Reconstruction of some Minoan words through signs of Phaistos disc

Alexander Akulov

independent scholar; St.Petersburg, Russia; e-mail: aynu@inbox.ru

Abstract

Some signs of Phaistos disc look like pictures of certain items/beings, i.e.: it seems that image of an item which name began with certain syllable was used to record this syllable, so it’s possible to reconstruct some words of Keftiw/Minoan language. Have been taken signs which meanings are evident and which sounds were restored through Linear A and Linear B: sign “house” – wa, sign “shield” – qe, and sign “sheep” – me. Minoan/Keftiw language seems to be a relative of Hattic, so can be said the following: Hattic wa,el – “house” correlates with the fact that Minoan/Keftiw word “house” begins with wa, Hattic kip “to protect” correlates with the fact that Minoan/Keftiw word “shield” begins with qe, Hattic memen “scream of a sheep” correlates with the fact that Minoan/Keftiw word “sheep” begins with me. Thus, it’s possible to reconstruct approximate initial view of Minoan/Keftiw words: “house” – *ware, “shield” – *qepV, “sheep” – *meme.

Keywords: Minoan language; Phaistos disc; Hattic language; comparative reconstruction

1. Introduction

Some signs of Phaistos disc inscription look much alike pictures of certain items/beings. It is rather logical to suppose that in its early stages the syllabary writing system of Phaistos disc was formed according to rebus writing principle, i.e.: image of an item which name began with certain syllable was used to record this syllable. Thus, it is possible to reconstruct approximate view of some words of Keftiw/Minoan language.

2. “House”

The sign shown in pic. 1. is conventionally named “house”/ “building”. This sign is represented once upon A side and five times upon B side (pic. 2)

Pic. 1. Sign “house”/ “building” (source Phaistos Disc)

Evans supposed that the sign depicted a house of a foreign culture and pointed on the fact that Minoans had no such buildings. He compared the sign with Lycian tombs (pic. 3) (Evans 1921: 657).
Also there is an opinion that the sign depicts a palanquin (Schachermeyr 1964; Mackay 1965: 25). However, palanquins are unknown in Minoan culture.
The sign actually represents a notable asymmetry in its lower storey: left part is open while right part is closed (pic. 1) and this is an evidence that the sign definitely depicts a building (Grumakh 1969).
Actually it is possible to suppose that initial form of the sign was pile dwelling (pic. 4) and closed right part of lower storey can be simply result of wet clay blurring.
Thus, it is supposed that the sign depicts a pile dwelling (pic. 5) that was main form of house during Neolithic/Chalcolitic period and also could be used during so called Minoan period.

Pic. 2. Drawing of Phaistos disc signs (source Phaistos Disc)

Pic. 3. Facade of a Lycian tomb from Myra (source: Festskii disk)

Pic. 4. Another variant of sign “house” (source: Phaistos Disc)
Pic. 5. A reconstruction of Neolithic settlement in the island of Crete (source: The Stone Age)

Pic. 6. Map representing locations of Crete, Lycia, Myra and the territory that was occupied by Hattians in 3\textsuperscript{rd} – 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennia BC.

Signs of the disc are rather close to those of Linear A (Duhoux 1983), so it’s possible to correlate some signs of the disc with certain signs of Linear A and then it’s possible to reconstruct phonetic meanings of certain signs through Linear A and Linear B.
Thus, it’s possible to say that in Minoan/Keftiw language word “house” begins with syllable *wa*.

Then, taking into account the fact that Minoan/Keftiw language seems to be a relative of Hattic (Akulov 2016; Akulov 2017) it’s possible to state that Hattic *wa₁el* – “house” (Soysal 2004: 320) correlates well with the fact that Minoan/Keftiw word for “house” begins with *wa*. Minoan/Keftiw word “house” probably was had the following view: *ware*.

This reconstruction is based on the following evidences:

a) Minoan/Keftiw and Hattic seem to be rather close relatives;
b) Linear B is just a continuation of Linear A, i.e.: Linear B represents generally the same set of syllables as Linear A (Packard 1974: 34, 36);
c) there are no signs for syllables with /l/ in Linear B and Linear A (Packard 1974: 34, 36), so it’s possible to conclude that Keftiw/Minoan language seems to be a language that has only /r/ phoneme and has no /l/;
d) in Linear B and Linear A there are signs for CV syllables only, and there are no signs for VC syllables (Packard 1974: 34, 36).

