

A THREAD LEADING OUT OF THE VENTRISIAN LABYRINTH
REMARKS ON MINOAN LINEAR B

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A clear distinction between the well-known types of external inflexion and root inflexion leads to three types of texts, written on tablets in Minoan (Old Cretan) Linear B: Semitic, Semitic-Greek, and Greek records.

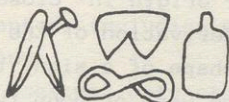
Up to today there has not been any attempt at deciphering a Linear B text whose decoding has found general acceptance. In view of this fact I venture my own conception which, while resembling the theory put forward by Cyrus H. Gordon (1966)¹, includes an independent investigation of the phonetic values of the Old Cretan syllabograms, and which I set down in my manuscript of February 1990.² For the purpose of this article it has been condensed into seven points, followed by a chart, a grid, and five analysed tablets.

1. Old Cretan ("Minoan") is an ancient North-Western Semitic language still combining Canaanean and Aramean elements. Since the former components predominate I call it a Proto-Canaanean language.

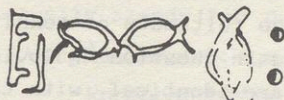
¹ Cyrus H. Gordon, Evidence for the Minoan Language (Philadelphia: Ventnor Publishers, 1966).

² Friedrich Dürr, Wiederkehren wird der Geliebte Tammuz: 'AD DUD TUMMUZ. Entzifferte altkretische Texte, 207 Seiten, Nürnberg, Februar 1990, privatgedrucktes Manuskript.

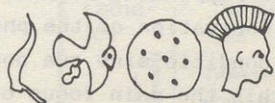
2. This language is recorded by means of a syllabary appearing in five variants (three hieroglyphic and two linear scripts) which are integrated in a continuous development starting from hieroglyphic beginnings and reaching the final linear form centuries later before giving way, in Eteocretan times, to the Greek alphabetical script.



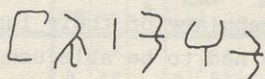
Hieroglyphic script
class A = HA



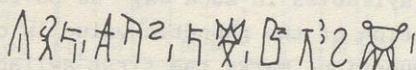
Hieroglyphic script
class B = HB



Hieroglyphic script
class PHI = HPHI



Linear script
class A = LA




Linear script
class B = LB

3. The Old Cretan script is the very proof of that epochal step which, made by North-Western Semitic speaking peoples around 2000 B.C., led from the word-syllabic scripts of Mesopotamia and Egypt to a pure syllabic script - itself a kind of predecessor of the first alphabet which was created by the same cultural group living in the area of overlap between the river cultures around 1500 B.C. Conspicuous external indications of this pure syllabic script are the

restriction of the number of signs to approximately 100 and the absence of semantic and phonetic indicators (to adopt the accurate designation of determinatives and complements by Ignace Jay Gelb, 1952).³

4. While only 10 % of the syllabograms represent genuinely open syllables (CV), the vast majority stands for genuinely closed ones (CVC). This is due to their origin in closed syllables of whole words. The regular derivation of the phonetic value of a sign starts from the shape of a sign, then leads to a corresponding Proto-Canaanite verb or noun (which underlies the basis of the sign founded on Old Cretan convention), and finally arrives at the (ultimate or penultimate) stressed syllable of the word in question.⁴ Obviously monosyllabic "basal logograms" are identical with the (syllabic) phonetic values of the corresponding signs. (Convinced that clear evidence for the derivation of the phonetic value from written signs is a *conditio sine qua non* for any decipherment, I have made this the main focus of my investigation.)
5. In order to record the complete vocabulary of their language in a syllabary, the ancient Cretans had to be able use those 90 % of the syllabograms that represent the phonetic value of genuinely closed syllables in such way as to turn CVC into CV. This reduction of the phonetic value is only applied if the sign in question marks the first syllable of word (with trisyllabic words also the second one). Never, however, does the phonetic value of a sign encoding a closed syllable lose its final consonant if the sign marks the last syllable of a word in Proto-Canaanite texts. This strict

³ Ignace Jay Gelb, *A Study of Writing: The Foundations of Grammatology* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago (Ill), 1952).

