GREEK LANGUAGE IN MINOAN ART:
A NEW METHOD OF LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION

Yurii Mosenkis

Greek language in Minoan art:  
A new method of linguistic interpretation

У р ечка мова у міноїському мистецтві: 
новий метод лінгвістичної інтерпретації

Юрій Мосенкіс

Статтю присвячено проблемі віддзеркалення мови в творах мистецтва, міфах та обрядах. Показано, що мова митця впливає на риси його твору – останній певною мірою виступає результатом перекодування мовних знаків на мистецькі символи. Лінгвістична паралель до запропонованого підходу – теорія мовної відносності або гіпотеза Е. Сепіра-Б. Уорфа, що демонструє вплив мовного членування світу на мислення носіїв мови. Реконструючи цей процес, отримуємо можливість ідентифікувати мову творців певних творів мистецтва, міфів та обрядів. Наведено приклади, коли зв'язок певних елементів твору мистецтва може бути пояснений завдяки схожості (омонімії) назв цих елементів у певній мові, однак не в іншій – саме та мова виявляється мовою митця. Використання схожості корелює з принципом омонімії як одним із чільних у формуванні ієрогліфічного письма – абстрактні поняття позначають близькими за звучанням найменуваннями поняття конкретних. Цей принцип використовують при дешифруванні найдавнішого (малюнкового доклинописного) шумерського письма – абстрактні поняття позначають близькими за звучанням найменуваннями поняття конкретних. Цей принцип використовують при дешифруванні найдавнішого (малюнкового доклинописного) шумерського письма – абстрактні поняття позначають близькими за звучанням найменуваннями поняття конкретних. 

Ключові слова: грецька мова, міноїське мистецтво, лінійне письмо А, лінгвістична інтерпретація, міфологія.

TEXT AND IMAGE: ESSENTIAL PROBLEMS IN ART HISTORY. 2018. 1(5) | 43
Hieroglyphic writing was preceded by ‘hieroglyphic way of thinking’ which influenced arts as well as myths and rites. E. g., Ancient Egyptians linked an animal to a god if their names were similar. The usage of homophony to create double senses is well-known in Japan poetry. Japan symbol of the Emperor’s Chrysanthemum Throne is based on the homonymy of koku ‘chrysanthemum’ and ‘state’. In the first full moon of a year Koreans visited bridges because the words for the moon, bridge, and foot are homonyms (tari) in Korean. Famous concept of the Blue Bird might be ultimately traced to Old Iranian (Avestan) homonymy of Saēnō (mythical bird of prey, Sanskrit śyenah is the same) and axšaena ‘dark blue’ (e. g., as the name of the Black Sea). Another famous concept of the Blue Flower might be related to German blau Blum ‘blue flower’ Swan Song might reflect a common Germanic association: Proto-Germanic *swanaz ‘swan’, literally ‘singer’, and *sangwaz ‘song’. Cucuteni-Trypillian vessels for cereals, decorated with pictures of cat with tail looking like ear of corn, might reflect homonymy of *kat ‘vessel’, ‘cereal’, and ‘cat’.

Many motifs of ancient Greek myths and art were language-addicted. In other words, myths and rites enable to propose the ‘language interpretation of myth, rite, and art’ method: searching of homophones give a chance to identify a language in with words compared. The method is proposed and defended by the present author (Мосенкіс 2001; Мосенкіс 2002).

E. g., after the flood, Deucallion and Pyrrha cast stones (laai) to create peoples (laoi).

Participants of the Eleusinian mysteries throw piglets into a trench to imitate Persephone in the underworld because the name of Persephone (Περσεφόνη) was interpreted as ‘killer of pigs’ (‘Pelasgian’ *pors- ‘pig’, Greek -φονία ‘murder’). Meat of pig was prohibited in Cretan Πραίσος (Athen. F 376a) which name is very similar to the aforementioned name of piglet.

