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SEPARATA

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ON SOME RECENT ATTEMPTS TO IDENTIFY LINEAR A MINOAN LANGUAGE

1. Confusion and uncertainty

Many attempts have been made to 'identify' the Minoan language of the Linear A documents, that is to connect it to other (better known) languages or linguistic families.

Not to speak of the oldest approaches, unsuccessfully arisen nearly after the Linear B decipherment (C.H. Gordon, L.R. Palmer, S. Davis and others), in recent times there has been a new1 'wave' of identifications, among which those of Owens and Aartun: their extreme weakness, from a methodological point of view, is highlighted in some papers2 and the whole question is briefly reconsidered in CM, pp. 35-37.

The case of Best and Woudhuizen is even more indicative, because of the quite great diffusion (on reviews, proceedings, etc.) of these hypotheses: so we can find quoted (by non-specialists, though linguists) some absolutely groundless ideas in scientific books (an example in CM, p. 34).

Aartun and Best-Woudhuizen, particularly, extended their interest up to the Phaistos Disk and the (latter ones) to the Cretan Hieroglyphic. If anyone had the patience to read and examine the old Hrozny’s ‘dechipherments’ of Linear B and Protoindic script, he would find a lot of methodological similarities with the proposals of the above-mentioned authors on Phaistos disk and Cretan Hieroglyphic. None of them seems to have ever read such an important book as Enzifferung verschiedener Schriften und Sprachen (by Johannes Friedrich, Berlin 1966) and, especially, the simple but fundamental notions contained in the third chapter.

The consequences of all that on the ‘interpretations’ of the disk have been summarily pointed out by me in CM, pp. 173-175.3 Something similar may be said of the Cretan Hieroglyphic: another article of mine4 illustrates various

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1 That is subsequent to GORILA 5 and, particularly, to the overcoming of the important question of the Linear A readability, correctly put forward by Godart and Olivier (see CM, pp. 37-44, 50-59), though many (less or more reliable) interpreters have simply ignored it.

2 Substantially these authors found their assertions on mere formal coincidences (isolated words on cretulae, terms occurring in tablet headings not at all clarified by combinatorial analysis, etc.). The case of Aartun is much more amazing. See below and Negri 1996, 2001.

3 The Appendix on the Phaistos disk, from CM, is also readable on line, at the address: www.scrutinedimenticate.iulm.it

4 «Alcuni appunti sulla scrittura geroglifica cretese», forthcoming in Do-so-mo. This text can also be read on the website www.scrutinedimenticate.iulm.it

Minos 37-38, 2002-2003, pp. 89-94
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ISSN: 0544-3733
aspects of application of the combinatory method on different levels of hermeneusis of texts written in unknown or scarcely known forms of writing. The so-called ‘Cretan Hieroglyphic’ is a clear case in which it is possible to show how the method operates on the levels of the form of writing, the signs decoding, the study of morphematic and lexical elements. The full and correct application of the method is preliminary to any scientific and reliable attempt of ‘decipherment’. As to Phaistos disk and Cretan Hieroglyphic, these simple concepts are (nearly) completely forgotten by the above-mentioned ‘interpreters’, so their ‘results’ can be easily acknowledged as untenable.

Thus, even if very probably the truth is that, at the moment, a definition of the problem is impossible because of the scarcity of linguistic material, the status questionis of the identification of the Minoan language, can appear confused and uncertain, at least to non-specialists. Yet, at this point, if we ask how to distinguish reliable works (that is interesting, even if not definitive, suggestions), we may affirm that a main argument and discrimen is the consideration given to data preliminarily got from combinatory researches and analyses.

However some other hypotheses have been recently published, that seem to me worthy to be considered.

I refer to Monti 2002 and Witzczak 2000 / Witzczak-Zawiwa 2002-2003. On them I will give a commentary in the next two sections of this article.

At the end I will reserve a section to briefly comment also my personal suggestion of identification.

2. Hurrian-Urartean hypothesis

Monti 2002 (p. 120) affirms that some considerations would indicate «la possibilité que la langue du Linéaire A soit apparentée avec le hourro-urartéen».

Actually this paper is (only) based on a group of morphematic elements of the Linear A (not every identification is sure). Unfortunately no precise detail on meaning and function of these elements can be deduced from a combinatory analysis of the contexts.

So, for instance, the comparison between Min. i- / in(a)- / an(a)- and some formally similar Hurrian-Urartean elements is weakest: indeed by the same kind of reasoning we should assume, and more strongly, that Min. in(a)- and an(a)- are ‘clearly’ identifiable as Indo-European prepositions (<*en(i)* ‘in’; *an(a)* ‘on’): in the case of Minoan alternation ti-ti-ku / i-ti-tu-ni we could even recognize a term (a n-stem) regularly inflected in locative. Therefore, if Minoan were an Indo-European language with *e > i and *o > u (at least in certain contexts), we would have, approximately:

nominative ti-ti-ku [titiku(n)]
preposition locative i-ti-tu-ni [in titiku(onomy)]

Let us compare Lat. statio / in statione; Gr. meizon / en meizoni. We should expect that the proclitic preposition would be correctly written (through the Cretan syllabary) together with the word which is referred to: i-ti-tu-ni (in titikun-i).