⁴ An example:  shows the shape of a wheel. The Proto-Canaanite noun for this is GLGL, which gives as the phonetic value of the sign: GAL.

rule confines the decoder of Proto-Canaanite texts to narrow paths. Unfortunately the rule of the final syllables is diluted in linear B texts with Greek contents because it is inadequate to the Indo-European language.

6. The phonetic values of the Old-Cretan syllabograms only include the basic vowels of Semitic: I, A and U. In Greek linear-B texts, therefore, these basic vowels need to be extended, including diphthongs.

Thus:

I does not only stand for ι , but also for $\epsilon, \eta, \upsilon, \epsilon\iota, \epsilon\upsilon$;

A does not stand only for α , but also for $\alpha\iota, \alpha\upsilon$;

U equally stands for $\omicron, \omega, \omicron\iota, \omicron\upsilon$;

Vergleichsmatrix zum Verständnis der Artikulation
konsonantischer Laute im Altkretischen

	Labiales		Dentales				Gutturales						Uvul-lares		Glottales		
			Zungenspitze				Pala-tales		Semi-Vela-res		Vela-res						
			vorn		zurück- genom- men												
	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	stimm- haft	los	
Explo-siva	b [b]	p [p]	d [d]	t [t]						g [g]	k [k]						A K IPA
Spiran-tes/Fri-kativa	v [v]	f [f]	w p w [w]	z [z]	s [s]			j [j]	ʃ [ʃ]					h [h]			A K IPA
Nasa-les	m [m]		n [n]														A K IPA
Liquidae Laterales			l [l]														A K IPA
Liquidae Vibrantes			r [r]											r [r]			A K IPA
Affri-katae					ʃ [ʃ]												A K IPA

A = Altkretisch; K = Kanaanäisch; IPA = Internationales Phonetisches Alphabet (in eckigen Klammern).

7. A consonant may occur in initial or final position: its phonetic value is interchangeable within the same place of articulation (e.g. a labial may be pronounced [b] or [p], equally dentals and gutturals. Also interchangeable are the uvulars and glottals which, essential for the onset of vowels in Semitic languages, "disappear" in Greek texts, making room for "pure" vowels.

The decoder thus confronts three kinds of linear-B texts. The oldest ones are products by people speaking and writing Proto-Canaanean. Starting from the moment when Indo-European invaders for the first time in their history begin to write their language using the strange and unwieldy syllabary bilingual (Semitic-Greek) and Greek texts appear.

LINEAR-B GRID

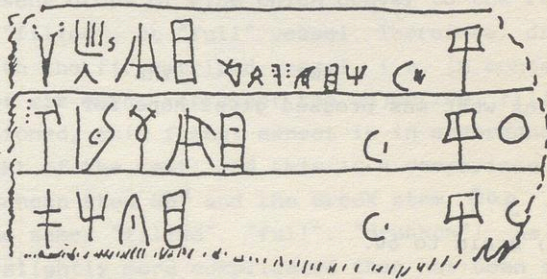
	I	IB	ID	IG	IH	IL	IM	IN	IR	IS	I?
B			𐀀		𐀁				𐀂		
D	𐀃		𐀄						𐀅 𐀆)	(+)
G	𐀇 𐀈				𐀉				𐀊 𐀋		𐀌
H			𐀍		𐀎				𐀏	𐀐	
J									𐀑		
L		𐀒									
M			𐀓		𐀔					𐀕	
N	𐀖	𐀗			𐀘	d					
R		𐀙	𐀚		𐀛	R	𐀜				
S	𐀝	𐀞							𐀟 𐀠		𐀡
W			𐀢							𐀣	

A AB AD AH AJ AL AM AN AR AS A?

