

Charles for the book which I am now  
returning. I've  
at last got my  
own copy  
of Brice.  
Egman

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February 15, 1962

DEPARTMENT OF MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES

Dear

Egman

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 goddess) Yasasaramu" with the West Semitic preposition le "to." The dedication ends with ki te-te-bi ki-re-ya-tu, which is West Semitic kī tēteb kiryat "that the city may be well." In other words, the table was dedicated to the goddess 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.

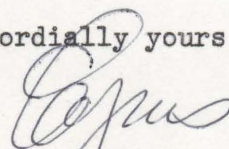
That the Minoan language is Phoenician ties in with what Herodotus repeatedly tells about the early Phoenician penetration of the Aegean. It also is supported by the fairly large number of West Semitic personal names in the Minoan tablets, including da-we-da "David."

The detailed interpretation of the Minoan texts will of course require technical studies that will be appearing in professional journals for years to come. 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.

Cordially yours,



Cyrus H. Gordon

Professor of Near Eastern Studies

CHG/rt