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TRANSLATION OF ETEOCRETAN EPIOI INSCRIPTION

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to translate the so-called EPIOI – Eteocretan inscription with the help of Old Church Slavonic and other related languages. The morphology of the inscription is the same as of the funerary inscriptions of Old Bulgarians and all the Eteocretan words have clear Slavic cognates.

Introduction

The brick fragment on which the inscription was made belonged to the private collection of S. Giamalakis. The object has height of 175 mm, width 163 mm and thickness of 48 mm. The date of its purchase and the exact place of its discovery are unknown [1].

According to Marinatos [2], p. 227, the possessor had told him that the artefact was found in the vicinity of the village of Psykhro, near the sacred cave identified by the excavators and few scholars as the Diktaian cave. Other sources point to the village of Ini as the place of finding [3].

The inscription consist of four words under which are to be seen three signs, resembling signs from Cretan Linear A and Linear B script. The alphabet of the inscription is identified as Ionian from the 3rd century BC [1]. The depiction of the artefact can be seen in **Fig. 1**.



ΕΠΙΟΙ ΖΗΘΑΝΘΗ ΕΝΕΤΗ ΠΑΡ ΣΙΦΑΙ
(in Greek letters)

EPIOI ZETHANTHE ENETE PAR SIFAI
(in Latin letters)

Figure 1. The Eteocretan EPIOI inscription

I have to mention few things about the transcription and the reading. The Greek letter **H** (*ita*) now has the sound value **I**, whereas in the antiquity its sound value was **E**. What was the sound value of **H** in the Eteocretan language (**E** or **I**) cannot be determined with certainty.

ΠΑΡ ΣΙΦΑΙ (**PAR SIFAI**) could be seen as two separated words just like Brown [3] sees it (cf. below) **ΠΑΡ** and **ΣΙΦΑΙ**, or as a single one - **ΠΑΡ ΣΙΦΑΙ**, depending on one's personal view.

A few scientists considered the inscription to be a modern fake. According to Kaldhol [4] the letter **N** was too modern and that indicated forgery. Kritzas [5] thought that the inscription is not authentic because of other reason. He claimed that he saw clear traces of modern attempts to conceal the fresh traces of the cutting of the brick, and the engraving of the stone [3].

Previous reading and interpretation

Brown [3] has made an attempt to interpret the inscription as Greek. **ΕΠΠΙΟΙ** should represent a verb in optative mood – *he, she come upon*. **ΕΝΕΘΗ** was perhaps a fem. adjective – *inserted*, or fem. noun – *pin, broche*. **ΠΑΡ** was proposed to be a Doric variant of Classical Greek **ΠΑΡΑ** – *to the side of*. **ΖΕΘΑΝΘΗ** was interpreted as a personal name – *Zethante*, perhaps theonym. **ΣΙΦΑΙ** was considered to be a personal name – *Siphias*.

According to Brown the translation from Greek should be:
May (the goddess) Zethanthe go (to be at curse) implanted in Siphias household

In personal letter to Brown, J. Chadwick [6] objected this interpretation. He pointed out that the 3 Greek words **ΕΝΕΘΗ**, **ΠΑΡ**, **ΖΕΘΑΝΘΗ** do not make good sense together. Also the Doric **ΠΑΡ**, **ΣΙΦΑΙ** do not harmonize with Attic-Ionic **ΕΝΕΘΗ** – *inserted*.

Brown [7] also presents possible Celtic and Semitic translations, but he himself calls them mistranslations - a spoof.

Discussion

I would like to bring attention on the authenticity of the artefact, which was questioned by Kaldhol and Kritzas. Kaldhol [4] considered the Letter **N** of different period than the rest. But the so called “modern” **N** could be just a local variant, since not all the types of the Greek alphabet developed at a uniform rate.

The main objection of Kritzas [5] was that the artefact displayed clear traces of modern attempts to conceal the fresh traces of cutting and engraving on the surface of the artefact. Those “traces” could indeed be recent (but unintentional). The discovery and recovery performed untrained and inept individual(s) who failed to properly catalogue the find. The lack of proper documentation is in fact evidence of their lack of expertise. Giamalakis and Marinatos (as professional scientists), however, did not question the authenticity of the object.

