

Literacy, Writing, and Society: A Critical Literacies Investigation
into the Writings of Bronze Age Crete.

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Introduction

The earliest evidence of Bronze Age civilisations in Greece has been found in the Cycladic Islands dating to the third millennium BC, however, developments followed in Crete.¹ During this period, the Minoans formed a highly structured society that was centred around the palace complex. These palaces were built near the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, approximately 1900 BC.² No matter how dominating they were, eventually mainland Greece took over in power, and in the Late Bronze Age the area has been referred to as Mycenae, due to the 'size and importance' of Mycenae during this period.³ The Late Bronze Age covered between 1600 BC to the twelfth century BC, where scholars have identified the collapse of the Bronze Age.

Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia and Zakro were some of the 'major administrative, economic, and political centres'⁴ of Bronze Age Crete, and it can be seen that Knossos had considerable political power; it was the only palace that was rebuilt in Crete after the destruction of the palaces in 1470 BC.⁵

Evidence for literacy in Bronze Age Crete includes a number of different types of artefact. Literacy did not have one form, but several. The function and use of Linear B has been studied fairly extensively.⁶ It appears that Linear B was an administrative language, also used in trade, and is found mainly in Mycenae, but also in Crete.⁷ The Linear A examples are far more

¹ Fitton 1995, p. 9.

² Fitton 1995, p. 9.

³ Fitton 1995, p. 9.

⁴ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁵ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁶ Hooker 1980; Olsen 2014; Palaimier and Sikkenga 1999; Schoep 1999; Tomas 2013.

⁷ Malafouris 2013, p. 68; p. 70.

cryptic. Many of the artefacts featuring Linear A are unfortunately fragmentary and the script is also untranslated. From what scholars have seen so far, Linear A appears to have been used for a wider range of purposes. It is evident in administrative forms but also appears in religious and ritual contexts.⁸

Linear A was present between 1800 BC to 1425 BC, and Linear B was used after this until about 1390 BC, however, Ferrara offers evidence that the two scripts were in use extending up until 1200 BC.⁹ Cretan Hieroglyphic predates Linear A, where Ferrara says it appeared between 1850 BC and 1800 BC, and this was predated by Arkhanes script, which was present between 2100 BC and 1850 BC. Linear A artefacts are almost exclusively from Crete, and these ones have been found in 'palatial contexts, villas, sanctuaries, and tombs'.¹⁰ Linear A also has a misconception of being solely a religious language, due to the number of votive objects that are covered with the symbols. This script can be found on a wide variety of materials compared to the more limited use of Linear B mainly on clay tablets and painted stirrup jars. Ferrara lists precious metal objects as one of the surfaces that Linear A can be found on, and says that cuttlefish ink was used to paint the symbols on the insides of clay objects, and mentions that there is wall graffiti of Linear A.¹¹ Linear B symbols have been found to overlap with those of Linear A, but Linear B is 'a different writing system, recording a different language'.¹² Linear B died with the collapse of the Bronze Age Palaces, however it was closely connected with the development of written Greek. Ferrara notes the significance

⁸ Tomas 2010, p. 121.

⁹ Ferrara 2014, p. 13.

¹⁰ Ferrara 2014, p. 14.

¹¹ Ferrara 2014, p. 14.

¹² Ferrara 2014, p. 16.

of Linear B as representative of ‘the earliest stage of the process of writing the Greek language’.¹³

Many literacies exist simultaneously in our society, however there is not universal access to all of them. Academic literacy, for example, is unique to the world of universities and scholarship, social media requires computer literacy, something that older generations are sometimes less competent with. Computer languages, used for programming, require specialist training and are a niche interest. To learn a type of literacy or language, gives power in some way. The person who has the knowledge of computer language will have better opportunities in their field of employment than somebody who does not have this knowledge, something that both Rassool and Freire emphasise in their works.¹⁴

In Bronze Age Crete, it was likely that not everybody had access to the forms of literacy that were in use. Literacy requires education, and also provides opportunities and so often power and literacy go hand-in-hand.

Traditional concepts of literacy have argued that literacy is a set of skills that simply need to be learnt. Modern literacy theorists now understand literacy as being something more. Rassool argues that ‘Literacy is now more generally regarded as a social practice that is integrally linked with ideology, culture, knowledge and power’.¹⁵ Someone with access to certain literacies will have power and access to certain parts of the world. This access is controlled by people in a more powerful position, and literacies can be used to keep people in their place in the social hierarchy.

¹³ Ferrara 2014, p. 23.

¹⁴ Freire 1994; Rassool 1999.

¹⁵ Rassool 1999, p. 7.

This study investigates how the multiple literacies of Bronze Age Crete were used and accessed by individuals in a highly stratified society. It looks at who could possibly read and write Linear A, or at least have access to the script. This study also looks into how these chosen written forms were used, what purposes they had, as well as the use of the Phaistos Disc, with it being an original script, and its origins with who would have had access to this artefact.

Bronze Age Crete was a highly structured society, where literacy featured in all aspects of life, including religion, administration, and the palace complex. Literacy was key for the organisation of large households, and these were run by literate administrators. Sacred and religious texts were the province of religious authorities connected to the elite households. There were multiple literacies, and each had their own use and meaning within and to Minoan society. Literacies in a religious context were accessible to those involved in religion, and the literacies that were created were controlled by the commissioner, who decided who would be able to access the literacy and who would be the people to help create it. This is evident that literacy is connected to power, and the wealthy and influential people of Minoan society controlled this availability and accessibility.

Literature Review

The concept of critical literacies is the overarching framework for this dissertation. I examine the multiple literacies of the Minoans and this framework enables the relationship of literacy to power, privilege and culture to be taken into account.

Rassool adopts and explains the critical literacy approach as one which acknowledges the multidimensional aspects of literacy.¹⁶ Literacy is described as ‘serving a variety of social, economic, ideological and political purposes’.¹⁷ Far from being a set of technical skills that must simply be learnt, literacy, in its multiple forms, is embedded in social, economic and political practices in ways that promote and support established social institutions and power structures. Key to this idea, Rassool asserts that literacy can be ‘regarded as a social practice that is integrally linked with ideology, culture, knowledge and power’.¹⁸ It is precisely these aspects of literacy that I wish to investigate in Bronze Age Crete, in particular how the literacies of the Phaistos script and Linear A fit into the highly stratified society of the Minoans.

The ability of literacy to exclude or privilege members or groups within a society is a focus of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire highlights how the privileging of certain literacies over others leads to exclusion and oppression in Brazil. The privileging of colonial over indigenous literacies results in the exclusion of indigenous people from many aspects of the dominant society, such as the legal system, voting rights and education. Such structural violence may also have existed in the literacy practices of Bronze Age Crete as barriers to social mobility and participation in economic and political spheres. Freire makes the argument

¹⁶ Rassool 1999, p. 7.

¹⁷ Rassool 1999, p. 7.

¹⁸ Rassool 1999, p. 7.

that literacy is not neutral but bound up in the structures of power and identity that permeate society. The place of literacy within the complex social hierarchy of Bronze Age Crete is the focus of this dissertation, and Freire's work has been influential in developing understanding of the ways in which literacy can promote inequality.

A full understanding of the Minoan social hierarchy, gender relations and economy is an essential part of this research. Castleden discusses the *Life of the Minoans* during the Bronze Age, covering a wide range of areas, including, the dressing of the people, the craft workers, their religion, and 'The Minoan personality'.¹⁹ It is a descriptive piece displaying the knowledge of what was known about the Minoans at the publishing date (1990), which helps build a picture of everyday life of the people in Bronze Age Crete. Of the six sections, Castleden's detailed description of the Minoan social hierarchy is most helpful in providing an account of the complex structures of authority within the palace complexes and the wider Minoan world.

