

THE AMENHOTEP III ‘PLAQUES’ FROM MYCENAE: COMPARISON, CONTRAST AND A QUESTION OF CHRONOLOGY

Jacke Phillips*

Abstract

In 1886 and 1890, Ch. Tsountas found several faience ‘plaque’ fragments inscribed with the names and titles of Amenhotep III in the citadel of Mycenae. Further fragments subsequently were recovered by G.E. Mylonas and W.D. Taylour in the 1960s. Another recently has come to light in the excavation store-rooms at Mycenae. Direct comparanda for these ‘plaques’ are not forthcoming, even in Egypt, and they have been the source of many theories regarding the relationship between Egypt and Mycenae, especially between Amenhotep III and those who ruled Mycenae during his reign. But the ‘plaques’ themselves have not been directly and intimately studied until now. The author’s study indicates several key features of the ‘plaques,’ not recognised or considered before, that allow their place in the complex relationship between Mycenae and Egypt to be more specifically understood and for previous contentions to be discarded.

In 1886 and 1890, Ch. Tsountas found several glazed faience ‘plaque’ fragments inscribed with the names and titles of Amenhotep III within the citadel walls at Mycenae, at two separate locations. The one fragment from 1886 was recovered, it seems, in what is now known as ‘Tsountas’ House’ in the Cult Centre, whilst the six fragments from 1890 were generally recovered north-east of the Lion Gate, in the area of the North Quarter that includes House N (Fig. 1).¹ Two of the 1890 fragments joined, and together pro-

vided three edges of a single ‘plaque.’ TSOUNTAS (1891, pl. 3.3–4) published drawings of one face of only two 1890 fragments, one being the joined pair. The others preserved little of any inscription, one (Tsountas 5²) being entirely without text on either face. Little further information was made available, but SEWELL (1904, figs. 1–2) published photographs of the same side of both published ‘plaques.’ FIMMEN (1921, fig. 171) published these photographs again, together with *both* faces of the 1886 fragment for the first time.

Direct comparanda for the ‘plaques’ have never been forthcoming, even in Egypt, and they have been the ultimate basis for numerous theories concerning the relationship between Egypt and Mycenae, especially between Amenhotep III and those who ruled Mycenae during his reign *c.* 1388–1350 BC. (LH IIIA1 and early 2 in Mycenaean terms). SEWELL (1904) called them ‘tiles’ and suggested that the “Greek king actually ornamented his own residence with a quantity of Egyptian tile-work,” before Tsountas informed him that he believed “they have no connection with the palace at all.” FIMMEN (1921, 175) called them “*Platten*” and for the first time distinguished not only the two separate find areas and museum numbers, but also their different thicknesses and the point that the 1886 fragment inscription need not necessarily be of Amenhotep III – which is true, as only two Tsountas fragments (Tsountas 2 and 3) undoubtedly identify Amenhotep III himself – before suggesting Smenkhare, Akhenaten’s immediate successor, was the pharaoh named on that piece instead.

* Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge

¹ No exact record exists of where he excavated, although certain areas are known to have been excavated in particular years, and some objects were recorded by find location and year of excavation. Perusal of the original National Museum register in Athens also is helpful in this respect. Nothing is certain, however. Fig. 1 is a very general indication of Tsountas’ excavation areas in 1886 and 1890, together with the more precisely recorded findspots of ‘plaque’ fragments recovered by later excavators. IAKOVIDES 2003a, 118 fig. 1 indicates the full extent of Tsountas’ activities within the citadel. My thanks to Drs. Elizabeth French and Kim Shel-

ton for their help in placing the ‘plaques’ in their respective contexts as much as possible.

² The ‘plaque’ fragments are assigned specific identifications for the purposes of this article, consisting of the excavator’s name and a number. These are identified in the caption to Fig. 3. Note that, for the museum catalogue numbers given in parentheses, ‘NMA’ refers to the accession number of objects held in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, and ‘MycM BE’ refers to the accession number of objects held at the new Mycenae Museum, whilst ‘MM’ refers to the *display* number of the objects exhibited in the latter’s galleries.

