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Formation of the Greek Writing Systems in Ancient Greece in the Context of European Identity

Ancient Greece represents one of the most significant regions in terms of forms of writing and the scale of their application. Existence of diverse writing systems is confirmed in Aegeida, which follow each other chronologically, but it is not also excluded that they used to function simultaneously in a certain period of time. At the same time, it is possible that an earlier system may represent a prototype for another. Pictographic script [and hieroglyphic script developed from it later] is the earliest among the writing systems confirmed in the Aegean Sea basin. There is a controversy about the origin of the Cretan hieroglyphic system in scientific literature until now. Possibly, the Minoan system must have been originated without a genetic connection with foreign scripts; however, its minor formal resemblance with the Egyptian hieroglyphs is not excluded. H. Haarmann considers the Cretan and the old European, namely Paleo-Balkan pictographic parallels as convincing.[1] In the period of old palaces it was impossible for the ruler to remember all resources and control them; it became necessary to account them which appeared to have facilitated the origination of script. Therefore, the Cretan hieroglyphic system must have been created within the Minoan culture and its active usage is assumed in around the first phase of palaces (1900-1700 BC).

We think that the Cretan script became distant from the old Oriental systems from the beginning. Even the superficial study evidences that the

[1] Haarmann H., Hieroglyphen und Linearschriften: Anmerkungen zu alteuropäischen Schriftkonvergenzen, Kadmos, 28, 1989, 1-6.

part of clay plates performed with the Cretan hieroglyphic script contains tables of numerical symbols which graphically coincide with the system of numerical symbols of linear scripts. This fact allows one part of scientists to assume that in this case we have to deal with the comprehensive accounting system, which by its structure demonstrates resemblance with the same kind of records of the Cretan linear script.[2] The possibility that the Cretan hieroglyphs may be read as the symbols of linear script is not excluded as well. For example, according to DNP,[3] hieroglyphic script contains about 100 syllables and 30 logograms.

As it appears, the economic progress has influenced the further development of the Cretan script and the cursive "A" linear script was formed in about the I Middle Minoan period (1700-1600),[4] which occupies one of the significant places among the undeciphered scripts discovered in the Aegean Sea basin. H. Haarmann reviews the "A" linear script in the context of European scripts. In his opinion, a number of parallelisms between the Paleo-Balkan and the old Cretan writing systems are particularly noticeable, which is expressed not only by typological resemblances but also by the graphical identity of the inventory of symbols. According to the researcher's assumption, this fact represents a significant precondition for finding the basis of origination of the Cretan script. T. Gamkrelidze and V. Ivanov also do not exclude a certain connection between the old Balkan and Aegean scripts. In their opinion, after decline of the old Balkan culture [which was spread in the 4th millennium BC], its continuation is observed in the southern part of the Balkans and the Aegean Sea basin [mainly on the Island of Crete and the Cyclades].

The "A" linear script must have ceased functioning as soon as the Minoan culture declined, giving way to the Mycenaean "B" linear script (1500-1450 BC). There are certain parallels between "A" linear and "B" linear: the script structure is almost similar, and about 80 symbols of their symbol repertoire ("A" linear – 199, "B" linear – 89) graphically coincide with each other. Majority of ideograms in the Mycenaean script have their corresponding symbols in "A" linear script. The numerical systems also coincide, however, there are differences as well: many syllables, ideograms and ligatures which play a significant role in "A" linear script, are not confirmed in "B" linear script. The number of symbols is relatively

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[2] Brice W. C., Notes on the Cretan Hieroglyphic Script, Kadmos, 29, 1990, 1-10, 3.

[3] Der Neue Pauly – Enzyklopädie der Antike, Bd. I-, Sttutgart; Weimar: Metzler 1996-.

[4] However, it is noteworthy that the plates found is Phaistos date back to the I Middle Minoan Period (1900-1700).

small in "B" linear script, unlike "A" linear script [about 90 symbols], which may be associated with development of script [application of economy principle]. We also do not have the system of decimals and on the contrary, there are a number of syllables, ideograms and ligatures in "B" linear script with no matches in then Minoan script. The same can be said about the system of weights which is absolutely new in "B" linear script. Unlike "A" linear script, ideograms are often used in the economic accounting records of "B" linear script; however, in the texts which have reached us, they never perform the function of the member of sentence and are mainly found with numerical nouns. In some cases, the word is first written using syllabic symbols and then it is followed by a separate pictorial symbol denominating the same word. In "B" linear texts, ideograms differ from other symbols by their large size but it should be noted that such manner of writing does not relate only to ideograms: as it seems, the Mycenaean "writer" tried to convey the necessary and significant information by graphically different symbols and focus attention on them by this method (see KND1 946, KND1 463, KNB 988+5761+7040+ 7601+III-36). Perhaps, this factor and not devaluation of the writing system and activation of elements of pictographic script predetermined the increase of function of ideograms in "B" linear script.

