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EVIDENCE FOR EARLY SLAVIC PRESENCE IN MINOAN CRETE

New Reading of the Linear A Inscription on the Golden Signet Ring of Mavro Spelio

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Povzetek

DOKAZ O ZGODNJI SLOVANSKI PRISOTNOSTI NA MINOJSKI KRETI Novo branje napisa na zlatem pečatnem prstanu v pisavi Linear A iz kraja Mavro Spelio

Teorija paleolitske kontinuitete ne določa natančno, kje so bila v antiki, področja Jugovzhodne Evrope dejansko poseljena s Slovani. Zato so včasih presenetljiva spoznanja, da napisi, imena plemen, krajevna in vodna imena pripisana drugim kulturam na območjih, ki niso tradicionalno priznana Slovanom, dejansko ohranjajo dokaze o starih slovanskih izvorih. Več pomembnih in različnih dejstev kaže slovansko prisotnost na Kreti v 2. tisočletju pr. Kr. Navedenim dejstvom moramo dodati raziskavo napisa na zlatem pečatnem prstanu, najdenem v grobnici IX E. 1 pokopališča Mavro Spelio, v bližini Knossosa na Kreti. Leta 1963 je Georgiev prevedel napis s pomočjo podobnosti s Hetitskim jezikom, vendar se njegovo prečrkovanje in prevod ne zdita posebej verjetna. Še novejši poskus prevoda napisa je podal Woudhuizen, kar predstavlja izboljšanje razlage Consanija. Besede napisa na zlatem pečatnem prstanu Mavro Spelio v pisavi Linear A se zdi, da imajo pomen v jeziku, slovanskih Minojskih ljudstev. Zanimivo je, da v napisu, čeprav je star približno 3500-4000 let, vse besede ustrezajo celo besedam v sedanjih slovanskih jezikih. Naša prečrkovanje in prevod potrjujeta te ugotovitve in odpirata nove poglede na antično zgodovino tega območja.

Introduction

In his paper [1], p. 134, about the Paleolithic Continuity Theory (PCT), M. Alinei sets out that the thesis of the so called late arrival of Slavs in Europe is totally absurd and “must be replaced by the scenario of Slavic continuity from Palaeolithic, and the demographic growth and geographic expansion of the Slavs can be explained, much more realistically, by the extraordinary success, continuity and stability of the Neolithic cultures of South-Eastern Europe”. However, the PCT theory does not state precisely which areas of South-Eastern Europe or outside were actually settled by the Slavs in the antiquity. Thus, it is sometime surprising to recognise that artefacts with inscriptions

attributed to other cultures [2-5], European tribe names [6], toponyms and hydronyms [6-7] in areas not traditionally admitted as settled by Slavs actually preserve evidences of their ancient Slavic origin. In this paper we intend to deal with facts supporting a Slavic presence in the ancient Minoan Crete.

Facts supporting a Slavic presence in the ancient Crete

Several relevant and different facts indicate a Slavic presence in Crete in the 2nd millennium BC.