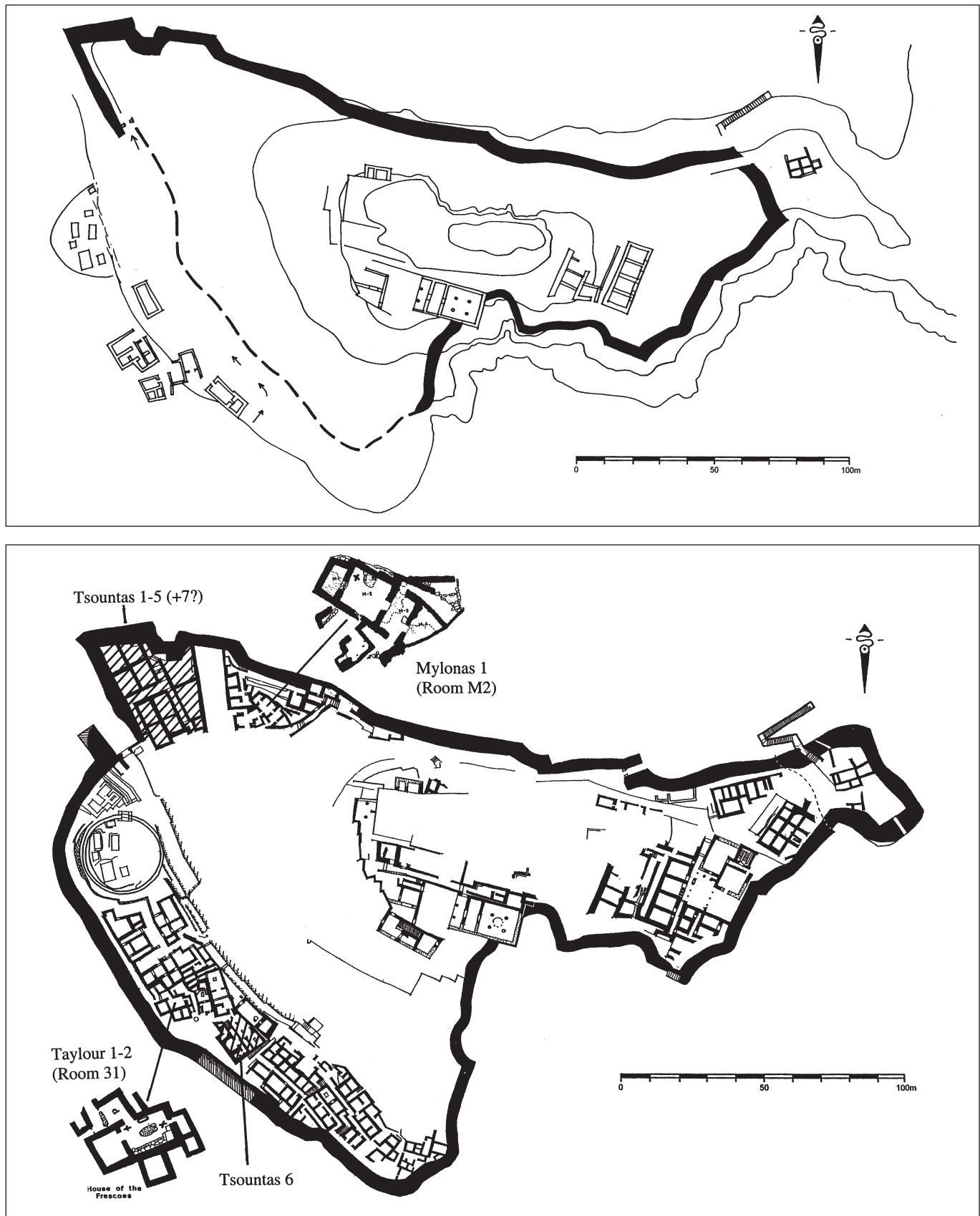


Fig. 1 Maps of the Mycenae citadel, showing findspots and find areas of 'plaques:' a) Structures of LH IIIA2-B1, during which the 'plaques' most likely arrived at Mycenae; b) Structures of 'palatial' Mycenae, LH IIIB2-B/C, within which the 'plaques' were (or, for the Tsountas material, most likely were) recovered. Plans courtesy of L. French, with additions by the author from original computerfiles for FRENCH 2002, figs. 16 and 19

This undoubtedly is the source of PORTER and MOSS's (1952, 402) identification of Smenkhare as the king named on the 'plaques' in Vol. VII of their *Topographical Biography*. They did not speculate about the circumstances behind any of their listed objects abroad, but these fragments and their discovery at Mycenae continued to be the source of much further speculation and fanciful reconstruction. HELCK (1979, 97) envisioned them as having been set into a door of an 'Egyptian Room' in the palace at Mycenae. CLINE (1990, 211) suggested they may have been "sent from Egypt as part of a formal contract, perhaps even via an official Egyptian delegation" that may have been recorded on the Kom el-Heitan list of Aegean place names. HANKEY (1981, 45–46) thought they were foundation deposits for a temple or shrine. The last actually is the most plausible suggestion, but none have any archaeological basis whatsoever. Although they have been displayed (and thus accessible) for many years in the National Museum in Athens, good photographs and a general description of the findspots were published for the first time only in 2000.³

Further pieces were recovered in the 1960s, basically in the same two areas of the site. Two barely joining fragments were recovered in Building M by G.E. Mylonas in 1962 (MYLONAS 1963b, pl. 76β; IAKOVIDES 1983:52) and W.D. Taylour found two separate pieces in 1968 in the 'Room with the Fresco' of the 'Cult Centre' (TAYLOUR 1969:95–96) (Fig. 1). Another, from Mylonas's subsequent excavation and cleaning of the 'Cult Centre' area in the early 1970s, recently has come to light in the excavation storerooms at Mycenae. I shall not be discussing this last piece, which has just been published by Eric Cline and myself,^{3a} except to say it exhibits some unique features that will underline some of my comments here. These recent finds have enabled less tentative reconstructions of the 'plaques' to be made, since the larger of Taylour's fragments preserved three edges and was nearly square, whilst the two Building M pieces could be reconstructed with the same text as Taylour's larger piece.

HELCK (1979, 96 fig.) presented a reconstruction incorporating all TSOUNTAS's fragments, somewhat embellished by a fragment that is not a 'plaque'

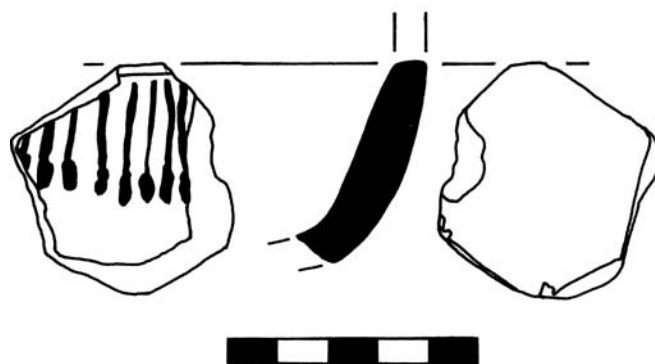


Fig. 2 Drawing of 'tray' NMA 2719

(Fig. 2),⁴ as an inscription of Amenhotep III's *prenomen* and *nomen* titulary with epithets, the names each within a cartouche.⁵ The basics of this reconstruction have been generally accepted, although the extra embellishment has been removed. The 'complete' text as reconstructed and generally accepted today is as follows:

ntr nfr (Nb-m3ʿt-Rʿ) s3 Rʿ (Jmn-ḥtp ḥk3 w3st) di ʿnh

'the good god, (Neb-maʿat-Raʿ), son of Raʿ, (Amenhotep, ruler of Thebes), given life.'

The fragments were closely studied but not published by P. Kourachanes before his untimely death in 1988. The interpretation and reconstruction now displayed in the National Museum in Athens is the result of his work, and shows an amalgamation of the preserved texts.⁶ Shortly afterwards, the Taylour finds were evaluated by CLINE (1987; 1990), with reference to the Tsountas material.

None of the fragments was found in a context remotely contemporary with Amenhotep III's reign, a point that already has long been recognised. The vast majority simply were recovered in later fill levels – if any of the Tsountas fragments had a decent context, it is lost to us now – and only two in a 'good' context. The large Taylour fragment was recovered in a crumpled lead alabastron on the LH IIIB (middle) floor of the 'Room with the Fresco'.⁷ Mylonas's 'Building M' excavations are not yet published in detail, but we are informed that the two barely joining fragments (Mylonas 1) were recovered in an LH IIIB (late)

³ By L. PAPAZOGLU-MANIOUDAKI, in KARETSOU *et al.* 2000, 252–254 #249.

^{3a} PHILLIPS and CLINE 2005.

⁴ NMA 2719; see Fig. 2. Its purpose remains obscure.

⁵ See GARDINER 1957, 71–76, also 294 §378 for a detailed description of the full royal titulary.

⁶ PAPAZOGLU-MANIOUDAKI 2000, 251 figs. lower.

⁷ The smaller Taylour fragment (Taylour 2) was recovered in a fill context of the next level above, also dated within LH IIIB (middle). The lead alabastron is discussed in TZEDAKIS and MARTLEW 1999, 203 #202.

deposit next to an internal structure against the north wall of Room M2.⁸ Both dates are over a century later than Amenhotep III's death c. 1350 BC. Any scenario regarding Amenhotep III's relationship with LH IIIA1/early 2 Mycenae and its ruler(s) is no more than hypothetical. The pieces in fact could have arrived at any time during or after his reign.⁹

The 'plaques' themselves have never been directly and intimately studied together before.¹⁰ Let us evaluate some physical features that need to be considered in attempting to shine further light on these objects. New drawings by the author, taken directly from the original fragments, are here shown as Fig. 3. References to individual fragments are as indicated in its caption. The obverse face of each 'plaque' (as distinguished here) is illustrated on the left, and its reverse face on the right.

QUANTITY

The first point to be noted is that, with the exception of the two barely joining Mylonas fragments and the two joining Tsountas pieces, *no* individual fragment can be associated with any other. All are individual pieces, representing a minimum of 10 'plaques' (excluding the recent Mycenae Museum storeroom find, an 11th). All possible pairings can be rejected on one or more technical criteria. These are:

Fabric

Some fabrics are grittier than others, and visual inclusions appear to differ. Fabric colour, however, is immaterial, as is the colour and texture of their surface glaze, and more generally their present condition, all of which can be affected by their use, their context conditions, and their modern cleaning and handling.

