THE LAST PALACE AT KNOSSES AND
THE DATE OF ITS DESTRUCTION

by M. S. F. HOOD

In this article I shall not attempt to argue a point of view, which I have already done elsewhere 1; but will confine myself to outlining the nature of the complex of problems involved, and to making clear and setting in their context against this background the different opinions that prevail among those who have examined them.

The basic problems are of course to decide what pottery was actually found in the ruins of the fire-destroyed Last Palace, to which the Linear B tablets belonged, and how this pottery is to be dated. It is not perhaps generally realized that a great mass of relevant pottery from the old excavations by Evans and Mackenzie (1900 onwards) is preserved in the Stratigraphic Museum at Knossos, but has never been published. Mr. Mervyn Popham has now made an important beginning of this necessary work of publishing the evidence 2.

The pottery in question is that found above the floors of the palace as it is today. The great bulk of this pottery, although the areas of the palace from which it came are known, is virtually unstratified. That is to say, it is stratigraphically doubtful whether it came from the destruction of the Last Palace or from later horizons. Some of this pottery may in fact belong to earlier horizons than that of the destruction of the Last Palace, because in some areas of the palace, floors and deposits of earlier periods (from Middle Minoan IIIB onwards) were exposed during the original excavations. What is needed in the first instance therefore is to examine this mass of pottery, to look for joins between the fragments of it, and to decide whether the com-

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1 Kadmos IV (1965), 16-44; V (1966).
2 See notably Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology V (1964); Antiquity XL (1966), 24-8.
plete or nearly complete vases so obtained fall into one or more stylistic
groups, assignable to one or more horizons of destruction or abandonment.

During the recent excavations (1957-61) in the area of the city outside
the palace at Knossos deposits were recovered attributable to the following
periods on the Minoan system of Evans: Late Minoan IA, Late Minoan IB,
Late Minoan II, and at least two phases of Late Minoan III which have not
yet been studied in detail. It seems clear that during the original excavations
from 1900 onwards, and in the course of subsequent soundings, deposits of
Late Minoan IA date were found in many places below the paved floors of
the fire-destroyed Last Palace. It is possible that some deposits from below
the floors, which were assigned by the excavators to Late Minoan IA, were
really of Late Minoan IB date. The plain wares of L.M. IA and B being vir­
tually indistinguishable, it is difficult in the absence of fine decorated vases
to differentiate between deposits of L.M. IA and those of L.M. IB. This fact
has led to a good deal of confusion in the past.

In one area (the Court of the Stone Spout) on the east side of the palace
Evans and Mackenzie in the second year of the excavations (1901) came
upon a good deal of L.M. IB material; but it was virtually unstratified. This
L.M. IB material at the time that it was discovered in 1901 was called by the
excavators " Palace Style " , and eventually (after Evans had published the
Minoan system of periods in 1905) it was described as L.M. II. That is to say,
in these early years of the excavation, Evans and Mackenzie thought that
the L.M. IB material came from the destruction level of the Last Palace
with the Linear B tablets, which they assigned to L.M. II. It was only some
twenty years later (after the First World War) that Evans came to distin­
guish the L.M. IB style of vase decoration from that of L.M. II, and correctly
assigned the L.M. IB material from the Court of the Stone Spout to an earlier
horizon than that of L.M. II which, as he continued to believe, was that of
the destruction of the Last Palace with the Linear B tablets. But the original
conflation of L.M. IB with L.M. II has caused immense confusion, because
almost every student of Minoan archaeology has rejected the distinction
made by Evans and has continued to regard the L.M. IB material as contem­
porary with that assignable to L.M. II. This confusion still persists, in spite
of the recent (1958-61) discoveries at Knossos, and now at Zakro, confirming
the chronological separation of L.M. IB from L.M. II which Evans made.

