

47 Highpoint,
North Hill,
Highgate,
LONDON, N6.

Good Friday 1948.

26 March

Dear Miss Kober,

Sir John Myres sent on your last letter to me, and I think the simplest will be to let you have a copy of my answer direct. I was very interested in your comments, but I can't really take any responsibility for the text - I was copying blindly from a specimen page. I've amended my conventional symbols, as you can see from the enclosed sheet, but there are lots of possibilities, and this may still not be the most workable.

I was grateful for the sign-list, because though I have Myres' printed list, ~~xx~~ a number of the signs there seem to be drawn in rather untypical shapes, and I can't find any distinction, for example, between \mathbb{M} and \mathbb{M} . (Incidentally, are \mathbb{X} , \mathbb{X} and \mathbb{Y} all identical?

If it comes to copying ~~out~~ all the inscriptions for publication, I shall have taken on a rather laborious job, but it may be the only way to get the whole material out in a form where it'll be of use. I should have thought your notes would be invaluable. Minoan is only a part-time job with me, and there is always the problem of getting enough material to work on: in fact, I don't feel like coming out publicly with any more theories until I've laid my hands on all the available material. Incidentally, you refer to the Pylos inscriptions in your letter: is there any prospect of their being published, or will you have any private access to them? To judge from the examples published in AJA they look in some ways more interesting than the Knossos ones. A point that interests me is: how often do words coming directly in front of the word $\mathbb{T}\mathbb{I}\mathbb{M}$ begin in \mathbb{E} ?

My own position is that I still stand by my 1940 AJA article in broad outline, but I've given up most of the phonetic values and word-identifications mentioned there. I'm more than ever inclined to believe in the existence of a common pre-hellenic language, which we might call Aegean if 'Pelasgian' is objectionable, and which has as dialects both Minoan and the later Etruscan. In fact possibly the nearest approach to the language of the Minoan texts might be that of the Lemnos inscription. However, it takes one all one's time to find out what is known of Etruscan, before one ever gets on to Minoan.

I was very interested to read your articles, but I must admit that I feel the "paradigms" you mention are in the main less likely to be grammatical inflexions than alternative name-endings applied to the same radicals.

I should be very interested to hear how far you have got at present, and particularly if you have any ideas on phonetic values, or have identified any words, as opposed to names. $\mathbb{T}\mathbb{M}$ looks interesting: any idea what it means? In thinking how one might publish the Knossos material, it seemed to me that we should have to add critical appendices to the text, perhaps even a series as time went on. Then I began to day-dream that one might fit into this scheme a symposium from everyone at present working on Minoan language and writing, explaining the position they had reached, and suggesting the next lines of approach, - possibly developing into a series of mutual bulletins routed through someone with a duplicator.

Good Friday 48

-Only a fantasy perhaps - but do you think there is room for a more general exchange of views? ~~xxxxxxx~~
For one thing, I don't even know exactly who is working on Minoan at the moment. - Hrozny evidently (but Myres says he's all wrong) - Sundwall (I haven't seen his recent Hagia Triada stuff at all) - Ktistopoulos - Is there anyone else? I suspect there must be some in Italy.

I feel it shouldn't be altogether impossible, eventually, to fix fairly reliable phonetic values to the Linear letters, though all I've got at the moment are hunches ~~xxx~~ rather than opinions - that 'T' represents a vowel, and so on. But when all the material's available I think pure statistics will get us a certain way.

I am trying gradually to build up the probabilities for phonetic values in a form which I call "the Grid".

I'm using the symbols :C: and :V: to mean "has the same consonant (or vowel) as....".

Arranging the :V: series in vertical lines on the page, and the :C: series horizontally, one might eventually be able to solve the crossword puzzle satisfactorily and construct the whole syllabary.*

Briefly, I take it there is a case for :C: if two signs replace each other in words apparently from similar radicals. First priority here seems to be the relationship between the second letter in two-letter names, and the second letter of longer names with the same initial letter. The assumption here is that names are in fact generally built up on monosyllabic or disyllabic radicals with added suffix-groups.

I take it there is a case for :V: if 2 signs occur with more than average frequency both before and after each other: again, there is a possibility of :V: between double signs and the signs immediately before and after them. Here the assumption is that vowel-harmony occurs to a certain extent, both in the actual structure of words, and in the syllabic spelling of consonant-clusters.

If at a later stage you would care to exchange "grid" possibilities I'd be only too willing.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Ventris

* my current guess is that the complete syllabary (if it is complete) should contain 80 letters: -
the vowels a, e, i, o, u and their combinations with the consonants

c (k)	r
w (v)	s
h* (x)	s'
z	t
θ	f (φ)
j (uncertain)	
l	
m	
n	
p	

from x
* if h is differentiated, one would expect the syllables built on it to occur only initially.

there doesn't seem to be room for diphthongal or closed syllables, except possibly for exceptional signs.