Text overlap

Certain fragments duplicate the same portion(s) of text so, unless the titulary is repetitive (a unique cir-

cumstance if so), such fragments must be from different 'plaques.' Tsountas 1, 4, 6, and Mylonas 1 all duplicate portions of Taylour 1. Tsountas 2 duplicates a large portion of Tsountas 3. Tsountas 4 has the *nb* sign (V 30)¹¹ of Taylour 1 on one face, and the *di* sign (X 8) of Tsountas 3 on the other.

Hand (Palaeography)

Several different scribes have painted the texts on these fragments, although the writing itself is all good New Kingdom Egyptian orthography and palaeography.¹² The most obvious is the distinctly individual and very heavy hand seen *only* on Mylonas 1. Different hands seem to have painted the obverse and reverse text on several fragments, whilst the different shape and actual line application of several cartouches also seems to indicate different hands at work. Compare the sun disc (N 5) on Tsountas 1 with those on Mylonas 1 and Taylour 1, and those on the obverse with reverse of Tsountas 6, the duck (G 39) on either face of Tsountas 1 (especially the legs and feet), the flattened lower curves on most cartouches with that on Tsountas 3 obverse, and the painted line application on Taylour 1 and Tsountas 2 obverse. The upper cartouche curves of Tsountas 6 obverse and reverse are particularly distinct, as are the round and flattened sun signs (N 5) on this fragment. These are palaeographic differences more likely indicating different scribes at work, rather than variations of the same hand.

Orientation

The obverse text of all 'plaques' faces right. The reverse text of three fragments (Tsountas 2–3, Mylonas 1) also faces right, whilst four reverse texts (Tsountas 1, 4, 6, Taylour 1) unmistakably face left. The remainder are indeterminate as preserved. Also, most fragments show the individual signs positioned higher on the obverse than the reverse, whilst

⁸ Not Room M3, as stated by CLINE 1987, 9 and repeated in later references. Mylonas's description of the material from Building M is provided here as an Appendix. My thanks to Elizabeth French for her translation of MYLONAS 1963b, 101.

⁹ But see below for further discussion.

¹⁰ I would like to thank Dr. Lena Papazoglou-Manioudaki (Ephor, Prehistoric Antiquities) and her staff at the National Museum in Athens, Dr. Alexandras Mantis (Ephor, 5th Ephoreia) and all the staff at the Mycenae Museum, and Dr. Elizabeth B. French and Prof. Spyridon Iakovides for permissions to see and study the 'plaques.' I

am especially grateful to Eleni Palaiologou (widow of Dr. Kourachanes) of the 5th Ephoreia, for taking the time to discuss with me her late husband's research.

¹¹ All code references to hieroglyphic signs correspond to the sign list in GARDINER 1957, 438–548.

¹² Note that the right border line of Tsountas 3 obverse and the flag on Tsountas 6 reverse are no longer visible, but could be seen shortly after the fragment was discovered; see TSOUNTAS 1891: pl. 3.4 and FIMMEN 1921:176 fig. 171, lower right and upper left. As for Tsountas 5, with no decoration visible on either face, either all the paint has worn off or it was never inscribed.

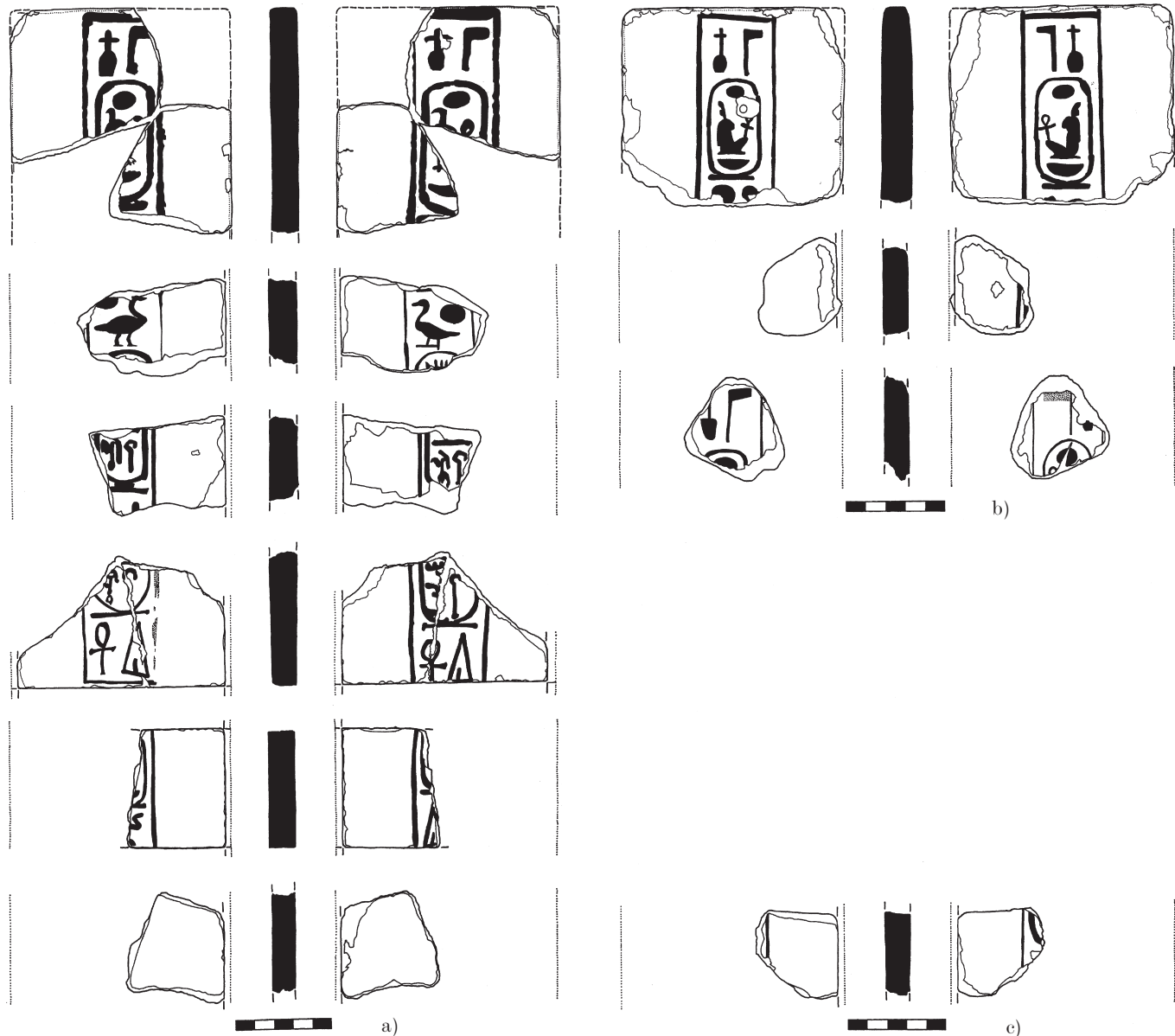


Fig. 3 Drawings of all plaques, with obverse shown at left and reverse at right. In order, top to bottom:
a) From the area north-east of the Lion Gate: Mylonas 1 (MycM BE 13887+13888 = MM 1499+1498); Tsountas 1 (NMA 2566.1); Tsountas 2 (NMA 2566.5); Tsountas 3 (NMA 2566.2); Tsountas 4 (NMA 2566.4); Tsountas 5 (NMA 2566.3);
b) From the 'Cult Centre' area: Taylour 1 (MycM BE 18340 = MM 1501); Taylour 2 (MycM BE 18532); Tsountas 6 (NMA 2718); **c)** General position uncertain, most likely north-east of Lion Gate: Tsountas 7 (NMA 12582)