B			⊂	Y⊙					⊗	⊕		⊞
D			⊖	⊕	⊕				⊗			
G		⊗	⊖	⊕	⊕	⊕		⊕	⊕			
H			⊕	⊕	⊕							
J						⊕						
L				⊕								
M			⊕						⊕	⊕		
N				⊕	⊕							⊕
R				⊕	⊕						⊕	
S		⊕	⊕	⊕						⊕		
E									⊕			

A Proto-Canaanite Text

On the following fragment of a linear-B tablet, kept at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Alice Kober (1946) believed to have discovered a proof of final inflexion, apparently evident in three pairs of signs. Once decoded however, the text shows examples of root inflexion on each line.



The writing runs from left to right.

FIRST LINE

First sequence

GUR NU? SI? YAL

GRNW

SYH

YHL

(On the) threshing floor what was scattered gives hope for

Second sequence (in smaller writing)

GIR RIB DIR WIS YAL HID

KR

RYP

DWS

YHYD

(On the) meadow the scattered grain (during) a threshing time

Third sequence

single

53 GAN

53 DGN

53 (measures of) grain.

SECOND LINE

First sequence

HAD MID SAB SI? YAL

◌MD

SB

SYH

YHL

(At the) place of the cart what was scattered gives hope for

Second sequence

51 GAN 100

51 DGN 100

51 (measures of) grain to 100

THIRD LINE

First sequence

BAR RID MUS YAL

PRT

MWS

YHL

Fallen off berries what was pressed gives hope for

Second sequence

51 GAN 50

51 DGN 50

51 (measures of) grain to 50.

Glossary

GRNW with old nominative ending: threshing-floor, barn-floor;

SYH spread, pour out, scatter;

YHL transitive: give hope for, raise expectation;

GN in commercial correspondence abbreviation for DGN;

KR meadow, field;

RYP waste, of fruit or grain;

DWS old form of DYS: threshing time;

YHYD single;

◌MD place, position;

SB cart;

PRT dropped off, or torn off berries;

MWS juice (result of pressing, what was pressed).

(Appropriate to the Proto-Canaanite language emphatica I didn't mark.)

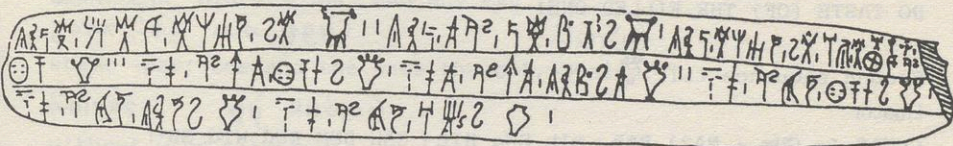
Two Bilinguals

The Tablet PY Ta 641

Some people consider this tablet as a kind of chief witness for the accuracy of the Ventrisian decipherment. All the same I dare point out a minor formal mistake (overlooked by both proponents and opponents) because it affects the contents: the signs (1) and (2) do not have the same phonetic value!

In accordance with the true contents the Greek writer furnished the sign "large tripod-vessel" with two handles, the sign "mug", however, without handle. All other so-called "handles" represent drops of wine which convey to the reader the meaning of a "filled", or "full" vessel. Therefore, drops in connection with the first tripod-vessel, i.e. in connection with five out of six mugs, represent the adjective "filled". As already mentioned, this formal aspect is in accordance with the main subject of the text; and this is a comparison between the Proto-Canaanite stem SB³ and the Greek stem βαρ. Both mean exactly the same: "filled", "full", "drunken"! As we see, the matter is slightly more complicated than has been assumed so far.

Note also that the sign of the tripod-vessel should be read as a complete "basal logogram", i.e. RBH. The five signs of a mug with drops are simply referred to under the nominalized adjective SB³ "the filled one", according to the North-West Semitic dictionary. (Both originals and English translations of Semitic words are written in capitals.)



SECOND LINE

Third sequence till Ϝ^1

Ligatur

GUNA? BAR HIL | MIH SUG HIL | MUS HUB WID HIL SB² ||

γονά βαρ ῆλ(ιξ) μεστὸς ῆλ(ιξ)

stem: -bar; identical form; filled: identical form;

MS

RBB

Ϝ^1

ῆλ(ιξ)

SB²

SUCK (AT) THE BIG ONE: he said identical form: THE FILLED ONE

Fourth sequence till Ϛ^1

Ligatur

GUNA? BAR MIH WIS JUN GAH DUM RUD WID SB²

γονά βαρ μία φρήν Ἴων(ις) KH TCM

stem: -bar; one and the same thought, Ionian; DO TASTE!

