

COMMUNICATIONS

I take this opportunity to wish the readers of Nestor a prosperous new year, and to thank them for their encouragement, their communications, and the offprints of articles and reviews sent during the past year, especially if I have failed to acknowledge their gifts individually.

M. S. F. Hood writes (November 1960): "I thought it might interest you to know that the fragments of Linear B tablets, some 8 in all, that we have been recovering from our excavations on the north side of the Royal Road next to the Armoury at Knossos appear to come from a deposit that dates from a time after the destruction of the Late Minoan II Palace. The deposit consists of a deep fill that found its way into pits apparently dug by people quarrying for stone at some point after the destruction of the so-called "Last Palace." There is strong circumstantial evidence that the tablets, like much of the pottery from the fill, date from the period of the "Last Palace," but the fill itself appears to be later, even if not much later in date."

From the newsletter of the Alumni Association of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: "Professor Blegen continued the work at Pylos, assisted in the supervision of the excavation by both Mrs. Blegen (her many friends will be delighted to hear) and Marion Rawson. They were working along the west side of the Palace, trying to clarify the numerous walls of the several earlier periods. A new plan and survey of the Palace and the whole hilltop was prepared by John Travlos during the season." (It is also reported that the roofing of the excavated palace is now completed.)

"Professor and Mrs. Caskey conducted a trial excavation for the University of Cincinnati on the island of Kea. The promontory of Aghia Eirene in the harbor of Aghios Nikolaos was inhabited in the Bronze Age, to judge from the house walls and a cyclopean defense wall on the landward side which date from Late Helladic II and early Late Helladic III times. Below there are indications of Middle Helladic occupation. On the headland of Kephala traces were found of a settlement and cemetery probably of Early Cycladic date."

The maps of Mycenae prepared by Mrs. Wace and C. Williams may now also be obtained from Heffer's in Cambridge.

Summaries of papers read at the meeting of the American Philological Association, Hartford, 28-30 December, 1960.

G. P. Goold, "Homer and the Alphabet" -- This paper examines the orthodox belief that Iliad and Odyssey were at some stage transliterated from the Attic into the Ionic alphabet. The evidence for this belief, from scholia and conjectural reconstruction, is considered and found invalid. The evidence adduced is better explained by assuming that misunderstanding of formulaic and archaic language arose when the transmission of epic occurred orally; it supports Lord's theory of dictated oral-composition.

The evolution of the Ionic alphabet was complete by 700 B.C. Inscriptional evidence, however, fails to account for the easy victory gained by the Ionic over other local alphabets, especially at Athens: parallels are cited to show that a tremendous influence is needed to change an established script. It is demonstrated that all extant Greek literature (i.e., having book-form) was originally written in the Ionic alphabet, and inferred that Homer's poems (which alone could have exerted such influence) established the practice.

Each poem must originally have occupied several scrolls; these scrolls must have been numbered. Others have shown that the present book-division of both epics is original. It is suggested that the numbering of the books by the 24 letters of the Ionic alphabet is not an innovation of the Alexandrians (when a different system prevailed) but goes back to Homer himself.

Milman Parry has demolished the assumption that Homer composed like a literate author: neither Homer's matter nor language nor even style can be expected to be without inconsistency; for Homer was a collector and stitcher of lays who superlatively exploited the invention of the alphabet by compiling in two designedly comprehensive epics the vast treasures of oral literature. It is impossible to postulate one or more earlier geniuses: their poems can only have lasted for an hour or two, and had life only whilst voice was heard. It is unnecessary to suppose that the epics were occasioned by a festival. They were written down, not as competition-pieces of the moment, but as treasures for ever.

H. D. Ephron, "Phaistos Disk: Covenant between Iacon and Tharso (>Athene)"
-- My study of the Phaistos Disk has made it apparent to me that no one has made the basic assumptions necessary before an attempt to decipher its writing system could have hope of even partial success, that no one has in fact produced results which are not mere chance owing to the accidental adjacency of random sounds. There are, however, sufficient clues to make possible certain important basic assumptions leading to a limited understanding of the disk. This very early system of writing with movable pictographic "type" provided an extremely slow, clumsy, and exasperating method the difficulties of which led to much spelling variation; nevertheless, labels may be given to individual signs, spelling rules set up, and known words clearly recognized.