Tsountas 4 and 6 have the obverse text lower instead, thus limiting options for compatibility even within text orientation. The 'long' CLINE reconstruction (1990, 208 fig. 4) is impossible using the fragments we have, as is the HELCK reconstruction (1979, 96 fig.) as illustrated, despite their generally accepted text reconstruction. Whilst it is possible that some indeterminate fragments might be associ-

ated with another on this criterion, they are rejected on other grounds.

Thickness

The 'plaques' range between 12.6 and 17.1 mm in thickness, and some simply cannot be associated with another on the basis of their incompatible thicknesses.¹³ This includes Taylour 1 and 2, previously linked

¹³ The distinctly different thickness of NMA 2719 (Fig. 2), between 9.2 and 11.0 mm, confirms it is unrelated to the 'plaques.'

by CLINE (1990, 206, pl. 3). Their thicknesses are too disparate to be the same ‘plaque.’ Taylour 1 is 15.1–17.1 mm thick and Taylour 2 is 13.3 mm thick. Large individual fragments are somewhat thicker at the centre than at the preserved edges, but the thinning is gradual and relatively even. Not all differences can be explained in this manner. Whilst glaze thickness, preservation and conservation also must be taken into account for this criterion, the 1.8 mm difference at the same location near the preserved edge, where glaze preservation is similar, still remains too great to associate Taylour 1 and 2.

Compatibility

If the border line(s) on the obverse of any two fragments are positioned, those on their reverse are incompatible. I have attempted all possible associations, using both drawings and, when possible, actual fragments. Line thickness is immaterial, as this changes quite abruptly on at least one fragment (Tsountas 1), and in any case often is directly related to the surface condition of the ‘plaques’ themselves.

Findspot

The final criterion is findspot, since the fragments were recovered in two distinctly separate general areas of the citadel, either NE of the Lion Gate (Tsountas 1–5, Mylonas 1, likely also Tsountas 7) or the ‘Cult Centre’ area (Tsountas 6, Taylour 1–2). This criterion remains questionably valid, as we do not know how any of the fragments arrived in their final fill contexts, and both find areas contained considerable downwash from further uphill that arguably had originated from the palace. However, all these downwash layers are at higher levels, overlying the known contexts of all the Mylonas and Taylour fragments which are not downwash contexts. Thus, we cannot demonstrate these ‘plaques’ originated from a single uphill (and thus likely palatial) source, although it remains *theoretically* possible.

Whether any of the Tsountas fragments were recovered in downwash layers is, of course, unknown but we must consider that Tsountas himself declared they “had nothing to do with the palace at all” (SEWELL 1904, 259).

PRESENT CONDITION

This constitutes the second point to be considered. The accidentally achieved wear-and-tear condition of the ‘plaques’ is immaterial here,¹⁴ only their *deliberately* and anciently altered condition that has never been considered in previous discussion. Only two of the fragments (Mylonas 1, Taylour 1) retain any original edges.¹⁵ This is indicated by the faience glaze extending over the entire ‘plaque’ surface, including along the surface of the edges. The edges on all other fragments are *not* glazed. It is manifestly apparent that they have been deliberately sawn to reduce (at least) their width and in some cases also their height. All sawn edges, as the original glazed edges, essentially are at right angles to the reverse and obverse faces.

Width

Both fragments (Mylonas 1, Taylour 1) with fully preserved side edges are 11.3 cm in width, with their texts generally centred on both obverse and reverse.¹⁶ The one fragment (Tsountas 3) with both surviving ‘reduced’¹⁷ side edges is only 10.7 cm wide, with the text generally centred on both obverse and reverse. This suggests that TSOUNTAS 3 also had the same 11.3 cm width originally, and 3 mm must have been removed from *both* side edges, in order to retain the centrality of the text. When this same ‘reduced’ width of 10.7 cm also is applied to fragments having only one surviving ‘reduced’ side edge (Tsountas 1–2, 4–5, 7, Taylour 2), the preserved text also generally is centred. The original width of 11.3 cm is indicated by the dotted lines on either side of all fragments in Fig. 3. The one fragment lacking both

¹⁴ Mylonas 1 retains a good strong blue-green colour in its glaze, whilst the glaze of all other ‘plaques’ either is virtually leached of colour or it has been lost altogether. This is assumed here to be the result of the different conditions in the various specific contexts where the individual fragments were recovered. In general, colour rarely survives on glazed faience objects recovered in Aegean contexts, whereas those in Egyptian contexts normally retain their colour; see BEN TOR, this volume. Thus the actual physical situation of the context of Mylonas 1 must be most unusual for the Aegean, and its description will make interesting reading when it is published in detail. A preliminary account in

English is IAKOVIDES 1983, 52, but see also Appendix and MYLONAS 1963a–b.

¹⁵ As does the ‘rim’ of NMA 2719 (Fig. 2).

¹⁶ This figure corresponds almost exactly to the ancient Egyptian measurement of 6 digits, as kindly pointed out to me by Rolf Kraus; my thanks also to Kate Spence for further details. An Egyptian cubit corresponds to 52.5 cm. There are 7 palms to a cubit, and 4 digits to a palm, therefore 28 digits to a cubit. One digit thus is 1.875 cm, and 6 digits therefore 11.25 cm. See ARNOLD 1991, 10.

¹⁷ This term is employed here for the edges that have been sawn (in antiquity).

side edges (Tsountas 6) also can be generally positioned by similarly centring its text. Thus, most likely, all 'plaques' originally had this same width of 11.3 cm before their side edges were sawn. The 'plaques' therefore likely all were the same shape and size originally or, at minimum, had a uniform width.

This point seems always to have been assumed, but had never actually been demonstrated. The 'reduced' side edges all are absolutely flat and smooth to the touch, with glaze chipped off along the face edges (most clearly seen on Tsountas 3–4). That these edges were in fact *sawn* rather than, for example, shaved or worn down, is indicated by one fragment (Taylour 2) that clearly has been 'snapped' at the last minute rather than entirely sawn off, leaving part of the original edge standing proud of the 'reduced' edge and somewhat rough to the touch. Furthermore, none of the 'reduced' edges shows any indication of further treatment. Their surface, or rather lack of it, was unimportant for their altered function, but the centred text *was*, since it is a tricky, time-consuming and otherwise unnecessary process to remove so narrow a portion of the edge.