- a) The amazing resemblance of the Cretan writings: Hieroglyphic and Linear A, B with the older Vinča, Gradeshnitsa, Karanovo culture writings. According to Georgiev [8], pp. 157-158, these last three represent Thracian-Pelasgian cultures. The identity between Thracian and Slavs is admitted by Simokates, cited by Tsenov [9], p. 14, according to whom, Slavs and Thracians are two names of one and the same people, used in different times. Moreover, Thracians, Pelasgians and Illyrians, according to Duruy [10], pp. 23-24, were three branches of one and the same ethnoses.
- b) The well archaeologically attested arrival in Crete of peoples from the Balkans (Thrace, Scythia, Illyria) in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC, Hrozny [11], p. 220. Hrozny connects the spread of the so called band pottery with Thracian migrations.
- c) The Slavic interpretation of the contents of the Cretan Linear A inscribed tablets made by Kozel'skij [12].
- d) The presence of Thracian personal names in Linear A inscriptions attested by Porozhanov citing Soesbergen [13], p. 18.
- e) The, in our opinion, Slavic ethnonym/anthroponym – **Rusa**, on the Linear A tablet HT 96 – reading by Georgiev [14], p. 40, meaning: family, and related to the Slavic ethnonyms **Ruteni/Rusini/Russians** and to the Bulgarian anthroponyms **Rod**, **Rodoslav**, all derived from Gen. Sl. verb RODITI – to give birth, having variant ДА РУДЯ in dial. Bulgarian (Plovdiv region).
- f) The, in our opinion, Slavic ethnonyms/anthroponyms: **Enetijo**, **Rusi** on Linear B tablets in the times of the Mycenaean supremacy – reading by Chadwick [15], p. 543, and later, 3rd –2nd century BC, the Slavic ethnonym **Eneti** in the Epioi inscription, reading by Serafimov [7], pp. 199-206.
- g) The name of the Cretan capital Knossos (KO-NO-SO in Linear B writing) having no meaning in Greek, but corresponding well to the Thracian word **knisa** – eroded place, attested also in the Bulgarian toponym Книшава according to Duridanov [16], p. 56. Strabo [17], X 4-8, testifies that the city was cut in two by the river Caeratus as can be seen also today by visiting the site of the Knossos palace. The root in Knossos is KAN which can be found in the Sanskrit word KANI – mine, and Old Ch. Sl. КАНАВЪ – ditch, excavated place. The hydronym Caeratus is, in our opinion, linked to the similar ancient Thracian toponym Kurpisos that was an ancient settlement in the vicinity of Chirpan, Bulgaria. According to Duridanov [16], p. 40, the root is KURP – to dig, related to the Old Ch. Sl. КЪРПАТИ: to dig, Russ. КОПАТЬ: to

- dig, Ukrainian КОПАТИ – to dig, Lith. KUPTI: to dig. Toponyms having a similar root are the Bulgarian КЪПЕЦ and the Croat KRPEC [16], p. 40.
- h) The Minoan royal symbol – the double axe widely used by the Thracians. Its most ancient name DAPURO [18], corresponding to the generally Slavic word ТОПОР – axe.
- i) A strong argument for the connection of proto-Slavs with Crete is the recent genetic research showing that the Slavic Macedonians are genetically closer to the Cretans than the Greeks are [19]. That is a clear and undisputable indication for the past presence of proto-Slavic people on Crete. Another recent genetic study [20] shows an appreciable presence of the haplogroup R1a1 in the eastern regions of Crete, especially on the Lasithi Plateau. It indicates one of the earliest genetic strata on Crete and a very close genetic relationship between the R1a1 chromosomes from the Lasithi Plateau and those from the Balkans. This genetic marker is widespread among the Slavs [21]. Some theories place the origin of R1a1 in Eastern Europe [22], which according to Alinei has been populated with Slavs since the Palaeolithic times [23].

The situation on Crete is thus in some way similar to the relation between the Indo-Aryan and Slavic populations, where the haplogroup R1a1 has been found at high frequencies in both of them, which points to a common genetic origin of a large percentage of Slavic and Indic language speakers. The Indic languages, Vedic Sanskrit in particular, and Slavic languages, show evidence of remarkable similarities as well [24-28].

The inscription on the signet of Mavro Spelio

To the above facts, we have to add the discovery of the inscribed golden signet ring found in the chamber tomb IX E. 1 of Mavro Spelio cemetery, near Knossos (Crete), described by Evans [29], p. 24, Plate XXX, V-14, which, in the time of Evans, was shown in the Museum of Heraklyon. In our opinion, Mavro Spelio reminds the Slavic “Mavrova špilja” – *Mavro's cave*.

