

COMMUNICATIONS

KADMOS. Zeitschrift für vor- und frühgriechische Epigraphik. In Verbindung mit Emmett L. Bennett, William C. Brice, Porphyrios Dikaios, Konstantinos D. Ktistopoulos, Olivier Masson, Piero Meriggi, Fritz Schachermeyr, Johannes Sundwall herausgegeben von Ernst Grumach. Verlag Walter de Gruyter, Berlin. Zwei Hefte jährlich im Gesamtumfang von etwa 190 Seiten. Heft 1 erscheint im Frühjahr. Manuskripte in deutscher, englischer, französischer oder italienischer Sprache erbeten an die Adresse der Redaktion: Prof. Ernst Grumach, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Berliner Strasse 60 (Berlin West), Germany.

A (thoroughly modern) corslet with countable plates is illustrated in the Illustrated London News for January 27, 1962.

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Notices (among others) concerning Olympieion (Mycenaean sherds), Perati (Mycenaean cemetery), Lerna, Dendra (Mycenaean cemetery, armor, figs. 8, 9), Messenia, Pylia, Pylos, Mouriatadha and Mira, Gla (fig. 13), Parga (Mycenaean tholos, fig. 14), Kefallinia (chamber tombs), Volo (palace), Keos (fig. 21), Naxos, Mallia, Tourtoula,

Praisos, Khondros Viannou, Lebena, Phaistos, Khandia, Rethimno, Knossos (Royal Road, figs. 29, 30, Houses S of Palace, Fortification Wall, Tombs S of Palace, West of main Herakleion Road, Neolithic finds, Date of tablets, Sealings in the Herakleion Museum), Mycenae (fig. 33), Ayios Stephanos (figs. 34-35), Karpathos, Kos, Kalymnos.

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#### WORK IN PROGRESS

L. R. Palmer, "The interpretation of Mycenaean Greek texts."

Incunabula Graeca: prossimamente, II. L. Deroy, "Initiation à l'épigraphie mycénienne." III. A. Morpurgo, "Mycenaeae Graecitatis Lexicon." IV.

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V. VI. Georgiev, "Fondamenti di linguistica comparata indo-europea." VI.

C. Gallavotti, "Le origini greche."

(This not in Ann Arbor copy)

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY  
WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES

February 15, 1962

Dear Colleague:

In September 1957, Antiquity reported my discovery that the Minoan Linear A tablets of Crete were Semitic. My facts were derived almost entirely from the inventories discovered at Hagia Triada containing single words but not sentences. For this reason my critics rightly pointed out that without sentence structure, my Semitic vocabulary might be loanwords in some non-Semitic language. The best source of Minoan sentence structure is a group of eighteen stone cult objects with dedications inscribed on them. They come from at least seven different points in eastern and central Crete, from before 1500 B.C. In 1957 I could not do much with the reproductions in the books then available. But in 1961 a new edition with better photographs and drawings was published in England by W. C. Brice, whose keen eye detected a group of four signs which I immediately recognized as ki-re-ya-tu, a West Semitic word kiryat "city." The dedication, on a libation table from Palaikastro, begins with le ya-sa-(sa-ra-mu) which means "To (the deity) Yasasaramu" with the West Semitic preposition le "to." The dedication ends with ki te-te-bi ki-re-ya-tu, which is West Semitic ki tēteb kiryat "that the city may be well." In other words, the table was dedicated to the deity for the welfare of the community.

The West Semitic languages include Hebrew, Phoenician, Ugaritic and Aramaic. Fortunately, a libation table from Knossos opens with ta-nu-a-ti that can only be a form of the Phoenician word tana' "to set something up as a votive offering." Forms of this appropriate word and of yatan "to give" open several of the Minoan dedications. Both yatan and tana' are common in Phoenician dedications.

Still another libation table from Palaikastro is dedicated for the welfare of bi-ti za, the Phoenician for "this house", referring to the temple in which the table was presented.

A jar fragment from Knossos is incised with words including ya-ne, the correct Minoan spelling for West Semitic yain "wine", designating the original contents of the jar.

