

MINOAN DEITIES IN AN EGYPTIAN MEDICAL TEXT

The British Museum possesses a very interesting papyrus-rolle of medical contents, because it includes several chapters in foreign languages. This rolle is two meters and ten centimeters long and seventeen and a half centimeters wide. But its beginning and end are unfortunately lost. This London Medical Papyrus was published by Wreszinski in 1912.¹ In the meantime the text on this rolle was quoted mainly by the Egyptologists and others, who are interested in the history and in different questions of ancient medicine. But the section of *both* Minoan incantations within the chapters written in foreign languages was quoted only by Jean Vercoutter in 1956, by Wolfgang Helck in 1979 (=21995) and by me in 1988 for non-Egyptological readers.² Because of the importance of these incantations, it seems necessary to look once more at this text.

I

The text is written in a so called hieratic book-script. The form of the letters shows that the text is to date not later than in the time of Tutenchamun (1333-1323) because their forms were changed after the Amarna Age.³

The papyrus contains an individual collection of 21 thematic chapters. They consist of medical prescriptions and incantations, which are quoted from different older and well known handbooks of therapeutic contents from the time before 1700 B.C.⁴ Therefore the original of our text was written between the seventeenth and the fourteenth century B.C.

As accented besides the chapters in Egyptian language this collection contains even other chapters in foreign mother tongues:

1. in Semitic (chapter 13: no. 27-30)
2. in Nubian(?) (chapter 14: no. 31) and
3. in Minoan language (chapters 15 and 16: nos. 32 and 33).

All these non-Egyptian texts are written down in their own language but spelled with Egyptian hieroglyphs by the aid of a syllabic manner of writing, and therefore they are readable too.

The headline of the Minoan Chapters runs as follows:⁵
11, 4

No. 32

⁴šn.t n.t tjn.t-ꜣm.w Det. "illness" m dd n.f K3ftjw Det. "foreign land:" (transcription)

⁴shenet net tant-Amu-illness em dshed nef Kaftu-foreign land: (vocalization)

⁴Incantation of the Asiatic illness in the language of Kaftu-foreign land: (translation)

- 1 W. WRESZINSKI, *Der Londoner medizinische Papyrus (Brit. Museum Nr. 10 059) und der Papyrus Hearst* (1912).
- 2 J. VERCOUTTER, *L'Égypte et le monde égéen préhellenique* (1956) 83-85; W. HELCK, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens und Vorderasiens zur Agäis bis ins 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr. (Erträge der Forschung 120, 1979; 21995) 85-87; P.W. HAIDER, Griechenland-Nordafrika: Ihre Beziehungen zwischen 1500 und 60 v. Chr. (Impulse der Forschung 53, 1988) 19.*
- 3 G. MÖLLER, "Zur Datierung literarischer Handschriften," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 56 (1920) 42.
- 4 WRESZINSKI (*supra* n. 1) p. XV-XVIII.
- 5 WRESZINSKI (*supra* n. 1) Taf. II, Zl. 4, p. 151, 192; VERCOUTTER (*supra* n. 2) 82-83; HELCK (*supra* n. 2) 85; HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 19.

In the meantime we can identify “K3ftjw/Kaftu” in Egyptian texts as the name of Crete without any doubt.⁶ Therefore “the language of Kaftu-foreign land” means the speech of the Minoan people.

In this article our interest belongs to the second Minoan incantation in this medical papyrus only:⁷

11,6-7

No. 33

šn.t n.t s3-m-c-w-n-3 Det.“illness”
 w-b(?)-q-i(?) Det.“illness” s3-t Det.“t”(or “bread”) s3-b-w-j-73-jj-d3-3 Det.“to go” hw-m-c-k3-3-t-w
 Det.“man” r-t3-jj ntr p3-3 wr ‘a-m-c-j-3 ntr.
 dd.tw r3 4x

shenet net samuna-illness:

webeqi/ubuqi(?-illness sat sabuja7jadsha humekatu(-“man”) razaja/razija netsher pa wer
 ameja/amija netsher.
 dshedetu ra 4x!

Incantation of the illness Samuna:

webeqi/ubuqi(?-illness sat sabujajadsha humekatu R/Lazaja(R/Lazija), the great god,
 Ameja/Amija, god.
 (This) sentence has to be said four times!