Fig. 1 shows the layout of the inscribed signet ring. Evans [29], p. 24, classified the object as “Gold Signet-Ring”, but this appears to us merely a formal definition. In fact, the characters of the inscription are too small (approx. 2,5 – 3 mm) for being imprinted on clay and representing a recognizable sign of property. Also the inscription is too long, a single name and a title would be enough for expressing possession of goods property. Examples of this are the personal names on Linear A seals: **Mirelo** (Cr. IV 1a), **Relo** (Cr. IV 11b), **Danka** (Cr. III 2), [29], Plate XIV, and in the Linear B inscription: **oduruwijo wanakatero** – to Odyr, the king, [30], p. 210, on an amphora.

The reading direction of the inscription, along the spiral from the outside to the inside of the signet, is suggested by the orientation of the 3rd, 11th, 13th, 16th and 19th characters in said direction. The 3rd, 4th, 7th, 8th and the 16th character said direction, are unknown in Linear B but known in Linear A, so the inscription conforms to the Linear A writing. In addition, the signet itself is described by Evans [29] together with the other artefacts of the Minoan stratum.

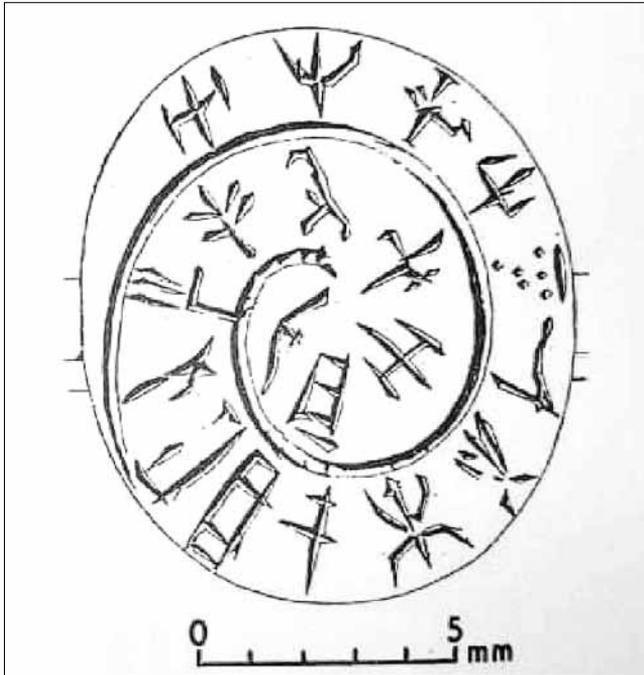


Fig. 1: inscription on the Golden signet of Mavro Spelio

Parsing and Interpretation

Georgijev

In 1963 Georgiev [14], p. 95, translated the inscription on the signet by the help of similarities with the Hittite language. His transcription is:

A-RE-NE-Ī-DI-PE2-PI-KE-PA-JA-TA-RA-NO-TE-PU-A-A-JA-KU

in continuous text:

ARENEĪDIPE2PIKEPAJATA RANOTEPUAAJAKU

which he subdivided in words as:

Are neī (n) di pe ke: paj atala(n) no(n) tepu, aa ja-ku

translated into Hittite as:

Iyarri neyanti ape pihhi: pai attalan nun tepu, aha iya-ku!

giving for it the following Latin translation:

Iarri regenti ea (sive id) do: da paternam salutem paulum, age (?) fac quidem!

which can be translated in English as:

Iarri, rule in this way, giving, give to the fathers a little greeting, do it sure!

According to Georgiev [14], p. 95:

ARE – is Hittite word Iyarri, Dat.-Loc. of Iyarri-s – god of war, bow’s master.

NEĪDI – to be read **neī (n) di**, corresponds to the Hittite **neyanti** – Dat. sing. of **neyant** – **nai, ne** – to lead.

PE2 – Hittite **ape** – Nom. acc. of **apas** – to breathe out.

PIKE – to be read **pihhe(y)** – corresponds to Hittite verb **pihi, pai** – to give.

PAJ – Hittite **pai** – give! Imp. sing.

ATARA – to be read **atala(n)** – corresponds to Hittite **attalan** Acc. sing. of attala-s – paternal.

