

Some notes on the grammatical structure of a verb from a Minoan incantation from London Medicine Papyrus

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Abstract

Word *sabujajəɟəɟja* from a Minoan incantation from London Medicine Papyrus is a verb of movement. Its ending: *-ja* (actually *-sha*) correlates with *-se* of Phaistos disc. This *-se* correlates with Hattic *-aš*, which correlates with Kabardinian *-ś*. Kabardinian *-ś* expresses affirmative mood, so Hattic *-aš*, *-se* of Phaistos disc, *-sha* of the incantation express alike meanings: affirmative/optative. (Previously has been found serious resemblance of Hattic verbal grammar and that of Phaistos disc idiom; also has been proved relatedness of Hattic and Kabardinian). Component *sa* of *sabujajəɟəɟja* correlates with Hattic negative prefix *šaš*. Component *bu* can be a marker of agent or a compound of agent and patient markers. The rest part of the word: *jajəɟəɟ* is left-handed triplication of *jed* that is the main root and that probably means “to approach”. In current context triplication means intensifying. Thus, *sabujajəɟəɟja* probably means “let it not to approach”.

Key words: Minoan; Kaftiw; Minoan language in Egyptian recordings; London Medicine Papyrus

1. Introduction

The London Medicine Papyrus (pic. 1) is an ancient Egyptian papyrus from British Museum. The papyrus is a collection of recipes, descriptions of magic means and incantations. First it was published by Walter Wreszinski (Wreszinski 1912). The papyrus is dated to about 1629 – 1628 BC (Friedrich et al. 2006). It contains some incantations in languages other than ancient Egyptian: in Semitic, Nubian and in so called Kaftiw/Keftiw¹ (Haider 2001: 479).

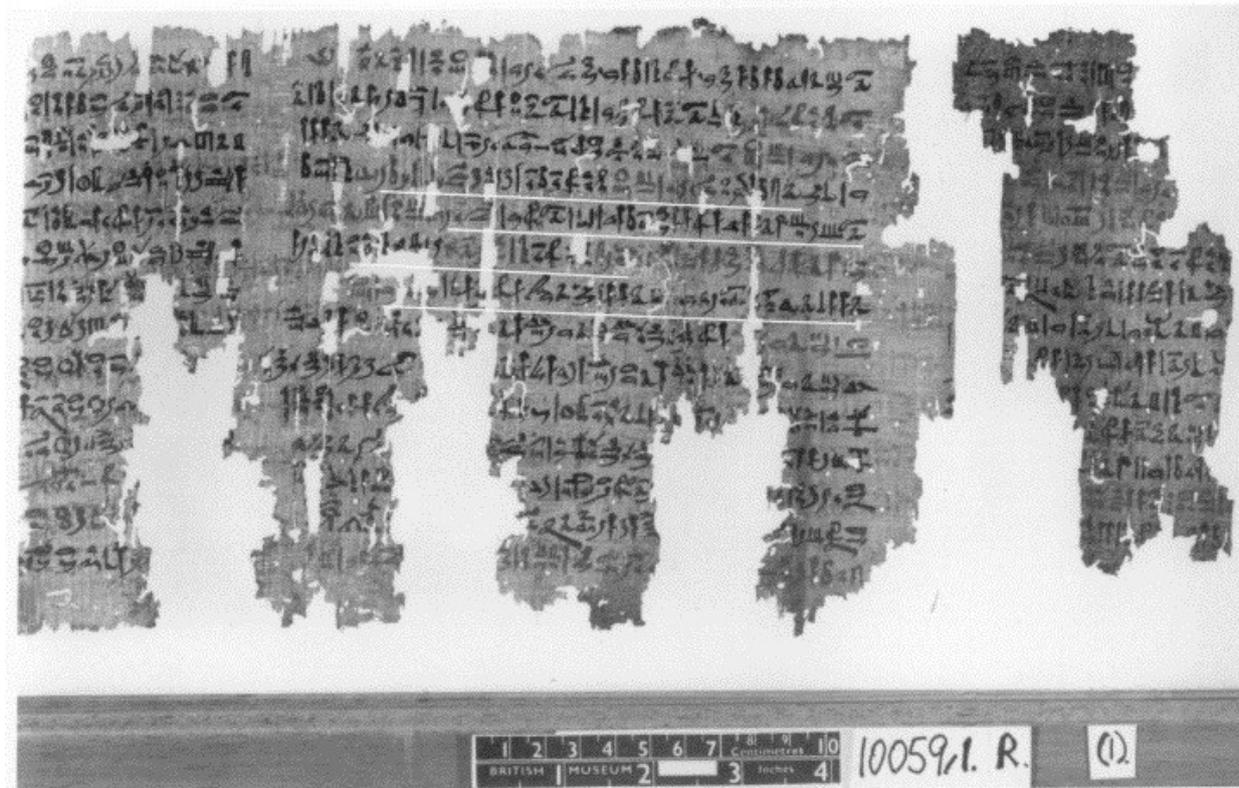
There are two Kaftiw incantations in the papyrus.

