; *PGC*, pl. 945 a (LM II B date is wrong); *Mycenaean World* 104f., no. 34 and col. fig.

<sup>35</sup> Open jar from House A, room 22: *Keos III*, 107, no. 1221, pl. 1221; bridge-spouted jar from room 31, *ibid.*, 125, no. 1552, pl. 1552. For Phylakopi sherd, see *PM* III, 312, fig. 201. See also the comments by D. Wilson, 'Ayia Irini, Kea, in the Late Bronze Age: Helladic or Cycladic?', *AIA Abstracts*, *AJA* 90, 1986, 177f., and R. Barber, 'The status of Phylakopi in Creto-Cycladic relations, in *Minoan Thalassocracy*, 179-182.

<sup>36</sup> Chamber Tomb 10, *Arch. Mus.*, Chalkis no. 517. V. Hankey, 'Late Helladic chamber tombs at Khalkis', *BSA* 47, 1952, 49-95, esp. 78f., no. 517, fig. 4; *PGC*, pl. 946 (LM II date is wrong); Coldstream & Huxley (supra n. 34), 301 n. 3: "looks purely Minoan in style".

<sup>37</sup> Chamber tomb at Vari, Attika. Private Coll., Athens. *PGC*, pl. 903 a.

<sup>38</sup> *MSV*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Royal Ontario Museum, Inv. 960.38.1: N. Leipen, 'A clay alabastron with shield decoration', *Annual, Art and Archaeology Division of the Royal Ontario Museum*, 1961, 27-34. (I am grateful to Mrs. A.H. Easson, Associate Curator of the Greek and Roman Department, for sending me a copy of this article); *PGC* 73, no. 947, pl. 947.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. notes 19-23, 42. The palm tree has been discussed by N. Marinatos, 'The date-palm in Minoan iconography and religion', *OpAth* 15, 1984, 115-122.

<sup>41</sup> M. Popham et al., *The Minoan Unexplored Mansion at Knossos*, London, 1984, pl. 60 a, 153.8; Warren (supra n. 20), 197, fig. 7.

<sup>42</sup> *CMS*, I, 253, no. 219, and recent comments by Niemeier in *CMS Beiheft* 3, Berlin 1989, 177. I had the opportunity to examine the Vapheio ring (1990) through the kindness of K. Demakopoulou.

<sup>43</sup> Modeled horns of consecration occur on top of another vessel found in a LM III B1 pit at Khania: E. Hallager & Y. Tzedakis, 'The Greek-Swedish excavations at Kastelli, Khania, 1984', *AAA* 18, 1985, 9-28, esp. 24, fig. 14.

<sup>44</sup> *PM* IV, 1002, suppl. pl. LXVII a; *APG* 158 n. 40; M. Cameron, 'Theoretical interrelations among Thera, Cretan and Mainland frescoes', *TAW* 1, 1978, 578-592, esp. 581, pl. 1 (reconstruction). Cf. the construction on which two "animal demons" stand in the relief scene carved on a stone triton shell found in a LM I B context at Mallia: C. Baurain & P. Darcque, 'Un triton en pierre à Malia', *BCH* 107, 1983, 3-73, esp. 16f., figs. 13-14.



Fig. 13. LM II pitcher, "Unexplored Mansion", Knossos.



Fig. 14. LM I A/B Vapheio ring.



Fig. 15. LM II stirrup jar, "House of the High Priest", Knossos.

electrum cup found at Mycenae.<sup>45</sup> At the opposite side of the jug from the "Unexplored Mansion", located directly below the handle, is a figure-eight shield. Separating the altar and the figure-eight shield on each side of the jug from the "Unexplored Mansion" are a diverging pair of tall stems with leaves and flowers, which recall the elements in the necklace worn by the so-called "Lily Prince" on a relief fresco from the Knossos palace.<sup>46</sup> The floral ornaments on the vase are separated by an odd curvilinear ornament with trailing ends like a plume, a device seen elsewhere in Minoan pottery.<sup>47</sup> The jug shape is appropriate for containing and pouring liquids, while the exterior decoration suggests a connection with outdoor worship.

