

B.P. Hallager, *LM IIIB Knossos and its Relations to Kydonia*, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen, 4^o, 61, Stockholm (2025).

Knossos continues to attract scholarly attention and in recent years both more general and period-specific monographs have been devoted to the site¹. In a similar vein, the present publication deals with a single ceramic phase, Late Minoan IIIB, the 13th c. BCE. In the two first chapters, the Knossos controversy is narrated with (unfortunately only) some of the major actors involved – Palmer, Boardman, Popham, E. Hallager – and details on the remains unearthed by Kalokairinos in 1878². A third chapter deals with the LM IIIB evidence from the palace, starting with the South Propylaeum and clockwise ending with the South Terrace Basements. Then the pottery of the palace is discussed. In the next chapter, the LM IIIB evidence from Knossos town is briefly considered. There is also an extensive chapter on the LM IIIB evidence from the tombs at Knossos. The book finishes with a review of the Knossos-Kydonia relations and some conclusions.

The author's main aim is to show that, seen from Chania (Kydonia), the palace town of Knossos would have been a vibrant site and not a city in decline during the 13th c BCE as some authors have proposed³. At the same time, however, she returns to the dispute on the date of the Linear B tablets at Knossos, claiming a single date for all of them, LM IIIB1 (p. 173). While few Linear B experts would at present doubt the existence of *some* Linear B administration at LM IIIB Knossos, especially after the discovery of Linear B records at LM IIIB1 Chania⁴, most – but not the author of this monograph – also accept the presence of records that were stratified in earlier fire destructions of the palace⁵. It is therefore rather surprising that the author does not even refer to the discovery of Linear B tablets within blocked doors or later walls, clearly suggestive of later intrusions⁶. Are we then back at square one in the vexed

¹ See e.g. J. Whitley, *Knossos: Myth, History and Archaeology*, London: Bloomsbury Academic (2024), and C. Knappett, C.F. Macdonald & I. Mathioudaki, *Knossos: From First to Second Palace. An Integrated Ceramic, Stratigraphic, and Architectural Study (BSA Sup. 52)*, London: The British School at Athens (2023).

² I missed some of the more recent studies of the finds made by Kalokairinos, especially K. Kopaka, Minos Kalokairinos and his early excavations at Knossos. An overview, a portrait, and a return to the Kephala pithoi, in C.F. Macdonald, E. Hatzaki & S. Andreou (eds), *The Great Islands: Studies of Crete and Cyprus presented to Gerald Cadogan*, Athens: Kapon Editions (2015), 143-151; K. Kopaka, Η Κνωσός πριν τον Καλοκαιρινό: μια λησμονημένη μητρόπολη των πηγών, in G. Cadogan, E. Hatzaki & A. Vasilakis (eds), *Knossos: Palace, City, State: Proceedings of the Conference in Herakleion organised by the British School at Athens and the 23rd Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Herakleion, in November 2000, for the Centenary of Sir Arthur Evans's Excavations at Knossos (BSA Studies 12)*, London: The British School at Athens (2005), 497-511. More painful is the omission of the sherds drawn by J.L. Myres, all of which were Late Minoan II Palace style, cf. K. Kopaka, New Evidence on the Pottery from the Early Excavations at the Palace of Knossos, *BSA* 88 (1993), 93-102.

³ E.g. M.R. Popham, The Use of the Palace at Knossos at the Time of Its Destruction, c. 1400 B.C., in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces. Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 10-16 June, 1984 (Swedish Institute in Athens, Series in 4^o, 35)*, Stockholm (1987), 297-299.

⁴ E. Hallager & M. Vlasaki, New Linear B Tablets from Chania, in J. Driessen & A. Farnoux (eds), *La Crète mycénienne: Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale organisée par l'École française d'Athènes (26-28 Mars 1991) (BCH Supplément 30)*, Athens: École française d'Athènes; Paris: De Boccard Édition-Diffusion (1997), 169-174.