When Athenian prince Theseus was initiated in the Cretan labyrinth, his father Aegeus as an ‘old king’ must have been sacrificed (according to the J. G. Frazer theory). A form of the sacrifice was determined by a relation of Αἰγεύς with αἴξ ‘goat’ and ‘waves’. The famous paradox of Achilles and a tortoise might tie homonyms Ἀχιλλεύς and χέλυς ‘tortoise’. The paradox has an astronomical link: the constellation of Sagittarius (Achilles; his tutor Chiron and divine protector Apollon are also linked to the constellation) rises immediately after the constellation of Ophiuchos (looking like a tortoise): Sagittarius-Achilles ‘chases’ Ophiuchos-tortoise.

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3. Decoding Minoan art

The language of Minoan art is identified as Greek due to homophony. First, there is τρόπις ‘ship’ as a homonym of τροπὴ ‘solstice, equinox’ in Ancient Greek.
The Minoan lunisolar calendar (MMIa period, about 2000 BC – PM II, pt. 1, p. 202, fig. 111; Ridderstad) includes 13 lunar months (13 external spirals) and 4 main solar points (depicted as a crosses and ships near them) with 3 months between each two cross-ship pairs. Signs for solstices and equinoxes (Greek τροπή, ‘the turn’) depicted as ships (Greek τρόπις, ‘keel’ and ‘ship’) and reflected Greek homonymy. Both these words are derived from τρέπω, ‘turn’ of Indo-European (not of pre-Greek substrate) origin: from Indo-European *trep- (Beekes, pp. 1503–1504).

Second, Σκύλλη ‘Scylla’, σκύλαξ ‘young dog’ are homonyms of σκύλιον ‘dog-fish’.

The Minoan picture of dog-headed Scylla (a clay seal-impression of the MMIII period from Knossos, about 1600 BC – PM I, p. 698; see also: Cook, A. B., 1940, vol. III, pt. 1, p. 414) reflected the similarity of the words Σκύλλη and σκύλαξ, ‘young dog, puppy’ in Greek. Homeric Scylla (Σκύλλη) whimpers like a young dog, puppy (σκύλαξ): ἐνθὰ δ’ ἐνὶ Σκύλλῃ ναίει δεινὸν λελακυῖα. // τῆς ἦ τοι φωνὴ μὲν ὅση σκύλακος νεογιλῆς. (Od. 12.85-86). The word σκύλαξ is of Indo-European (not of substrate) origin: Russian skulit’, skolit’ ‘to whimper’ (Slavic-Baltic-Germanic word, cf. Old Norse skoll, ‘barking’ etc.) are cognates. Greek σκύλιον, ‘dog-fish’ (Aristotle) is a natural explanation of the mythical image of Scylla. Later the name of Scylla might be associated with the name of Sicily¹.

4. Other examples of the Greek language in Minoan myths and art

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of a concept</th>
<th>Homonym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lunar-shaped Cycladic ‘frying pan’ with lunar symbols²; ἄττανα: τήγανα ‘frying-pan’ (Hesych.)</td>
<td>Αδάνα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cretan ‘horns of consecration’ cult³; κέρας, ‘horn’ dual. κέρατε.⁴</td>
<td>Κρήτη &lt; κράτος, Ep., Ion. κάρτος, Aeol. κρέτας, ‘strength, might, power’; Καίρατος, a name of a river near Knossos and another name of Knossos; Keratas Mountain near Viannos (a place of the cult of Zeus in classical Crete – Watrous, L. V., p. 400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cretan bull cult; κάρτη· τὴν βοῦν. Κρήτες (Hesych.); Eleusinian drink (κυκεών), made from barley (κριθή, ‘barley’)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹ Pictures of calendar and Scylla are drawings by L. Shkrobanets from (Ridderstad).
² Ch. Johnsen kindly informed me that these ‘frying pans’ might be compasses (Hill, G. E. 2014).
³ The symbol is traditionally compared with Egyptian ṣw, ‘mountain’. Cretan New Palaces (from about 1700 BCE) were oriented to double-peaked mountains which were possible natural prototypes of cult horns (cf. Egyptian depiction of horizon as a double mountain).
⁴ Semitic karn as well as Georgian rka, Megrel kra might be derived from Indo-European ker-n-, ‘horn’.
'Poppy Goddess' of the Mycenaean period (PM II 1, p. 341); μῆκων, Dor., Arc. μάκων, ‘poppy’