Also of LM II date is the stirrup jar with a shield boss behind the pouring spout, found in the "House of the High Priest" at Knossos (Fig. 15).<sup>48</sup> This last example is important, because the "House of the High Priest" seems to have

been connected with epiphanic rituals, like the Knossos throneroom.<sup>49</sup> The raised shield may suggest a metal prototype, and one in fact exists in the pair of gilded shields

<sup>45</sup> See Davis (*supra* n. 27, e). Hood identifies it as a Minoan product also on the basis of the shape of the handle rivets: *APG*, 158 and n. 41.

<sup>46</sup> *APG*, 75, fig. 57. On the reidentification of the figure, see W.-D. Niemeier, 'Das Stuckrelief des 'Prinzen mit der Federkrone' aus Knossos und minoische Götterdarstellungen', *AM* 102, 1987, 65-98; *idem*, 'The 'Priest King' fresco from Knossos. A new reconstruction and interpretation', *Problems in Prehistory*, 235-244.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. the tufts surmounting the gorgoneion and ovoid objects on the jug from the "Cult Basement" (*supra* n. 22 and fig. 6).

<sup>48</sup> *PM* IV:1, 301, fig. 235.

<sup>49</sup> R. Hägg, 'Die göttliche Epiphanie im minoischen Ritual', *AM* 101, 1986, 41-62, esp. 52-55. On the Marine Style pottery from the house and its possible ritual use, see P. Mountjoy, 'Ritual associations for Marine Style vases', in *L'iconographie minoenne*, 231-242, esp. 233f.

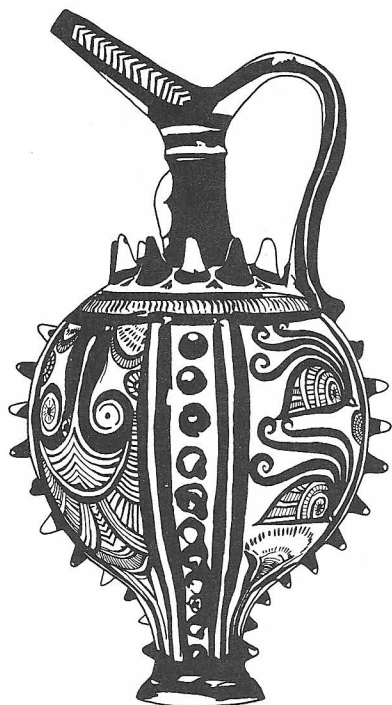


Fig. 16. LM II jug from grave near Knossos.



Fig. 17 a, b. LM II stirrup jar from grave near Knossos.



Fig. 18. LM II ritual bucket from grave near Knossos.



Fig. 19. LM I A gold ring, Archanes (LM III A 1 context).

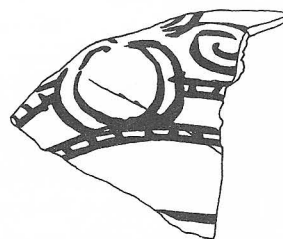


Fig. 20. LM III A1 alabstron sherd, Mycenae.



flanking the handle of the LM/LH I silver "Siege Rhyton" from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae, probably a Minoan work.<sup>50</sup> A separate small gold shield found in Shaft Grave V may be from another such vessel, indicating that precious metal containers with shield bosses may have been more common than the archaeological record now suggests.<sup>51</sup>

A LM II jug, found in a grave near Knossos, has a shield boss on the neck below the pouring spout (Fig. 16).<sup>52</sup> On a LM II stirrup jar from another grave near Knossos, a similar relief shield occurs behind the pouring spout (Fig. 17).<sup>53</sup> A polychrome "ritual bucket" painted with shields and helmets is another find of probable LM II date from a tomb near Knossos (Fig. 18).<sup>54</sup> All of these vessels are suitable for holding liquids, as is the Palace Style amphora with shield decoration which was found in fragments in the Knossos palace.<sup>55</sup>