The uniform width of all but the two still with edges intact (Mylonas 1, Taylour 1) also strongly suggests that the rest all would have been deliberately altered at the same time to this uniform width, for a single unknown purpose or perhaps several related purposes. Also, whenever they actually arrived at Mycenae – and we have over a century to play with – they most likely would have been kept or stored together before this alteration was done. This suggests either storage under controlled conditions, possibly in the palace uphill, or alteration immediately upon arrival, before any hypothetical distribution either within or beyond the palace but still within the citadel occurred. They appear to have been valued not for their text or any association with the Egyptian pharaoh named, but rather for their visual and physical attributes as thick flat colourful (blue-green) decorated objects. Nonetheless, the text clearly remained visually important (and clearly was intended to be *seen* on completion), as both edges were reduced by 3 mm to retain its central position, rather than just one side having 0.6 mm removed. The characteristic Mycenaean love of decorative symmetry is quite apparent in this alteration.

The two 'plaques' separately treated, or rather not treated, in this manner, perhaps arrived at a different time, or simply were used for a different pur-

pose or purposes at Mycenae. They are, after all, the largest and the least altered fragments.

Height

So, what shape were the 'plaques' intended to have *after* their alteration? The answer is: 'different' shapes. Despite their fragmentary condition as recovered and their uniform (reduced) width, their final, deliberately reduced, vertical dimensions demonstrably differ. One fragment (Tsountas 4) has a 'reduced' edge at both top and bottom and at one side, thus three of the four edges, and is now horizontally rectangular and 6.2 cm in its intentionally 'reduced' height. It is possible, although not demonstrable, that the majority of other fragments would also have been reduced to this shape or even shorter, as they do not exceed this height, except the three large fragments. Tsountas 3, Mylonas 1 and Taylour 1 all have different heights. Tsountas 3 and Mylonas 1 both were longer than they now appear, as they have a broken edge either at the top (Mylonas 1) or bottom (Tsountas 3), whilst Taylour 1 may or may not be as it was intended. The bottom edge of Taylour 1 is further discussed below.

The sawn bottom edge of two fragments (Tsountas 3–4) also may have had 3 mm removed, as on the vertical edges. It requires only the bottom painted border line to complete the text on the reverse of Tsountas 3 (as is seen on its obverse, with border line), as the reverse text is slightly lower on the 'plaque' than the obverse text. Adding 3 mm to the bottom would supply this needed extra space for the border line on the reverse. Tsountas 4 is somewhat problematic (I shall return to this point below), but that text also probably had only this same 3 mm of original edge removed, onto which its border line would have fit on both faces.

The other, smaller, fragments as preserved may have been cut down to a horizontal rectangle like Tsountas 4, with the inscribed text retained and deliberately centred, instead of (for example) cutting it only on one edge instead of both or cutting it lengthwise to avoid the text altogether or as much as possible – thus reducing the labour involved. Some dedicated effort seems to have been made to incorporate the text on at least one 'plaque' face as part of the new reduced form: Tsountas 4 is cut at the top just above the cartouche on the obverse, both it (on the reverse) and Tsountas 3 reverse strive to retain the base line of the *di* sign (X 8) whilst removing the bottom border line, and Taylour 1 has just the very top of the *s3Rc* (N 5, G 39) on the reverse. All this also suggests that their new purpose(s) may have required

only one visible side, which still needed to be balanced visually even if the text itself could not be read. If Mylonas 1 was reduced at the bottom, this would have done again at least below the cartouche, and possibly at a point similar to Taylour 1 reverse. The broken height of Tsountas 3 (6.8 cm) clearly is taller than the deliberately ‘reduced’ height of Tsountas 4 (6.2 cm), but we can only guess whether it was as tall as Mylonas 1 or Taylour 1, or neither. If we presume that visual aesthetics played some role in deciding its reduced height, we may assume that Tsountas 3 likely was sawn just above the top of the cartouche, estimated to be at about 9.5 cm above its reverse ‘reduced’ bottom edge. Therefore, it likely also was horizontally rectangular, not quite square, and almost the same preserved height as Taylour 1.

Taylour 1 usually is seen as a square and has become the model for reconstructing other less complete fragments as square, as was suggested as one possible reconstruction by CLINE (1990, 207 fig. 3).¹⁸ In fact, it actually is much shorter than it is wide – a full 14 mm shorter, at 9.9 cm – but the original text clearly continued below the bottom as preserved, as it still preserves the upper portions of the *s3 R^c* text. The bottom edge of this ‘plaque,’ our most complete fragment, is the only edge that is neither original nor sawn. The edge looks rather smooth and is surprisingly straight, so much so that it usually is taken as a straight edge. However, it is not glazed, yet is comparatively much too rough and uneven to the touch to have been sawn like other ‘reduced’ edges. It clearly differs from them, but *how* this was achieved is problematic. The nearest one might suggest is that it might have been chiselled in a single blow, except that this is not apparent at the break.

Mylonas 1 is 11.8 cm tall as preserved, when the two fragments are correctly positioned (as on Fig. 3), and therefore it is now 5 mm longer than its width. This ‘plaque’ too was not square but must have been vertically rectangular even after it had been sawn, *if* indeed it had been sawn. Therefore, the projected original and reduced shape both must also have been

even taller than it is now, since the bottom edge is not preserved. Whether this bottom edge was reduced, or remained glazed as it was made originally, we will never know unless further joining fragments are recovered. There is no evidence for any secondary alteration on this ‘plaque,’ and it may not have been altered at all.

In other words, we have two ‘plaques’ unaltered on three sides, of two different preserved lengths, one vertically and the other horizontally rectangular. If both originally displayed the same text *in full*, Mylonas 1 must either have been considerably taller than Taylour 1, or its lower (missing) text was squashed into a much smaller space. The same text on Mylonas 1 extends much farther than that on Taylour 1.¹⁹ These are not a pair, nor (perhaps) were they intended for the same purpose at Mycenae. The other fragments likely were used for another purpose, or at least reduced to several different heights, and probably all were horizontally rectangular (possibly excepting Tsountas 3).

ALTERED APPEARANCE AND FUNCTION(S)

What might their altered appearance and function(s) have been? Mylonas 1 and Taylour 1, despite their differing heights, appear to share several features in common. The first and most obvious commonality is their original edges. Another is their findspots, apparently related to cultic deposits: that of Taylour 1 is clear, whilst Mylonas 1 is not so clear due to its lack of specific context information (see Appendix), but the associated features (one of a variety of small finds near an internal structure [platform or bench?] in the large central room, of buildings having a similar megaron-like plan) of its context are reasonably alike insofar as is published.²⁰ Both might then have served the similar purpose of having been offerings to the deity or deities to whom the buildings or rooms were dedicated, presuming Building M also was a cult building.

What of the others, with deliberately and carefully ‘reduced’ edges indicating that specifically inten-

¹⁸ Kourachanes’ reconstruction (see n. 6, above) actually is rectangular, including the epithet following the royal *prenomen* (*Nb-m3^ct-R^c*) in cartouche. An epithet is not included in Cline’s reconstruction of the *prenomen*, as it does not appear – at least in full – on Taylour 1, and he has squashed the remaining *nomen* text onto a similarly square reconstruction (CLINE 1990, 207 fig. 3 lower. As Kourachanes’ reconstruction has only been recently published, CLINE’s reconstructions usually are cited in the literature.

