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MITTEILUNGEN

A NEW HIEROGLYPHIC ARCHIVE FROM PETRAS, SITEIA

During the summer of 1996 Dr. Metaxia Tsipopoulou discovered part of a new hieroglyphic archive in the palatial building at Petras, Siteia, in Eastern Crete. During detailed stratigraphic investigations in the area of the north facade a Middle Minoan II deposit was discovered below a heavy layer of LM IA. This deposit revealed the north entrance to the MM II building, and into this entrance the remains from a hieroglyphic deposit had fallen. In 1996 less than half of the area into which the hieroglyphic documents had fallen could be excavated. The documents were fragile and have, as yet, only been very preliminarily studied. At present we are therefore only able to present a few basic facts.

The Archaeological Context

The Minoan settlement at Petras across from modern Siteia has been excavated since 1985. Following the completion of the plan of the palace, stratigraphical trenches were dug in 1993–1995 within the building to document earlier architectural remains. These suggested that the core of the palace extended back into the Protopalatial period, and that certain elements of the plan were in continuous use from Middle Minoan II to Late Minoan IB, whereas others were modified or filled in.

The North Facade shows evidence of a major change: the Middle Minoan II doorway went out of use in Neopalatial times, and the building was extended westwards. The hieroglyphic documents had fallen from a room above this doorway, and had landed on a floor of hard yellow clay.

The hieroglyphic deposit itself exhibited signs of intense burning. Abundant pottery came to light and several vases were complete or only superficially damaged. The shapes are good Middle Minoan II examples with many parallels from Malia and Gournia. The complete vases contained among others a bridged-spouted jar with pronounced carination, a carinated cup with ribbon handle and a crinkled-rim kantharos. The finds, so far, support a MM IIB date for the hieroglyphic deposit.

The Documents

The composition of the finds clearly indicate that the documents came from an archive. The following have been identified:

- a. 2 complete four-sided clay bars.
- b. 9 more or less complete medallions.
- c. 1 complete crescent with both inscription and seal impression + fragments from probably 4 more crescents.
- d. 1 (or 2) unfinished noduli (seal impression missing).
- e. 2 door/chest sealings with seal impressions.
- f. 9 nodules with seal impressions of a type which was both pressed against something and which had string marks.
- g. 3 two-hole hanging nodules with seal impressions.
- h. A few complete but very irregular small clay lumps and
- i. A large number of very tiny fragments of which many still need cleaning.

The only "archival elements" not so far found are the labels and tablets, and noduli with seal impressions.

The Inscribed Documents

The 4-sided clay bars are not pierced. On the larger of the two bars (PE Hh 2) it appears that the inscription belongs to the category with sign groups and numerals as for example is seen on Fig. 1, with a sign-group followed by the number 64 and then a panel where only the bottom half is inscribed. The largest number recorded on the bars is 2,500+, found on the smaller bar (PE Hh 3). None of the sign-groups on the bars have previously been attested in the hieroglyphic script.

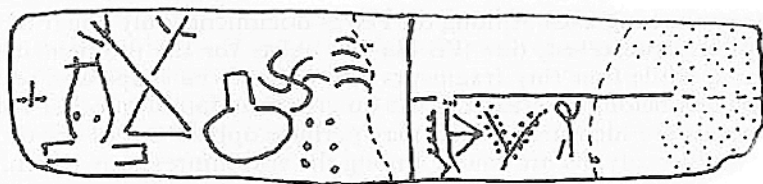


Fig. 1. Side .b of the clay bar PE Hh 2:

011-097-006-047-033 64,.1 *vacat*

.2 040-030-078 *vacat*

Scale 1:1

The medallions (PE He 4-12) are all of a more or less canonical design, having two convex sides and of a circular shape with depressions on either side of the perforation. It should be noted that the perforation, i.e. the hole at the top on most medallions is extremely small compared with other medallions. One medallion is uninscribed, while the remaining eight are all inscribed with a single sign-group on the obverse where there are no numer-

als or ideograms. Varying numbers of dots, each probably indicating the numeral 10 (Fig. 2) are furthermore found on the reverse of six medallions. The system used thus appears to be sign-groups on side .a and numerals on side .b. For this system there exists one certain parallel at Knossos (KN He (04) 03). None of the sign-groups appears with certainty to be attested previously.



Fig. 2. The fragmentary medallion PE He 4:

a. 061-012-042

b. Three dots in a row 30?

Scale 1:1



The crescents are the kind of document which most often contains both inscription and seal impression. It has a typical crescent shape, with a triangular section and string and knot impressions inside. The string always runs along the long axes. Among the Petras documents only one (PE Ha 13) is completely preserved, one (PE Ha 14) exists for the moment in many fragments, while four tiny fragments – to judge from shape and section – may perhaps belong to crescents. As on crescents found in other contexts no numerals are identified. What may perhaps appear out of the ordinary is, that no hieroglyphs are found among the seal impressions which, however, are all rather fragmentary.

The Uninscribed Documents

Apart from the crescents three main types of nodules with seal impressions, but without inscriptions were discovered:

1. Door/chest sealings
2. 2-hole hanging nodules
3. A type which has both been pressed against something and which has string marks.

Door/chest sealings. Two are preserved. Both are of the peg and cord type known from Quartier Mu, Phaistos and Monastiraki. One is almost complete, while the other is broken into many small pieces. On both only one seal impression was imprinted. The seal impression on the fragmentary

door sealing seems to come from a prism and it is most likely part of a hieroglyphic inscription. In any event, the preserved part of the design is the hieroglyphic sign 070 and there would be room for one or two more signs behind (or in front of) it (Fig. 3).

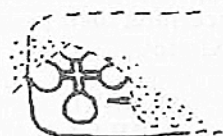


Fig. 3. The seal impression PE 010 found on a door/chest sealing is probably part of a hieroglyphic inscription starting (or ending) with the sign 070. Scale 2:1.

2-hole hanging nodules are a kind of document which has a roughly oval shape, is triangular in cross-section, and has impressions of string and knot inside. On the one flat side there is a seal impression, while the other two sides usually display clear finger prints. Three such documents with seal impressions were identified with reasonable certainty, two rather fragmentary and one almost complete. The seal impressions from 2-hole hanging nodules are all from relatively large seals of which two depict quadrupeds.

The last type of sealings may be subdivided on two different criteria: 1. whether it was pressed up against something flat or something uneven/irregular or 2. whether the string mark is found inside or on the reverse of the clay. In general this type appears to be relatively large, of roughly rectangular, oval or circular shape, and with a squarish section. The surface carries a seal impression, while fingerprints are usually found on the rim. The seal impressions on this type of sealings bear a surprisingly high percentage of pictorial motifs as opposed to simple geometric designs. Dominant are different kinds of quadrupeds, but on three impressions there may perhaps be human representations.

It is still too early to offer any interpretations about the hieroglyphic documents discovered at Petras, but a few facts may be stated:

1. There is nothing in this archive at Petras which recalls of Linear A.
2. The number of inscribed archival hieroglyphic documents has been raised by 13%.
3. The number of sealed documents (not counting crescents) in hieroglyphic deposits has been raised by 44% and
4. The number of hieroglyphic deposits in primary archaeological contexts has now been doubled.

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