NO – to be read **no(n)** – corresponds to Hittite nun – greet.

TEPU – corresponds to Hittite **tepu-s** – small.

AA – corresponds to Hittite aha – evocation at ritual.

JA – corresponds to Hittite iya – do, make.

KU – corresponds to the Hittite emphasizing particle.

However, the Georgiev’s [14], p. 95, transcription and translation appear not very probable. In fact, he applies phonetic values to some characters other than those generally accepted [31], Fig. 5. When he worked on the inscription, some Linear A characters were still not deciphered or their phonetic values not generally accepted. In 1963 Georgiev’s [14] had no access to the valuable information in the second edition of Chadwick [15] and to that of Packard [31], which appeared respectively in 1973 and 1974.

He established the phonetic values of the Linear A characters on the basis of the similarities with characters from Linear B. In Table I, we offer a comparison of the characters from Mavro Spelio inscription with their counterparts of Linear B.

Table 1: Comparative table of the characters from Mavro Spelio inscription and their counterparts from Linear B, line 1 Mavro Spelio characters, line 2 Linear B characters [31], Fig. 7, line 3 phonetic values of Linear B characters:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1																			
2																			
3	a	re			ta ²	ra			to	ja	ta	po	se	te	na		a	ja	ku

However, the 3rd, 4th, 7th, 8th and 16th characters belong to Linear A and their syllabic values were unknown to Georgiev [14]. Moreover, Georgiev [14] had only nine characters with accepted syllabic values: 1st = A, 2nd = RE, 8th = KE, 10th = JA, 11th = TA, 14th = TE, 17th = A, 18th = JA, 19th = KU, of nineteen. That makes his transcription and the consequent translation, although well supported by similarities with the Hittite, improbable. Georgiev [14], p. 95, assumed for the remaining characters: 3rd = NE (in fact U), 4th = I (in fact SI), 5th = DI (in fact TA), 6th = PE2 (in fact RA), 7th = PI (in fact KE), 9th = PA (in fact DE), 12th = RA (in fact PO), 13th = NO (in fact SI), 15th = PU (in fact NA), 16th = A (in fact U).

In addition, Georgiev [14], p. 95 did not answer why should the hypothetical Hittites arrived in Crete adopted Linear A, without, at least partially, using the two writings: hieroglyphic and cuneiform, they had developed. Moreover, migrations to Crete of Hittite populations or a period of Hittite dominance on the island after the defeat of the Assuwan League by the Hittite King Tudhaliyas (1430-1400 BC), Woudhuizen [32], p. 138, are not well documented, whereas the arrival in Crete of the people from the Balkans (Thrace, Scythia, Illyria) in 3rd and 2nd millennium BC, as already said, is well archaeologically attested.

Woudhuizen

Another more recent attempt of translating the inscription on the signet ring is provided by Woudhuizen [32], pp. 58-63, which represents an improvement of the interpretation of Consani [33], p. 231. His transcription is:

A-RE-NE-SI-DI-TĪ-PI-KE-PA-JA-TA-RA-NŪ-TE-E?-MU-A-JA-LU

divided into words

ARE NESIDITI PIKE PAJATA RANUTE E MUAJALU

which he translated in English as:

For Nesides: Pikes-Phaistos, Arnutes I-Ajalu (= Malia)

In this case, the signet is assumed to be a gift to Nesides (“likely a reflex of Hittite *nāšili*-Hittite” and “*primus inter pares*” [32], p. 61) of Knossos made by Pikes of Phaistos and Arnutes of Malia. However, also this transcription is questionable, because the author applies to some characters phonetic values other than those normally accepted [31], Fig. 5, and the interpretation, although well supported by Semitic, Luwian, Linear B, Cypro-Minoan, Lycian and Hittite similarities appears very questionable. In fact, for translating the inscription Woudhuizen [32], pp. 62, accepted that “the inscription starts in the lingua franca Semitic (a-re), but soon goes over to the language with which the scribe is more familiar, viz. Luwian (D sg. -tī, pronoun of the 1st person sg. e? -mu)”, i.e. the phenomenon of the code-mixing, Adams et al. [34], in Linear A. But this appears rather unusual and in contrast with the generally accepted linguistic principle that a writing is used for representing only one spoken language at the time.