3. “Shield”

The sign shown in pic. 8 is conventionally named “shield”. It is supposed that the sign is image of shield.

Through comparison with corresponding sign of Linear A and Linear B it’s possible to restore sound meaning of the sign (pic. 9).

---

1 Signs of Linear B and Linear A have been numbered by John Chadwick (Chadwick 2014: IX)
2 It is possible to make such conclusion due to the following fact: there are some examples of Minoan/Keftiw phrases recorded in Egyptian papyruses and there are Egyptian determinatives in Keftiw texts, and so it’s possible to determine word classes, and positional distribution of different syllables inside verbs is much alike positional distribution of material implementation of morphemes expressing grammatical meanings inside Hattic verb, it means that languages seem to be relatives, and close resemblance of two grammatical systems means that Hattic and Keftiw/Minoan seem to belong to the same group, not just to the same family/stock.
Pic. 9. Sign “shield” with corresponding sign of Linear A and Linear B (AB78) (for more details see: Timm 2004: 208)

Keftiw/Minoan word “shield” evidently begins with *qe, and this fact correlates well with the fact that in Hattic kip “to protect” (Soysal 2004: 288).

Thus it is possible to say that Keftiw/Minoan word for “shield”/“to protect” probably had the following view: *qepV (where V is an unknown vowel).

However it should be noted that there are serious doubts in possibility of interpretation of the sign as schematic image of shield since shields of round shape seem to be unknown in Minoan culture, and main form of shield was eight shape3 (pic. 10).

Pic. 10. Image from a sealing from Knossos depicting marching warriors with shields of eight shape and spears (source: Molloy 2012: 100)

4. “Sheep”

The sign shown in pic. 11 is conventionally named “sheep”.

3 B. P. C. Molloy says: “For the main palace periods of Crete (1900 – 1450 BC) all of the art indicates body shields of various forms. The figure of shield of eight form probably remained an iconic symbol into the later fourteenth century, but we have little art to tell us what was being used in combat at that point. So without evidence for any form of shields, it is difficult to say. Presumably they did use round shields like the rest of the Aegean by that time, but the evidence is not so clear” (personal communication October 18, 2017)
Pic. 11. Sign “sheep” (source: Phaistos Disc)

Through comparison with corresponding sign of Linear A and Linear B it’s possible to restore sound meaning of the sign (pic. 12)


The sign evidently is image of head of sheep, so it’s possible to say that in Keftiu/Minoan language word “sheep” began with me. This fact correlates well with the fact that in Hattic memen means “scream of sheep” (Soysal 2004: 294). Thus it is possible to say that Keftiu/Minoan word “sheep” probably had the following view: *meme.

It seems rather obvious that in both languages word “sheep” is onomatopoeia.

5. Preliminary conclusions

The fact that Keftiu/Minoan language and Hattic show certain correlations of lexical items beside previously shown correlation of their grammatical systems is very noteworthy. The most trustworthy lexical correlation of above shown is that of word “house”/“building”, however, the rest are also noteworthy. It seems that later can be discovered other lexical correlations between these two languages. Also should be noted that above described facts are evidences of Minoans connection with Anatolian cultures.

References


Akulov A. 2016. The idiom of Phaistos disc seems to be a relative of Hattic language. Cultural Anthropology and Ethnosemiotics, Vol 2, № 4; pp.: 28 – 39

Chadwick Jh. 2014. The Decipherment of Linear B. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge

Evans A. 1921. *The Palace of Minos: a comparative account of the successive stages of the
early Cretan civilization as illustrated by the discoveries at Knossos (Vol. 1): The Neolithic and
Early and Middle Minoan Ages.* Macmillan, London

Festskii disk  [Фестский диск] (The Phaistos disc)

Grumakh E. [Грумах Э.] (Grumach E.) 1968. К происхождению фестского диска [К
происхождению Фестского диска] (On the origin of Phaistos disc). *Vestnik drevnej istorii*
[Вестник древней истории] (Journal of Ancient History), 1968 № 2, pp.: 14 – 28

Mackay A. 1965. On the Type-Font of the Phaistos Disc Statistical Methods in. Linguistics IV.
1965

Molloy. B.P.C. 2012. Martial Minoans? War as social process, practice and event in bronze age

London


October 2017

*Indogermanische Forschungen* (109), pp.: 204 – 231