

75 Gough Way

Cambridge CB3 9LN

4 October 1986

Dear Emmett,

I can't think how Jean-Pierre got the idea that I was suggesting that we met at the proposed Aegean Congress next year. I have looked at the copy of my letter and it is quite clear to me that I said I had discussed it with John Killen and we had agreed that it was not relevant to Mycenaean studies, and that I had no intention whatever of attending it. Of course it depends what 'Aegean' is taken to mean, but I imagine this is primarily to be understood in the narrow sense of Cycladic, with of course contacts between the Aegean islands and the surrounding lands. The problem is whether Crete is an Aegean island, and since it holds its own congresses, I doubt whether the Cretans would consider themselves Aegeans. Thus it seemed to me that any papers on writing would have to confine themselves to the manifestations of Linear A in the area, and that can be dealt with in 10 minutes.

Suffice it to say that I do not like the idea of spending a week in Athens in August (when the British School is usually shut), nor of listening to a lot of archaeologists arguing about Early Cycladic, nor of paying large sums to inefficient organisers for the privilege. That said, I am not averse to the idea of a small Colloquium somewhere sometime to discuss the diffusion of the Linear Scripts; but there are not more than a dozen of us who could usefully contribute to this subject. I should be much happier if it were proposed as the theme for one day of the 9th international of 1990.

Talking of which, Sakellariou was at the Cyprus Colloquium, and having had to listen to yet another of his appalling papers, I am inclined to remark that if he is present at the next Mycenaean Colloquium, I shall not be. We must make it a condition of being invited to attend that you can read a Linear B tablet, or contribute something valuable to the elucidation of those or related documents. Sak. does not qualify, and I'm getting too old to waste my time on rubbish.

Apart from him and Tsopanakis (who thought modern Cypriot dialect was descended from the ancient Macedonian language!), the Colloquium was very successful. We all enjoyed ourselves, even if we all felt that our discussions would be much better if we had had more material to discuss. The new finds are a little disconcerting, since they make obsolete some of the confident assertions about the dialect in the past, and they add too little for us to be able to re-phrase these generalisations. I ended with the impression that at least we are coming (I had come long since) to admit that we know a lot less about ancient Cypriot than appears in the handbooks. Significant further progress will depend on new finds, and with 37% of the island impervious to archaeological research, prospects are not good. The worst linguistic paper was by a man called Kollitsis, who was supposed to tell us about modern Cypriot, but turned out to know nothing about phonetics and precious little about linguistics in general.

We saw the famous obelos, now in Nicosia Museum with the reading o-pe-le-ta-u. It looks plain enough, and its archaeological context is apparently quite certain as 11th cent. The two other spits found with it have what look to me like decorative marks, but are alleged to be Cypro-Minoan signs. I should like to hear your opinion of these when you have the chance to see them. Better be tactful to Vassos.

Your remark about triumvirates reminds me of the designation of the senior Court of Discipline in this University, the body which is

empowered to sack a member of academic staff for disgraceful conduct. Since it originally had 6 members plus the Vice-Chancellor, it was known as the Sexviri -- until there was a famous divorce case when a Professor seduced one of his female students, and the popular press made great play of the name. After this it became (counting the V-C) the Septemviri.

The letter to Kathemerini from Plevris sounds to be the usual nationalist nonsense. But I should be delighted to see the Orchomenos stirrup-jar dating to 6000 BC (your xerox or the original printing is not clear, but I think that's what he said). Of course in pre-decipherment days there were those who suggested that the Linear scripts were the origin of the Greek alphabet. But such views have been untenable since 1952. What is all too often overlooked is that although the Phoenician alphabet was undoubtedly the model for the Greek, the Greek was such an improvement on its model that it was virtually a new invention.

Talking of which, I was very sorry to see the other day that Ann (L.H.) Jeffery had died at the age of 74. In fact this has been a very bad year for deaths. We have lost a number of close and not so close friends, and I'm getting nervous about opening the Times every morning to see who else^s in the Obituary list.

Now I must get on with another job which is bugging me. But I can't tell you what it is, which probably tells you anyway.

Yours,

John