‘Griffins guarded the gypsum throne’ in the palace of Knossos (PM IV 2, p. 915); γύψος ‘gypsum’; γρύψ ‘griffin’ and ‘a bird of prey’/γυψ ‘vulture’

Fore-part of the goddess’ boat takes a form of hippocampus’ head on the ‘ring of Minos’ and gold signet-ring from Mochlos (PM IV 2, pp. 951–952); κάμπη ‘caterpillar’, κάμπος ‘a sea-monster’, ἵπποκάμπος ‘monster with horse’s body and fish’s tail, on which the sea-gods rode’, ‘a small fish, the sea-horse’

A girl with a spiral shell from the Idaean Cave (PM I, p. 222; PM IV 1, p. 210); κόχλος ‘shell-fish with a spiral shell’

'Lion’s head facing, surmounted by the sacred fleur-de-lis’ (SM I, p. 209, cf. p. 214); λείριον, ‘lily’

δόρος: Κρήτης τό δόρος (Hesych.)

Newborn Zeus was nurtured by bees in a Cretan cave (Ant. Lib. 19); μέλιττα, ‘bee’

Inhabitants of Elysion hunt deer (Ανδρέεβ, c. 519); ἑλλός ‘deer’

5. The Greek language in Cretan hieroglyphic art

Cretan princess Ariadne, a daughter of mighty king Minos, is well known from the myth of Theseus and Minotaur. She helped Athenian prince to fight a monstrous foe in the labyrinth. The name of the princess is now found among Minoan hieroglyphs (SM I, p. 135).

The proposed translation: Cret. Hier. ποδός-νε κυνός ἄραχνη (SM I, 135) = πότνια Κνώσια Αρι-ἄγνη, i. e. Potnia(i) anassa(i) Ariadna(i), ‘(for) Mistress Queen Ariadne’.

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<th>Reading</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>πούς, gen. ποδός ‘foot’ + syllabic sign ja</td>
<td>πότνια ‘mistress’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>κυνός ‘dog’ / ύανα ‘hyena’</td>
<td>Κνώσια ‘of Knossos’ / Φάνασσα ‘queen(-goddess)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>ἄραχνη ‘spider’</td>
<td>Αρι-ἀγνη, Αρι-άδνη</td>
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Not Venus, but Ariadne (as the ‘Lady of the Labyrinth’ in Linear B) was a lunar goddess. Her cult was related to the observation of the 18.6-year high-low Moon period, cf. twenty or rather nineteen years of Helen in Troy. D. V. Panchenko linked Theseus from Troizen with the Trojan myth whereas the labyrinth is named ‘Troy’ in Etruscan and Scandinavian art. Helen (= Selene ‘Moon’) was hidden in Troy as Ariadne – in labyrinth. Spider’s net might symbolize the same labyrinth. Suggested parallels in the Ramayana might be not only of Indo-European but also of contact origin: cf. the Sea Peoples of Yavana, Turvasha and perhaps Danava and Bhrigu in India. Stolen Sita, imprisoned in the world center, is clearly linked with Greek sitos ‘bread’; astronomical symbols of the fall of Troy are related to the Virgo constellation, including Spica ‘ear of corn’. The constellation is located near the center of celestial equator.

Knossian Ariadne was mentioned by Homer (Iliad 18.591).

Conclusion

The proposed method can be used to identify the language of a painter, a creator of myth, or a participant of a rite. Homonyms, interpreted as magic ones in mythological way of thinking, represented a background for many features of architecture, art, rites, myths, and other cultural manifestations of different ancient peoples. Using the method, one may propose hypotheses about linguistic attribution of archaeological cultures.

Abbreviations

Greek language in Minoan art:
A new method of linguistic interpretation

The proposed method of the ‘linguistic interpretation of arts, myths, and rites’ gives us a possibility to identify a language of archaeological cultures, which writing is not known or not deciphered. Minoan art, depended on the Greek language, confirmed the hypothesis of Greek reading of the Cretan Hieroglyphs and the Linear A script.

Key words: Greek language, Minoan art, Linear A, linguistic interpretation, mythology.

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