

NEW YORK STATE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY
CORNELL UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
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DEPARTMENT OF ENTOMOLOGY

Dear Miss Kober

Yes, I am one of those who very much like an argument.

I am afraid my letter was hurriedly written, and after quite some years of not seriously thinking about the problem of the pre-Hellenic languages; so I didn't bother to check sources and made some slips.

I see the character in the name ~~P~~ ~~AK~~ is \uparrow and not \times as I had remembered it. This obviously throws doubt on the "possible" value of u, though I still feel that those internal variations are much more likely to be a matter of orthography than of infixes. The words appear on tablets reproduced in AJA 1939, 565, etc. The short form is at the bottom of #213; the longer on the fourth line of #131. It seems to me that if the language is Greek, of which I don't feel at all sure, tablet 213, with its long formula

$B + \uparrow$. name. $B + P. F A \times$. \uparrow #. number
("possibles") hilopu Voke hilora toko-- --OXE-

is specially promising for solution, especially as it includes besides the possibles the very probable lo, to. The word that Minoan acc. Evans used to mean "sum" evidently here means merely "number" or the like, but I still like the reading tokos; but the third sign differs from the corresponding Minoan one. I judge the next to last sign is the ideogram for beef-creature, so if it is Greek the bow-sign should be a proclitic and the last sign a case-ending, which restricts the possibilities.

My own approach has been mainly not from the script, but from the mass of abnormal but to me apparently definite IE words in Greek. I got my first idea from the fact that the initial parts of the nth words seemed to make sense as IE roots if we assumed some degeneration and simplification: e.g. Tiryns (door), Korinthos (Kore), minthos-miaina, helmins-vermis, plinthos-flint, akanthos-/ak, etc. The little Blegen-Haley paper on Greek place names came out and I was much struck by the distribution of names with and without aspirates; the former forming a solid block in the Cyclades, generally following the coasts and invading Attica, but elsewhere with practically no representatives (The one exception, Brymanthos, might be a sailor's landmark). Then the nonaspirates occupied both mainland Greece and Crete, with no visible sign of discrimination. So I began to look for pairs of Greek words with related meaning, and with and without aspirates. I found plenty, one of the pair usually recognized as a good IE word, the other listed as of doubtful derivation or specially listed under a modified root. At that point I thought of course of English, so richly provided with pairs of IE words, one Anglosaxon and the other French. I ended with the definite idea that Greek as we know it is a blend of two languages, one (Hellenic) providing most of the grammar, the

commonest words (but not all), and the frame, while the other provided an enormous vocabulary, with a specially high percent in maritime words and architectural words. The latter (unlike the French element in English) being divisible more or less into aspirated and non aspirated pairs [but usually one of these would fall together with the Hellenic word, and at best supply some special meaning, which in general could not be identified]

Then I began thinking in terms of languages using a syllabary, or with the simple phonetics a syllabary of only 60 - 100 characters would imply, and consideration for a moment of Japanese led me to Polynesian, which could be in fact very neatly written in the Cyprian syllabary, with the small changes of substituting ng- for z-(x-). I then thought of the well fixed missionary belief that Polynesian had a substantial element of both "Greek" culture and language, and began checking vocabulary. The result was a list of nearly 300 words in a partial survey of Polynesian that had either obvious or possible IE roots, and they were unmistakably of the western "centum" type: e.g. kona, 'mother' and tekau, 'ten'. There were also several suggestive grammatical points, but they did not dominate, rather suggested a strong influx of loan-words than a basically IE language. E.g. e before the verb, to indicate continuous action, ka for past, e vocative (note second declension only), o genitive, i verb-former, (usually ia forming middle-passives, like Gk. ochriao, erythriao, priamai). The two patterns fitted together, giving me as a working hypothesis that there was a pre-hellenic element in Greek, appearing as a great mass of loans, and the same in Polynesian, both with IE roots simplified in basically the same way (only 3 stops, p.k.t, one consonant of a pair dropped, or a vowel inserted, etc.)

I have backed up from this position to some extent, and suspect that the simplification did not go so far as I first thought, but think I am still on the right track. Incidentally a few contacts of legend are strongly suggestive, but definitely do not have the "Olympics" (Leda-Laka and the eggs, and Tane-Tan for the young high god, are the most striking, but Pere-fenua-mea seems also to be a sort of Prometheus, and the sister pair of storm goddesses, Pele and Hi'iaka (i.e. Pere and Skiathe) suggests the Gorgons, especially when we recall the island of Skiathos used the Gorgon on its coins. (Note that ' for k, k for t and the confusion of r and l are normal for Hawaiian). The mixing of r and l are universal in Polynesian, except early loans in Melanesian, which kept the distinction partly; and ~~that~~ became h in all but Samoan.

One of the most striking coincidences is the triple mele-melos song; hula-choros dance, accompanied by song, and almost always a group dance, with or without a solo dancer; oli-lyris song specially commemorating a famous person. Another is Tyrian purple, the dictionary saying "repe-repe"=purple prepared from a shellfish. [The metathesis may be very modern, since it has happened to the name of Rapa island (the ruddy one) since the discovery by Europeans.]

