The etymology of the name Maya – a Minoan deity from the London Medical Papyrus

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Abstract
The Kaftiw spell against samauna disease from the London Medical papyrus contains two names of deities: Erupa and Maya. Minoan Maya definitely is connected with Maia of the ancient Greek mythology. Maia of the ancient Greek mythology is the oldest of seven Pleiades, and Pleiades were connected with seafaring. The ancient Greek myth preserved the key points of Minoan mythology: the name of the deity, and the connection of Maya with Pleiades and with navigation. Previously it was shown that the Kaftiw spells from the London Medical papyrus can be decoded through Hattic, so it is perspective to look for Hattic analogues of the name Maya. In the Hattic language there is such a word as mai(u) – “expensive fabric”, “linen”. In ancient times in the Mediterranean region linen was the main material for producing sails. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the name Maya originally means “sail”.

Keywords: Minoan religion; Minoan language; Minoan Crete; Kaftiw; Keftiu; London Medical Papyrus

1. Introduction
In the London Medical papyrus there are two spells against diseases in the Kaftiw/Minoan language\(^1\). One spell is against Asiatic, or Canaan, or āmu disease that is identified as tularemia (Trevisanato 2007), and another is against samauna disease, that is generally identified as mycetoma (Kinnier Wilson 1994), however, it is possible to say that different diseases with somewhat similar symptoms could be combined under the name samauna: mycetoma and ergotism (Akulov 2023: 5 – 6). Previously both spells were considered in special papers, and it was shown that the Hattic language can be immediately used for decoding the texts of both spells, i.e.: the Kaftiw/Minoan language can be considered as a variant/dialect of Hattic (Akulov 2021, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

The text of the spell is shown in Fig. 1. Elements 6 – 10 of the original text is the spell in the Kaftiw/Minoan language; elements 1 – 5 and 11 are explanations in Ancient Egyptian language.

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\(^1\) Some scholars believe that the London Medical Papyrus contains only one spell in the Kaftiw/Minoan language, and that the spell against samauna disease is not an example of the Minoan language. Such conclusions are reached on the basis that in the text of the spell against samauna disease it is not marked that this spell is in the Kaftiw language, there is no word Kaftiw with the determinative “foreign country”. However, this point of view is erroneous (for more details, see Akulov 2023: 2 – 3).
The transliteration of the text is the following:

\[\text{snt} \text{ Det. } \text{“to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) (1)} \text{ nt} \text{ (2)} \text{ s3mwn3} \text{ Det. “illness” (3)} \text{ wbk} \text{ Det. “illness” (4)} \text{ snt} \text{ Det. “bread” Det. “land” Det. “plurality” (5)} \text{ s3bw3yd3} \text{ Det. “to go” (6)} \text{ hvmk3tw} \text{ Det. “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) (7)} \text{ rp3y} \text{ Det. “seated god” (8)} \text{ p3bw3y} \text{ Det. “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) (9)} \text{ m3y} \text{ Det. “seated god” (10)} \text{ d3 tw r3} \text{ 4 (11)}.\]

Fig. 1. The text of the spell (Ancient Egyptian text was drawn after Wreszinski 1912)

The translation of the text of the spell is the following:

a spell (1) about/against (2) samauna (3) illness (4) [that is] spread [through] grain [and through] soil (5), the spell in the Kaftiw/Minoan language (6 – 10), this [spell] to be said 4 times (11).

The original view of the Kaftiw spell is the following:

\[\text{sa-bu-ja-ja-d3a(1) hun-ma-katu(2) Erupa-j(3) pa-u-rej(4) Maja(5)}\text{ NEG-2sgag-approach(REDUPL)-OPT(1) 2sgag-1sgpt-protect with magic means(2) Erupa-ERG(3) 1sgag-2sgpt-call(?) (4) Maya ABS(5).}\]

The literary translation of this phrase is:

may you not approach me(1) you protect me with magic means(2) Erupa (3) I call(?) you(4) Maya (5) (for more details about interpretation of the Kaftiw/Minoan text of the spell see Akulov 2023).

The spell against samauna contains two names of deities: Erupa and Maya.