Gender dynamics are important to consider in any society, ancient or modern, when status and inequality are under scrutiny. Olsen's book *Women in Mycenaean Greece: The Linear B Tablets from Pylos and Knossos* is an analysis and evaluation of the appearance of women on the Linear B tablets from Crete and mainland Greece. Olsen discusses women and property holdings, land tenure, and religion in the two regions.²⁰ Olsen reveals the existence of wealthy women who were clearly prominent citizens in Knossos and owners of productive land.²¹ Women of power and status are not commonly found in the ancient world, therefore the tablets KN Uf 1031 and 5738 show strong evidence for the potential for women in Bronze Age Crete

¹⁹ Castleden 1990, p.9; p. 87; p. 123; p. 158.

²⁰ Olsen 2014, p. 134; p. 202; p. 236.

²¹ Olsen 2014, p. 202.

to become autonomous businesswomen. Even though this piece is about Linear B, which is later than the two scripts I have chosen to investigate, it demonstrates the presence of influential women of economic status within Bronze Age Crete. From this, it can be seen that, at least during the time of Linear B, Minoan women are likely to have been both the producers and consumers of literacy forms.

Much information can be inferred about Minoan society from the text of the Linear B tablets from Mycenae. And with this text being a Mycenaean language primarily, it does raise the issue of how much of this evidence that supposedly describes Minoan society, is actually Minoan information. Even so, by examining the text and the object the text is written on, a wealth of information can be discovered about the Minoan society. Similarly, the Linear A texts, which have not been translated, can still offer a wealth of information about Minoan society. Several works have focused on the materiality of writing, and these provide a different way to approach the artefacts beyond the translation of the text.

Malafouris' *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* presents a unique approach to the examination of material culture, which includes a study of Mycenaean Linear B tablets. Key to his theoretical approach is the concept of distributed-cognition.²² Here, Malafouris argues that human cognition extends beyond the body, and is represented externally in human material culture. It is, therefore, possible to glimpse the working of ancient minds through an examination of the artefacts they created.

Instead of using the Linear B tablets as a medium for getting
inside the Mycenaean head, I will show that a great deal of

²² Malafouris 2013, p. 66.

Mycenaean cognition lies out there in the world and it is enacted
through, rather than written *upon*, the Mycenaean tablets.²³

He gives an explanation of the process of creating and forming the tablets, and shows that this physical making of them is a display of their cognition. An example of this is the process of using small “leaf-shaped” tablets to record information, which are then collated to a much bigger “page-shaped” tablet.²⁴ Malafouris’ *Theory of Material Engagement* demonstrates how the forms and processes of writing themselves reflect the complex world of Minoan trade and transactions. The writing system of Linear B had to accommodate the needs of a fast-paced economic system within the limits of the technology available, and Malafouris shows how valuable a materialities approach can be. This approach can be applied with the Phaistos script and Linear A to understand the choices that the Minoans made.

There are many scholars who talk about the Minoan scripts, and how the scripts were used during the Bronze Age. Piquette and Whitehouse’s edited volume *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, surface and medium*, presents a fascinating insight into literacy practices and forms from multiple contexts, including the Minoan context.

Piquette and Whitehouse combine archaeology and philology to aid looking at writing through a materialities approach. They highlight that writing is key to understanding culture and cultural practice.²⁵ Piquette and Whitehouse define the term ‘materiality’, which they say refers ‘in a general way to the material aspects of artefacts, while also, and importantly, prompting

²³ Malafouris 2013, p.

²⁴ Malafouris 2013, p. 69-70.

²⁵ Piquette and Whitehouse 2013, p. 2.

their situation in relation to mutually-informing sets of practices'.²⁶ The idea offers possibilities for considering the textual and inscribed artefacts within the context of the social practices of the Minoans, and helps generate questions of how these written forms relate to the social world.

Included in the volume is a fascinating discussion of the scripts Cretan Hieroglyphic, Linear A, and Linear B within the palace context, undertaken by Whittaker.²⁷ In particular, she examines the varying materials which carry text in the Minoan world, including stone,²⁸ bone,²⁹ and clay.³⁰ In contrast, she discusses the writing board of the Ulu Burun, which used the more temporary medium of wax to record transactions and cargo at sea.³¹ She argues that the relative permanence of the information is linked with the material used.³² This avenue of research has implications for the analysis of the Phaistos and Linear A scripts, which can be found on multiple materials and objects.

Linking in with this is Finlayson, who says that the shape of the objects that feature the writing systems adopt the shape for the specific purpose they are being used for, and that as the purpose changes the shape does as well.³³ This has implications for investigating objects such as the Mavro Spelio ring, in comparison to less portable objects, such as a stone, inscribed libation table. Minoan texts have been shown to be wearable, enduring, traded, temporary, portable, immovable, etched in stone, and even hidden in the case of the layered text of the Phaistos Disc.

²⁶ Piquette and Whitehouse 2013, p. 3.

²⁷ Piquette and Whitehouse 2013, p. 8.

²⁸ Whittaker 2013, p. 109.

²⁹ Whittaker 2013, p. 111.

³⁰ Whittaker 2013, p. 111.

³¹ Whittaker 2013, p. 113.

³² Whittaker 2013, p. 118.

³³ Piquette and Whitehouse 2013, p. 8.

Flouda's contribution to the materialities discussion is of the 'material, shape, mode and direction of writing, as well as archaeological context', and uses semiotic theory.³⁴ She demonstrates, through the textual features, how the Minoans were connected through their use of Linear A, but particularly Linear B, to the wider world of their trading partners in the eastern Mediterranean.

Finally, Tomas focuses on the practice of cutting the Linear B clay tablets. She identifies at least two ways the Minoans cut their clay tablets, and suggests how these ways were related to the specific needs of processing information for different purposes. We begin to see, in the way Malafouris suggested, the thought processes behind the production of text. Furthermore, she presents a depiction of the whole production process, demonstrating how the process of text production related to multiple strata of Minoan society from labourers to artisans and crafts people, as well as scribes, traders, and palace elites. This information of the production process can be applied to all the Phaistos and Linear A objects.

Younger's website on Linear A and Linear B provides plenty of detail about the scripts, including tables on the symbols, vocabulary in the scripts, and notes on grammar.³⁵ Younger's work has been valuable in identifying the symbols from the artefacts themselves. Similarly, Ferrara's work on Linear B tablets has been a valuable resource,³⁶ as she provides a timeline of the scripts, starting at Cretan Hieroglyphic.³⁷

³⁴ Piquette and Whitehouse 2013, p. 8.

³⁵ Younger 2000.

³⁶ Ferrara 2014, p. 16.

³⁷ Ferrara 2014, p. 13.

Methodology

This research project uses a critical literacies orientation in order to examine the social and cultural place of literacy within the Minoan context. The complex social hierarchy of the Minoans centred around the palace complexes and the interconnected trading links with the wider Mediterranean are explored first to provide the context in which the literacies are placed. It is important to address the multiple literacies of Bronze Age Crete, and therefore the literary examples were chosen from a wide range of contexts and in a variety of forms. This allows for the literary forms to be seen within the bigger picture of the Minoan world, rather than in isolation, and for different spheres of literacy to be explored. A critical literacies orientation requires the cultural aspects of literacy to be foremost in the analysis, and therefore a materialities approach was deemed most useful in investigating the individual literary examples chosen. The materialities approach focuses on the place in life of the objects, their modes of production, their symbolic significance, their use and function, rather than focusing solely on the content of the text.

The Phaistos Disc was found in 1908 by Pernier in the Palace of Phaistos,³⁸ specifically in Chamber 8 of Building 101, which is in the Northeast wing of the Palace.³⁹ Its diameter is between 15.8cm to 16.5cm, and its thickness varies between 1.6cm to 2.1cm,⁴⁰ and it has been dated to the Middle Minoan II-IIIB Period.⁴¹ It is a cryptic object with no obvious function or purpose, and is, as yet, untranslated.

