Some refinements of the interpretation of the spell against samauna disease from the London Medical Papyrus

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Abstract

In the London Medical papyrus there are two spells in the Kaftiw/Minoan language. The spell against samauna disease is a spell in the Kaftiw/Minoan language: this spell comes immediately after the spell that is in the Kaftiw language, and in the text of the spell against samauna disease there is no indication of what language it is in. If the spell against samauna would be not in Ancient Egyptian and not in Kaftiw/Minoan, but in some third language, then it would be marked in the Egyptian text. Thus, the spell is in Kaftiw/Minoan. The name of the disease should be transliterated as sAmawnA, not sAmwnA as it was done previously. In the word sAbwyAyDAA there is a reduplication of the root, not triplication as it was supposed previously. It is possible to say that different diseases with somewhat similar symptoms were combined under the name samauna: mycetoma and ergotism.

Keywords: 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. 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). 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). Previously in the text of the spell against samauna there were some dim issues, and now these dim issues have been clarified.

The word samauna originated from Akkadian sāmānu that was derived from Akkadian root sāmu “red”, sāmānu literally means “someone red” (Beck 2020: 24). Usual manifestations of mycetoma are swellings and boils of red color, and usually the skin itself in the affected area is also bright red color.

The word samauna originated from Akkadian sāmānu that was derived from Akkadian root sāmu “red”, sāmānu literally means “someone red” (Beck 2020: 24). Usual manifestations of mycetoma are swellings and boils of red color, and also the skin itself in the affected area is of bright red color, so the Akkadian name of the disease precisely reflects this feature of the disease.
2. Why the spell against samauna disease is in the Kaftiw/Minoan language?

It is interesting to note that 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 were made 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.

Firstly, Susanne Beck, notes that the spell against samauna disease from the London Medical Papyrus is in some foreign language, but does not specify which one (Beck 2018: 15), this point is quite strange, considering that Beck knows the Near Eastern material well, and it would be interesting and useful to point out the Near Eastern original of the ancient Egyptian spell. Secondly, the spell against samauna disease comes immediately after the first spell, and the text of the first spell contains a direct indication that this is a spell in the Keaftiw/Minoan language (see Akulov 2021).

Thus, we have the following: the spell against samauna disease is not in the Ancient Egyptian language, and, at the same time, this spell comes immediately after the spell, the text of which contains a direct indication that it is in the Kaftiw language, and in the text of the spell against samauna disease there is no indication of what language it is in. If the spell against samauna disease was not in Ancient Egyptian and not in Kaftiw/Minoan, but in some third language, then the Egyptian scribe who wrote it down would certainly have indicated this point. However, nothing of the kind can be seen. And therefore, the most logical conclusion in this case is that the spell against samauna disease is also in Kaftiw/Minoan. Most likely, the person who wrote down the Kaftiw spells, believed that it was not necessary to designate the language of the spell against samauna, since the spell against samauna is in a foreign language, and since it stands next to another spell in which there is a direct reference to the language of Kaftiw, so people will not be tangled and will understand that the spell against samauna is also in the Kaftiw/Minoan language.

3. Refining the transliteration

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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{snt} & \text{ Det. “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) (1)} \\
\text{nt} & \text{ (2)} \\
\text{s3mwn3} & \text{ Det. “illness” (3)} \\
\text{wbky} & \text{ Det. “illness” (4)} \\
\text{s3lw3yd3} & \text{ Det. “to go” (6)} \\
\text{hw3kw3ktw} & \text{ Det. “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) (7)} \\
\text{rp3ly} & \text{ Det. “seated god” (8)} \\
\text{p3lwry} & \text{ Det. “to speak” (“to eat”/ “to drink”, “to think”) (9)} \\
\text{m3yw3} & \text{ Det. “seated god” (10)} \\
\text{dd tw r3 4} & \text{ 11).}
\end{align*}
\]

The main refinements over here are the following:
1) it is more correct to transliterate the name of the disease as \text{s3mwn3}, not \text{s3mwn3} as it was done previously;
2) in the word $\text{sabhwydyd}$ there is a reduplication of the root, nor triplication as it was supposed previously.

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

4. Refining the translation

The renewed translation 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 word $\text{wbqy}$ was left untranslated in previous interpretations since it isn’t represented in dictionaries, but now it is clear that this word can be correlated with the word $\text{wbnw}$ “wound”, “injury”, “harm”, “damage”. This word $\text{wbnw}$ is written with the determinative “liquid issuing from lips” (sign D26 according to Gardiner’s list) that has the following meanings: “spit”, “to spit”, “to vomit”, “blood” (see Fig. 2).
And thus, it is possible to say that the word $\text{wbqy}$ is a kind of dialectal version of the word $\text{wbnw}$, or a derivative of the word $\text{wbnw}$, i.e.: it is possible to translate $\text{wbqy}$ as “disease”, “illness” or “injury”.

The word $\text{sAt}$ was left untranslated in previous interpretations, but now it is quite clear that this word is linked with the word $\text{sAtwspy}$ that means “to go”, “to travel” (see Fig. 3), and it is possible to state that the word $\text{sAt}$ expresses the meanings of motion. And, thus, the fragment $\text{sAt Det. “bread” Det. “land” Det. “plurality”}$ designates that the samauna disease travels/spreads through bread/grain and through land/soil. The determinative of plurality can mean that the disease spreads by different ways, or can probably express the idea of abstractness, i.e.: can express that goes/travels not a being/thing, but something ephemeral (a disease).
The original view of the Kaftiw spell is the following:

\[ sa\text{-}bu\text{-}ja\text{-}ja\text{-}dʒa(1)\ \text{hun\text{-}ma\text{-}katu(2)\ \text{Erupa\text{-}j}(3)\ \text{pa\text{-}u\text{-}rej}(4)\ \text{Maja}(5)\]

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\(^1\)(3) I call(?) you(4) Maya\(^2\)(5) (for more details about interpretation of the Kaftiw/Minoan text of the spell see Akulov 2017b, 2017c).

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Fig. 2. The word \( wbnw \)

\[ wbnw \]

determinative
"spit", "to spit",
"to vomit", "blood"

Fig. 3. The word \( sʒtwspj \)

\[ sʒtwspj \]

determinative
"motion"

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\(^1\) Erupa is a name of a deity (for more details see: Akulov 2017b).

\(^2\) Maya is a name of a deity (for more details see: Akulov 2017a).
And in the very end of the text is the recommendation in Ancient Egyptian: this [spell] to be said 4 times (11).

5. Understanding the character of the samauna disease

There is reason to believe that different diseases with somewhat similar symptoms could be combined under the name samauna: mycetoma and ergotism. In the Egyptian explanation preceding the text of the spell it is said that the samauna disease is spread not only through the soil, but also through bread/grain, poisoning by ergot can lead to gangrene of the limbs, and it is somehow alike to mycetoma.

References