On the basis of Slavic morphology, i.e.: 1 – *demonstrative pronoun*, 2 – *verb*, 3 – *personal name*, 4 – *title or adjective*, I propose a comparison to a 10th century AD Old Bulgarian inscription and subsequent classification of the EPIOI inscription as Slavic: **Sǎde ležitǎ Mostič čirguboilǎ** – *Here lies Mostič čirguboil* [8], p. 289

SǎDE – *here* – dem. pronoun

LEŽITǎ – *lies* – verb

MOSTIČ – *personal name*

ČIRGUBOILǎ – *title*

The same build-up is evident in the Eteo-Cretan inscription.

EPIOI seems to be a demonstrative pronoun – **this, that (here)** related to Luwian **apa** – *that*, Hittite **apa** – *that*, Lydian **epad-** *this*, Lycian **ebei** – *here*, Vedic Sanskrit / Avestanic **ava** – *this*, O.Ch. Sl. **ovǎ** – *this*, **ovǎde** – *here*, Croat. **evo** – *here is, here are*, Serb. **ovi** – *these* and Russ. **етѣй** (etǎi) – *these*.

EPIOI isn't exactly equivalent of Slavic EVO and OVI, but the difference could be explained by the fact that we don't know what was the exact sound value of the Eteocretan letter P (Π) Perhaps it represented both P and V sound and EPIOI might be pronounced EVOI, EVI?

Let's also not forget that even if Eteocretan was a Slavic language, it was a separate one and evolved in isolation for a very long time. That would produce inevitably much deviation.

ZETHANTHE (or **ZITHANTI**) seems to be conjugation – 3 pers. pl. of the verb *to sit*: **sadanti** – *they sit* (Sanskrit), **sedatǎ** – *they sit* (O.Ch. Sl) e.t.c. In O.Ch. Sl. **sedati** means not only *to sit*, but also *to be situated at, to lay at*.

ENETE (or **ENETI**) represents the ethnonym ENETI (known also as Paphlagonians). Paphlagonians were regarded by Strabo as kin to Veneti from Galia Belgica and to the Adriatic Veneti [9], IV. 4.1.

None of the branches of the Venetic people were known as traditional inhabitants of Crete, but that doesn't mean that they didn't inhabit the island of Minos in the deep antiquity. Lycians were traditionally placed in Asia Minor, but according to Herodotus [10], I-173, Lycians lived on Crete, long before the Greeks arrived there.

Judging by the fact that Eneti (also called Veneti and Paphlagonians) were spread from Asia Minor to the Alps and to the Atlantic Ocean, it wouldn't be improbable that some of them could have reached Crete in the antiquity. Let's not forget that the Gaulish Veneti were famous seafarers and controlled important trading routes [9], IV. 4.1.

PARSIVAI could be an adjective consisting of 2 parts: **PAR** and **SIFAI**.

PAR corresponding to Sanskrit **pra** – *over, too, excessive, much*, Sanskrit **para** – *beyond, exceeding, supreme*, common Slavic **pra, pre** – *over, too, excessive, beyond*.

In Bulgarian dialects **pra** is pronounced **пѣра (pǎra)**. This variant is closer to the Eteocretan **PAR**. Eteocretan **PAR** is related also to English **OVER**, German **ÜBER** – *over, supreme*, and French **TRES-** *too, over*.

SIFAI corresponds to Sanskrit **shubha, shvita** – *shine*, Luwian **šiwat** – *day light*, common Slavic **svet** – *light*, Slovenian **sevati** – *to shine* and Thracian **ZIBI** – *noble, bright* (in **ZIBITIODES** – *noble people* [11]).

PARSIFAI (or PAR SIFAI) means in my opinion – *most illustrious (most noble ones)*. But it could also be related to Slovenian **PRISEVAJ** – *Come here bringing your shine!* The phrase isn't recorded, but in principle is possible in Slovenian [12].

I have to add something further about the last word PARSIFAI (or PAR SIFAI).

None of the cases cause a problem for the Slavic orthography. In Bulgarian language two variants are possible when we use the particle PRE – *too, excessively, over*. It could be used apart from the next word, but also “welded”:

1. **пре** много (**pre** mnogo) – *too much*
2. **преспokoйно** (**prespokoino**) – *too easy*

In Bulgarian dialect these phrases are:

1. **пъре** мъногу (**păre** mănogu) – *too much*
2. **пъреспokoйну** (**părespokoinu**) – *too easy*

New interpretation

I see few possibilities for translation of the Epioi inscription:

1. *Here lie (are buried) Eneti most noble ones.*
2. *These buried (people are) Eneti most noble ones.*
3. *These buried (are) Eneti, come (God) bring your shine (upon them)*

The function of the three signs under the inscription, however, is rather enigmatic and it is very hard to determine what exactly the signs are. Brown [7] reads the sign combination as RE-A-NJA. Duhoux [2] has various suggestions. According to him the first sign could be the Linear B sign **I**, the second sign could be the Linear B sign **ZO** and the third sign could be a developed variant of Linear B sign **SI**, but resembles also the sign from Cretan hieroglyphic script catalogued as P-20 by Evans [1].