ροφῆε

SB²

Sip of THE FILLED ONE!

THIRD LINE

First sequence till Ϝ^1

Ligatur

GUNA? BAR MIH WIS JUN MUS RIB JUN WID SB²

γονά βαρ μία φρήν Ἴων(ις)

Stem: -bar; one and the same thought, Ionian;

μῶριον

Ϝ^1

SB²

essential part like FILLED ONE;

Second sequence till Ϝ^1

Ligatur

GUNA? BAR MIH WIS JUN HAD NU? KAD

γονά βαρ μία φρήν Ἴων(ις)

stem: -bar; one and the same thought, Ionian;

ἄοινος

Ϝ^1 καθ(ος)

without wine like mug.

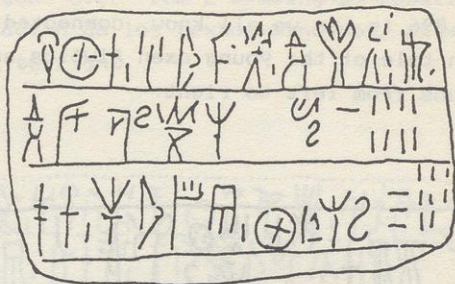
Glossary

- MS here: 2.sg.m.imp.kal: suck!
- RBH the big one (compare Ass. rabû);
- RBB
- SB> filled drinking vessel;
- KD (empty) mug;
- TR 2.sg.m.piel from TRH (causative meaning): start!
- MS squeezing; result of pressing; juice;
- THR unblended, pure;
- HMH sound; droning; harp- or pipe-playing;
- DGL rise
- HMH noise, roar;
- KH this adv. demonstr. you can take as a filler which has an inviting character;
- T^cM 2.sg.m.imp.kal: taste!

In my view PY Ta 641 is a pupil's tablet of a Greek speaking writer who could follow the didactic explanations of the Old-Cretan teacher only with great difficulties. Evidence for this is provided by the fragments of sentences that are noted down stereotypically and, from line to line more, mechanically, thus making the text appear more difficult than it actually is.

The so-called "Oil tablet" PY Gn 1184

Here the writing runs from left to right too. A single Old-Cretan term HL HR 'cave (womb) being in labor' makes the text of this tablet bilingual. Since line two mentions the ritual cave that is the highest and most centrally located one in Crete, Gargaron cannot refer to the Southern peak of the Troan Ida mountains but rather designates the peak of the Cretan Ida mountains watching over the famous cave.



FIRST LINE

GAh GAL RUD | DID BIh SU? DAR | HIL SIB DU DIDU

Ligatur

Γάργαρον νέσι(ος) σωτάρ(ος) εἰσεῖδος δεατός

The Gargaron of the divine saviour (presents) a sight, magnificent.

SECOND LINE

HIL HUR MIH DAR RID WISIR (= WID + SIR)

Ligatur

HL HR μητάρ(ος) Ρείη θρίσσει

(In the) cave in labour of Mother Rhea one is filled with awe.

THIRD LINE

PAR RUD | HID BIh NI WAN | GAL RAH MUH WID

πατρῶα

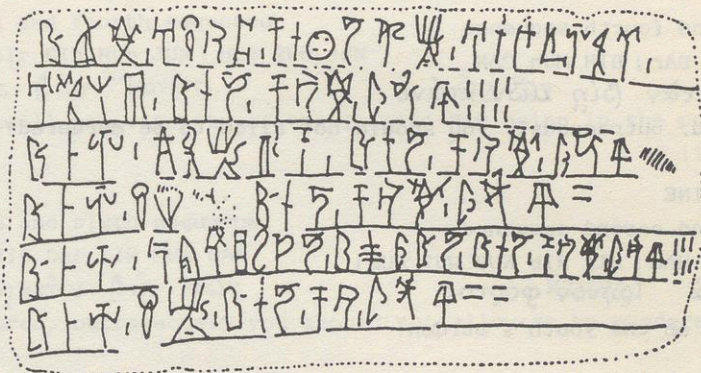
She, at all times worshipped by the ancestors,

εἶβει νιφάν κάρα μόρφην

softly lets fall snow on the peak, dark.