Eventually from about 1920 onwards Evans relegated the L.M. IB
material to an earlier horizon than that of the destruction of the Last Palace
with the Linear B tablets which he continued to assign to L.M. II about
1400 B.C. But while Evans called the period of the Last Palace " Late Minoan
II ", he was ultimately at least aware that some of the pottery in use in the
palace and elsewhere at Knossos at the time of the final destruction of the
palace was somewhat later in style. Furumark crystalised this by saying that
the destruction of the Last Palace took place, not at the end of L.M. II, but
The last Palace at Knossos

at the beginning of the following period, during a phase which he called L.M. IIIA 1, and which he dated about 1425-1400 B.C. Furumark, however, excluded from the horizon of the Last Palace, and assigned to a later phase of L.M. IIIA (his L.M. IIIA 2), some of the pottery which Evans had regarded as belonging to the period of the destruction of the Last Palace.

This is the background to the important work being done by Mr. Popham in studying and making available the unpublished Late Minoan material from the old excavations in the palace and elsewhere at Knossos. During the early years of the excavation the fine decorated L.M. IB pottery found in the Court of the Stone Spout was, as we have seen, assigned by Evans and Mackenzie to the period of the Last Palace. The relegation of this L.M. IB material to an earlier horizon left the Last Palace with virtually no small clay vases assignable to it. Almost the only clay vases which were ultimately assigned by Evans and Mackenzie to the Last Palace were the great pithoi of the West Magazines and the large and elaborately decorated Palace Style amphorae. The dearth of clay vases assignable to the Last Palace became still more acute when Furumark in 1941 relegated to a later period the remains of small fine decorated vases, some of which Evans, it seems, would latterly at least have assigned to the Last Palace. This point requires elaboration.

Among the unpublished material in the Stratigraphic Museum at Knossos Mr. Popham has identified a horizon of small fine decorated vases, many of which at any rate would appear to fall in a stylistic period after the end of Furumark's L.M. IIIA 1 (Fig. 1 (3)). Some of these vases Evans himself would almost certainly have accepted as belonging to the Last Palace, but many if not most of them it appears likely that he would have assigned to a later period of reoccupation of the palace site. This reoccupation he envisaged as non-palatial in character, an occupation of the ruins by squatters. The bulk of this material has not yet been published, but there seems no good reason to doubt Mr. Popham's claim that it is assignable to L.M. IIIA 2.8 Furumark distinguished two sub-phases in the pottery of the equivalent period (Mycenaean IIIA 2) on the Greek mainland, an earlier, Myc. IIIA 2 early (c. 1400-1375 B.C.), and a later, Myc. IIIA 2 late (c. 1375-1300 B.C.). Myc. IIIA 2 late is defined in terms of the great mass of imported Mycenaean pottery from the site of Ikhnaton's capital of Tell el Amarna occupied from about 1375-50 B.C. The question is, whether the horizon of L.M. IIIA 2 pottery identified by Mr. Popham at Knossos is to be regarded as contemporary with the earlier or with the later of these two sub-phases of Myc. IIIA 2.

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8 OTKT, 94 and note 1; AJA 68 (1964), 352.
Abbreviation:
OTKT = Palmer & Boardman, On the Knossos Tablets (1963): I (pp. xxviii + 256), II (pp. xii + 102).
Mr. Popham believes it to be contemporary with the earlier phase (Myc. IIIA 2 early) which Furumark dates about 1400-1375 B.C., and this may prove to be the case; but until the whole of the evidence bearing upon the question has been published it is impossible to form an independent opinion about the matter.

Mr. Popham has noted that there is not much fine decorated ware of later (L.M. IIIB-C) date among the fragments of pottery kept by Evans and Mackenzie from the original excavations on the site of the palace. But a group of complete vases of fine decorated ware (Fig. 1 (1)) assignable to L.M. IIIB (one of them being a Myc. IIIB import) was recovered during the second year of the excavations (1901) on the south edge of the palace site. These vases were not mentioned in the reports published by Evans and Mackenzie at the time of the excavations or later; but they were recorded by Mackenzie in his Pottery Notebook for the year 1901 in which they were discovered. Mackenzie, however, does not describe the stratigraphic context of these vases. Professor Palmer has argued that these vases were found at a deep level, in association with deposits of the Last Palace with the Linear B tablets. But the evidence on the whole seems against this view, which would if substantiated leave the earlier horizon of fine decorated L.M. IIIA 2 vases which Mr. Popham has identified curiously in the air. At the same time the style of the seals which made the clay seal impressions found with the Linear B tablets strongly suggests that they come from a horizon of L.M. IIIA date, and not from one assignable to L.M. IIIB. It seems most likely therefore that this group of vases represents a reoccupation of this part of the palace site during L.M. IIIB after the destruction of the Last Palace with the Linear B tablets.

