

# A Note on the Knossos Mc tablets

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## Abstract

The paper discusses the possibility that two of the Linear B records classed as Mc at Knossos date from a different phase (or different phases) in the history of the palace from the remaining records of their type.

**Key words:** Knossos, Linear B records, Mc 1508, Mc 5187.

## Resum. *Una nota sobre les tauletes Mc de Knossos*

L'article discuteix la possibilitat que dos dels documents en Lineal B classificats com Mc a Knossos es remuntin a una o diverses fases de la història del palau diferents d'aquella a la qual pertanyen la resta de documents d'aquesta mena.

**Paraules clau:** Knossos, documents en Lineal B, Mc 1508, Mc 5187.

The Linear B tablets from Pylos, one of the two principal sites from which records come, almost all date from the single last year before the final destruction of the palace c. 1200 B.C. The only apparent exceptions are a few fragments which T. G. Palaima has assigned to hand 91 and which he plausibly argues on both epigraphical and archaeological grounds date from an earlier phase in the history of the site<sup>1</sup>. At Knossos, however, our other major source of tablets, the situation is evidently different. First, as J. Driessen has persuasively argued, the tablets from the Room of the Chariot Tablets (RCT) are likely to predate the earliest of the remaining tablets from the site by about a generation<sup>2</sup>. And, second, it is open to question whether at least a few tablets elsewhere at the site do not derive from a different destruction than that which preserved others in the post-RCT palace<sup>3</sup>.

1. T. G. PALAIMA, *The Scribes of Pylos*, Rome, 1988, 111-113.
2. J. DRIESSEN, *An Early Destruction in the Mycenaean Palace at Knossos. A New Interpretation of the Excavation Field-Notes of the South-East Area of the West Wing*, Leuven, 1990.
3. For a list and discussion of isolated tablets which A. J. Evans and others have suggested fall into this category, see J.-P. OLIVIER, *Les scribes de Cnossos* (hereafter *Scribes Cnossos*), Rome, 1967, 117-121. More recently, J. Driessen has offered the much more radical suggestion, based on both palaeographical and archaeological evidence, that far from the tablets from the post-RCT palace

Two of the tablets about which such questions arise are found among the texts classed as Mc, which record proportional taxation in four commodities: \*150; she-goats; \*142; and horns. As Evans pointed out, the distinctive form of the CORN (= HORN) ideogram suggests that these are the horns of the Cretan agrimi goat<sup>4</sup>; and this in turn suggests that the she-goats (CAP<sup>f</sup>) are likewise agrimi. \*150 involves a ligature of the goat ideogram with the syllabic sign *ra*, and may stand for ‘buck agrimi’; while the fourth commodity \*142 is not certainly identified, though a case can be made in favour of Ventris and Chadwick’s suggestion in *Documents*<sup>1</sup> that it may be beeswax: perhaps, as VC suggest, a product of the mountain-sides where the goats were hunted<sup>5</sup>. For further discussion, see Killen 2008<sup>6</sup>.

The main group of Mc tablets are the work of scribe 132, and were found in the Arsenal. The text of Mc 4455, a typical example of these records, is given below.

**Mc 4455** + 8449 + 8554 + *fr.* ASHM (1910.217)/HM (132)  
 .A ] ‘a-pa-sa-ki-jo’ \*150 28 CAP<sup>f</sup> 17  
 .B ku-ta-to / \*142 M 12 CORN 24

Besides these, however, two other tablets survive whose subject is clearly similar to that of the hand 132 records, and which are also classified as Mc. These are Mc 1508 and Mc 5187, whose texts are given as follows in *KT*<sup>5</sup> and *CoMIK*<sup>7</sup>.

**Mc 1508** + 1564 (132?)  
 .A ] \*150 16 CAP<sup>f</sup> 10 [ ]  
 .B. ]da-\*22-ti-jo CORN 12 \*142 M 6[ ]

↓  
 v. ] OVIS<sup>f</sup> 63 ρ o-pi ÇORN [ ]

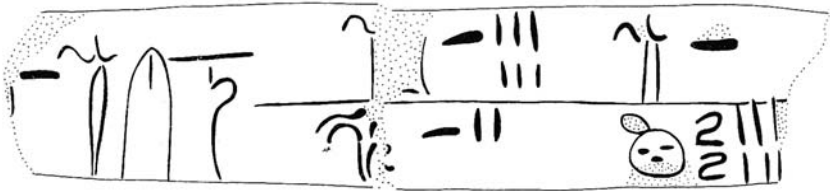
**Mc 5187** (132?)  
 .A ]5 ρ \*150 ρ ]7 [ ]  
 .B ] CAP<sup>f</sup> 8 \*142 M 20 [ ]