¹⁹ The texts are identical, although Taylour 1 preserves the top of the *s3 R^c* text on both surfaces, that is lost on both Mylonas 1 texts as preserved. The shorter (obverse) Mylonas 1 text is 10.3 cm from the top edge, the reverse text being at least 11.0 long, to the bottom of the cartouche. The Taylour 1 text is 8.1 cm on the obverse and 9.2 cm on the reverse, from the top edge to the bottom of the cartouche.

²⁰ See n. 14, above.

sive and carefully achieved labour was required for their altered appearance and function(s)? One (Taylour 2) was recovered in the same cultic space as Taylour 1, but in fill of a later level. We have no contextual record for the others. Their final deliberately 'reduced' flat shapes are not all the same. One suggestion for their altered function is perhaps as boxes or perhaps box-lids, as only one flat surface and centring the text appear to have been of consideration. Yet nothing now indicates any attempt at inset along the edge, nor any other means to prevent it from shifting, although inset Mycenaean lids are known in ivory and other materials. Nor is there any indication of gluing or otherwise joining the pieces, which are not all of uniform size in any event, to make a box-container.²¹ They might instead have been employed as insets on a larger object that has not survived, much like the famous Knossos 'Town Mosaic' inlay pieces had been; this would explain the different sizes, as well as the need for considering only one face and lack of concern for the raw 'reduced' edges, but would not explain the need to reduce the edges at all. Might they have been edged with gold, like some stone and faience seals? This would not elucidate their purpose, but would hide the raw edges, although it would also obscure the top and bottom edges of the text and still would not explain the need to reduce the edges so minimally. This factor is the key to understanding their specific altered function. Their use as cultic deposit objects may, I think, be secondary (tertiary?) to their deliberately altered initial purpose or purposes at Mycenae.

ORIGINAL APPEARANCE AND FUNCTION

What shape were the pieces with 'reduced' edges originally? Their apparently similar width and text strongly suggest they also would have been of similar shape to Mylonas I. Cline's reconstruction of an originally long rectangular 'plaque' therefore would have to be correct (CLINE 1990, 208, fig. 4), at least in principle. His alternative reconstruction of smaller

square 'plaques' (CLINE 1990, 207, fig. 3) must be rejected, on several grounds – not the least of which is that these "would not satisfy the Egyptian's love of balance and completeness," as LILYQUIST (1999, 303 n. 3) has recently pointed out. Also, the 'epithet' *s3 R* after the *prenomen* cartouche is not found in Egyptian texts without being followed by the *nomen* cartouche – it is in fact the formulaic text separating *prenomen* and *nomen*, as can be seen on Tsountas 1 – so the *nomen* cartouche must be restored on Taylour 1, a long rectangle. The 'plaques' generally are thought to have been 'foundation deposit' bricks, but such bricks almost always are inscribed only on one face, and indeed – as has been repeatedly stated – there are no direct parallels in Egypt for these 'plaques,' nor anywhere else for that matter. Nonetheless, the most closely similar objects to these 'plaques' remain Egyptian 'foundation deposit' plaques and bricks, and those dated to late Dynasty XVIII (Amenhotep III and later) are most closely similar in size.²²

So, what were they originally, and where did they come from? And what were they converted into, presumably but not necessarily at Mycenae? Lilyquist, quite rightly, cautions against our wholesale acceptance of these 'plaques' as *Egyptian* objects, despite their good orthography and palaeography. They equally could have been Canaanite products, produced under an outwardly overwhelming Egyptian cultural influence that began in the reign of Thutmose III in the mid-15th c. Whether either Egyptian or 'egyptianising,' we should also distinguish between those with text facing the same direction on both sides, and those that do not. As Lilyquist also points out, left-facing text is a *deliberate* choice, and a reason needs to be sought for it. Right-facing text, as seen on the obverse of all 'plaques,' is the norm. When the norm is not employed, it is done for a reason, such as counterbalance on the right side of a doorway, when both texts need to face inwards.²³ Knowing this reason (or reasons) is key to under-

²¹ Similar perhaps to that found in Shaft Grave V, see HOOD 1978, 114, fig. 100. Several inset lids are known as early as the Shaft Grave period.

²² WEINSTEIN 1973, 214–215 #72 includes one from the temple at Abydos inscribed with the name of Amenhotep III (one face only, facing right), as 19.7 × 10.5 × 1.2 cm in size. More generally, see his discussion on Dynasty XVIII and Dynasty XIX–XX plaques and bricks, *ibid.*, 126–133, 239–247. Foundation 'bricks' of Ramesses II (Dynasty XIX) are inscribed on both sides and have

both texts facing right; these are much larger in size; see *ibid.*, 235 #88.B–D.

²³ As was projected by HELCK 1979, 96 fig. FISCHER 1977, 9 gives three basic reasons: confrontation, symmetry and concordance, with further discussion and examples; see especially *ibid.*, 17–20 §11. Left facing text on the reverse side of portable objects is quite rare throughout the dynastic period; Fischer lists but 10 examples, only three of which are of Dynasty XVIII date and the latest in the reign of Tutankhamun.

standing the original purpose(s) of the ‘plaques’ – however, knowing their original purpose(s) also is key to explaining the left-facing text. We cannot separate the ‘plaque’ orientations by their text, as the same text is indicated in different directions on the obverse of different ‘plaques.’ Mylonas 1 has the same text as Taylour 1 and Tsountas 6 (all *prenomen* cartouche), as do Tsountas 1 (beginning of *nomen* cartouche) and Tsountas 2–3 (end of the same *nomen* cartouche).

Nonetheless, they obviously *were* separately distinguished by text orientation when they were initially produced. They are in fact two different ‘things,’ possibly even for different although possibly related functions, originally. At least one group, those with opposite orientations, certainly does *not* constitute ‘foundation bricks,’ as there is no reason to differentiate orientation on the two faces, even *if* (as is not the case in any event) foundation bricks were inscribed on both faces. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that the same-orientation-text ‘plaques’ are foundation bricks either, as they are otherwise too similar to the first group. The two groups must be related, although distinguished by text orientation. All we have done is eliminate the only apparent possible interpretation of their function. No comparison for alternative functions can be suggested at present.

We might note, however, that two ‘plaques’ have unique features. Unlike on all other fragments, the texts of Tsountas 4 are not the same on both surfaces. The reverse preserves the cartouche but no interior text, and enough of the *di* sign (X 8) that we may be confident in restoring the missing text as the *nomen* and epithet (*Jmn-ḥtp ḥk3 w3st*) *di* *ḥnh* (‘Amonhotep, ruler of Thebes), given life’) as on Tsountas 3 (and 2). The obverse of Tsountas 4 preserves again the cartouche but also a portion of the interior text that can only be the *nb* sign (V 30), and thus should be restored as the *prenomen* (*Nb-m3ṯt-Rṣ*), followed by an epithet that is difficult to interpret from the surviving text. The usual epithet following (*Nb-m3ṯt-Rṣ*) is *s3 Rṣ* (‘son of Re;’ compare with Mylonas 1), but personal detailed observation of the fragment allows me to state that the visible remains of the text cannot be *s3 Rṣ*. This also had been the conclusion of Kourachanes, who considered it to be the

snake (I 10) and bread loaf (X 1), reading *ḏt* (‘forever, eternally’), and thus the end of the inscribed royal titulary. This indeed seems to be the best interpretation of the text as preserved, and one accepted here for lack of a better. It clearly is not *di* *ḥnh* (‘given life’), but nor is it *ḥnh* *ḏt* (‘living forever’) since the *ḥnh* sign (S 34) would precede the snake. The epithet tells us the obverse text faces right, whilst the *di* tells us the reverse (unlike Tsountas 3) faces left.