It seems worth emphasizing that the Minoan vessels decorated with figure-eight shields from MM III-LM I B seem uniformly to have a religious character on Crete, Thera, and possibly on Kea, though perhaps there is a distinction between "hieroglyphic" shields (bosses or lugs) and "representational" shields shown with other emblems (architecture, landscape). In LM II on Crete, some vessels continue to be found in cultic contexts, while others begin to be deposited in tombs around Knossos which may be characterized as Warrior Graves, conspicuous for their inclusion of unusual objects and thus continuing the tradition of the earlier Shaft Graves at Mycenae.<sup>56</sup> By LM III A-B, terracotta vessels with shield decoration seem no longer to be produced on Crete, and this phenomenon may be connected with the final destruction of the Knossos palace. But one female burial of LM III A date at Archanes is noteworthy because it was extraordinarily rich in shield iconography and included an heirloom gold ring with a cult scene akin to that on the Vapheio ring (Fig. 19).<sup>57</sup>

On the mainland, the earliest terracotta vessels with shield decoration are manufactured in LH II A, perhaps under the influence of imports in the contemporary LM I B "Alternating Style", but are mainly confined to tombs. Whether they had a religious connection is uncertain.<sup>58</sup> After the beginning of LH III A, clay vessels with shields are few, but some are found in habitation sites as well as in graves.<sup>59</sup> The decoration on one alabastron sherd from Mycenae, where the shield is set against a running spiral, seems directly inspired by fresco painting (Fig. 20), although the surviving wall paintings of shields from the "Cult Center" there are later in date.<sup>60</sup> By LH III B, shield iconography is still prominent, but it has moved for the most part out of the realm of vase painting and into other artistic genres like fresco and ivory carving.<sup>61</sup>

But what does the figure-eight shield mean in the context of the throneroom alabastra? A lengthy exegesis is impossible here, but a few suggestion can be made. It seems crucial that most representations of the shield emphasize its dappled or hairy surface, indicating that the shield was manufactured from bull's hide. The figure-eight shield, however, has not once appeared on Crete in scenes of hunting or battle, though the Minoans clearly engaged in both activities.<sup>62</sup> Depictions of one or more shielded warriors in

<sup>50</sup> Davis (supra n. 27, e). Davis considers the work Minoan, though she leaves open the question whether it was imported from Crete or was produced on the mainland for a Mycenaean owner. For most recent discussion on the rhyton, see S. Morris, 'A tale of two cities: the miniature frescoes from Thera and the origins of Greek poetry', *AJA* 93, 1989, 511-535, esp. 520 n. 48, 528f., 528 fig. 8 (drawing).

<sup>51</sup> Davis (supra n. 26), 228 n. 535.

<sup>52</sup> Heraklion Museum no. 9540: *CM*, 146, no. 95, pl. 95; *KTMH*, 143 pl. 95; *PGC*, 71, no. 919, pl. 919; K. Foster, *Minoan ceramic relief* (SIMA, 64), Gothenburg 1982, 105 and pl. 17. Grave at Katsambas near the mouth of the Kairatos, near the ancient harbor area of Knossos.

<sup>53</sup> *PM* II:2, 640, fig. 406; IV:1, 300, fig. 234 a. LM II shaft grave no. 68 at Zapher Papoura, originally published by Evans, *The prehistoric tombs of Knossos*, London 1906, 74, fig. 83, pp. 121-123, fig. 115.

<sup>54</sup> Heraklion Museum no. 7702: *PM* III, 310, fig. 198; C. Zervos, *L'art de la Crète, néolithique et minoenne*, Paris 1956, 433, fig. 705; G. Karo, *Greifen am Thron*, Baden-Baden 1959, 43, fig. 60; *PGC*, pl. 939.

<sup>55</sup> *PM* III, 311, fig. 199; Niemeier (supra n. 22), pl. 20.XVII.B.5.

<sup>56</sup> For example the grave near Knossos which contained a jug with a shield boss (Fig 16; supra n. 52) also included an alabaster vase with the cartouche of Thutmose III. For a reassessment of Warrior Graves, see H. Matthäus, 'Minoische Kriegergräber', in *Minoan Society*, 203-215; I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, 'Jewelry in Mycenaean and Minoan "Warrior Graves"', in *Problems in Prehistory*, 161-171.