Besides, the value of this supposed Min. / Indo-European i(i)- could be also applied to the case of da-ma-te / i-da-ma-te, words written as isolated on ritual artifacts (among which gold and silver axes). In analogy, e.g., with the in + accusative Latin construction, we could interpret them as:

nominative da-ma-te [damarte]
preposition + accusative i-da-ma-te [in damarte]

or in similar ways, identifying *Damartis (vel similia) as the Minoan name of the goddess re-interpreted by the Greeks (through a paronomasy) as Dámētēr, i.e. Demeter.

We could go on with further examples, but the truth is that substantially for all the Minoan morphematic elements recalled by Monti (a-, i-, a-n(a)), i-n(a)-, -a-, -ja-, -re-, -re, -ma, -se, -ni-ta, -ni, -me) it is positively impossible to outline the meaning or the function, neither grosso modo, combinatory data being absolutely insufficient. The only exception, that is the Minoan ‘suffix’ -ja (which < donne l’impression d’être un véritable suffixe d’appartenance>: Monti 2002, p. 119, yet this assumption is not well proved in eodem loco), could be compared with genitive or possession suffixes, not only in Hurrian-Urartean, but in other linguistic families too (e.g. Old Etruscan genitive -ia; Indo-European genitive -ā, etc.).

The problem with Monti’s paper is that the interpretation of the considered elements is not based on an analysis of combinatory data, that is the possibility to obtain, from the (con)texts of occurrence, some less or more precise details on the significatum: in fact Monti founds his assertions on mere formal coincidences. This method has not value on a scientific level, since, as we have just shown, other linguistic families (Indo-European is just an example) should be used for analyses even more convincing than that displayed by Monti.

3. Indo-European hypothesis

On the other hand, the attempts (of identification of the Minoan as an Indo-European language) developed in Witzczak 2000 and Witzczak-Zawiwa 2002-2003 are noticeable because are based on an analysis of the combinatory data: the study being above all focused on the so-called ‘libation formulae’.

Moreover the arguments are strengthened, on a cultural-linguistic level, by the search for parallels in Mycenean texts with cultural and religious content or reference. Of particular interest is the suggestion of seeking Minoan formulae or phrases translated into the Mycenean language and culture.

Even if, in several occasions, I have expressed some different hypotheses on the possible (combinatory) interpretation of the libation formulae6 (and on

5 Let us remember that these morphematic elements constitute the only data upon which Monti’s proposal is built.

6 See CM, pp. 125-132, 137-139.
important terms, like *ja-sa-sa-ra-me*, the analysis of Witzczak and Zawiase
seems to be considered with accuracy.

Nevertheless, before any discussion in details, we must clearly underline that
the basis of all these ideas is built on crucially new (in comparison with
**GORILA** readings of some important texts.

In particular, the fundamental **SY Za 2** should be now read as:

```
a-ta-i-jo-wa-ja , ja-su-ma-tu-re
u-na-ka-na-si OLEUM
a-ja
```

instead of (according to **GORILA**):

```
a-ta-i-jo-wa-ja , ja-su-ma-tu OLIVAE
u-na-ka-na-si OLEUM
a-ja
```

But, even if it is sure that the logogram for OLIVAE is used, in one case (KO **Za 1**),
as a more refined **ductus** for the similarly shaped syllabogram **re**, everyone
can see that the undoubted presence of the logogram for **OLEUM** (also transcribed,
even though unexplained, in Witzczak-Zawiase 2002-2003, p. 46; instead Witzczak
2000, p. 44 read this sign as ‘89’) makes substantially sure the reading OLIVAE in
the same text, especially considering the comparison with all the remaining
libation formulae.7 In any case, the epigraphic problems arising about such a
crucial new reading, necessary to obtain *ja-su-ma-tu-re*, a main pillar of all this
theory, are nearly ignored or, at least, inadequately considered and discussed.

Moreover, the idea (indeed borrowed from Owens 1996) that PK **Za 11** shows a sequence *i-da, pi-te-ri*8 ‘to the Father (of) Ida’ is obviously valueless,
the correct reading being *a-di-ki-te-te-[.](extereme) pi-te-ri* (cfr. also PK **Za 15**),
where the doubtful *-da* could even be read as *-re* and the preceding grapheme [*],
for the visible curved stroke, is either hardly or in no way readable as *-i* (cfr. the *-i-
of *a-ta-i*, at the beginning of the same text).

Another clearly wrong reading is *i-da-ma-ta-ra*9 in **SY Za 2**: everyone can
see, from the picture of **GORILA** 5, that, without any doubt, the correct
transliteration is *i-da-mi, ja-l* as simply noted by Godart and Olivier.

These preliminary mistakes harm the whole hypothesis. However some other
cogent objections could be drawn against the method used by Witzczak and
Zawiase in order to identify place-names in the libation formulae, in comparison
with the scheme of all the remaining texts, but I think that, at the moment, this
commentary of the matter can be sufficient.

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7 See **CM**, pp. 125-132, 137-139.
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SUPLEMENTOS A «MINOS»

5. José L. Melená: Studies on Some Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos Dealing with Textiles, 1975, 154 págs. + 3 láminas fuera de texto.

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