³⁸ Balistier 2000, p. 10.

³⁹ Balistier 2000, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Balistier 2000, p. 32.

⁴¹ Duhoux 2000, p. 597.

The Mavro Spelio Ring was excavated between 1926-27 by Forsdyke and Evans, and is made of cast gold.⁴² It has been dated to the Middle Minoan III Period,⁴³ and it has been suggested that the inscription on it is possibly a title or name, like the contemporary Egyptian jewellery.⁴⁴ This ring has been chosen for an analysis due to its similar pattern to the Phaistos Disc, but also because the inscription is on a piece of jewellery. This unusual context raises questions about the nature and purpose of Minoan literary forms.

A libation table from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has been labelled as a religious artefact. It has been dated to 1800-1450 BC, is from Psychro,⁴⁵ and it is possibly made of serpentine.⁴⁶ The libation table presents a clear example of literacy in a religious context and invites an exploration of the relationship between literacy, religious authority and the Minoan social hierarchy.⁴⁷

I have also looked at graffiti featuring Linear A, specifically some symbols and markings on *pithoi* at Knossos. For this, I have used Boskamp's analysis of 100 jars and 'a large quantity of shards'.⁴⁸ In his piece, Boskamp uses Brice's collection of Linear A, which he refers to as 'still one of the pillars on which the study of the Linear A material rests'.⁴⁹ He also looks at whether the graffiti inscriptions should be considered a script or non-script throughout his analysis,⁵⁰

⁴² Davis and Verduci 2015, p. 54.

⁴³ Forsdyke 1927, p. 285.

⁴⁴ Forsdyke 1927, p. 285.

⁴⁵ Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, 2017.

⁴⁶ The Trustees of the British Museum. When looking at information for this specific piece of libation table, the Ashmolean Museum did not provide a material. But when I looked at the libation tables the British Museum had, which were also from Psychro, and they had been labelled as serpentine.

⁴⁷ Castleden 1990, p. 24.

⁴⁸ Boskamp 1996, p. 101.

⁴⁹ Boskamp 1996, p. 101.

⁵⁰ Boskamp 1996, p. 101.

and this leads to a discussion of who would have access to the *pithoi* as well as his conclusion of what these marks represent, such as commodity signs.⁵¹

⁵¹ Boskamp 1996, p. 111.

Chapter 1: Minoan Society and the Minoan Context

Before the Phaistos Disc was created and the Linear A script was used, there were two other scripts. The Arkhanes script was the first, and this was present during the EM III or MM IA period.⁵² Schoep discloses that the Arkhanes script has been found on 15 seal stones, with a total of 10 different signs featuring on the seal stones.⁵³ While the majority of this script has been found at Phourni necropolis in Arkhanes, there are some examples that have come from Pangalochori, in the north east of central Crete, and Moni Odigitria, in the very north east of Crete.⁵⁴

This was then followed by Cretan Hieroglyphic in the Protopalatial period.⁵⁵ Schoep discusses how Cretan Hieroglyphic was used in the north and north-eastern areas of Crete, and argues that before the development of script, perhaps during to Prepalatial period, that there was a single system for administration based on ‘the use of such direct object sealings and noduli’.⁵⁶ These two scripts have little surviving evidence of them, with Finlayson stating that for Cretan Hieroglyphic, there are ‘200 clay documents, 136 seals and 16 miscellaneous items’, which includes painted and incised pots.⁵⁷

Linear A has plenty more evidence. It was used during the First Palace Period at Phaistos, has about 1370 clay documents,⁵⁸ and Finlayson says there are also

⁵² Schoep 1999, p. 266.

⁵³ Schoep 1999, p. 266.

⁵⁴ Schoep 1999, p. 266.

⁵⁵ Schoep 1999, p. 265.

⁵⁶ Schoep 1999, p. 265.

⁵⁷ Finlayson 2013, p. 124.

⁵⁸ Finlayson 2013, p. 124.

some 300 tablets, together with a few three- or four-sides bars, and a single 'label' compromised of a flat, oblong piece of clay, pierced at its pointed end. The sealings can be classified as noduli, flat-based nodules, roundels, and single-hole and two-hole hanging nodules.⁵⁹

Linear A also has been incised on other materials, including walls, stone vessels, and jewellery, and the script is found in both religious and domestic contexts.⁶⁰

Linear B came about after Linear A, and was mainly a Mycenaean language. There is considerably more evidence surviving of Linear B, with there being over 5000 clay documents available. These have been found in Knossos and Chania on Crete, but the majority have been found across mainland Greece.⁶¹ The earliest form of Linear B has been found at the Room of the Chariot Tables in Knossos, which was in Late Minoan IIIA1 period.⁶²

Before starting my analysis, I must give a disclaimer. Much of the knowledge we have on the Minoan social hierarchy comes from the Linear B texts found, not in Crete but in mainland Greece. The fact that this information is not from a local Cretan Bronze Age source is kept in mind throughout the analysis of the artefacts and texts from Crete.

⁵⁹ Finlayson 2013, p. 127.

⁶⁰ Finlayson 2013, p. 127.

⁶¹ Finlayson 2013, p. 127.

⁶² Finlayson 2013, p. 127-28.

This is kept in mind throughout researching and the analysis of the artefacts, and when placing the literacies in society that has been described from texts that have been found on mainland Greece.

Society and the social hierarchy of Bronze Age Crete is hard to determine due to the lack of sources from the period,⁶³ but Castleden presents the possibility that it may well be similar to Pylos society.⁶⁴ Castleden proposes a social hierarchy for the Minoans from his inferences of these texts. He suggests there is a king, who has limited power. He had the Hequetai next to him as his loyal Followers, and he also had the Lawagetas, the 'Leader of the People'. Just below were the Telestai, who were religious leaders, and the Klawphoroi, who were possibly priestesses. These two roles controlled the temples, which were very important because the 'wealth was gathered and redistributed' here. Castleden also says that the lower classes were 'on the whole, not the concern of the tablet scribes'.⁶⁵ He comments on Willetts reflection of the society of classical Crete, where there were three lower classes, where these may have evolved from the Minoans.

Linear B tablets show that there was possibly a king of Knossos, and he may have been 'dominated by the priesthood and by other officials'.⁶⁶ Evans initially suggested there were four palaces (Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia, and Zakro), where he claimed there was 'evidence for the existence of powerful and grandiose dynastic kings'.⁶⁷ Castleden argues, however, that the palaces may well have been temples, and if so, this undermines the suggestion of Evans and changes the picture considerably.

⁶³ Castleden 1990, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Castleden 1990, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Castleden 1990, p. 25.

⁶⁶ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Castleden 1990, p. 22.

Linear B tablets are the sources for our basic understanding of society in Bronze Age Crete. Castleden focuses on the use of the word 'royal' in his extensive work on the tablets. Those that featured the word 'royal' were from either Knossos or Pylos, and nowhere else.⁶⁸ On a tablet from Knossos, there was a list of men's names linked to two officials; these officials had the title of *qa-si-re-wi-ja*;⁶⁹ this has been translated as an alternative title for 'king'.⁷⁰ Castleden describes that it is unknown if the *qa-si-re-wi-ja* were 'officials acting under a king or in effect kinglets in their own right'.⁷¹ It is clear that Minoan society had a complex hierarchy, in which the political and religious authorities, who were based in the temples – cave sanctuaries included – and palaces, held sway over an underclass of ordinary Minoans who lived their lives in the rural periphery.

In the Early Minoan Period, scholars have said that the societal structure is based around extended families, due to studying the burial practices of the time.⁷² There is a possibility that the *qa-si-re-wi-ja* came from the wealthy families who were successful commercially when the urban centre evolved, and Castleden says 'It would certainly make sense for progressive economic and social differentiation to result in the emergence of individual social leaders'.⁷³

The Klawiphoros was a religious role, and at Pylos they were known as the 'key-bearer', and were 'often or perhaps always a woman'.⁷⁴ This role was equal to the Classical Greek priestess role. Castleden argues that the priests, priestesses and any other religious leaders/roles must

⁶⁸ Castleden 1990, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁷¹ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁷² Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁷³ Castleden 1990, p. 23.