<sup>57</sup> J. Sakellarakis, 'Minoan cemeteries at Archanes', *Archaeology* 20, 1967, 276-281; *idem*, 'Archanes 1965. Report on the excavations', *Kadmos* 4, 1965, 177-180; *idem*, 'Das Kuppelgrab A von Archanes und das kretisch-mykenische Tieropferitual', *PZ* 45, 1970, 135-219. For the illustration of a gold ring with alternating shields and "sacral robes" see A. Megaw, 'Archaeology in Greece', *AR* 1965-1966, 22, fig. 40. J. Younger argues that the gold rings with shields and sacral robes were manufactured in LH III A1; 'Aegean seals of the Late Bronze Age: stylistic groups V. Minoan groups contemporary with LM III A 1', *Kadmos* 25:2, 1986, 119-140, esp. 140 III. In addition to the rings, there was an ivory lid with shields suspended between columns with warriors heads in boars tusk helmets at the ends.

<sup>58</sup> For example, other Minoan religious symbols occur on mainland pottery, e.g., nearly identical LH II A stirrup jars with double axes from Thebes and Messenia: *Mycenaean World*, 118f., no. 58, 120, col. fig; R. Hägg, 'On the nature of the Minoan influence in early Mycenaean Messenia', *OpAth* 14, 1982, 34, fig. 12: from Routsis, tomb 2.

<sup>59</sup> LH III B hydria-rhyton with shield bosses found in Attika: M. Benzi, *Ceramica micenea in Attica*, Milan 1975, 314, no. 470, pl. 18.470; *Mycenaean World*, 122f., no. 61 and col. fig. Athens Nat. Museum, no. 9814. A late example of the shield as armor occurs on a painted sherd from Tiryns showing two warriors; one wears the tower shield and the other the figure-eight shield: *AR* 1979-1980, 29, fig. 51; E. Vermeule & V. Karageorghis, *Mycenaean pictorial vase painting*, Harvard Univ. Press 1982, 229 Addenda: X.19.1, pl. X.19.1.

<sup>60</sup> E. French, 'Late Helladic III A1 pottery from Mycenae', *BSA* 59, 1964, 251, pl. 69 (d) 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ivories: *Mycenaean World*, 86, no. 16 and col. fig. Shield frescoes like that from Knossos, Loggia of the Grand Staircase (*PM* III, 301-308) are known from Tiryns, Mycenae and Thebes: See Immerwahr (supra n. 31).

<sup>62</sup> I thus disagree with some of the conclusions of N. Marinatos, who postulates a connection between the figure-eight shield and a male hunting divinity, in *Minoan sacrificial ritual* (ActaAth-8°, 9), Stockholm 1986, 52-58. A sealestone in Paris (*CMS* IX, no. 7D) may not be genuine.

procession on Cretan seals and sealings have been characterized as largely talismanic in nature.<sup>63</sup> But, the goddess of the Knossos throneroom or her human impersonator in glyptic representations wears a headdress of animal horns surmounted by the double ax, both emblems indicative of sacrifice.<sup>64</sup> I suspect, therefore, that for the Minoans the figure-eight shield is initially a symbol of bull sacrifice which was enacted for a goddess whose major concern was the fecundity of the natural world, and perhaps only secondarily as an item of defensive armor. Significantly in Mycenaean times, the figure-eight shield is still connected with a goddess, but perhaps one of more specific and narrowly defined militaristic function than her Minoan predecessor associated with the "Temple Repositories" and the throneroom at Knossos.<sup>65</sup>

#### ADDENDUM: THE RUNNING SPIRAL DECORATION ON THE THRONEROOM ALABASTRA

An issue related to the shield bosses on the throneroom alabaster is the low-relief frieze of running spirals with dotted centers around several of the rims. Because of their rather mechanical execution, Warren considered the spiral decoration "purely Mycenaean in character", and cited as parallels for the motif the ivory pyxis from Routsis (supra n. 6) and stone reliefs from the Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae. Both may be Minoan works, however, since it is doubtful that independent ivory workshops were functioning on the mainland as early as LH II A/LM I B, and J. Younger has argued that the Atreus reliefs are reused Cretan works.<sup>66</sup>