In current paper attention is paid to the incantation that is conventionally named: incantation against *samuna ubuqi*² illness. This incantation is the most interesting Minoan part of the papyrus since it contains enough words belonging to different grammatical classes/categories. The incantation is recorded by so called group-writing with the use of determinatives (pic. 2, 3), so it is possible to reconstruct original sounds; and determinatives help to see borders of words and to determine classes of words and sometimes even say something definite about lexical meaning. Thus, the text of the incantation is considered as something alike ‘Rosetta stone’ for Minoan language. However, no positive results have been received yet since attention was paid mostly to words identified as names/nouns, but not to the structure of verbs, while to conclude

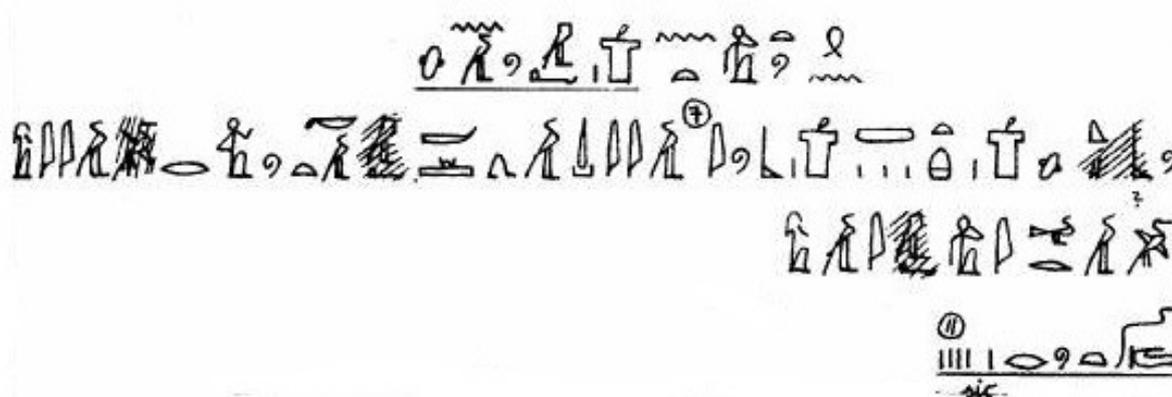
¹ Kaftiw/Keftiw (*K3fjw*) was ancient Egyptian name of Crete and Cretan people.

² The incantation is usually named “incantation against/for *samuna* illness”, however, as far as the text of incantation begin with words: *samuna* and *ubuqi* which both have determinative of “illness” I suppose that name of illness is formed by these two words and so it is more accurate to name it “incantation against *samuna ubuqi* illness”.

something about relatedness of certain languages we should compare grammatical structures of verbs (Akulov 2015).



Pic. 1. London Medical Papyrus; fragment of text with Kaftiw incantations is marked by white lines (source: Kyriakidis 2002: 215)



Pic. 2. *Samuna ubuqi* illness incantation hieroglyphs transliteration (source: Wreszinski 1912: 152)



Pic. 3. *Samuna ubuqi* illness incantation hieroglyphs transliteration (source: Kyriakidis 2002: 214)

The transliteration of the above shown hieroglyphic text is the following:

šntw ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) *nt s3m^cwn3* ^{Det.} “illness” *wbkj* ^{Det.} “illness”
s3t ^{Det.} “bread” ^{Det.} “land” (?), ^{Det.} “plurality”
s3bwj3jjd33 ^{Det.} “to go” *hwm^ck33tw* ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) *rp33jj* ^{Det.} “god”
p33 wrj ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) *m^cj3* ^{Det.} “god” *dd tw r3 4*.

And the interpretation can be the following:

Incantation against/for *s3m^cwn3* ^{Det.} “illness” *wbkj* ^{Det.} “illness” *s3t* ^{Det.} “bread” ^{Det.} “land” (?), ^{Det.} “plurality” *s3bwj3jjd33* ^{Det.} “to go” *hwm^ck33tw* ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) *rp33jj* ^{Det.} “god” *p33 wrj* ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) *m^cj3* ^{Det.} “god” to be said 4 times.

Some words within the text of incantation evidently are verbs and so analysis of their structures and meanings can be helpful in the context of concluding something more definite about Minoan language structures and its possible genetic relationship.

