

LINGUISTIC CONTINUITY FROM MINOAN TO ETEOCRETAN

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The application of the term "Eteocretan" to Cretan non-Greek texts in Greek letters, implies that the language stems from the main ancient language of pre-Greek Crete; namely the Minoan language of the Linear A inscriptions. It is our present aim to show that this implication is essentially correct.

The soundness of Ventris's decipherment of Linear B is corroborated by the testimony of Linear A. For instance, Linear A *ku-ni-su* must mean some kind of wheat because it is followed by the WHEAT determinative¹. Now *kunnišu*² is a Semitic word for "emmer wheat" so that Linear A *ku-ni-su* WHEAT "emmer wheat" not only adds a word to our Minoan vocabulary but it also establishes Ventris's readings of the *ku*, *ni* and *su* signs. Similarly, the pot-pictograms on HT 31³ establish Ventris's values in the Semitic pot-names *su-pu* (= Ugaritic SP), *su-pà-ra* (= Ugaritic SPL) and *ka-ro-pà* (= Ugaritic KRP-N)⁴, reconfirming the phonetic value of *su* and establishing the values of the *pu*, *pà*, *ka*, *ra* and *ro* signs. Anyone interested in tabulating all of the Linear B values confirmed by Linear A, can do so easily by the data presented in EML⁵.

All the Eteocretan inscriptions are so far commemorative and on stone.

¹ EML (= my *Evidence for the Minoan Language*, Ventnor Publishers, Ventnor, N. J., 1966), §§ 116, 163 and pl. VIII.

² The double *-nn-* is indicated by the Aramaic cognate. The Akkadian and Aramaic forms, as well as the Semitic root, are given in EML § 116.

³ The Minoan texts from HT (Hagia Triada) have been republished by G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Le epigrafi di Haghia Triada in Lineare A* (Supplement 3 to *Minos*), Salamanca, 1963. We cite the texts from other Minoan sites according to the corpus of W. C. Brice, *Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A*, London, 1961.

⁴ Ugaritic words can be found with full documentation in the glossary of UT (= my *Ugaritic Textbook*, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 1965).

⁵ Saul Levin stresses the desirability of confirming the phonetic value of each sign, in *The Linear B Decipherment Controversy Re-examined*, State Univ. of New York, 1964.

They should therefore be compared not so much with the lists on the HT tablets, but rather with the eighteen Minoan stone cult objects inscribed with dedications. The two sets of stone inscriptions provide the best evidence for the continuity of dedicatory or commemorative formulae, from Minoan to Eteocretan⁶. Moreover, if Minoan-Eteocretan belongs to a well-known Mediterranean family of written languages, the formulae should be found in clearly translatable documents between Minoan and Eteocretan times (i.e., ca. 1700-300 B. C.).

There is no need for tenuous, circular or otherwise inconclusive arguments. We are not dealing with Easter Island or pre-Columbian Yucatan, but with the hub of western civilization in a relatively late literate age, well over a thousand years after the introduction of literacy from more than one direction.

A Minoan libation table from Palaikastro (I, 3)⁷ opens with *re = l-* "to, for" in West Semitic. In Phoenician dedications this appears as *l-* "to, for"⁸. In Eteocretan a dedication ends in $\lambda\mu\omicron$ = Hebrew *l'immo* "for his mother" in a bilingual from Dreros where the final phrase contains the dative $\mu\alpha\tau\tau\iota$ = $\mu\eta\tau\epsilon\rho\acute{\iota}$ "for mother". Here we have Minoan-Eteocretan-Phoenician agreement plus the unequivocal control from the Greek version in a bilingual⁹.

The verb "to give" in votive formulae appears in Minoan; e.g., *ya-ta-no-?* *u ya-*[] (I, 14) "he has given it (?) and he has [set it up as a votive offering]". Phoenician dedications employ YTN = *yatan* "he has given"; indeed the Phoenician YTN W YTN'¹⁰ "he has given and set up as a votive offering" suggests that the second verb in the Minoan text should be restored to correspond with YTN': a very common Phoenician verb occurring on a libation table from Knossos: *ta-nu-a-ti*¹¹ (I, 8) "I have set up as a votive offering". The conjunction *u* (as distinct from *wa*) is found regularly in Akkadian, Eteocretan and Punic: and sometimes in Ugaritic, Hebrew and Aramaic¹².