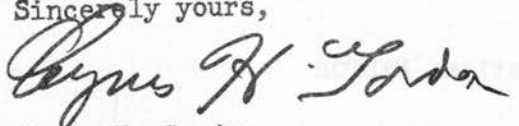
The conjunction "and" in the Minoan dedications is not wa but u, as at Hagia Triada. This u was my main reason for favoring an East Semitic identification. But now it appears that u was used very early in West Semitic too, whereas it had been thought that it developed only late in West Semitic.

That the Minoan language is Phoenician ties in with what Herodotus repeatedly tells about the early Phoenician penetration of the Aegean. It also is supported by the fairly large number of West Semitic personal names in the Minoan tablets, including da-we-da "David."

The detailed interpretation of the Minoan texts will of course require technical studies that will be appearing in professional journals for years to come. My first report on the West Semitic character of Linear A is in press for the July issue of Journal of Near Eastern Studies edited by Professor Keith C. Seele. Meanwhile the very fact that the texts are Phoenician may be of interest to you.

When Homer tells us that the mother of King Minos was a Phoenician princess, he had something more factual in mind than may meet the eye.

With best greetings,

Sincerely yours,  
  
Cyrus H. Gordon



Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY  
WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

DEPARTMENT OF MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES

1 March 1962

Dear Colleague:

During the 1880's the first of four Eteocretan inscriptions was found on Crete. Those inscriptions are written in Greek letters, but in a "mysterious" language that scholars correctly assumed to be the pre-Greek speech of Crete. The identity of that language, however, remained a mystery until February 1962.

Herodotus repeatedly mentions the Phoenicians as active in the Minoan World. Homer tells us that the mother of King Minos was a Phoenician princess. Early Greek tradition informs us that the Phoenician Cadmus founded Thebes and introduced Phoenician script to Greece.

Unfortunately we tend to underestimate the value of tradition. For reasons spelled out in my forthcoming book "Before the Bible" (Harper, 1962), I have come to realize the correctness of the ancient Greek traditions to the effect that prior to around 1500 B.C. the dominant factor throughout the entire East Mediterranean, including Crete and the Aegean, was Phoenician. Accordingly, during the last few weeks I reexamined the Eteocretan texts which date from the sixth to the third centuries B.C. Since they are in the Greek alphabet, there is no difficulty in pronouncing them. Three Eteocretan texts from Praisos, Crete, turn out to be tombstones. They all contain the word mit (which means "died" in Phoenician) after the name of the deceased in the opening line. One tombstone records that the deceased was a "benefactor" who had been "mayor over Praisos" and a "mighty ruler of Praisos". Another tombstone, after recording that the lamented "had gone to sleep and died", invokes the curse of exile on anyone who desecrates the grave. The third text requests kind treatment from everyone "be he lord of a city or any man at all". The remaining Eteocretan text, from Psychro, Crete, can be translated completely: "There are no valuables buried in the tomb that I have established" (literally, "the house which I have given, there is not with it in the earth anything beautiful"). The Semitic vocabulary, morphology, syntax and idiom are flawless.

The language of the Eteocretan inscriptions is no more different from the Phoenician dialects of Byblos or Carthage than the latter are from each other.

Like the Greeks, so too the ancient Egyptians recognized the unity of the entire East Mediterranean prior to 1500 B.C., for they apply the name "Keftiu" to its various component parts prior to that date.

When the Mycenaean Greeks wrested Knossos from the Semitic Minoans in the fifteenth century B.C., the beginning of the end had come for the earlier population. Minoan enclaves survived into classical Greek times to leave us a few Eteocretan inscriptions. But the Indo-Europeans were destined to displace the Semites in the Aegean, Crete, Cyprus and Asia Minor. This historic fact may well be what Genesis 9:27 expresses as Noah's prediction that Japheth (the traditional ancestor of the Greeks and other Indo-Europeans) "shall dwell in the tents of Shem".

My scientific publication of the four Eteocretan inscriptions has gone to press. Pending its appearance in the July issue of Journal of Near Eastern Studies edited by Professor Keith C. Seele, you may be interested in knowing what has happened.

With best greetings,

Sincerely yours,



Cyrus H. Gordon

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