The etymology of the name Erupa has been considered in a special paper (Akulov 2017b), and the current paper is about the etymology of the name Maya.
2. The correct reading of the name of the deity

The recording of the name Maya in the papyrus has a completely unambiguous reading (Fig.2): $m\text{"y}\text{3}$. According to Gardiner’s sign list numbers of signs are the following: G17, D36, M17, G1. However, in some publications a completely incorrect reading of the name can be seen.

![Determinative](image)

**Fig. 2.** The name Maya ($m\text{"y}\text{3}$) as it is written in the text of the papyrus

For instance, Peter W. Haider reads the name in a completely wrong way: he reads the signs shown in Fig. 2 as Ameja/Amija (Haider 2001: 480). Such way of reading is nothing else, but an amateurish fantasy, it isn’t reading of the signs, but ascribing a certain invented reading to them.

Here should be taken into account the fact that the ancient Egyptian writing system implements vowels in a very inconsistent way: the vowels [a], [i], [u] were expressed the best way, while the sounds [e] and [o] were not expressed at all.

The name shown in Fig. 2 can’t be read as Ameja/Amija: if there was an [a] sound in the beginning, then the ancient Egyptian scribe, who wrote down the spell, would mark it, i.e.: it is completely unrealistic that initial [a] (if it would really have existed) would be omitted in the recording. Also, according to Haider, the vowel that stands after [m] is [e] or even [i] that harshly contradicts the ancient Egyptian recording, the D36 sign is read as $\text{3}$ that is close to [a], but not to [e] or [i]. If the name of the deity really would be Ameja/Amija it would have been written in a completely distinct way (see Fig. 3).

![Ancient Egyptian Signs](image)

**Fig.3.** If the name of the deity would be Ameja/Amija it would be written this way by the ancient Egyptian signs
The reading offered by Haider isn’t an accurate reading of the original signs, but ascribing a certain invented reading to the signs expressing the name. And, thus, the name of the deity shown in Fig. 2 should be read only as Maya (m₃’y’š’).

3. The interpretation of the original meaning of the name

Previously it was noted that Maya mentioned in the Kaftiw spell against samauna disease can be correlated with Maia of ancient Greek mythology.

Maia of the ancient Greek mythology is the oldest of seven Pleiades. Pleiades were connected with seafaring, since the season of navigation in the Mediterranean region began with the heliacal rising of the constellation² (see Akulov 2017a: 15 – 16).

Here it should be noted that although mythology cannot be used as a source of information about real historical events and as a source about the origins or migrations of certain nations, but mythology can be used as a source of information about beliefs/ideas, as a source of information about deities.

The ancient Greek myth definitely preserved the key points of the more ancient Minoan mythology: firstly, the very name of the deity, and, secondly, the connection of Maya with Pleiades and, accordingly, the connection with navigation. And the main idea of the original Minoan myth was developed by the Greeks with new details: appeared the idea about the seven sisters Pleiades and the idea about the origin of Pleiades from Pleione.

Kaftiw/Minoan Maya could be a protector of sailors; the use of the name Maya in an incantation against a disease is completely logical since seafaring was very important of Minoan people, and so a deity that was protector of sailors evidently was considered as a mighty one and could also be an effective protector against other troubles.

Previously it was shown that the Hattic language can be directly used to decipher the Kaftiw spells from the London Medical Papyrus, which means that the Kaftiw/Minoan language appears to be a very close relative of the Hattic language. And thus, it seems promising to look for analogues of the word Maya in the Hattic language.

If we turn to the dictionary of the Hattic language compiled by O. Soysal, we can see in it such a word as mai(u) – “expensive fabric”, “linen” (Soysal 2004: 294). In ancient times in the Mediterranean region, flax was one of the main materials for the production of fabric for sails. The concept of sail and the concept of navigation are closely related in modern languages, see, for example, the English word sail, that has such meanings as “to sail”, “to navigate”. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the name Maya originally means simply “sail”.

²The name of Pleiades has been derived not from the name of their mother Pleione, but from the ancient Greek verb πλεῖσθαι “to sail”. The idea that Pleiades has been derived from the name of Pleione is nothing else, but a very naïve attempt to explain the origin of the name, and actually it is nothing else, but so-called folk etymology (Hard 2004: 518).
References