⁵ For an attempt to use the Linear B evidence to write a diachronic history of Late Bronze Age Crete, see J. Driessen & O. Mouthuy, The LM II-III A2 Kingdom of Knossos as reflected by its Linear B Archives, in A.L. D'Agata, L. Girella, E. Papadopoulou & D.G. Aquini (eds), *One State, Many Worlds: Crete in the Late Minoan II-III A2 Early Period. Proceedings of the International Conference held at Chania, Μεγάλο Αρσενάκι, 21st-23rd November 2019 (SMEA NS Sup. 2)*, Rome: Edizioni Quasar (2022), 71-84. Likewise, in the same volume, V. Petrakis discusses the existence of earlier than the final Linear B records on the Mainland.

⁶ See e.g. J. Driessen, Le palais de Knossos. Combien de destructions ?, in J. Driessen & A. Farnoux (eds), *La Crète mycénienne: Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale organisée par l'École française d'Athènes (26-28 Mars 1991) (BCH Supplément 30)*, Athens: École française d'Athènes; Paris: De Boccard Édition-Diffusion (1997), 113-134.

discussion on the date of the Linear B tablets of Knossos that started with A. Wace's foreword in the first edition of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*? This is, I think, not necessary if we disregard the only limited engagement with the extensive and detailed debate about the dating in the book and simply focus on its new insights. But let me explain first why I think her argument is fallacious. The main problem in the entire monograph is that the author fails to demonstrate that there was a fire destruction in LM IIIB at Knossos, *conditio sine qua non* for tablets to be preserved. Evans and Mackenzie regularly mention finding Linear B tablets in burnt deposits in the palace. When we try, however, to find indications in H.'s book that LM IIIB pottery was found in a burnt deposit (without tablets), we will be disappointed. In fact, I only found two instances in the palace. On p. 20, there is a claim of a burnt deposit east of the S. Propylaeum where Mackenzie notes "in the deposit, which was largely impregnated with charred wood", there is indeed associated LM IIIB pottery. But is this sufficient to claim a destruction by fire for the entire building since the other instance, on p. 32, where M.R. Popham is cited discussing a possible (not certain) LM IIIB sherd which was "overfired or burnt" seems hardly convincing. There are astonishingly few cases where Linear B tablets are more or less directly associated – according to the information in the excavation diaries – with LM IIIB pottery. In fact, if we note the spaces in the palace where LM IIIB pottery was found and those where tablets were found, they largely do not coincide⁷. Moreover, nowhere outside the palace at Knossos is there clear evidence for a fire destruction associated with LM IIIB pottery, and this despite the many town contexts discussed in this book. The only potential fire destruction that may have included LM IIIB pottery was in a small area of the Little Palace⁸. When fire destructions occurred in Knossos town, they date to LM II (Unexplored Mansion, SEX, S.-W. Houses). All LM IIIB contexts (even the recent Anetaki excavations, p. 121) are abandonment deposits... But the detailed discussion of LM IIIB deposits in Knossos town made something even more clear: apart from the fragments of Linear B in the Little Palace, none of the many IIIB contexts at Knossos has yielded the slightest evidence for Linear B administration, which, in view of the situation at Mycenae, Tiryns and Thebes for example, where Linear B is also attested in private houses outside the palace in LH IIIA-B, seems also indicative and represents yet another contra argument. But in general, the author refuses to tackle the main problem: the palace tablets were burned and highly fragmented, but the LM IIIB pottery is complete and not burned. So why in the Northern Entrance Passage and the Room of the Stirrup Vases complete, unburnt vases were found near highly fragmented burnt tablet fragments is not considered (also p. 170)⁹ – an oddity for archaeologists recognising the significance of deposit taphonomy. For this reviewer, who has excavated similar deposits (of the same date) at Malia, Sissi and Palaikastro, there can be no doubt that the Knossos palace and at least much of the town were suddenly abandoned in LM IIIB, and this is most eloquently illustrated by the Shrine of the Double Axes. This said, only five small complete stirrup jars (some from the Area of the Chessmen) and a small tankard (from the area north of the Room of the Clay Signet) from the Kydonia workshop were found in the palace (p. 91), while more than 60 (p. 161) come from Knossos town, a contrast which

⁷ Granted, this is also the case at Pylos, since each category of material is likely to be used and stored in different contexts, as noted by T. Whitelaw, Knossos during LM II-IIIB, in A.L. D'Agata, L. Girella, E. Papadopoulou & D.G. Aquini (eds), *One State, Many Worlds: Crete in the Late Minoan II-III A2 Early Period. Proceedings of the International Conference held at Chania, Μεγάλο Αρσενάκι, 21st-23rd November 2019* (SMEA NS Sup. 2), Rome: Edizioni Quasar (2022), 35-70.