The word for "engraved stone" (specifically one on which a text is engraved) is PTH in Phoenician, which may be followed by Z "this"; PTH Z

⁶ The continuity of the Minoan tradition is reflected in the Psychro text (EML, plate VII), where the scribe rewrites the opening word ($\epsilon\pi\theta\iota$) in a late form of the Minoan syllabary (*i-pi-ti*). Thus the knowledge of the Aegean syllabary survived from the Bronze Age into Hellenistic times on Crete as well as on Cyprus.

⁷ As stated above, we follow Brice's numbering.

⁸ We number the Phoenician and Punic texts according to H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* I-III, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1962-1964. For Phoenician inscriptions beginning with *l-* see texts 17, 36, 42, 63, 66, 71, 72, 73, etc.

⁹ For $\lambda = l-$ "to, for" in another Semitic text in Greek letters, see the Neo-Punic inscription from El-Hofra (Donner-Röllig, no. 175).

¹⁰ Donner-Röllig, nos. 32:2; 39:2; 41:1-2.

¹¹ For the verbal form, see EML § 157.

¹² See EML § 162, UT § 19.3.

“this engraved stone” refers to the inscribed stone itself. The Minoan form is *pi-te za* on a libation table from Palaikastro (I, 4) = Phoenician PTH Z¹³ “this engraved stone”. In late (Eteocretan) times the article was prefixed, so that instead of what appears in Phoenician as PTH Z, we find the formation H-PTH Z¹⁴. The Eteocretan stone from Psychro opens *επιθι ζ ηθανθη* = Phoenician H-PTH Z YTNTY “I have given this engraved stone”¹⁵, in which every lexical and grammatical element occurs in the Phoenician counterparts of this formula, and every element except the definite article occurs on our Minoan engraved stones. We shall comment on each of these elements:

The definite article, which is an innovation¹⁶, has not yet appeared in Semitic texts of the Bronze Age (which closes ca. 1200 B.C.). Accordingly its absence in Minoan and its presence in Eteocretan shows that Semitic speech in Crete and Northwest Semitic dialects in Asia developed more or less in tandem. The article is entirely lacking in Ugaritic (ca. 1400-1200 B.C.); in Phoenician it is rare in the earlier texts but occurs more frequently with the passing of time, especially in late Punic. It is interesting to note that the Phoenician letter H comes into Greek as E (both in shape and in alphabetic position). Since the definite article is vocalized *ha* in Hebrew, but *e* in Eteocretan and Punic¹⁷, the phonetic shift *ha-* > *e-* must have taken place in the Mediterranean dialects of Northwest Semitic.

The weakening or loss of laryngeals (which, however, may color an adjacent vowel), occurs in Minoan and is inherited by Eteocretan. This phenomenon is attested in Akkadian from an early date (third millennium B. C.) and in some later Northwest Semitic dialects such as Punic and Mandaic¹⁸.

¹³ With the possessive pronoun: PTH-Y Z “this engraved stone of mine” (Donner-Röllig, no. 10: 5).

¹⁴ As an example of this common construction note H-ŠcR Z “this gate” (Donner-Röllig, no. 18: 3).

¹⁵ Phoenician usage also makes it possible to take the Z as the relative pronoun; e.g., 'RN . Z P^cL . [']TB^cL (Donner-Röllig, no. 1: 1) “The sarcophagus which Ittobaal made”; BT . Z BNY . YHMLK (no. 4: 1) “The edifice that Yehomilk built”. In these examples the word-divider indicates that the Z is the relative pronoun prefixed to the verb (rather than the demonstrative pronoun suffixed to the noun). It is true that in the Psychro text, the ζ goes with ηθανθη (ζηθανθη) on the second line, whereas επιθι is on the first line. However, there is no room for the ζ after επιθι on the first line. Since both constructions occur in Phoenician, it does not make much difference for present purposes whether we take the Psychro phrase to mean “I have given this engraved stone” or “the engraved stone which I have given”. Anyway, Z “this” and Z “which” are of the same Semitic derivation.