* also Kio - Κρίος + Κριός (the early god descended to Kore (the void))
Kio - Κριζω, κριζω (the Titans descended to χέρω (u u))
(to squeak) (to squeak)

As to the particular Minoan and Cyprian signs to compare with each other, I have been pretty much in a fog. I used a comparative tabulation of the forms used in the different Cyprian cities (which I can't seem to lay my hands on now), and sometimes checked forms to the actual inscriptions as reproduced, but I remember that in the Metropolitan some of the tablets on exhibit did not match with the transcriptions set up beside them, so I suppose anything done from published works is risky. The most promising forms, I remember were some very loosely written graffiti-like ones. My feeling that the chariot tablets might be in order was again based on a dim and probably misplaced memory, of a group of tablets published somewhere in the position they were found (presumably the top layer of a box). I have since looked up P of M iv, and see there the tablets as you say, unrelated, so the idea of relative numbers means nothing.

As to whether assigning values first is a mistake or not, I suppose because I was trained in natural science I am a strong believer in the method of "multiple hypothesis", - when you get a problem that does not clear promptly try several approaches (even contradictory ones) at once, on the ground that whether sound or not they will point the proper way to further study; - and sometimes apparently contradictory approaches sometimes end in the same answer, as notably in the last generation in theoretical physics, where Eddington showed that Dirac's statistical approach and Einstein's one based on changing axes of reference, could be converted into each other. In biology we are notably still in the multiple state in the theory of segmentation, the phylogeny of the vertebrates, and many other points. But it seems in the fields that have grown out of the classics there is a feeling that one correct method should appear early in a piece of research, and that other leads become then "mistakes"; I don't feel that way at all. I think that the recognition of grammatical type may well come out of mere study of the arrangements of characters, but that it can never lead to meaning. But I feel that the method of identifying some signs and testing them for possible words can also only work if we have accumulated a good list of possible words, which means sifting Greek for possible (or even probable) Prehellenic survivors. If it were not for the fact that place-names show that Crete and the Mainland had the same or a very closely similar language, the case would be hopeless. Of course if the Pylos group turn out to be Greek, this will make a spectacular short-cut, but with so very few published it is almost equally hopeless for the moment.

But personally I don't think the Semitic approach would be productive, - There seems to be no link of culture in that direction, and practically no words in Greek that are obviously Semitic (compared with the hundreds of distorted IE words). Even amasa will be shaky, since it is also in Polynesian (amos-, carry)... as the habit of using loose trailing clothes is post-minoan, I suppose chiton is a later loan.

My feeling is that the useful fields are Hellenic (for survivals), Polynesian (for early loans from a centum group of IE languages), and especially to show how a language with very simple phonology treats IE words; Asianic, and Libyan. And I personally have exactly zero background for the last two approaches. A further argument for IE is the fact that IE languages evidently swept into the Mediterranean area in a great fan in the early second millenium: from east to west: Hittite, Lydian, (Minoan), Italic, Celtic.

As to a few particular signs; I was inclined to consider Linear A H merely a slightly differently written axe H , and Cyprian X as a still slightly different axe. *all based on* H

I wonder if possibly na and nga could have been distinguished, if so I suppose B40 would be nga, as never initial, though nga is often initial in Polynesian. Incidentally the ~~fixak~~ plural particle varies between na and nga. It is curious that both signs were obviously written for na in Cyprian. I feel that Cyprian a and e; to and tu also contaminated each other though based on quite different original signs, respectively.

I never understood the statement that the pre-Hellenic words in Greek were not IE; it seems to me that a round argument was involved; i.e. that if IE they must follow the Hellenic sound-shifts, when they would fall together and not be recognizable. But if you assume instead that they followed the quite different laws of a language with a strong tendency to simplify, they would stand out, but obviously would not show the subtleties of more complex languages: so we must seek for coincidences of meaning and two consonants, not more.

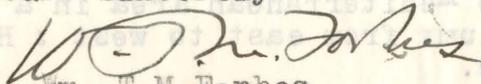
By the way for convenience I am calling the presumed mainland language without aspirates "Lelegian" (Carian obviously won't do, and I firmly believe the Pelasgians were somebody else); and the aspirated island language "Telchinian", since the Telchins were legendary very early invaders with an aspirate in their names. They of course will not necessarily turn out more appropriate than the present "Minoan" and "Minyan", based on the names of the destroyers of their respective cultures, so far as we can judge by the Greek dates.

I had believed that the Cyprian rules (of the classical period) were fundamentally rather simple, namely use the e syllable unless another was called for; 2, if the two consonants were closely connected, supply them with the same vowel. I had assumed that the Minoan ~~if~~ it had double consonants and closed syllables, as the two surviving Cretan inscriptions show they had a thousand years later, would have similar rules, basically, but perhaps interpreted with more, or perhaps less option. One of the reasons for thinking of i rather than e-syllables was the presence of two forms of si (shown together in the doulos name on tablet 131). I supposed as this distinction was so widely and carefully used it meant some slight and common modification, and thought of si vs. s. Incidentally I think I have seen the oblique stroke (virama) on some Cretan inscription, as on the Phaestos disc, and again on an i-syllable, but haven't notes.

(OVER)

I hope to be in New York for some days in the middle of November (on my proper entomological work), and will have evenings free. I wonder if we might get together.

Yours sincerely



Wm. T.M. Forbes