This is one crux. Another and more important crux concerns an assemblage of vases (Fig. 1 (2)), which Evans and Mackenzie from 1901 onwards assigned to a reoccupation of the palace site by squatters after the destruction of the Last Palace. A number of these vases were found resting on floors in different parts of the palace area, and some of them were therefore recovered intact. A few of these vases were published by Evans and Mackenzie at the time of the excavations or later, and others have been identified and published or republished by Mr. Popham. The vases consist to a large extent of storage vessels of one kind and another, either plain or with comparatively simple decoration. Important among these are large storage stirrup jars, a number

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1 OTKT, 94.
3 OTKT, 155.
4 OTKT, xvi-xvii note 2, 151.
5 Kenna in OTKT, 96-100.
of which have octopus designs painted on them. But very few of the vases of this group have elaborate decoration of a kind that can be dated with comparative unambiguity, and the smaller vases assignable to it are nearly all plain without any decoration at all.

At the end of the first season of work at Knossos in 1900 Evans appears to have assumed that the vases of this group (Fig. 1 (2)), or such of them as had been found by then (notably in the South Terrace Basements and the area of the North Entrance Passage), belonged to the time of the final burnt destruction of the palace with the Linear B tablets. But in 1901, as already remarked (p. 64), the deposit of fine L.M. IB pottery was found in the Court of the Stone Spout on the eastern edge of the palace, and was assigned by the excavators to the horizon of the fire-destroyed Last Palace. It was recognized at once that the fine decorated L.M. IIIA 2 pottery (Fig. 1 (3)) which had been recovered was later in style, and this, together with the group of vases (2) described above, was therefore relegated to a supposed reoccupation of the palace site by squatters after the destruction of the Last Palace. Even when many years later, from about 1920 onwards, Evans came to realize that the L.M. IB pottery did not in fact belong to the period of the destruction of the Last Palace but to some earlier horizon, he continued to refer this group of vases (2), and the bulk at any rate of the fine decorated L.M. IIIA 2 ware (3), to a squatter reoccupation of the palace site.

Evans seems to have thought of this group of vases (2), and of the pottery which he assigned to the assumed squatter reoccupation of the palace site, as dating from the period of Amarna, that is to say, the equivalent of Furumark's L.M. / Myc. IIIA 2 late. But the views of Evans on this point are not always explicit, and they have been further obscured by the fact that he ultimately called the horizon of the assumed reoccupation "Late Minoan IIIB", reserving the term "Late Minoan IIIA" for a short intermediary period between the destruction of the Last Palace, which he placed in L.M. II about 1400 B.C., and the final stages of the reoccupation less than a century later. Furumark, however, relegated this group of vases (2) to his L.M. IIIB 1 period, by which he meant a later phase than Evans had implied by the term "Late Minoan IIIB: Reoccupation", and which he dated to the 13th century B.C.

Mr. Boardman and Mr. Popham have supported Furumark's date for this group of vases (2), which Evans assigned to the reoccupation, and they regard them as being contemporary with the group of fine decorated L.M. IIIB vases (1) found in 1901 on the south edge of the palace site. Professor Palmer has also assigned all these vases to L.M. IIIB, but he has suggested a date for them about 1150 B.C., which would fall within Furumark's L.M. IIIB 2, the equivalent of L.M. IIIC. At the same time Professor Palmer has

argued that an examination of the published reports and of the evidence from the original excavation notebooks kept by Evans and Mackenzie shows that many of the vases of this group (2), and by implication all of them, were found in the burnt ruins of the final destruction of the Last Palace together with the clay sealings and the Linear B tablets.