¹⁶ The early texts, such as Akkadian and Ugaritic, have no definite article. In various later texts, the article assumes diverse forms (precisely because it is an innovation); in Hebrew it is *ha-*, in Aramaic it is suffixed *-ā*, in Arabic *al-*. A comparable situation prevails in Indo-European.

¹⁷ EML § 46.

¹⁸ Rudolf Macuch, *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic*, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin, 1965, pp. 79-96.

Note the loss of *-h* in Minoan *pi-te* = Eteocretan $\pi\theta\iota$, and of *-s* in Minoan *re*¹⁹ < Egyptian *r^c* (the Egyptian sun-god known as Ra^c or Re). In the preceding paragraph we have already noted the loss of the initial *h-* in the definite article. The early date of Minoan *pi-te* and *re* suggests that Crete may have been the Mediterranean center from which the wearing down of laryngeals emanated, spreading eventually into the Punic dialects. The mixture of linguistic communities on Crete (Odyssey 19: 175-177) would tend to accelerate the breakdown of the old Semitic pattern.

The Minoan verb *yatan-* "to give" occurs in Ugaritic and Phoenician. The equivalent of Eteocretan $\eta\theta\alpha\nu\theta\eta$ "I have given" occurs in Neo-Punic as YTNTY (Donner-Röllig, text 145: 6). The initial *y-* interchanges with *'-* in Minoan; thus *'atan-* occurs alongside *yatan-*²⁰. This interchange also occurs in Minoan *ya-sa-sa-ra-mu*: *a-sa-sa-ra-mu* (EML §§ 148, 163), and elsewhere throughout Semitic. To the examples listed in EML § 148, we may add Ugaritic *ahd* = *yhd* (UT § 19.126). Hebrew also has 'TN in *'etnān* "gift, hire" which occurs in Ugaritic as ITNN "gift, dowry". The 1 sg. suffix *-ti* "I" used with the past tense ($\eta\theta\alpha\nu\theta\eta$ = YTNTY *yatanti* "I have given") is regular in Hebrew and other Northwest Semitic dialects, including Minoan *ta-nu-a-ti* (written ṬN'T in standard Phoenician) "I have set up (as a votive offering)".

The linguistic character and continuity of Minoan from the Middle Bronze Age to at least the Hellenistic period on Crete, are clear from the sources. The decipherment was effected without the help of bilinguals; the bilinguals from Dreros (EML §§ 19-31) merely confirmed a *fait accompli*. The Semitic identity of Minoan-Eteocretan was known in Greek and Roman antiquity; e.g., from the writings of Hellenistic Cretan historian Dosiadas and of Lucius Septimius in the fourth century A.D. (EML, p. 16).

Things being what they are, the burden of refining our knowledge of Minoan and Eteocretan must fall primarily on the shoulders of competent Semitists. For this reason it is gratifying that a growing number of qualified Semitists are going on record as understanding its Semitic identity; e.g., Armas Salonen, *Die Hausgeräte der alten Mesopotamier*, Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, Helsinki, I-II, 1965-1966, see II (*Gefässe*), pp. 91, 49, 111, 125 and especially 432 (where Minoan is classified as Semitic); Michael Astour, *Hellenosemitica*, Brill, Leiden, 1965; David Neiman, JNES (= *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*) 25, 1966, p. 46; Edwin Yamauchi, JAOS (= *Journal of the American Oriental Society*) 85, 1965, p. 517 and JNES 25, 1966, p. 95; and Jack Sasson, JAOS 86, 1966, p. 128.

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¹⁹ Occurs in a number of Egyptian personal names in the HT tablets (EML § 127).

²⁰ *'a-ta-no-* (I, 16) = *ya-ta-no-* (I, 14).