⁷⁴ Castleden 1990, p. 24.

have had a place in the social hierarchy due to the 'size and elaborateness of the Minoan temples and the very large number of cult objects produced'.⁷⁵

Telestai were those who owned large amounts and plots of land, who grew in political power through this. Later in ancient Greek times, Castleden says that this role had 'associations with cult and ritual, so it may be wiser to assume provisionally that the Minoan and Mycenaean Telestai were also major religious leaders'.⁷⁶

The Wanax at Pylos had a group of courtiers that Castleden records were called the Hequetai, which can be seen on the tablets as *e-qe-ta*, meaning 'Followers'.⁷⁷ Castleden suggests that these people provided security and support for the Wanax, while having their own responsibilities of 'senior administrators and military commanders'.⁷⁸ The Followers were likely to be town-based. Chadwick suggests that when grouped together, the Followers could have threatened the king's power.⁷⁹

The Koreters or Governors were another set of rural officials who were in Pylos, but were also possibly in Crete. The Koreters seemed to have an extremely similar role to the Guasileus, with the only major distinction being that while the Guasileus was determined through dynastical measures, the Koreters were appointed by the official administration and they were 'allocated to a district's clan system'.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Castleden 1990, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Castleden 1990, p. 24.

⁷⁷ Castleden 1990, p. 24.

⁷⁸ Castleden 1990, p. 24-25.

⁷⁹ From Castleden 1990, p. 25.

⁸⁰ Castleden 1990, p. 25.

Gender is part of the social hierarchy, especially since in history women's autonomy and rights have often been controlled. Dr Amanda Foreman starts her series *The Ascent of Woman* with the claim that you can often tell the fairness of a society by how it treats women.⁸¹ By considering how women were treated in Bronze Age Crete, a whole new area of where literacy had the possibility of availability can be explored. When reading Olsen's work on women in Linear B tablets, it shows that women had power, and there is the possibility of them having some form of education, and were perhaps literate in areas. To explore this aspect, I will be using Olsen primarily, as her book covers plenty on the impact and treatment of gender in Bronze Age Crete, and the information can be transferable to Linear A especially, where questions of how women were involved in society, and how much they were allowed to be involved are be discussed.

⁸¹ 'Civilisation' 2015.

Chapter 2: Phaistos Disc



*Figure 1. Phaistos Disc Side A. From Aserakov 2010.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Phaistos_disc_A.jpg*



*Figure 2. Phaistos Disc Side B. From Aserakov 2010.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Phaistos_disc_B.jpg*

Since its discovery, the Phaistos Disc (Figure 1. & 2.) has caused much controversy in scholarship with its mysterious and untranslated script. Bossert explains it well, with how untranslated inscriptions ‘tend to exert an irresistible charm and to occasion daring conjectures and fantastic attempts at reading and interpretation’.⁸² To this day, scholars have not agreed on the origin or dating of the Disc, never mind its translation, and there is controversy within scholarship concerning the writing system, reading direction, and the language itself.⁸³ Balistier claims that even the authenticity of the Phaistos Disc has been questioned, but he dismisses this quickly.⁸⁴

⁸² Bossert 1931, p. 249.

⁸³ Balistier 2000, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Balistier 2000, p. 6.

The Phaistos Disc was found in Chamber 8 of the Palace of Phaistos,⁸⁵ and it was found 50cm above the stone floor of the room in the layer of the collapsed building.⁸⁶ It is still not known whether the building in which the Disc was found ‘had palatial functions or was an ancillary building’.⁸⁷ There are multiple layers from different time periods within the building. Above the collapsed area, the materials found were ‘Mycenaean or post-Bronze Age’,⁸⁸ and this has made dating the room difficult.

The Phaistos Disc was found amongst other ceramic pieces, which has helped with dating the pieces between the 18th century BC to the Hellenistic period.⁸⁹ With this broad time span, it is difficult to truly date the Disc, and, thus, narrow down the context in which it was created and used. An amphora and jug were found in the building and have been associated with the Disc. However, the most important material that has been associated with the Disc is a Linear A tablet. These two objects are from the same time period, as Fuls has said the Disc possibly dates between 1850 and 1600 BC, and Carinci and La Rosa suggest between 1550 and 1200 BC based on a comparison of the pictographs on the Disc and the ‘absence of any real floor deposit’.⁹⁰ Both of these suggestions place the Disc at the time when Linear A was in use. The Disc was found amongst ruins of what scholars and archaeologists believe to be a collapsed, two-storey building, that also had Middle Minoan pottery, and a Linear A tablet.⁹¹

With little knowledge on the precise context in which the Disc was found and the content of the text, it is difficult to even make presumptions about the possible use and nature of the Disc.

⁸⁵ Balistier 2000, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Carinci and La Rosa 2013, p. 116.

⁸⁷ Carinci and La Rosa 2013, p. 116.

⁸⁸ Carinci and La Rosa 2013, p. 116.

⁸⁹ Del Freo 2017. (trans. M. Rockenhaus).

⁹⁰ Carinci and La Rosa 2013, p. 116.

⁹¹ Fuls 2019, p. 1.

However, through a materialities analysis of the object, and by collating the suggested meanings and translations of the script in scholarship, it could be possible to release more information and possibilities of who was involved in the use and creation of the Phaistos Disc.

The Phaistos Disc is made of clay, which Balistier likens to the consistency of 'Minoan eggshell ware'.⁹² Minoan eggshell ware is 'a hallmark of MM IIA', where Hallager defines it as 'cups with walls less than 1 mm thick'.⁹³ This shows that the clay used for the Disc was of high quality, which suggests the Phaistos Disc was important within its context, and that implies the content may be equally as noteworthy. Hallager describes eggshell ware as 'sophisticated',⁹⁴ which enhances the value of the Disc. Eggshell ware, also known as Kamares Ware, was most popular in drinking vessels as well as large storage jars and amphorae.⁹⁵ The Kamares Ware was not used after the MM IIB period.⁹⁶

Kamares Ware has mainly been found from the Kamares Cave, and then the Phaistos and Knossos Palaces.⁹⁷ Walberg looks into Day and Wilson's claims that Kamares Ware was important in displaying power and social status in the social hierarchy during the Protopalatial period.⁹⁸ While the Kamares Ware has been connected to religion, Walberg says that there is no obvious shape of Kamares Ware or decoration that displays status and power, but that each palace had their own individual style to show status.⁹⁹ Both Knossos and Phaistos possibly

⁹² Balistier 2000, p. 32.

⁹³ Hallager 2010, p. 409.

⁹⁴ Hallager 2010, p. 409.

⁹⁵ Hallager 2010, p. 410.

⁹⁶ Hallager 2010, p. 410.

⁹⁷ Walberg 2001, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Walberg 2001, p. 9.

⁹⁹ Walberg 2001, p. 14.

exported and exchanged vases as gifts, and this may well have happened due to the possibility of both of the cities prioritising ostentation.¹⁰⁰

It is obvious that Kamares Ware was prestigious in many ways, and the fact that the Phaistos Disc was made of clay similar in consistency and texture suggests that it was important to whoever was involved in making and displaying or using it.

The Disc was made by hand, which is important as during the Middle Minoan period the potter's wheel was introduced, specifically during MM IB.¹⁰¹ During the beginning of this period though, Hallager says that there was a mix of pottery and other pieces made from the wheel, as well as by hand.¹⁰² This means that it is likely that the Disc was created during the Middle Minoan IA period or the very beginning of the IB period, especially with few pieces being made by hand with the increasing use of the potter's wheel.