⁸ But see E.M. Hatzaki, *Knossos: The Little Palace* (BSA Sup. 38), London: British School at Athens (2005), 195-196 for the full argument where the burnt LM IIIA sherds are stressed.

⁹ Already J. Driessen, The Northern Entrance Passage at Knossos. Some Preliminary Observations on Its Potential Role as 'Central Archives', in S. Deger-Jalkotzy, S. Hiller & O. Panagl (eds), *Florent Studia Mycenaea. Akten des X. Internationalen Mykenologischen Colloquiums in Salzburg vom 1.-5. Mai 1995. Band II*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (1999), 205-226, and now O. Mouthuy, The Linear B tablets from the North Entrance Passage at Knossos: a preliminary account of an interdisciplinary approach, in J. Bennet, A. Karnava & T. Meißner (eds), *KO-RO-NO-WE-SA: Proceedings of the 15th international colloquium on Mycenaean studies, September 2021 (Ariadne, Sup. 5)*, Rethymnon: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Crete (2024), 561-578. Also O. Mouthuy, *The Linear B Tablets of the Northern Entrance Passage at Knossos. An Interdisciplinary Reassessment* (Aegis 31), Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain (2025).

seems not to invite discussion. Again we may ask if the situation between palace and town does not suggest another scenario than the author has in mind. But that both palace and town were largely abandoned, there can be little doubt. We may also suggest that this abandonment formed part of a much wider phenomenon on Crete¹⁰. When exactly was this abandonment? Here, the author's ceramic expertise should be acknowledged, proposing LM IIIB1 (p. 173). We can even wonder if this abandonment was forced by the structural weakening of the buildings since we know that in LM IIIB1 Chania was struck by a serious earthquake, estimated to have been 6.5-7.5 on the Richter scale,¹¹ and Malia, Sissi and Palaikastro seem also to have suffered considerable damage¹². In other words, we do not have a situation as in the palace of Pylos where the palace was packed with LH IIIC early pottery and 90 % of the preserved tablets were complete, while at Knossos, most tablets were found dispersed, and less than 50% of the preserved tablets were complete¹³. When she concludes that the "most important evidence for an LM IIIB date for the Linear B script in the palace" (p. 170) is a Linear B inscription on a LM IIIB deep bowl (KN Z1715) from the East Wing (her Fig. 34), she forgets to mention that these three signs do not make up an intelligible word and are regarded as a pseudo-inscription, "indicating that the idea of writing held some visual currency for those whose level of literacy was low or non-existent"¹⁴. Moreover, it was probably not even a Knossian product¹⁵.

I would certainly agree with her in seeing the LM IIIB palace as a "giant warehouse" (p. 170) rather than a properly functioning royal administrative centre as it had been during LM IIIA2. This said, even in the Final Palatial period, the palace was giving much attention to storage. She in fact under-plays the importance of the many pithoi in the West Magazines, many of which, through independent parallels (e.g. at Psari Phorada, Kera Limaniotissa, Chondros Viannou, Archanes), can be dated to LM II-III A¹⁶. There is now also some proxy confirmation for the use of Linear B at LM IIIA Knossos in the form of a wine logogram inscribed before firing on a LM IIIA pithos from the Ninth Magazine¹⁷.

There are some other limitations in the volume. I regret foremost the absence of an index and a detailed pottery catalogue where potential traces of fire could have been mentioned. In general, it is to be

¹⁰ J. Driessen & F. Gaingerot-Driessen, Toppling the domino: the destruction of the palace at Knossos and the Aegean Bronze Age collapse, in T. Bürge & P.M. Fischer (eds), *The Decline of Bronze Age Civilisations in the Mediterranean: Cyprus and Beyond (SIMA 154)*, Nicosia: Astrom Editions (2023), 117-133.