The writing begins at the center of the disk, moving from left to right spirally outward. We are dealing with Mycenaean Greek and with spelling rules similar to those already known, but with differences owing chiefly to the earlier origin of the method, such as, that signs for open vowels and labiovelars had not yet been invented. An assumption is possible which reveals the correct values of certain signs and makes possible the labeling of additional signs until that always indeterminable point is reached where chance results cancel out dependability, but not before it becomes possible, by means of "Greek" words correctly spelled according to the adopted rules, to read (with omissions):

"Iacon [>Ion] the Bold of Sardes matched himself against the honored goddess Tharso [= Bold; >Athene]. At Sardes the divine son of Tharso prepared a

feast Asiatic style for the man from Asia and [urged?], "Yield to the goddess. Make obeisance to Hygeia." The son of Tharso [pleaded earnestly?] on behalf of the goddess. Iacon the Bold [finally] came to terms with Tharso." (Copies of the values assigned, of the spelling rules assumed, and of the transcription and interpretation of face B will be supplied on request.)

Summary of a paper read at the meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, Hartford, 28-30 December, 1960.

J. W. Graham, "Bathrooms or Lustral Chambers?" -- Everyone takes sides on this long-standing question on the function of the chambers in Minoan Palaces variously identified as bathrooms or lustral chambers. No one has taken the trouble to discuss it in adequate detail. The arguments regularly brought against the use of these rooms as bathrooms are ill-founded; on the other hand there are good reasons to suspect ritual associations. Surely the explanation is that they served a dual purpose, though the relative emphasis on the functional versus the cult usage might vary in different instances.

G.M.A. Hanfmann reports that during the last week of the 1960 campaign Mycenaean sherds have been found at Sardis. In a deep sounding made by G.F. Swift south of the "House of Bronzes" (50 meters south of the Salihli highway) a sequence of strata was observed which begins with Lydian levels of the sixth and seventh century B. C. Below these, two levels with Greek Geometric are followed by one level with the fragment of a Submycenaean or Mycenaean jug and a burned level with two or three Mycenaean sherds. The earliest Mycenaean sherd was found below the burned level. Out of a half dozen of identifiable sherds (more are represented by small bits) several resemble "local imitations of Mycenaean" found in Troy VI and VII a, one (from the burned level) may be from Rhodes, and the earliest is mainland Mycenaean. No precise dating can as yet be suggested given the small exposure; the campaign of 1961 will show, it is hoped, whether the burned level is to be associated with the arrival of the Heraclidae (505 years before the ascent of Gyges, Herod. IV,45), the activities of Moksos (Mopsus, cf. HSCP 63, 1958, 73), or the campaign of Tudhaliyas IV against Assuwa (1250-1220 B.C., cf. G. L. Huxley, Achaean and Hittites, 1960, 34).

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 "...at the beginning of the Epic tradition, θέμιστες and θέμις (collective singular) were the ξεστοὶ λίθοι that served as seats for the γέροντες and made up the ἱερὸς κύκλος of the βουλή. The pre-Epic history of θέμις may be traced in part with evidence from Mycenaean texts, and the development of the word within the Epic followed.
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 I. On peut interpréter par καλεῖν "convoquer en assemblée" les substantifs mycéniens ko-re-te (= κολετήρ, cf. hom. καλήτωρ) et da-mo-ko-ro (= δαμοκόλος): ils désignent des notables chargés de convoquer l'assemblée du peuple. II. pa-sa-ro ku-ru-so a-pi to-ni-jo (PY Ta716) est peut-être ψαλῶ χρυσῶ ἀμφοιστορνίω "boucles en or fixées sur leurs ceinturons"; wa-o serait un nom du bouclier et l'ideogramme 232 représenterait BOUCLIER+CEINTURON. III. te-re-ja-e est le dénominatif d'un substantif *τελεία (fem.); il paraît entrer dans la série des infinitifs grecs formés sur base athématique à voyelle longue et représente vraisemblablement *τελειᾶ-[σ]εν > τελειᾶεν.
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