The running spiral with dot or rosette centers are a typical feature of LM I A-B pottery,<sup>67</sup> and dotted spirals occur in stone on fragments of the "triglyph and metope" friezes that adorned some of the entrances of the Knossos palace.<sup>68</sup> That the running spiral could be used in hieratic settings is indicated by the decoration (without dotted centers) of the LM I A shrine facades on the Zakro rhyton and the adyton fresco from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri on Thera.<sup>69</sup> Running spirals are often connected with shield friezes in frescoes and in glyptic;<sup>70</sup> this led Evans to restore conjectural shields to the east hall of the Domestic Quarter where a spiral frieze occurred near the remains of a canopied throne.<sup>71</sup> Two sealings from near the Hall of the Double Axes repeat the motif of figure-eight shields. On one, now identified as coming from the lower East-West corridor of

the palace, a line of figures wears the shield.<sup>72</sup> On the other—a sealing from the "Treasury" of the Domestic Quarter mentioned but never illustrated by Evans—the shields are set against a running spiral.<sup>73</sup> The spiral motif with dotted centers obviously appealed to the Mycenaeans (e.g., the LH III A throne base from Tiryns, supra n. 17) but even in stone it need not be considered more than a Mycenaean borrowing from Minoan sources.

#### Paul Rehak

Department of Classical Studies  
Loyola University of Chicago  
6525 N. Sheridan Rd.  
Chicago, Illinois 60626  
U.S.A.

<sup>63</sup> J. Weingarten, 'Seal-use at LM I B Ayia Triada: a Minoan elite in action, II. Aesthetic considerations', *Kadmos* 27, 1988, 102f.

<sup>64</sup> R. Hägg & Y. Lindau, 'The Minoan "Snake Frame" reconsidered', *OpAth* 15, 1984, 67-77.

<sup>65</sup> P. Rehak, 'New observations on the Mycenaean "Warrior Goddess"', *AA* 1984, 535-545.

<sup>66</sup> J. Younger, 'The Elgin plaques from the Treasury of Atreus: evidence for a new reconstruction of the facade', *Kolloquium zur ägäische Vorgeschichte*, 1986, Mannheim 1987, 138-150. While I accept Younger's argument for the reuse of the fragments, E. French has informed me that C.K. Williams once examined the facade of the tholos (unpublished study), the evidence of which might necessitate changes in Younger's proposed reconstruction.

<sup>67</sup> Betancourt (supra n. 5), 128, 129, fig. 98 M, 132, fig. 100, pls. 17 B, 22 E.

<sup>68</sup> *PM* II:2, 163, fig. 83 g: S.W. Entrance Porch. Cf. 166, fig. 84; *KTMH*, pl. 118 (above), from NW entrance; *PM* II, 590-596, 591, fig. 368.

<sup>69</sup> J. Shaw, 'Evidence for the Minoan Tripartite Shrine', *AJA* 82, 1978, 429-448, esp. figs. 5, 6. For illustration, see *KTMH*, pls. 108, 109. No photographs of the Xeste 3 shrine façade have been published. For a line drawing, see N. Marinatos (supra n. 62), 27, 29, 28 fig. 17.

<sup>70</sup> For frescoes, see supra nn. 29, 30. For glyptic examples, see e.g., *CMS* II:3, no. 113 (gold ring from Kalyvia). Cf. a sealing from a basement near the "Stepped Porch" at Knossos (*PM* I, 694 and fig. 516; III, 313, fig. 204).

<sup>71</sup> *PM* III, 333-338.

<sup>72</sup> Published by Evans as belonging to the "Treasury" of the Domestic Quarter: *PM* III, 313, fig. 205, 314 and n. 1; relocated by M. Gill, 'The Knossos sealings: provenience and identification', *BSA* 60, 1965, 81: sealing R. 60. See also the discussion by Weingarten (supra n. 63).

<sup>73</sup> *PM* III, 313. The "Treasury" has now been reinterpreted as a shrine by R. Koehl, 'A marinescape floor from the Palace at Knossos', *AJA* 90, 1986, 407-417.