The Egyptian determinatives and appositions within the Minoan text make it possible to identify the ends of some foreign words and names. So we find named two Minoan deities. Both are doubtless male and arranged in a hierarchical row: “Razaja/Razija (or: Lazaja/Lazija), the great god” and “Ameja/Amija, the god.” Because, if the named deities had been female, we would find other determinatives, and the apposition along with “Razaja” would be “t3 wr.t” and never “p3 wr.”

But at this point we have to ask, if we can be sure, that the Egyptian physician had characterized the Minoan deities correctly.

6 VERCOUTTER (*supra* n. 2) 15-124; 369-396; E. EDEL, “Die Ortsnamenlisten Amenophis III.” (*Bonner Biblische Beiträge* 25, 1966) 33-47, 61-63; Sh. WACHSMANN, *Aegeans in the Theben Tombs* (OLA 20, 1987) *passim*; HELCK (*supra* n. 2); HAIDER *supra* n. 2)1-33; P.W. HAIDER, “Ägäer in ägyptischen Diensten zwischen c. 1550 und 1200 v.Chr.,” *Laverna* 1 (1990) 18-49; E.H. CLINE, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea. International trade and the Late Bronze Age Aegean* (BAR International Series 591, 1994) 108-114; P. WARREN, “Minoan Crete and Pharaonic Egypt,” in *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant: Interconnections in the Second Millennium B.C.* (1995) 1-18; P.W. HAIDER, “Menschenhandel zwischen dem ägyptischen Hof und der minoisch-mykenischen Welt?,” *Ägypten und Levante* 6 (1996) 137-156; R. LAFFINEUR, “From West to East: The Aegean and Egypt in the Early Late Bronze Age,” in *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium. Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium Cincinnati, 18-20 April 1997*, *Aegaeum* 18 (1998) 53-67; R.S. MERRILLEES, “Egypt and the Aegean,” in *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium. Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium Cincinnati, 18-20 April 1997*, *Aegaeum* 18 (1998) 149-158.

7 WRESZINSKI (*supra* n. 1) Taf. II, Zl. 6-7, p. 151-152, 192; VERCOUTTER (*supra* n. 2) 84-85, but his reading of the god’s name “razaja” in line 7 is not correct. HELCK (*supra* n. 2) 86-87; HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 19; CLINE (*supra* n. 6) 110.

II.

Besides our two Minoan incantations within the London Medical Papyrus we find two more Minoan texts spelled with Egyptian hieroglyphs. They date in the early 16th century:

- a) A school exercise with a list of Minoan personal names, and
- b) a collection of magical sentences in the Papyrus Harris no. XII.⁸

The knowledge about all these Minoan texts and their contents on the Egyptian side at the beginning of the New Kingdom becomes more understandable, if we bear in mind the following facts:

1. Minoans worked in Egypt at that time, they frescoed several walls inside the late Hyksos/earliest 18th Dynasty palace at Avaris⁹ and constructed “Kaftu-ships” in the dockyard of the pharaonic harbour at Memphis under the pharaoh Thutmosis III for example.¹⁰
2. Regular diplomatic and economical contacts between the Minoan Crete and the Pharaonic court are testified by epigraphical and pictorial sources during the whole 18th Dynasty.¹¹ These facts are well known, I think.
3. Egyptian interpreters for Nubian, Libyan, Akkadian, Hurrian, Hittite, and Minoan languages are attested during the New Kingdom.¹²
4. There are more examples of foreign texts being used to train students of professional classes like translators, ambassadors, priests, and physicians.¹³

This historical background allows us to postulate, that the names of our Minoan deities and their characterization are correct. Further, the fact, that Minoan incantations were transferred into the Egyptian medical practice and literature is not only a proof for the intensive contacts between the two cultures, but also for the importance of the Minoan healing rituals on the island of Crete itself. The latter in the Aegean Bronze Age was analysed by Robert Arnott.¹⁴

So, two healing gods existed in the belief of the Minoans: “the great god Razaja/Razija” and the “god Ameja/Amija” competent at least for an «Asiatic illness»¹⁵ and the “illness Samuna.” “Razaja” as “the great god” may have possessed further competences. Perhaps he passes for a lethal deity also as we know from other examples like Apollo, Reshep or the Sumerian goddess Ninkarrak of Isin.