There exist few different possibilities explaining the function of the signs:

1. The signs may have sound values of Linear B signs and the meaning would be: RE-ZO-L(?) (**rezal, razil** -*I wrote*).

In the classical Linear B the character with the sound value of LA is not known, but there were other deviating Linear scripts on Crete, one of them might have had such a sign. In antiquity, Linear Cypriote script did have a character with the sound value of **LU** [13], p. 54, resembling much the last character of the Eteocretan inscription. Many Cypriote Linear signs resembled strong Linear A and Linear B signs of Crete [13], p. 53. And on Crete there were not one, but several types of Linear script [14], p. 43.

If the three signs below the inscription represent syllables of a variant of Linear script they might form a single word. The first sign could be a deviating variant of **RE** (Lin. B), second **-ZO** (Lin. B), the third could be **LA, LU** (?) so we get: **RE-ZO-L(A, U)** – *wrote*, (corresponding to the past tense of common Slavic verb **rezati** – *to cut, to make a notch*.)

2. The signs could represent family coats of arms belonging to few (three) buried Enetic nobles. It seems that the number of the deceased people was more than one, most probably three, because the signs were three. Usually one sign was used as coat of arms

of a noble person, I'm not aware of any deviations, i.e. the use of two, or more signs for one person.

Also the ending I (E) in ENETI (ENETE) suggests more than one buried person, because it corresponds to the Slavic endings E, I, of words in plural: LJUDE_ – *people*, CARE_ – *kings*, MOMCI_ – *lads*, REKI_ – *rivers* (Blg.).

Signs strongly resembling those of the Epioi inscription were chiselled on the grave steles of the Bosporian kings. The trident was used as the coat of arms in Kievan Russia and also by the Old Bulgarians. Similar signs were used also in Northern Italy in the 10th century BC in the Villanova culture [16], p. 57. In later times that custom ceased to exist.

3. There is also a possibility that the signs on the artefact were left by ancient Iberians because the three signs from the inscription show some resemblance with Celto-Iberian letters of the 3rd century BC. The trident-like letter has the sound value of T, the arrow-like letter has the sound value of U and/or V, whereas the triangle crossed by a line has the sound value of DU [15] pp. 24-29. Celt-Iberians weren't homogenous people as the name suggests. Strabo narrates that in the beginning they were hostile to each other and waged many wars, but later they were united in one community. I think that Celts were responsible for the Celt-Iberian alphabet, judging from the similarities of that writing system with the Venetic, Lepontic and Gaulish alphabets, which were also older than the Celt-Iberian alphabet.

Because Iberians had another language, different from that of the Celts, the alphabet of the newcomers (the Celtic tribes) had to be modified (to Iberian speech) and new signs were added.

Although the resemblance to the ancient Iberian script is great, the probability that the signs were left by Iberian people is very small. The former four (five) words of the inscription are definitely not Iberian. The three signs combination of Iberian letters has sound value TUDU, which could be an ancient Iberian word, but it is very unlikely that a single Iberian word would be an equivalent to the former four (five) words from another language in order to make a bilingual inscription.

4. The last possibility I suggest for the meaning signs is that they were religious symbols having origin in the hieroglyphic script preceding the Linear scripts.

In such a case the last word from the inscription - PARSIFAI (PAR SIFAI) would correspond best to the Slovenian *PRISEVAJ* – *Come here bringing your shine!* PARSIFAI (PAR SIFAI) could have been an evocation to some solar deity.

This version seems to me the most probable one. On the tomb stone of the Old Bulgarian king Persian there were chiselled out various solar signs in the introduction and among the words of the inscription [17], p. 177.

Solar signs were chiselled also into the Steinberg inscription from 5th century BC, which appeared to be an ancient Slavic one [18], p. 179.

All three signs from the Eteocretan inscription were present in the Old Bulgarian Runic system: Nr 39 - arrow-like, Nr 42 - trident-like and Nr 68 - triangle crossed by a line (after Beshevliev [17], p. 87).