The genitive νέσιος σωτάρος referring to Mother Rhea, is feminine of course..

Pylos-tablet, gone over from a drawing by Peruzzi, Aportaciones a la interpretacion de los textos minoicos, page 80. The writing runs from left to right.



FIRST LINE

First and second sequence

HUB WIS DAR | HAD RAH RIh DAh₁

Ὀρφεὺς Θραῖξ ἀρὰς ἐήτρα

Orpheus, the Thracean, prayer's speaker

Third and fourth sequence

DUm RUD GAH JUn MIH NU? | HAD RUD HUR RAH HAD RIh SAB₁

δοῦρῶ καιόμενῶ ἀνδρὸς

for the ship, having caught fire, of the warrior

ῶρα ἄριστα

in the prime of life, the most beautiful:

SECOND LINE

First and second sequence

HAd DAR RiD WAN | HUB RuD JUN |

ὦ βᾶ ῥίμφα ὠραῖον

Woe Zeus, quickly! Him being in the prime of life,

Third and fourth sequence

DUm RiH DAR | BiH MUH GAN

νιωρηκτᾶν βίη μῶν κτάνε

armoured, outrageously you should not allow to be murdered!

THIRD LINE

First and second sequence

HUB DAH HAd | HiL RiB NU? WU? DUM |

ὦ βᾶ ῥῆ ἰρῆνος φόρτος

O Zeus, oh the youth's burden!

Third, fourth and fifth sequence

HUB RuD JUN | DUM RiH DAR | BiH MUH GAN

ὠραῖον νιωρηκτᾶν βίη μῶν κτάνε

Him being in the prime of life, armoured, outrageously you
should not allow
to be murdered!

FOURTH LINE

First and second sequence

HUB DAH HAd | GUR MUs SU? | HUB RuD JUN |

ὦ βᾶ ῥῆ κόσμῳ σώε ὠραῖον

O Zeus, woe! In honour save! Him being in the prime of life,

Third and fourth sequence

DUM RiH DAR | BiH MUH GAN

νιωρηκτᾶν βίη μῶν κτάνε

armoured, outrageously you should not allow to be murdered!

FIFTH LINE

First and second sequence

HUB DAh HAD | BUH DI Nib JAl WId SUn JUN|

ὦ ῥᾶ ἴϛ (βοηθίῃ νῆα φέσσου Ἴων(ος))

O Zeus, woe! Hasten to help the ship of the excellent Ionian!

Third and fourth sequence

HUB DIr BIh HUB JUN | HUB RUD JUN

ὦ ῥᾶε βίον Ἴων(ος) ὥρᾳτον

Let swell the vitality of the Ionian! Him being in the prime
of life,

Fifth and sixth sequence

DUm RIh DAR BIh MUH GAN

σίωρηκτᾶν βίῃ μῶν κτάνε

armoured, outrageously you should not allow to be murdered!

SIXTH LINE

First, second and third sequence

HUB DAh HAD | GUR NU? HUB RUD JUN|

ὦ ῥᾶ ἴϛ κλόνω ὥρᾳτον

O Zeus, woe! In the thick of the battle, him being in the prime
of life,

Fourth and fifth sequence

DUm RIh | BIh MUH GAN

ῥορῖ βίῃ μῶν κτάνε

aboard the ship, outrageously you should not allow to be
murdered!

This text may belong to a cycle of Orpheus legends. Older than the Iliad, it develops the famous motive of the burning ship. As for the deciphered language, it must be considered as a mixture of dialects. Provided that my decipherment is correct, I tend to interpret this circumstance by regarding it as a linguistic form which chronologically precedes the formation of the Ionian and Dorian dialects.