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In our opinion, the phonetic value of the characters is the following:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
																			
A	RE	U	SI	TA	2	RA	KE	KE	TO	JA	TA	PO	SE	TE	NA	U	A	JA	KU

The 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 7th – 11th, 13th – 15th, 17th – 19th characters are set in agreement with [31] Fig. 5. The 3rd, 6th, 12th, 16th characters are not included in [31], Fig. 5. The 3rd and 16th characters according to [32] have phonetic value AU but we have chosen U because of the acrophony of the characters – bird, chicken with the Russian word UTKA – duck, meaning originally winged animal. The 6th, 12th character have phonetic value respectively RA and PO [32]. The 12th and 15th characters are written upside down. The reason of this could be the unusual way to write along a spiral, that has confused the writer. But they could also represent a local variant of said characters. Note that, for example, the character DE has up to 17 variants [29], Table III.

Accordingly, our transcription of the inscription is:

A-RE-U-SI-TA-RA-KE-KE-TO-JA-TA-PO-SE-TE-NA-U-A-JA-KU

which can be subdivided in words as:

Areu Sitarake Keto Jata Posetenau Ajaku

and translated in English as:

To Arei, the chief, first son of the honourable Ajak.

Concerning the subdivision in words, we have to observe:

AREU – corresponds to the generally Slavic Dative of the personal name AREI, meaning: to Arei. This anthroponym is undoubtedly Thracian [13], p. 19. Arei is the older variant of the generally Slavic (gen. Sl.) name Jarei, having also variants as **Jara**, **Jaro**, **Jarilo**, **Jarognev**, **Jaromir**, **Jaroslav**, **Jarovit**. All these names have the gen. Sl. common root **JAR/OST** – fury, rage.

SITARAKE – corresponds to the Thracian STARA – old and, of course, to the gen. Sl. STAR – old, here in the meaning of elder, chief, noble one. Note that the Old Church Slavonic (O. Ch. Sl.) word СТАПЕЦЪ means chief, commander, however, the best phonetic match to **sitarake** is the Russian (Ru.) word **старик** – old, wise person.

KETO – corresponds to Thracian KENTH – child, Old Bulgarian (O. Blg) ČENDO – child, and also modern Bulgarian (Blg.) ČEDO – child. KENTH and ČENDO are nasalized, but Linear A KETO is not. Dropping of the nasals was quite normal for words derived from Linear A, Linear B, for example: KO-RI-TO = Korinthe [13], p. 20. In our opinion KETO – son, child is related to O. Ch. Sl. verbs **načeti** – to begin, and **začeti** – to conceive a child.

JATA – corresponds to gen. Sl. **JEDIN**, **EDIN**, **ODIN** – one; here in the sense of: the first one. JATA corresponds also to Sanskrit (Sn.) ADI – first, initial.

POSETENAU corresponds to the O. Ch. Sl. ПОЧИТЬ – honour, ПОЧТЕНЪ – honourable one, as well as to the Sn. PUJITA – honoured.

AJAKU – corresponds to the Dative of the personal name AJAK. Note that AJAK(OS) was also the name of the grandfather of Achilles and according to Evans [29], p. 67 the name Achilles is a non-Greek one. The name AJAK corresponds to Blg., Ru., Slovenian (Slo.) adj. ЯК, ЯГКИЙ, ЯК – strong.

Discussion

Although all the words do have Slavic etymology the inscription cannot be defined as pure Slavic, as can be seen by comparing it with the corresponding expressions in Slo. and Ru., the most conservative languages in the Slavic family.