The other unique ‘plaque’ is Tsountas 5, with no indication of any text on either face. Based on the proposed ‘reduced’ width of 10.7 cm for all sawn fragments, this piece should have at least the vertical border line on either face (*if* the edge is in fact a vertical edge). Either its text too has faded completely, like some lines on Tsountas 3 and 6,²⁴ or it had never been inscribed. If the latter, then this would allow us to reconsider the rejection of *all* ‘plaques’ original identification with ‘foundation bricks’ in this case, as most ‘bricks’ have large undecorated areas on one face and no decoration on the other.

Would they be contemporary with the reign of Amenhotep III, or could they have been produced at a later date? Either, generally speaking, is possible. Ancient Egyptian monarchs often continued to be venerated long after their death, and many were the foci of posthumous cults. Various objects of amuletic significance (scarabs in particular) are well known to have been manufactured and inscribed with the name of a long-dead king as protective devices imbued with the power of the king named. There is, however, little evidence for posthumous veneration of a deified Amenhotep III,²⁵ and so the likelihood of objects of later date being inscribed with his name is extremely limited. The odds are overwhelmingly that these ‘plaques’ were manufactured during his lifetime or only shortly thereafter, almost certainly not later than the reign of Tutankhamun at the most – if that, and hence possibly later in, but not the latest years of, Dynasty XVIII and the 14th c. BC. Nonetheless, it is not entirely impossible that they are posthumous, especially since they are unique.

ORIGIN

Setting aside the generally unanswerable question of whether the original artefacts were Egyptian or ‘egyptianising’ from Palestine (or elsewhere?), cer-

²⁴ No original photograph or early drawing of Tsountas 5 was published, so we cannot make comparison with its present state.

²⁵ Even his mortuary temple had been demolished by the time of Ramesses II.

tain evidence has been cited suggesting that these 'plaques' were in fact created in the Aegean, perhaps even at Mycenae. Crucial for this argument are the results of Brill's lead isotope analysis of the glaze covering the Taylour I 'plaque' that indicated a source for the lead trace constituent at Laurion in the Attic peninsula.²⁶ Combined with their good orthography, this has led to the suggestions (amongst other scenaria) that one or more Egyptian artisans were resident at Mycenae, or that a Mycenaean artisan was familiar enough with Egyptian hieroglyphs and technology that he could both produce these 'plaques' at Mycenae and inscribe the text properly.²⁷ The implications of such interpretations of events surrounding the 'plaques' are far-reaching and, I think, should await far stronger evidence than we presently have. Nothing else recovered at Mycenae even tentatively suggests either possibility.

What was known from its initial publication but not *considered* a strong factor in concluding an Aegean origin is that this particular 'plaque' had been found actually within a Mycenaean vessel made of lead, and thus had been directly exposed to its lead isotopes for the more than 3,000 years between LH IIIB (middle) and AD 1968 when Taylour excavated it.^{27a} The results of this analysis are inherently flawed, and I think so too any scenaria based upon it. A more useful analysis might be conducted on Mylonas 1, the only fragments to have retained their original glaze colour. The glaze on all other 'plaques' have been leached out to become virtually whitish opaque or colourless, the result of their context conditions.²⁸ Clearly, the context conditions under which the two Mylonas 1 fragments survived must have differed considerably from the other contexts, even those excavated by Tsountas somewhere nearby.

Alternatively, importation of Laurion lead (or silver) for production in Egypt has been postulated. The apparent use of the Egyptian measuring system in their manufacture, being 6 digits in width, would suggest an Egyptian origin for the 'plaques' as the

most likely option or, at minimum, manufacture in an area or situation where Egyptian units of measurement were employed.

ARRIVAL

So, when would the 'plaques' have arrived at Mycenae? This cannot of course be said with any degree of certainty, presumably all at the same time but this could have been at any point between Amenhotep III's reign in the first half of the 14th c. (= LH IIIA1/early 2), and LH IIIB (middle), the earliest actual context date, over a century later. What else arrived at Mycenae during this period, and can we reduce the margin at all? The first question to ask is: Is there any period within this more than a century that anything could *not* have arrived? Answer, no. No Egyptian import found at Mycenae post-dates LH IIIB (middle) in Egyptian terms (latter half of the 13th c. BC, later reign of Ramesses II), and anything dateable between this point back to the reign of Amenhotep III could have arrived at any point within this period up to the date of its depositional context.

Is there a limited period of *manufacture* in Egyptian terms for the imports that arrived within this period. Actually, yes, very much so. No imported Egyptian object recovered at Mycenae need be any later in date than Dynasty XVIII, with the exception of two Dynasty XIX scarabs in CT 526, which therefore can only have *arrived* at Mycenae no earlier than LH IIIB.²⁹ The other tombs at Mycenae having Egyptian imports, all with Mycenaean contents indicating long use within LH II–IIIB or even later, contain only Egyptian artefacts not demonstrably later than Dynasty XVIII in manufacture. These chiefly are stone vessel types that do not continue into Dynasty XIX.³⁰ Even though many Egyptian objects are recovered in contexts of LH (and LM) IIIB date, very little Egyptian material recovered in the Aegean can actually be dated to Dynasty XIX in Egyptian terms. Exceptions are the two small Ramesses II cartouches and eight scarabs from Perati ('end of LH IIIB through

²⁶ See CLINE 1990, 209–210.

²⁷ See, for example, LILYQUIST 1999, 306.

^{27a} Brill's caveat to this effect, cited by CLINE (*ibid.*, 210 n. 44), seems to have been largely ignored. Two samples were taken beside breaks, one from each face; the glaze is still quite green-stained at one of these points, either remains of the original glaze colour, or from contact with the lead vessel.

²⁸ They do not appear to have been so faintly coloured origi-

nally, as faint traces of blue-green colouration can be still discerned on some fragments upon close examination. See also n. 14, above.

²⁹ WACE 1932:93 #1–2, 198, pl. IX.1–2; FRENCH 2002, pl. 8.

³⁰ A detailed analysis of Egyptian and 'egyptianising' objects and their contexts at Mycenae and elsewhere on the Greek Mainland is in progress by the author. This follows a similar analysis of material on Crete (Phillips forthcoming).