Scholars have discussed if the Phaistos Disc was created by either a single artist, or by multiple. Grumach 'hypothetically' claims that there must have been three people involved for the three different roles there were in the creation, but that some of these roles could have been covered and managed by the same person.

As discussed in this chapter, the Phaistos Disc is constructed of multiple layers, with the two outer layers having a spiral inscribed and the symbols stamped on. The Disc was then intentionally dried and fired perfectly – which can be seen due to the lack of cracks – and all

¹⁰⁰ Walberg 2001, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Hallager 2010, p. 409.

¹⁰² Hallager 2010, p. 409.

these steps have been completed with expert skills, showing the importance the Disc could have had to the commissioner and whoever was allowed access to it after its creation.

“the creator of the original model, the copyist, who perhaps worked purely mechanically, and the corrector, though the question must remain open as to whether two of these persons or all three are the same”¹⁰³

Balistier uses Grumach’s hypothetical thoughts to explain and list the largest number of roles there could have been in the creation of this Disc:

one who prepares the special clay, another who shaped the “pancake(s),” one who put the imprinted Disk(s) together, one who fired them. If the toolmakers who made the stamps and other instruments are included, it becomes clear that the work process required detailed knowledge and special skills¹⁰⁴

Balistier investigates the process and order to the creation of Phaistos Disc, and quotes Godart’s views on the stamps and incisions, saying both the actions were completed simultaneously:

the author of the inscription made a first section of the spiral, then imprinted a certain number of sign groups into the groove

¹⁰³ Balistier 2000, p. 42.

¹⁰⁴ Balistier 2000, p. 42.

created by it, after that drew a further portion of the spiral,
imprinted further sign groups, etc¹⁰⁵

This process shows that the artist already knew what each section entailed, showing that there was planning involved in the creation of the Phaistos Disc, and the information written on it was pre-conceived. When discussing how the signs were written within the spiral, Grumach and Godart agree that the scribe must have had a model to copy from,¹⁰⁶ and that this is not affected by the possibility of the scribe following the spiral inwards or outwards.

Balistier summarises scholars' arguments when discussing at what point the 'spider's web' spiral line was drawn,¹⁰⁷ and says that the line surely could not have been drawn before the stamping of the signs and the divider lines.¹⁰⁸ It has been confirmed that the divider lines were drawn in after a group of signs were stamped in and before the scribe moved onto the next set of signs.¹⁰⁹

The spiral pattern on the Disc is very important in its meaning to the Minoans at the time, according to Balistier.¹¹⁰ The pattern has been argued to be the 'most significant' element of art in the Early Palace Period.¹¹¹ The Minoans took this pattern on 'suddenly and passionately', and its introduction had 'epoch-making significance in the development of Minoan art'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Balistier 2000, p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ Godart 1995 and Grumach 1969, from Balistier 2000, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Godart 1995 and Grumach 1969, from Balistier 2000, p. 39-40.

¹⁰⁸ Balistier 2000, p. 39-40.

¹⁰⁹ Balistier 2000, p. 39.

¹¹⁰ Balistier 2000, p. 29.

¹¹¹ Balistier 2000, p. 29.

¹¹² Balistier 2000, p. 29.

Complementary evidence from other contexts and periods can help in the analysis of the spiral design and layering of the disc. Roman British curse tablets were folded and rolled to help 'scramble' the text, and also solidify the curse on the victim.¹¹³ The spiral could be seen as a way to 'scramble' the text; with the information now having to be read in the spiral direction, it may not 'scramble' the information, but it does make it harder to read. Only one person at a time would be able to handle and fully read the symbols, and because these symbols are unique compared to the other Minoan languages, it is likely the people who knew how to read this Phaistos Disc was also restricted in this way. The literate people of Crete were likely wealthy and higher in the social hierarchy, which means the Phaistos Disc text was not accessible to those lower in the hierarchy, and this spiral only enhanced this difficulty.

In Rumpel's experimental study, a copy of the Disc is made to understand more of the production process. In this, Rumpel describes the three suggestions from scholarship of how the Disc was fired and stamped:

Proposals rank from more carefully applied shallower impression at the second side (Godart 1995 --In fact present, but in size almost insignificant), over the separate preparation of one partial disk for each side and later combination (Grumach 1969), to a three-partite production, where a pre-baked tertiary plate was interfered in order to achieve stability (Merten 1977)¹¹⁴

¹¹³ CSAD 2020.

¹¹⁴ Rumpel 2003.

Rumpel points out, however, the firing method used. The Disc must have been fired intentionally, and with this, clay shrinks by approximately 10%, and to ensure even drying and no cracking, Rumpel says that the Disc must have been placed upright while drying and as one piece rather than multiple.¹¹⁵

The creation of the Disc was very technical, which not only shows how advanced the Minoans were in pottery and other materials, but that the Disc was made with considerable forethought. To go through such a complicated process, the Disc was important in its context.

It is more likely that the Disc was created by a team of people with there being so many roles in its creation. Firstly, the person who commissioned this piece would have likely had no part in the physical creation of the Disc, and, with a model or not, a different person would have been involved and key in the forming of the layers. Someone would have also needed the skills to incise into the stamps to create the signs, and another person would have to compose the text. After this stage and the stamping, the Disc was dried and fired intentionally, which is a process that was completed correctly with the Disc having no cracks. All of these stages required a person of expertise to display and use their special skills, and it was all under the direction of the commissioner. The form of literacy was brought to the Minoans by the commissioner, meaning this piece of literacy was created by someone with wealth and power, who evidently was an individual of wealth and power. An ordinary Minoan is unlikely to have access to the many different skills and resources evident in the disc or to be able to draw on those for the purpose of creating such an object. The Phaistos Disc is an example of how literacy leads and is equal to power.

¹¹⁵ Rumpel 2003.

Chapter 3: Linear A

The origin of Linear A has been discussed extensively in scholarship, notably by Serafimov and Tomezzoli. In their discussion of the translation attempts of the Mavro Spelio ring inscription, they cover that Giorgijev translated the script by noticing the similarities it has with the Hittite language, and then translating it from the Hittite version into Latin, and then into English.¹¹⁶ Serafimov and Tomezzoli, however, argue that Linear A has developed from the Slavic presence in Crete in the 2nd millennium BC. The evidence they present to support this argument includes the ‘amazing resemblance of the Cretan writings’,¹¹⁷ the ‘presence of Thracian personal names in Linear A inscriptions’,¹¹⁸ and that the recent study into genetic research shows that the ‘Slavic Macedonians are genetically closer to the Cretans than the Greeks are’.¹¹⁹ Despite all the attempts made by scholars to translate the Linear A inscriptions and language, no attempt has confidently been accepted by scholarship.

Linear A appears in a number of forms and for a variety of purposes in Minoan society, from religion to administration, and even in graffiti. It is possible to discern that the people involved in the creation and use of documents and artefacts that hold Linear A were able to benefit from their literacy knowledge. In other words, literacy was an advantage and held power within Minoan society. As Flouda states, ‘Persons actively involved in economic activities and merchants or traders would arguably have been literate or at least able to use logograms and numerical signs for basic notation’.¹²⁰ Those who needed to know Linear A for their occupation and the wealthy and influential people of society would be the only people who knew Linear

¹¹⁶ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 222.

¹¹⁷ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 220.

¹¹⁸ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 220.

¹¹⁹ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 221.

¹²⁰ Flouda 2013, p. 159.

A, and the wealthy would have commissioned for new Linear A documents to be created by using the workers to create it for them. Linear A has been found in palatial contexts as well as sanctuaries, tombs and villas,¹²¹ and these places are all associated with the wealthy and elite of Minoan society. The following analysis of a variety of these forms of literacy demonstrate that in the Minoan context literacy links to power, and the wealthy use it and restrict it from others to establish and maintain a social hierarchy that privileges them.