I am convinced, and have argued elsewhere 11, that Professor Palmer is right in his view about the stratigraphic context of these vases of group (2), and that they do in fact come from the burnt destruction of the Last Palace with the Linear B tablets. At the same time I believe that the dating of these vases as late as L.M. IIIB is mistaken, and I have recently tried to show that on stylistic grounds they should be relegated to L.M. IIIA 2, which is the horizon to which Evans (while believing that they belonged to a period after the destruction of the Last Palace, which he placed about 1400 B.C.) in effect seems to have assigned them 12.

For easy reference I append a summary of the various opinions about this complicated set of problems in the form of a chart (Fig. 1: see next page).

11 Kadmos IV (1965), 16-44.
Chart showing distribution of the various groups of Late Minoan pottery from the palace site before and after the destruction of the Last Palace with the Linear B tablets according to different views.

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<tr>
<th>POST-DESTRUCTION</th>
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<th>Evans: final view</th>
<th>Popham</th>
<th>Hood</th>
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<td>1900</td>
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(1) Group of fine decorated vases from the south edge of the palace site assignable to Furumark's L. M. III B 1 (13th century B.C.).

(2) Group of vases assigned by Evans and Mackenzie to a reoccupation of the palace site after the destruction of the Last Palace. Variously dated:

Evans. L. M. III A, and eventually L. M. III B, but meaning by this the equivalent of Furumark's L. M. / Myc. III A 2 late.
Palmer. About 1150 B.C. (i.e. within Furumark's L. M. III B 2 = L. M. III C), Hood. L. M. III A 2 late.

(3) Fine decorated ware assignable to L. M. III A 2 (according to Popham to L. M. III A 2 early before 1375 B.C.).

(4) Pithoi and large Palace Style amphorae, assignable to L. M. II - L. M. III A.

(5) L. M. I B wares.
In the preliminary report after the first season of excavations at Knossos in 1900 Evans noted the resemblance of the pottery recovered to that of the Amarna horizon of the second quarter of the 14th century B.C., and suggested that the Last Palace with the tablets had been destroyed by fire in the 14th or 13th centuries B.C. (BSA VI (1899-1900), 65-6). But in an Addendum on a fly leaf at the beginning of that report he indicated that the idea of such a late date for the destruction was mistaken, and hinted at a date for it contemporary with the Fourth Shaft-Grave at Mycenae (ibid. 3). In the second report for the year 1901 (BSA VII (1900-1), 81-2) Evans more definitely suggested that the destruction of the Last Palace took place about the time of the Fourth Shaft-Grave, and implied that this was in the reign of Thothmes III (ibid. 67). It was in this year (1901) that Evans first put forward the concept of a reoccupation after the destruction of the Last Palace with the tablets. This idea he may have adopted from Mackenzie, who already appears to have entertained it during the first season of excavations in 1900. To this assumed reoccupation the pottery of groups (2) and (3) was now assigned. This was an inevitable corollary to the mistaken assignment to the period of the Last Palace of the clearly earlier group (5) of L.M. I B pottery (called "Palace Style" at the time) which had been found that year (1901) in the Court of the Stone Spout.

The Mycenae Shaft-Graves overlap with L. M. I in Crete, and it would seem (although this is disputed) that a good many of their contents are assignable to the end of the period, L. M. I B. It is usually accepted that L. M. I B occupies the first half of the 15th century B.C., roughly contemporary with the long reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Thothmes III. The view of Evans in 1901 that the Last Palace at Knossos was destroyed about the time of the Shaft-Graves, contemporary with the reign of Thothmes III, was therefore essentially correct, assuming (what later of course was recognised as having been a false assumption) that the L. M. I B pottery found in the Court of the Stone Spout belonged to the destruction level of the Last Palace.

The Old Vicarage, Great Milton, Oxford.