Various variants of "B" linear symbols which often belong to the same writer are also noteworthy, but these variants do not strongly differ from each other, even when they are distant from each other in time and place. The variants of symbols presented on the examples of "A" linear script discovered in the same place and belonging to the same period of time are so different that it is difficult to realize them as one symbol.

As it appears, as a result of contact with the pre-Greek population of the Island of Crete, the Mycenaean Greeks created their own writing system, better accommodated to the Greek language which must have been largely influenced by the syllabic "A" linear script existing the Minoan era. Presumably, "B" linear script was created at a definite place, for a definite purpose, for a definite purpose and with stylized symbols of a definite form, which did not undergo essential changes despite the variety of time and place.

Creation of "B" linear script should be considered as a step forward in the evolution of syllabic systems, as the Mycenaean script chose a more democratic way unlike cuneiform scripts: nearly no logograms are found in "B" linear script, the number of syllabograms is much fewer as well. This is a purely syllabic script with small number of symbols. In addition, it is noteworthy that "B" linear documents (4806) are performed with

different "scripts". According to T. Palaima, 75-100 scripts are observed in Knossos, 40 – in Pilos, 12 – in Mycenae, 4 – in Thebes (out of 43 plates).[5] It was found out that often one "writer" had to make only several documents. Besides, next to professions mentioned in "B" linear texts we do not find a term which denominates a "writer". Therefore, it is assumed that there was not a hierarchically segmented class of professional writers in Mycenae, unlike the Khetian royal palace and the plates were made by officials of various ranks which did not learn to read and write only for this purpose.

The examples of linear script were discovered on the Island of Cyprus in the late 19th century. As it was found out later, the given system must have had a close connection with the Cretan "A" linear script which is confirmed by identity of structures of these two scripts. Archaeological excavations have demonstrated that the Cretan system must be older than the Cyprian one. Therefore, on assumption of A. Evans, the script confirmed on Cyprus represents a branch of Cretan script, the result of its development, so the researcher offered the name "Cyprian-Minoan" for the Cyprian script.[6]

Depending on the manner of writing, forms of symbols, inventory and chronology of inscriptions the researchers differentiate between three versions of the Cyprian-Minoan system: CM 1, CM 2, CM 3. As it appears, the local population of Cyprus created their own script CM1 under the influence of the Cretan scripts of the Bronze era [A linear, pictographic] as early as in the 17th century BC and later CM 2 and CM 3 were possibly developed based on it.

On assumption of researchers, the Cyprian syllabic script used on the Island of Cyprus simultaneously with the Greek alphabet and the Phoenician script in the 1st millennium BC must have been originated from the CM 1 type of script. The Greek alphabet finally superseded both the Cyprian dialect and the syllabary from the 4th century BC. Unlike the Cyprian-Minoan script of the 2nd millennium BC, which has failed to be deciphered yet, the Cyprian syllabary was deciphered by means of Phoenician-Cyprian bilingual in 1871-1876. The Cyprian system represents a syllabic script relating to "B" linear script, whose symbols for vowels and

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[5] Palaima T. G., Comments on Mycenaean Literacy, Studies in Mycenaean and Classical Greek Presented to John Chadwick, ed. by Killen J. T., Melena J. L., Olivier J.-P., Salamanca, 1987, 499-510; Der Neue Pauly, Bd. 7, 248.

[6] SM I – Evans A. J., Scripta Minoa I, The Written Documents of Minoan Crete I: The Hieroglyphic and Primitive Linear Classes, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1909, 69.

open syllables correspond to "B" linear symbols not only by graphic outline, but also by phonological value.

The final significant stage in the evolution of writing systems of the ancient Greece in the 1st millennium BC [about the 7th century] is the creation of the Greek alphabet whose Semitic origin does not require special evidences. The Greek tradition already refers to the Greek script as "Φοινικήια γράμματα" or "σημεῖα", which clearly suggests where to search for the origins of this system. However, if we review the alphabet as the system of symbols conveying separate sounds of speech, then we should admit that the first alphabet was created by Greeks. The Semitic script had a row of symbols conveying so-called "weak consonants". The Greeks used the achievements of Phoenicians, took the forms of symbols of the Western Semitic consonant script, created symbols for vowels based on the "weak consonants" in their opinion and connected them to consonants, as a result of which we obtained the first alphabetic system of script. Therefore, the greatest achievement of Greeks is not the invention of the new method of denomination of vowels, but the systematic application of the method "matres lectionis" which were used by the old systems on an irregular basis.

It may be said, that the script underwent nearly all stages of evolution in ancient Greece, from the Cretan hieroglyphs to the Greek phonetic script which chose a democratic way of development. Introduction of vowels in the Greek script transformed it into an accurate and universal system which serves communication of humans better than other writing systems existing earlier. The phonetic script was spread throughout Europe by means of the Latin system created on the basis of the Greek alphabet and despite the colossal achievements of the Western civilizations in many areas of human activities it has not undergone evolution since the Greek period. The alphabet became a sign of European identity, one of the main factors of its formation and an integral part of the Western thinking.