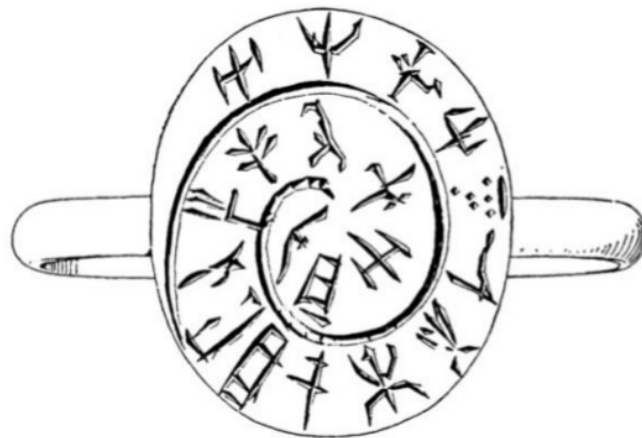


FIG. 37.—INSCRIBED GOLD RING, TOMB IX E, 1. (Scale 5:1.)

Figure 2. Mavro Spelio Signet Ring. From Forsdyke 1927, p. 284.

The Mavro Spelio ring KN Zf 13 (Figure 3) was found at the Mavro Spelio cemetery in Knossos, and it was reported by Forsdyke in 1927, and Evans released a statement in *The Times* about 'The New Discovery at Knossos'.¹²² In Evans' statement, he describes the ring as 'red gold', and that the inscription 'curves inwards and consists of 19 signs', which are

¹²¹ Ferrara 2014, p. 14.

¹²² Evans 1927.

identified as Linear A.¹²³ In Forsdyke's account, he says that Evans gives the ring a possible talismanic meaning, due to the Double Axe symbol 'which begins the first and last groups'.¹²⁴

It has been accepted within scholarship that the Double Axe symbol is one of religious or cult significance.¹²⁵ Haysom discusses the possible other meanings this symbol could have, and says that a symbol's interpretation can change in different contexts.¹²⁶ With this he suggests that the Double Axe was associated with 'a social group which exercised power in the economic, military and religious realms', and that the religious meaning came about later in time.¹²⁷ This interpretation can be seen with the Mavro Spelio ring; with its material being gold the ring would have been expensive to commission. The commissioner would have been someone who was wealthy and had a level of influence during this time, and Haysom's Double Axe interpretation fits with the ring very well.

The Mavro Spelio Ring was found in Tomb IX (Figure 4), specifically in Room E.¹²⁸ In this room, there were a total of eleven objects, which included another gold ring, some gold, faience, and carnelian beads, as well as a bronze knife-blade.¹²⁹ In the other rooms of the tomb, there were finds of pottery, gems, more jewellery and more beads.¹³⁰ This tomb was large and had many items that displayed wealth. Whoever this tomb was intended for was likely wealthy and/or influential, and so the ring was a way to display this.

¹²³ Evans 1927.

¹²⁴ Forsdyke 1927, p. 285.

¹²⁵ Haysom 2010, p. 35. Haysom mentions Banti and Nilsson, who both are 'two great sceptics of among scholars of Aegean Bronze Age religion', who agree in their respective 1941-3 and 1950 pieces that the Double Axe is a religious symbol.

¹²⁶ Haysom 2010, p. 35.

¹²⁷ Haysom 2010, p. 50.

¹²⁸ Forsdyke 1927, p. 269.

¹²⁹ Forsdyke 1927, p. 269.

¹³⁰ Forsdyke 1927, p. 267-269.

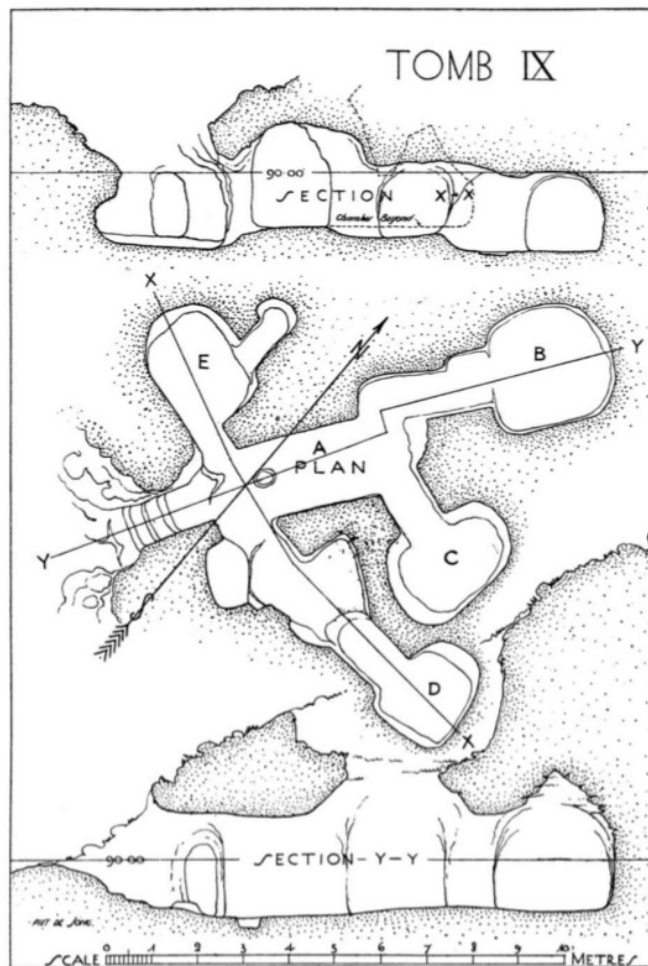


FIG. 19.

Figure 4. Tomb IX of the Mavro Spelio Cemetery. From Forsdyke 1927, p. 265.

This ring has a diameter of 1.0cm by 0.85cm,¹³¹ which is very small to have inscriptions on as well. To have a piece of jewellery this small, the inscription's content is already reduced. Forsdyke made the suggestion that the ring is likely not a finger-ring, but a signet ring instead, and compares it to 'contemporary Egyptians rings and scarabs' and early Greek rings that were

¹³¹ Flouda 2013, p. 160.

also inscribed.¹³² These inscriptions were titles and names, so this further suggests that the person who owned this piece of jewellery was someone with status.

There have been suggestions into the possible translations and meanings of the ring. Serafimov and Tomezzoli have taken some and critiqued them. Woudheizen is one, who used Consani's suggestion, in which he suggested a transcription of:

A-RE-NE-SI-DI-TI-PI-KE-PA-JA-TA-RA-NU-TE-E?-MU-A-JA-LU

Where he divided it into these words:

ARE NESIDITI PIKE PAJATA RANUTE E MUAJALU

Woudheizen translated this into 'For Nesides: Pikes-Phaistos, Arnutes I-Ajalu', which means the ring is an offer to Nesides of Knossos, and it was made by Pikes of Phaistos and Arnutes of Malia. Serafimov and Tomezzoli question this, due to Woudheizen applying phonics that have not been accepted by scholarship, despite them being supported by other scripts including Linear B, Cypro-Minoan, and Semitic.¹³³

Before Woudheizen, Georgiev decided to attempt a translation by using the Hittite language, and then looking at it in Latin before translating into English. Georgiev suggested, 'Iarri, rule in this way, giving, give to the fathers a little greeting, do it sure!'¹³⁴ But this has been critiqued as well, with Serafimov and Tomezzoli saying that he 'applies phonetic values to some

¹³² Forsdyke 1927, p. 285.

¹³³ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 224.

¹³⁴ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 222.

characters other than those generally accepted', and that he based these values on the similarities Linear A has with Linear B.¹³⁵ All the attempts that Serafimov and Tomezzoli highlight link to those of a higher status in the Minoan social hierarchy, and this is supported by the context in which it was found, and that it was made of gold.