2. Words identified as verbs within Minoan text

There are two words which are marked by determinative A2 (number of sign according to Gardiner’s sign list) “to speak”, “to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think” (pic 4, 5), and there is a word marked by determinative D54 “walking legs” (pic. 6) that is marker of verbs of movement.



Pic. 4. Verb *hwm^ck33tw* ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”)



Pic. 5. Verb *p33wrj* ^{Det.} “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”)



Pic. 6. Verb *s3bwj3j3d33* ^{Det.} “to go”

3. Some notes on meaning and structure of *s3bwj3j3d33* verb

3.1. General notes on possible meaning of the verb

The most interesting part of the incantation is the word marked by “walking legs” determinative (pic. 6) since its meaning seem to be rather univocal in the context of incantation. Taking into consideration the fact that this is a verb of movement and that it is used within an incantation it is possible to conclude that it expresses an order to the disease “to go” or “not to approach”, or, probably, optative “let it not to approach”/ “let it not to approach”.

3.2. Notes on the structure of the verb

First of all *s3bwj3j3d33* verb should be rewritten in a more convenient form, i.e.: *sabujajəjadja* (in current context ə represents unidentified sound) despite Egyptologists will probably criticize this.

3.2.1. Affirmative mood/optative

It’s rather notable that *sabujajəjadja* has almost the same ending as words of Phaistos disc inscription identified as verbs: many of verbal forms of Phaistos disc have *-se* ending (Akulov 2016); and this *-se* seems to be correlated with *ja* ending.

The verb of Phaistos disc idiom demonstrates certain common features with that of Hattic³ language (Akulov 2016: 36 – 37).

From the other hand Hattic and Kabardinian⁴ belong to the same family/stock: Verbal Grammar Correlation Index of Hattic and Kabardinian is 0.41, such value of the index means that compared languages belong to the same family/stock⁵ (the research about relatedness of Hattic and Kabardinian is under the process of publishing now).

Ending met in verbal word forms of Phaistos disc: *-se* is correlated with Hattic *-aš* ending, that in its turn is correlated with Kabardinian *-ś* ending (in Kabardinian orthography it is written as *u*).

Despite meaning of Hattic *-aš* is actually rather unclear (Kassian 2010: 180), but as far as Hattic and Kabardinian belong to the same stock so it’s possible to say that Hattic *-aš* has alike meaning as Kabardinian *-ś* since both morphemes belong to verbal grammar and both are placed in very alike positions.

Kabardinian *-ś* expresses affirmative mood (Matasović 2010); and so Hattic *-aš* supposedly expresses something alike. And thus through Kabardinian it’s possible to say that *-se* ending of the idiom of Phaistos disc probably expresses affirmative/optative meaning.

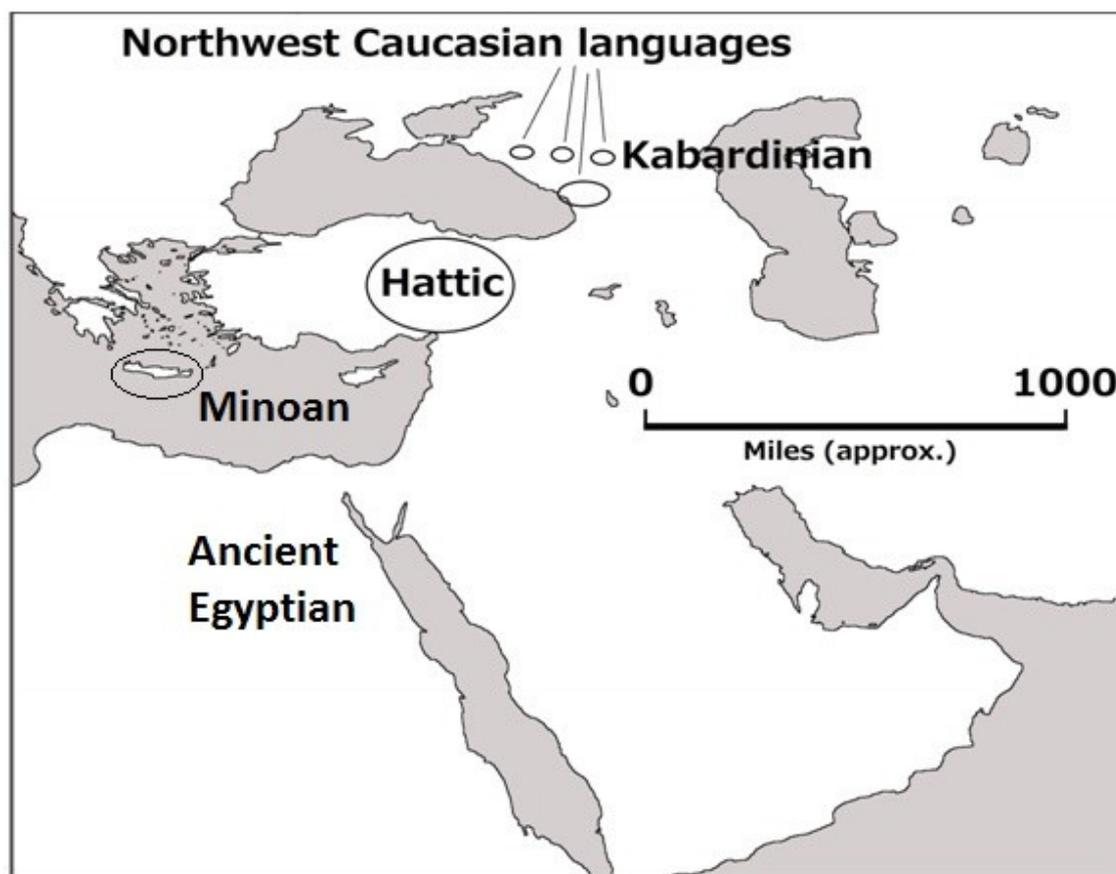
Almost the same ending can be seen in the currently considered verb of movement: *sabujajəjadja*.