¹¹ M. Vlasaki, The arrival of the Mycenaeans at Kydonia. Ancient tradition and archaeological evidence, in A.L. D'Agata, L. Girella, E. Papadopoulou & D.G. Aquini (eds), *One State, Many Worlds: Crete in the Late Minoan II-III A2 Early Period. Proceedings of the International Conference held at Chania, Μεγάλο Αρσενάκι, 21st-23rd November 2019 (SMEA NS Sup. 2)*, Rome: Edizioni Quasar (2022), 199.

¹² S. Jusseret, C. Langohr & M. Sintubin, Tracking Earthquake Archaeological Evidence in Late Minoan IIIB (~1300–1200 B.C.) Crete (Greece): A Proof of Concept, *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America* 103.6 (2013), 3026-3043.

¹³ For estimates, see J. Driessen, *The Scribes of the Room of the Chariot Tablets (Minos Sup. 15)*, Salamanca (2000), 39. In the case of the Room of the Chariot Tablets, only 11.5 % of the tablets was complete.

¹⁴ P.P. Steele, *Exploring Writing Systems and Practices in the Bronze Age Aegean*, Oxbow Books, Oxford & Philadelphia (2024), 113.

¹⁵ H.W. Haskell, R.E. Jones, P.M. Day, J.T. Killen, *Transport Stirrup Jars of the Bronze Age Aegean and East Mediterranean (Prehistory Monographs 33)*, Philadelphia 2011, Table 27.

¹⁶ E. Banou & G. Rethemiotakis, Centre and Periphery: New Evidence for the Relations between Knossos and the Area of Viannos in the LM II-III A Periods, in J. Driessen & A. Farnoux (eds), *La Crète mycénienne: Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale organisée par l'École française d'Athènes (26-28 Mars 1991) (BCH Supplément 30)*, Athens: École française d'Athènes; Paris: De Boccard Édition-Diffusion (1997), 7, 23-57, esp. figs 23-26, and as noted ib., 46: "Therefore, the new evidence from Viannos, well-dated by LM II and LM IIIA vases, helps to establish a LM IIIA date for their Knossian counterparts". See already K.S. Christakis, Palatial economy and storage in Late Bronze Age Knossos, in G. Cadogan, E. Hatzaki & A. Vasilakis (eds), *Knossos: Palace, City, State: Proceedings of the Conference in Herakleion organised by the British School at Athens and the 23rd Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Herakleion, in November 2000, for the Centenary of Sir Arthur Evans's Excavations at Knossos (BSA Studies 12)*, London: The British School at Athens (2004), 299-309.

¹⁷ M. Del Frio, J. Zurbach & K.S. Christakis, 'Minoan' or 'Mycenaean' Wine? Observations on an LM IIIA inscribed pithos from Knossos, *SMEA n.s.* 9 (2023), 99-106.

regretted that H. has been over-selective in her choice of literature and citations. The latter is especially problematic in the closing sentence of the book, a citation taken from Evans' first report on the excavations: «*On the whole it seems difficult to bring down the period of destruction of the Palace later than the thirteenth century B.C. »*¹⁸. It would have been appropriate to have cited the entire passage, however: «*Nothing was more striking throughout the excavations than the absence of all remains later than the flourishing Mycenaean period. Even in the superficial earth there was hardly a scrap that could be set down to a later date. The Geometrical pottery, abundant on other parts of the site of Knossos, was here conspicuous by its absence. Even the later Mycenaean style answering to the " Warrior Vase " and the Warrior Stela from the Lower Town found no representative either in the vases or the wall-paintings brought to light*». Before 1900 CE, only 'Kamares' and 'Mycenaean' were used as pottery descriptions. Evans was simply claiming that Knossos was at least that old, and probably earlier than the 13th c. BCE. He in fact stressed the resemblance of the pottery with that found in the city of Akhenaten, then dated c. 1383-1365 B.C., now ca. 1350-1335 BCE, i.e. the date defended by M.R. Popham.

Hallager's summary of LM IIIB pottery at Knossos is evidently useful in stressing the scale of the reoccupation of the palace and the town in some detail, and the evidence is indeed more impressive than the present reviewer suspected. The book does not help, however, to advance our understanding of a historical problem that will soon have kept us busy for a century. But if it was meant to keep us alert that this problem has not yet been fully resolved, then it will have succeeded.

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¹⁸ A.J. Evans, Knossos. Summary Report of the Excavations in 1900, *BSA* 6 (1899/1900), 66.