The spiral has been compared to the spiral of the Phaistos Disc, in which Forsdyke also mentions the two cups that feature Minoan ink-inscriptions in the same pattern.¹³⁶ The difference between the cups and the ring, however, is that the inscriptions in the cups do not have a 'guiding line'.¹³⁷ The spiral and the symbols were inscribed onto the ring, as the ring is too small for them to have been stamped on.¹³⁸

It is clear this ring was important to its owner, and the person who commissioned this was wealthy in Minoan society. They employed skilled people to make this piece of jewellery, so they could either wear it or gift it to someone. The palace context of the ring and, in fact, all other examples of Linear A texts demonstrate the limited access to literacy in Minoan society. Only those within the palace context had access to the inscribed objects and, perhaps, the necessary education to read the script might have been further limited to the elite members of the household.

¹³⁵ Serafimov and Tomezzoli 2008, p. 223.

¹³⁶ Forsdyke 1927, p. 285.

¹³⁷ Forsdyke 1927, p. 285.

¹³⁸ Flouda 2013, p. 162.



Figure 5. Linear A Inscribed Libation Table. On Display at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology.
http://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per_page/25/offset/0/sort_by/relevance/object/75881

The Libation Table AN1896-1908.AE.1 (Figure 5) can be found at the Ashmolean Museum. There is another libation table (1907,0119.232) at the British Museum (Figure 6); both tables are from the Psychro religious site and have been dated to the period of 1700-1450 BC.¹³⁹ The British Museum example has a width of 18.50cm, and the tables are made from serpentine, which is a soft-stone that was used as a material for sealstones, along with steatite.¹⁴⁰ Serpentine has been described as ‘dull and grainy’, and that ‘it is sufficiently hard for a penknife, without excessive pressure, only lightly to scratch it’.¹⁴¹ When looking at the libation table in the Ashmolean Museum collection, there are some remains of a Linear A inscription, which has been scratched or inscribed on.

¹³⁹ The Trustees of the British Museum 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Younger 1984, p. 117.

¹⁴¹ Younger 1984, p. 117.



*Figure 6. Serpentine Libation Table from Psychro. From The Trustees of the British Museum.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1907-0119-232.*

Psychro was a religious cave sanctuary that came about after the Middle Minoan period,¹⁴² where drinking rituals were performed, including pouring libations.¹⁴³ At the Psychro cave there is an upper and lower level; the upper level shows evidence that it was in use only after the MM period, and the lower level was in use after this.¹⁴⁴ In this cave there were findings of votive offerings among many treasures that include relief decorated jars, human and animal figurines made of bronze, a bronze chariot model, and a minimum of eighteen double axes.¹⁴⁵ This cave was clearly an important place of worship and dedication for Minoan religion, and the libation table would have been used frequently in offering drinks to the deity alongside the sacrifices.¹⁴⁶ The bronze figurines of humans featured both men and women, and, with these

¹⁴² Dietrich 1969, p. 265.

¹⁴³ Lupack 2010, p. 254.

¹⁴⁴ Nilsson 1927, p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ Nilsson 1927, p. 63.

¹⁴⁶ Nilsson 1927, p. 62. Nilsson describes that animal bones were found, in which he comments they must be part of a sacrificial ritual.

bronze figurines being a common item to find in cave sanctuaries, scholarship claims that this may be an indication that the elite were involved, and they ‘played a key role in the rituals performed’.¹⁴⁷

If the wealthy and influential Minoans had a large role in the rituals, then it is likely that those below them in the social hierarchy featured less. The elite who were involved were likely the people who could read the inscription on objects like the libation table, even if this act was restricted to the priest or priestess. Ordinary Minoans would not even have the chance to read it, either through restriction of access or just not knowing how to read Linear A. Flouda claims that ‘Linear A was not employed on monuments of public display’,¹⁴⁸ and this implies that ordinary Minoans were not the intended audience of Linear A texts. When Linear A was involved in cult activities and rituals, ‘knowledge that writing was present, meaningful and exclusive would probably have mattered more for the social agents than the specific content of the inscription’.¹⁴⁹ These show that knowing Linear A and being able to take part in the literacies of religion would have been prestigious in society, and therefore exerted some level of power over other people. Flouda’s observation on the prestige of having writing within one’s presence also shows that inscriptions and writing held power over those who could not even read them. The Minoans of the lower class were controlled not only by the wealthy and elite, but by the writing and literacies themselves.

Being involved in the rituals at Psychro likely meant that the people would have been literate, and at least understood what the inscription was about overall. People involved in religious rituals at Psychro would have been both men and women, including the priests and priestesses,

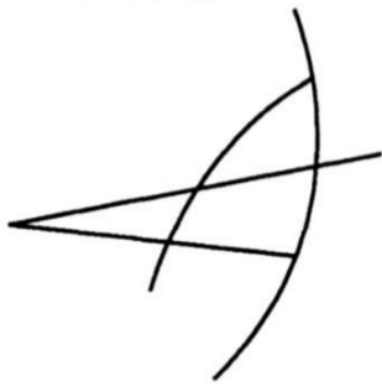
¹⁴⁷ Lupack 2010, p. 254.

¹⁴⁸ Flouda 2013, p. 167.

¹⁴⁹ Flouda 2013, p. 167.

as well as the palace elite, if Lupack is correct in her statement of the elite being heavily involved in ritual activity. It can be seen at Knossos that priestesses formed part of the wealthy and elite. In Olsen's records, tablets at Knossos record the distribution of oil and the 'recipients are either divinities or human cult officials'.¹⁵⁰ At least in the religious aspect, it can be seen that gender was not a restriction from being literate due to the importance of the priestess in cult activities.

KN 056 (1989)



Another Linear A literacy that features in Minoan society is graffiti. A common area that graffiti features is at Knossos, on *pithoi*. For such an interesting area and type of literacy graffiti is and how much it appears, scholarship has not yet delved into it as much as they could. With this information, Boskamp will be the scholar of choice, as he covers interpretation attempts of the markings on some of the *pithoi*.

*Figure 7. Graffito Marking on Pithos KN 056.
From Boskamp 1996, p. 105.*

When analysing the graffiti marks, Boskamp looks into scholarship's interpretations and ideas of what the symbols could mean. The symbol on the *pithos* KN 056 (Figure 7) has been suggested to be a potter's mark by Godart and Olivier, but Boskamp points out the issues behind this suggestion.¹⁵¹ The symbol has been considered as a sign of commodity or 'probably

¹⁵⁰ Olsen 2014, p. 190.

¹⁵¹ Boskamp 1996, p. 105.

a ligature', so Boskamp says that the inscription would be put with the group of Linear A signs 633, or 'some version of 126a' (Figure 8).¹⁵²



Figure 8. Boskamp's Groupings of Signs 633 and 126a. From Boskamp 1996, p. 105.

Pithos KN 065 (Figure 9) has two graffiti markings, the upper one is 184mm below the collar, and the lower one is 515mm below the collar, which Boskamp says is 'almost at knee-height'.¹⁵³ The upper sign is 'the largest graffito' found in the storage areas, or magazines, with it measuring 112mm by 98mm, and it was 'boldly though not carefully executed'.¹⁵⁴ The sign was inscribed into the wet clay of the jar, and Boskamp says that 'the upper graffito supersedes an earlier, now vanished, sign which was part of a longer inscription of three or even four signs'.¹⁵⁵ These signs were erased after being cut into the soft clay, and scholarship does not know the reason for this. The deletion of the previous sign means that the sign that was inscribed on the *pithos* 'must have some intrinsic importance, either as a commodity sign or as a ligature'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Boskamp 1996, p. 105.