³ Hattic is an extinct language spoken in Asia Minor (pic. 7) in 3rd – 2nd millennia BC. Hattic is generally considered as an isolated language.

⁴ Kabardinian is one of Northwest Caucasian languages (pic. 7).

⁵ For more details about Verbal Grammar Correlation Index see: Akulov 2015.

We should keep in mind that ancient Egyptian didn't care much about precise recording of morphemic structure of foreign words as far as they didn't care even about precise recording of sounds of foreign languages, i.e.: their task was to express approximate appearance of foreign words.



Pic. 7. Approximate location of languages mentioned in the text

That's why I suppose it's possible to separate *ja* from *dja* and to say that in current case ending of verb is *-ja*, but not *-dja*. It seems highly probable that initially this ending was *-sha*, but became *-ja* under the influence of voiced consonant ending of verbal stem, i.e.: *d*.

Also it is completely logical and natural to suppose use of verb with affirmative/optative meaning in the context of incantation.

Thus, it's highly probable that currently considered *-sha* is correlated with *-se* of Phaistos disc, with Hattic *-aš* and with Kabardinian *-š*; and that these morphemes express/duplicate⁶ affirmative/optative meanings.

Moreover, we have to keep in mind that in Minoan language definitely there were certain dialects, and so *-se* and *-sha* probably are just dialectal variants of the same morpheme.

3.2.2. Negation

Component *sa-* that is placed in terminal left position of the considered verb seems to be much alike Hattic prefix expressing negation *šaš/šeš* that also is placed in terminal left position. (Kassian 2010: 178; Akulov 2016: 36)

⁶ In Hattic, for instance, optative is normally expressed by a prefix (Kassian 2010: 179; Akulov 2016: 36)

3.2.3. Agent or agent and patient

Component *bu* that is placed in the left part of the considered word form seems to be compound of prefixes expressing agent and patient, for instance: something alike Hattic subject marker *u* and object marker *w* correspondingly (see Kassian 2010: 179; Akulov 2016: 36). Also this component *bu* can probably be simply marker of agent, for instance: *u* (see Kassian 179 – 180; Akulov 2016: 36). In certain Hattic polypersonal verbs direct object can optionally be omitted (see Kassian 2010: 180).

3.2.4. Intensification

I suppose that *jajəjad* is left-handed triplication of main root: *jed*; also this it is accompanied by alteration of vowel that takes place in the terminal left variant of the root.

Triplication may have the meaning of intensification so its usage is rather logical in the context of incantation.

Examples of reduplication can be seen in some verbs of Phaistos disc (Akulov 2016: 32).

The root of the verb, i.e.; *jed* seems to mean “approach” and so this form *sabujajəjadja* can be translated as: “let you/it not to approach [me]” or “let you/it not to approach me”.

4. Some preliminary conclusions and further perspectives

Grammatical structure of the above analyzed verb correlates well with previously made hypotheses about positional distributions of grammatical meanings of Minoan verb, with hypothesis about Minoan and Hattic relatedness, and with the fact of Hattic and Kabardinina relatedness (it has been unpublished yet).

It seems that the idiom of Phaistos disc and the idiom of the incantation from the London Medicine Papyrus are different dialects of Minoan.

More information about Minoan language can probably be got from the analysis of recordings about so called Sea Peoples since Minoan people could be among them.

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