LH IIIC') on the Mainland,³¹ and one scarab each at Zaphor Papoura Tomb 99 (very late LM IIIA2 or fairly early LM IIIB)³² and in an LM IIIB house at Poros,³³ both on Crete. Three of the five scarabs recovered in the Cape Geledonia shipwreck are Dynasty XIX in date,³⁴ and the wreck itself is roughly dated to *c.* 1200. Other scarabs found both on Crete and the Mainland are no earlier than Dynasty XIX in date, but are surface finds or otherwise without provenance. They could not have arrived in the Aegean earlier than LH/LM IIIB because of their Egyptian date, but could have arrived at any point thereafter. Thus some types of goods, specifically small amulets and scarabs, clearly continued to arrive in the Aegean in Dynasty XIX. We cannot therefore discount any period within this century or more that the 'plaques' – or even fragments of 'plaques' – arrived at Mycenae. There is nothing to argue against their having arrived in less than perfect condition. Nonetheless, the odds are more strongly in favour of their having arrived at Mycenae earlier rather than later, in the 14th (later Dynasty XVIII) rather than 13th (Dynasty XIX) century BC, and so had been around for some time before the circumstances under which Taylour 1 and its container were last seen (or used?) by a Mycenaean in the 'Room with the Fresco.'

I don't have a snappy ending, nor a full set of conclusions. We can now say that they originally were a group, or rather two probably related groups, of like objects. That there seem to have been a considerable number of them. That two of them (Taylour 1 and Mylonas 1) seem to have been of some cultic importance, possibly offerings to one or two deities, at Mycenae. That the others were deliberately altered with great care into something quite particular, not necessarily at Mycenae but certainly something different from the two already mentioned. We must accept that the reversed text on some of them is key to under-

standing their original purpose(s), and their uniformly 'reduced' edges are key to understanding the intended (initial?) purpose of the majority of them at Mycenae. And that, whilst we must remain uncertain of their actual Egyptian origin, the apparent 'fact' of an Aegean origin cannot be taken at face value.

But the 'plaques' remain problematic. What *were* they originally? *Why* were they reduced in size? *Where* were they reduced in size? *What* were they intended to be? *When* were they brought here, and by *whom*? And, perhaps most importantly, *why* can't we find anything like them anywhere else? They are still a mystery.

More than half of the pieces have an apparently deliberate gouge at or near the centre of one face (Mylonas 1, Taylour 1, Mylonas 2) or elsewhere on the face (Tsountas 2, Taylour 2), whilst Tsountas 3 may have been broken by such use (centrally radiating break). This all seems too coincidental for accidental damage, especially as Taylour 1 apparently is the result of a small circular drill still distinguishable within the damaged area. They most likely are the result of the *raised prongs* used to support the 'plaque' during firing, as all surfaces were glazed and so such prongs would have been used during firing. The positions strongly suggest that three such *prongs* were used, one centred near one end, and the other two near the corners of the other end. If so, and since the two centrally positioned 'gouges' are at the 'top' *prenomen* end (Mylonas 1, Taylour 1), and the off-centre 'gouge' is at the 'bottom' *nomen* end (Tsountas 2), this would suggest that the cartouche on Taylour 2 encased the *nomen*. This in turn would provide further evidence for a 'long' rectangular shape for the 'plaques' in their original state.

APPENDIX

"In almost the middle of the NE wall of room M-2 were found the remains of an elliptical structure, of

³¹ IAKOVIDES 1969–1970, III, pls. 48.β.Δ11, 113.δ.Δ140 (cartouches), pls. 30.α.Δ128, β.Δ 129, 37.α.Δ196, 58.β.Δ132, 85.α (scarabs); most if not all the scarabs are of Ramesside date. It may be that some of the cornflower beads and amulets also found in this cemetery (*IBID.*, III: pls. 31.α.Δ172, 46.α.Δ13, 61.α.top row, 69.α.Δ269 (cornflower beads), 91.β.Δ69, Δ75 [Bes figures], Δ70, Δ74 [*T3-wrt* figures], Δ71–Δ73 [crocodile figures]) also are Dynasty XIX–XX, but they cannot be dated so precisely. The 'end of LH IIIB through IIIC' dating of the Perati graves as a whole also allows for the possibility of Dynasty XX manufacture for this material (see IAKOVIDES 2003, 128–130). The quantity of imports at Perati is the exception that proves the rule at this time.

³² KARETSOU *et al.* 2000, 322 #332. This scarab has a virtually identical text to one from Mycenae CT 526. See PHILLIPS forthcoming, #482.

³³ KARETSOU *et al.* 2000, 324 #336. Note that the inscription on this scarab is *not* the name of Queen Ankhesenamun, but rather an amuletic formula, and the scarab itself is of Dynasty XIX date. See PHILLIPS forthcoming, #265.

³⁴ BRANDL 2003. The scarabs and other seals were the only Egyptian objects found at the wreck site, suggesting that little else Egyptian was being transported (although perishable goods may well have been) at this time.

1150	EGYPT	Ramesses IV	EVENTS	EVENTS	MAINLAND	1150
1160	Dynasty	Ramesses III			LH IIIC	1160
1170	XX					1170
1180		Setnakht				1180
1190		Tewosret			LH IIIB/C	1190
		Siptah				
1200		Seti II	C. Geledonia	Dest'n Myc		1200
1210		Merenptah				1210
1220					LH IIIB2	1220
1230	Dynasty			E'quake Myc		1230
1240	XIX	Ramesses II				1240
1250						1250
1260					LH IIIB1	1260
1270				Rm31(fresco) built		1270
1280		Seti I				1280
1290		Ramesses I				1290
1300		Horemhab	Uluburun			1300
1310						1310
1320		Aye	Uluburun			1320
		Tutankhamun				
1330			Amarna		LH IIIA2	1330
1340	Dynasty	Akhenaten	Amarna			1340
1350	XVIII					1350
1360		Amenhotep III				1360
1370					LH IIIA1	1370
1380						1380

Fig. 4 Chronological chart

which the actual use remains uncertain because the structure for the most part had been disturbed in the original excavation of the area (pL. A). The floor, which survived under this structure, as well as the wall behind it were coated with a layer of limeplaster. The deposit between this structure and the NW corner of the room to a depth of about 0.70m. along the length of the wall, was found undisturbed and in it were found beads of glass paste, sherds dating to the last years of LH IIIB, fragments of figurines of the well known Mycenaean types Φ and Ψ and animals as well as one complete figurine of Φ type the surface of which was covered with sinuous lines in reddish paint (pl. 77a). Immediately above this figurine were found two small fragments of an Egyptian faience plaque which bears the same inscription on both sides (pl. 76b). The inscription, according to Mr. N. Boufidis of the National Archaeological Museum, includes the cartouche of Amenophis III of

the 18th dynasty (about 1405–1370 B.C.). In the same deposit was found a bronze ring the circular bezel of which had been of silver and originally carried further decoration or a carved seal stone, which has not been preserved. Among the other finds from the building I note a fragment of a small rectangular plaque of glass paste on which we have the depiction of a lion-shaped daemon, of the type known from the finds of Tsountas in the Tholos Tomb of the Genii, and many fragments of lead vessels. One example, almost complete but heavily crushed, of a lead vessel was found *in situ* (pl. 78a) in room M-3. In the undisturbed deposit of the triangular area Φ was found a figurine of ivory, carved in the round, only 0.035m. in height, of a woman holding her naked breasts in her hands (pl. 77b) and a carved seal stone with the representation of a lion and a bull.” (MYLONAS 1963b, 101; translation by Elizabeth French).

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