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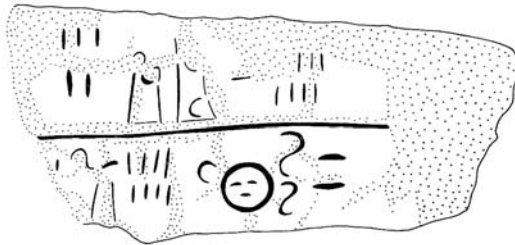
stemming from a single destruction, they were baked and preserved by as many as four different conflagrations, with for instance the records from the North Entrance showing a more conservative writing style than those from the Arsenal or the Western Magazines (J. DRIESSEN, «Le palais de Cnossos au MR II-III: combien de destructions?», in *La Crète mycénienne. Actes de la Table Ronde tenue à l'École française d'Athènes du 26-28 mars 1991* (BCH Supplément 30), Paris, 1997, 113-134).

4. A. J. EVANS, *The Palace of Minos*, London, 1935, IV, 832-833.
5. M. VENTRIS and J. CHADWICK (VC), *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, Cambridge, 1956, 302.
6. J. T. KILLEN, «The commodities on the Pylos Ma tablets», in *Colloquium Romanum. Atti del XII Colloquio Internazionale di Micenologia, Roma, 20-25 Febbraio 2006*, Pisa, Rome, 2008, 445-446.
7. *KT*<sup>5</sup>: J. T. KILLEN and J.-P. OLIVIER, *The Knossos Tablets: Fifth Edition*, Cambridge, 1989. *CoMIK*: J. CHADWICK, L. GODART, J. T. KILLEN, J.-P. OLIVIER, A. SACCONI and I. A. SAKELLARAKIS, *Corpus of Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos*, Cambridge, Pisa, Rome, 1986-1998.

Although the hand of these records is given by Olivier in *Scribes Cnossos* and hence also in *KT*<sup>5</sup> and *CoMIK* as 132?, there can be little doubt, as R. J. Firth and J. L. Melena have pointed out, that neither is by the same scribe as wrote the main group of Mc records<sup>8</sup>. On 1508, the \*22 in the initial term, the CORN ideogram and the 'ear' of \*142 all have significant differences from their equivalents on records in h. 132; and there are also clear differences between the \*142 and she-goat ideograms on 5187 and those on the majority group of records. It is less clear whether 1508 and 5187 are by the same scribe or are in different hands. Apart from the different order in which the commodities are listed on 5187, there appear to be differences between the she-goat signs on the two records; but both the absence of CORN from 5187 and the badly cracked surface of the tablet make any final decision about authorship impossible. I give below the drawings of both tablets that are published in *CoMIK*, together with the drawing in *CoMIK* of the majority group record Mc 4456, on which more will be said later.



1508



5187



4456

8. R. J. FIRTH and J. L. MELENA, «Identifying the Linear B tablets from the Arsenal and Little Palace at Knossos», *Minos* 33-34 (1998-1999), 114.

It is also clear that 1508 and 5187 have a different find-spot from that of the majority group of Mc tablets. While the latter were found in the Arsenal, 5187 is from the East-West Corridor in the East Wing of the palace; and 1508 appears to have had a similar location, though its exact find-spot remains uncertain. As Olivier notes in *Scribes Cnossos*<sup>9</sup>, the tablet shown as 1508 in *Scripta Minoa II*<sup>10</sup> is in fact another copy of the verso of the text listed as 1528. 1508 is reported by Evans as coming from the same East-West Corridor as 5187, and R. J. Firth gives this as its location in his recent survey of the find-places of the tablets<sup>11</sup>. 1528, however, joins with 1564, which Evans records as coming from the Corridor of the Sword Tablets (Olivier's *J3*); and it seems safest therefore to follow Olivier in *Scribes Cnossos* in giving its location as *J3* query<sup>12</sup>.

What is the function of each of these tablets? Beginning with 1508, it is difficult to doubt that, like the majority group of Mc tablets, this is a record of an assessment for tax contributions on the place referred to at the beginning of the text. This is clear for the majority group from the fact that they show more or less fixed ratios between the amounts of the four commodities listed, and in particular from the fact that none of the records either contains the term *a-pu-do-si*, 'payment', or shows a deficit entry, prefixed by the sign *o* = *o-pe-ro*, *ophelos*. Exactly the same holds good for 1508. In contrast, there is good evidence to show that 5187 is a record of actual payments of taxes. Although the *o* before the \*150 ideogram on l. A of the record is given in *KT*<sup>5</sup> and *CoMIK* as dotted, it is difficult to see what else it could be; and given that the other records of the commodities that are listed on the tablet are concerned with the taxation of these items, it is difficult not to conclude that this is a taxation payments record, with *o* standing for 'deficit' as regularly in this context<sup>13</sup>.