¹⁵³ Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

¹⁵⁴ Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

¹⁵⁵ Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

¹⁵⁶ Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

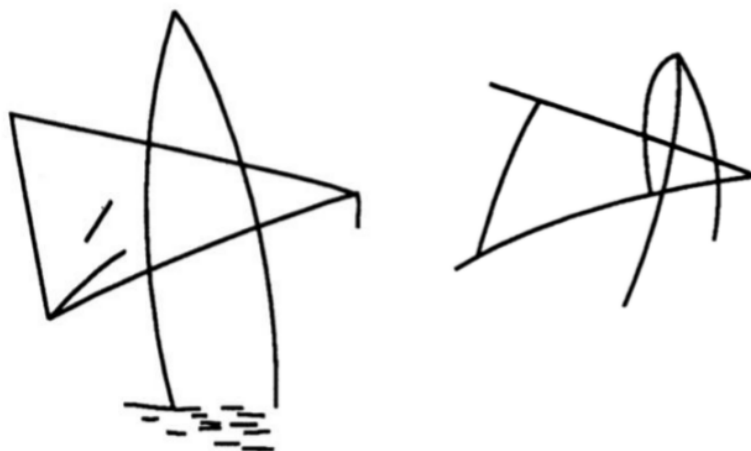


Figure 9. Upper and Lower Graffito Marking on Pithos KN 065. From Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

The lower graffito is nearly the same size as KN 056, and there is a possibility that this graffito may be older than the upper piece. When suggesting this idea, Boskamp says that if this engraving was to be acknowledged as a script it would make sense that the lower would be older.¹⁵⁷ He also suggested that these two inscriptions were made by two different people, and that when the upper graffito was being engraved it was 'erroneously added', and then when the mistake was noticed it was erased.¹⁵⁸

If these signs and markings are what Boskamp says – commodity signs – then these markings are not necessarily graffiti but just labels. This reinforces that the people who knew Linear A were either the wealthy or those who needed to know the script for their occupation. The people who had access to the *pithoi* to write these symbols and markings likely knew a limited range

¹⁵⁷ Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

¹⁵⁸ Boskamp 1996, p. 106.

of Linear A marks necessary for their work. This places Linear A not just in the sacred but also in the profane sphere.

It can be seen that Linear A was known by those who used it in the workplace, and by the wealthy elite who used their influence to control who was allowed access these certain types of literacies. Linear A was used on a wide range of materials, and they too had a wide range of uses to the Minoans. The ring was a treasure to its owner, and if it did not belong to the body it was buried with, then it was a valuable treasure to the person who gave it to their deceased relation. The libation table was used in religious rituals, which scholarship has said the elite and wealthy were highly involved in. The priests and priestesses would have been able to read the inscriptions on the libation tables as well, making religion even more exclusive. The commodity signs on the *pithoi* show that working people also needed to know a certain amount of Linear A for their work. Such craftspeople worked for the wealthy, who thus controlled who had access to certain literacies and knowledge. Power and literacy were connected in Minoan society, and it appears that literacy was controlled and for the most part limited to the elite. The processes involved in the making of these objects were overseen by the commissioner. So while different people have different skills, the production of inscribed objects was controlled and managed by the educated elite. Overall, the wealthy had a large influence over the access people could have to certain literacies, and therefore the power they had in society.

Conclusion

This research set out to investigate the place of literacy in Minoan society using a critical literacies approach. It sought out to identify how literacy related to the social hierarchy of the Bronze Age Minoan world.

During this time period, it is evident that Crete had a highly structured social hierarchy and society. Minoan Linear A scripts are unique to Crete. Literacy was involved in multiple areas of the Minoan world, which included domestic, religion, and administration, but writing features within and consistently links back to the palace context. The multiple literacies that feature in Bronze Age Crete had their own assigned use and meaning to the Minoan people, and this was controlled by the wealthy and elite. The commissioners that paid for inscribed objects to be made controlled what the message was, who had access to the literacy during the creation process, and who was able to read the inscription after creation. Religious texts were accessible to the religious authorities, but also elite and wealthy people, creating an exclusive environment. It can be seen overall that literacy is connected to power, and that this power was a way that the Minoan elite maintained the social structure.

The complex social hierarchy of the Minoans had made it so those higher in the hierarchy – political, royal, and palatial authorities – had influence over the ordinary Minoans who were not involved in the palatial or religious contexts.

Those using the literacies across Bronze Age Crete would have access to certain ones based on their place in the structured hierarchical society. Literacy became a sign of power and status for the elite, and this power was used to influence those below them in the social hierarchy.

People involved in a particular work area knew Linear A, but it is possible they were only educated in what they needed to know to fulfil the role.

The Phaistos Disc demonstrates a link between religious authority and literacy. Access is limited in the placement of the Disc in a palace setting, in its unique spiral and double-sided design, and in the production of the Disc using prestigious materials and techniques. All of these aspects mark the Phaistos Disc as an elite object out of the reach of the common Minoan. The extensive and professional skills that went towards the creation of the Phaistos Disc indicate that the object and inscriptions held a level of importance to the Minoans. The likelihood of a team of people who would have needed to be hired enhance this, and it can be seen in how the Phaistos Disc looks after being dried and fired. The commissioner of the Phaistos Disc had the power and authority to control who was involved and, therefore, exposed or allowed access to the Disc and its meaning. Only those with the correct skills were involved in its creation. The Phaistos Disc is shown to be an example of how literacy is equal to and can lead to power.

Linear A texts are exclusively found in contexts that link to wealth and power. The Mavro Spelio ring combines wealth, status and religious authority in one object; it shows a private and exclusive use of Linear A. The Libation tables show that Linear A was used in a religious context, and that connects literacy to religious authority. The cave sanctuary context limits access to the members of the elite who were involved in the religious cultic activities of this sanctuary. The lack of public display of Linear A on monuments further confirms the exclusiveness of literacy in Minoan Crete. The very exclusiveness of writing was closely connected to its power and meaning than the ritual context. Graffiti on objects that at least had a connection with the wealthy households show how literacy had the potential to spread into

the areas connected to the elite in more practical and more mundane areas of life. The objects do not carry the exclusivity and religious power like the other objects, but show practical application of literacy that nevertheless serve the ultimate interests of the elite.

Literacy was almost exclusively connected to the higher strata of the Minoan society: the palaces and religious authorities. And while the contexts were varied, including personal, religious, and practical, all ultimately served the interests of the elite.

For the majority of the Minoans who were not the elite and not involved in the palace and religious contexts, they were not able to read the inscriptions and writings within the forms of literacies that surrounded them. However, they would have been aware of them, and the presence of these literacies were markers of power and status to them. While they might not have been able to read the texts, they would have been aware of what they stood for. Today scholars stand with the majority of ordinary Minoans. We do not understand what the writings mean, but we are aware of power they have today and had in the past.

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FINAL GRADE

70/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

First marker: 70

This is an excellent piece of work, exploring Bronze Age writing systems on the island of Crete from the perspective of critical literacy, but also informed by current archaeological approaches to literacy.

To evaluate the social significance of writing on Crete in the BA brings together an impressive range of source materials, whilst at the same time recognising their potential limitations.

She also has an innovative approach, in focusing on a discrete number of inscribed objects rather than writing about Linear A generically, or keeping to the more frequently explored evidence of the tablets.

The research that has completed onto each individual object is excellent.

The weak point of the dissertation is the very generic introduction - I would have preferred to see specific focus on the issues of BA writing systems and the questions was asking of these.

Also, it would have been nice for to reflect upon her intellectual journey - which began with the Phaistos disc.

These are minor points however, and all in all this is an impressive piece of work and deserves a first class mark.

Marker 2:

This is an excellent piece of work. It has taken into account the relevant theoretical issues, and engaged with both the objects and the scholarship critically throughout.

The dissertation is written well, and structured carefully

to support the argument.

Structurally, it would have been better if the individual discussions were connected to the overall argument more closely at the beginning and end of each chapter.

In terms of the argument, the main issue is the lack of consideration of change over time. The diffusion of literacy, or at least knowledge of the script, can be related to change over time, as diffusion spreads over time and the "elite" nature of a script changes as more people are introduced to it.

Mark:70

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