I have to mention that in the deep antiquity Venetic tribes also occupied the lands

along the lower Danube, the homeland of the Old Bulgarians [16], p. 77, whose Slavic origin was substantiated by the anthropologist M. Popov, cf. [19], p. 170.

Also, the Eteocretan signs resemble some signs from the ancient Danube script: The second sign resembles the sign DS 53 whereas the third sign resembles the sign DS 46 [20], p. 244.

Of course, the meaning of the signs remains uncertain. Unless other, similar artefacts (with letters and signs) are found, the possibilities proposed above remain just a suggestion to be considered in future work.

If we compare of Eteocretan words with Slavic ones, Lycian [21] (because Herodotus testified that once they inhabited Crete [10], I-173), Greek, and Sanskrit translations of Slavic words, Table 1, we see that the greatest resemblance is between the Eteocretan and Slavic words.

Table 1. Comparison of Eteocretan words with Slavic, Lycian Greek and Sanskrit

Eteocretan	Slavic	Greek	Lycian	Sanskrit
EPIOI	EVO – <i>this, here</i> Cr. OVI – <i>these</i> Sr. OVA – <i>this</i> O.C.Sl. ETÁI – <i>these</i> Russ.	Αυτό – <i>this, that</i>	EBE, EBEI – <i>this, that, here</i>	AVA – <i>this, that</i> ETAT – <i>this, here is, see</i>
SETHANTHE SITHANTHI	SEDETI – <i>to sit</i> C.Sl.	Κάτομαι – <i>I sit</i> Κηδεύνω – <i>to bury</i>	ISTAI – <i>to sit</i>	SADATI – <i>to sit</i>
ENETE ENETI	Eneti, Veneti, Vendi – <i>Sl. ethonym</i>			VANDAYATI- <i>to praise</i>
PAR	PRE – <i>too, excessive</i> C.Sl. PĀRE – <i>excessive</i> B.Dial.	Περ – <i>a lot</i>	PRI – <i>over</i>	PRA, PARA – <i>too, excessive, beyond</i>
SIFAI	SEVATI – <i>to shine</i> Sl.	Σαφής – <i>clear</i>	ZBALI – <i>deity, bright one</i>	SHVITA – <i>bright</i>

The Greek counterparts of the Eteocretan words are presented in Table 1 only as Indo-European cognates. Neither Brown's choice nor my choice of the Greek words is suitable to build a grammatically correct phrase, simply because the Epioi inscription was not left by Greek speaking people. The Greek language does offer distantly related words only because Greek belongs to the same language family.

On the other hand, there isn't any problem combining the Slavic words, which I propose as the corresponding ones. Of great importance is the fact that the Eteocretan SETHANTHE (SITHANTHI) is of the Satem type (like all Slavic languages) while Greek words Κάτομαι – *I sit*, and Κηδεύνω – *to bury* are of the Kentum type.

In support of the suggestion that the language of the Eteocretan Epioi inscription is Slavic, is the genetic research showing that the Slavic Macedonians (who belong to the oldest population of the Balkans) are genetically closely related to the Cretans and not to the neighbouring Greeks [22].

Conclusion

The Eteocretan Epioi inscription is most probably a funerary dedication to deceased Enetic noble (nobles), buried on Crete. Despite the fact that the function of the three signs (chiselled under the text) can not be determined with certainty, the presence of very similar signs in the runic system of the Slavic Bulgarians [8] gives more or less the right to claim connection between Eteocretans and Slavs. Further we can see that the affinity of the words from the Epioi inscription with the Slavic languages (Blg., Cz., Sl., Sr-Cr., Russ.) is remarkable, and the fact that the morphology of the Eteocretan inscription is identical to those of the Old Slavs (that of the Old Bulgarian nobleman Mostič, but also that of Old Bulgarian king Persian [17] p. 177 has also very similar build up) is one more confirmation that Eteocretan Eneti were in fact Slavic people, who still inhabited Crete at the end of the first millenium BC and weren't completely Graecised at that moment of time.

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Povzetek

Prevod eteokretskega napisa EPIOI

Podan je poskus, prevesti eteokretski napis EPIOI s pomočjo stare cerkvene slovanščine in drugih sorodnih jezikov. Zgradba napisa je taka kot pri starobolgarskih pogrebnihih napisih in vse v tem napisu prisotne eteokretske besede imajo jasne sorodnice v slovanskih jezikih.