In modern Slo., the expression would be:

AREJU STARIJI PRVI SIN POŠTENEGA AJAKA

Here the adj. PRVI – first, precedes the noun SIN – son, whereas in the Linear A inscription the noun KETO precedes the adj. JATA, the adj. POŠTENEGO – the honourable one, is in Genitive case, while the counterpart POSITENAU has ending U indicating the Dative case, AJAKA is in Genitive case, while the counterpart AJAKU has ending typical for Dative case in O. Ch. Sl.

In modern Ru. the expression would be:

АРЕЮ СТАРИКУ ОДНОЙ (ПЕРВЫ) СЫН ПОЧТЕННОГО АЯКА

Also here the adj. ОДНОЙ (ПЕРВЫ) precedes the noun СЫН, the adj. ПОЧТЕННОГО and the name АЯКА are in Genitive case with endings corresponding to those of O. Ch. Sl., while in the inscription the endings of POSETENAU and AJAKU are corresponding rather to the Dative of O. Ch. Sl.

These deviations can be explained as peculiarities of the Slavic Minoan language beneath the Linear A writing. However, Linear A was a syllabic writing and, although the phonetic value of the characters is in some way known, it is possible that in some circumstances their phonetic value changed. For example, KU was read as KA. Otherwise, the ending of the Genitive case in the Sl. Minoan was actually different from that of the contemporary Sl. languages because of the mixing of the Thracian / Slavs migrated to Crete with local populations which lead to language changes and grammatical alterations.

The signet inscription clarifies that the signet was a gift to Arei. But, specifically, we think that the signet was a special gift for the funerary ritual as in the Thracian tradition documented by the similar rings found in the Thracian burials of Ezerovo and Trebenište [8], p. 106.

Conclusion

The Linear A words of the inscription on the signet of Mavro Spelio have meaning in a language, Sl. Minoan, belonging to the Sl. family. It is remarkable that in the inscription, although about 3500-4000 years old, all the words have very close counterparts even in the Modern Sl. languages. This linguistic evidence together with the facts mentioned above supports a Thracian / Slavic presence in the ancient Crete. Note that English has lost 85 % from its vocabulary in about 1000 years [35], p. 123.

However, said facts and signet cannot tell us, which was the kind of the Thracian /Slavic presence in Crete. The possession of a special golden ring represents however a symbol of nobility, so we can assume that at least some Thracian / Slavs belonged to the upper class.

Further details, at the moment, cannot be given. For example, it is unknown whether the ancient Thracian / Slavs as a whole, or in part, were members of the aristocracy, the warrior or the merchant classes. We know for sure only that, according to Strabo [36], V-2.3-4, the Minoan society was multi-ethnic in the second millennium BC.

We hope that further archaeological and more detailed and wider genetic researches will provide us with better information about the Slavic Minoans.

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Abstract

The Paleolithic continuity theory does not state precisely which areas of South-Eastern Europe or outside were actually settled by the Slavs in the antiquity. Thus, it is sometime surprising to recognize that artifacts with inscriptions attributed to other cultures, tribe names, toponyms and hydronyms in areas not traditionally admitted as settled by Slavs actually preserve evidences of their ancient Slavic origin. Several relevant and different facts indicate a Slavic presence in Crete in the 2nd millennium BC. To the above facts, we have to add the discovery of the inscribed golden signet ring found in the chamber tomb IX E. 1 of Mavro Spelio cemetery, near Knossos on Crete.

In 1963 Georgiev translated the inscription by the help of similarities with the Hittite language; however, his transcription and translation appear not very probable. Another more recent attempt of translating the inscription was provided by Woudhuizen, which represents an improvement of the interpretation of Consani.

The Linear A words of the inscription on the golden signet ring of Mavro Spelio appear to have meaning in a language of Slavic Minoan peoples. It is remarkable that in the inscription, although about 3500-4000 years old, all the words have very close counterparts even in the Modern Slavic languages. Our transcription and translation confirm such statements and open new regarding of ancient history in this region.