But what is the relationship between these records and the much more numerous 'standard' Mc tablets? To begin with 1508, this deals with the same place *da*-\*22-*to* as is dealt with on the 'standard' record Mc 4456. The texts of both records are set out below.

<b>Mc</b>	<b>1508 + 1564</b>	(132?)
.A ]	*150 16 CAP <sup>f</sup> 10 [	
.B. ]da-*22-ti-jo	CORN 12 *142 M 6[	
↓		
v. ]	OVIS <sup>f</sup> 63 ρ o-pi ÇORŃ [	

9. J.-P. OLIVIER, op. cit. (n. 3), 25.

10. A. J. EVANS, *Scripta Minoa II*, edited by J. L. MYRES, Oxford, 1952.

11. R. J. FIRTH, «A review of the find-places of the Linear B tablets from the Palace of Knossos», *Minos* 35-36 (2000-2001), 244.

12. J.-P. OLIVIER, op. cit. (n. 3), 194.

13. Further support for this conclusion may be available. To judge from the photograph in the Cambridge collection (see too the photograph in *CoMIK*), there is a slanting trace on the left-hand edge of l. A of the tablet which if it is a genuine stroke and not simply a crack could be the right-hand side of a further \*150 ideogram. If it is, this and the following numerals will be part of the 'positive' \*150 entry which we should have expected to precede a record of a deficit in this commodity.

**Mc 4456** + 4477 + fr. (132)

.A ]	‘si-nu-mo-ro’	*150	16	CAP <sup>f</sup>	10	[
.B ]	da-*22-to /	*142	M 7	CORN	14	[

Apart from its scribal hand, 1508 does have some differences from 4456. Like most at least of the majority group of records, 4456 begins with the simple form of the place-name, while 1508 begins with the derived ethnic *da-\*22-ti-jo*<sup>14</sup>. In addition, the commodities on 1508 are listed in a different order, with CORN before \*142, not after; and the figures for CORN and \*142 each differ slightly from those on 4456: 12 and 6[ (presumably complete) on 1508; 7 and 14 on 4456. These, however, are minor differences: in particular, the different figures for CORN and \*142 on the two texts are both within the tolerance allowed by the standard ratios between the four commodities found elsewhere on the ‘normal’ group of records<sup>15</sup>. In short, in terms of its content, 1508 is a virtual duplicate of 4456; and this is likely to have implications as far as its dating is concerned. Elsewhere in the archives taxation records appear normally to relate to annual contributions, as witness terms like ‘this year’ and ‘last year’s’ on the Pylos Ma tablets; and while we appear to have evidence for multiple assessments and contributions relating to the same year at Mycenae, the tablets concerned there were not only written by the same scribes but were found in the same location<sup>16</sup>. Against this background, therefore, it is tempting to conclude that 1508 and 4456, with their different hands and find-spots, reflect assessments on *da-\*22-to* for two different years, and hence were preserved by two different destructions of the palace. If so, this will lead to the further conclusion that a district’s assessment for the taxes that are dealt with on the Ma tablets could remain virtually identical from year to year; though we have unfortunately no clue, if 1508 and 4456 do relate to assessments for different years, how far apart in time they are.

Turning finally to Mc 5187, it is possible in theory, since this is a ‘payments’ record, that it relates to the same year as either 4456 or 1508. The former, however, seems extremely unlikely, since elsewhere at Knossos and Pylos ‘assessment’ and ‘payments’ records relating to the same year were (a) written by the same scribe and (b) filed in the same place. It is less easy to exclude the possibility that 5187 is a ‘payments’ record written in the same year as 1508, since both could just be by the same scribe and both have approximately the same find-spot; but there must be at least some doubt about this. The badly cracked surface and fragmentary state of the tablet prevent us from saying anything for certain about the ratios between the commodities on 5187<sup>17</sup>; but even allowing for the fact that at least one *o* entry

14. The only possible—but far from certain—case of an ethnic on the majority group of records is *ri-na-jo* on Mc 5818.

15. For details, see M. PERNA, *Recherches sur la fiscalité mycénienne* (Études Anciennes 28), Nancy, 2004, 282.

16. J. T. KILLEN, «On the Mycenae Ge tablets», in *Res Mycenaeae. Akten des VII. Internationalen Mykenologischen Colloquiums in Nürnberg vom 6.-10. April 1981*, Göttingen, 1983, 229.

17. M. PERNA’s statement, op. cit. (n. 15), 274, that Mc 5187 shows different ratios from those elsewhere on Mc tablets does not take account of the fact that the \*150 entry on l. A is a deficit entry, and that the same could be true of the SHE-GOAT entry on l. B.

has had to be included on the record its arrangement seems significantly different from that of 1508, with a SHE-GOAT entry appearing on l. B rather than on l. A.

In sum, then, it is arguable that among the records classed as Mc at Knossos we have tablets dating from two different phases in the history of the palace, and possibly as many as three.