- 8 T.E. PEET, “The Egyptian Writing-Board, B.M. 5647,” in *Essay in Aegean Archaeology presented to Sir A. Evans* (1927) 90-101; VERCOUTTER (*supra* n. 2) 45-48; HELCK (*supra* n. 2) 83-86; HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 19-21.
- 9 HELCK (*supra* n. 2) 47-49, 62-68; HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 20-21; M. Bietak, “Die Wandmalereien aus Tell el-Dab‘a/‘Ezbet Helmi,” *Ägypten und Levante* 4 (1994) 44-80, Taf.14-22; M. BIETAK, “Auaris und die minoische Welt,” in *Pharaonen und Fremde - Dynastien im Dunkel* (1994) 50-52; L. MORGAN, “Minoan Painting and Egypt: The Case of Tell el-Dab‘a, in Egypt,” in *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant* (1995) 29-53; M. BIETAK, “Connections Between Egypt and the Minoan World,” in the same publication 19-28. pls. 1-4; LAFFINEUR (*supra* n. 6) 56-63; N. MARINATOS, “The Tell-el-Dab‘a Paintings,” *Ägypten und Levante* 8 (1998) 83-99, Fig. 1-33.
- 10 Literary sources quoted by VERCOUTTER (*supra* n. 2) 53-55, and HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 22-23.
- 11 Epigraphical and archaeological sources: VERCOUTTER (*supra* n. 2) 185-368; M.T. PHELPS, *A Re-evaluation of the Importance of the Mycenaean Pottery Sherds from Tell El-Amarna, Egypt* (1978) 6-112; WACHSMANN (*supra* n. 6) 27-77; HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 1-33; E.H. CLINE, *Orientalia in the Late Bronze Age Aegean: Catalogue and Analysis of Trade and Contacts between the Aegean and Egypt, Anatolia and the Near East* (1991) 11-71, 206-302; CLINE (*supra* n. 6) 31-47, 108-116; HELCK (*supra* n. 2) 11-87; summarily WARREN (*supra* n. 6) 4-10, 11-14; R. REHAK, “Aegean Natives in the Theban Tomb Paintings: The Keftiu Revisited,” in *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium. Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium Cincinnati, 18-20 April 1997, Aegeum* 18 (1998) 39-53; LAFFINEUR (*supra* n. 6) 56-62; MERRILLEES (*supra* n. 6) 152-156.
- 12 W. HELCK, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Ägyptolog. Abhandlungen 5, 1971) 435-443; H. Kaplony-Heckel, “Schüler und Schulwesen in der ägyptischen Spätzeit,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 1 (1974) 227; HELCK (*supra* n. 2) 87; HAIDER (*supra* n. 2) 21.
- 13 Sources quoted by HELCK (*supra* n. 9) 435-437, 495-496, 498, 505-536.
- 14 R. ARNOTT, “Healing Cult in Minoan Crete,” in *MELETEMATA* 1-6; R. ARNOTT, “Disease, Healing and Medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age,” *Journal of the royal Society of Medicine* 89 (May 1999) 266-269.
- 15 H. GOEDICKE, “The Canaanite Illness,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 11 (1984) 100 beliefs, that this illness was a “bubonic plague.”

III.

Finally it is interesting to find a name “a-me-ja/a-me-a” on Linear-B-tablets from Knossos and Pylos.¹⁶ Could the latter be linked with the name of our “god Ameja?” In the older Linear-A-texts perhaps “A.MA” and “RA2TI” match with our Minoan healing gods testified in the same time.¹⁷ But this is an other questions.

A new publication of all known Minoan texts existing in the Egyptian literature is necessary, and therefore it is in preparation including a critical commentary and historical conclusions by the author.

Peter W. HAIDER

16 J. CHADWICK and J.T. KILLEN and J.-P. OLIVIER, *The Knossos Tablets* (⁴1971) 34 (KN B 799+8306 v.4), 61 (KN Da 1189+6065), 188 (KN F 153+7348+fr.3), 259 (KN Od 765+7320.b), 356 (KN Xd 7964); E.L. BENNETT and J.-P. OLIVIER, *The Pylos Tablets Transcribed*, Part I (*Inc.Graec.* 51, 1973) 224 (Sa 834), 227 (Sh 736); J.-P. OLIVIER and L. GODART and C. SEYDEL and C. SOURVINOU, *Index généraux du Linéaire B* (*Inc.Graec.* 52, 1973) 22.

17 D.W. PACKARD, *Minoan Linear A* (1974) 152 (C1 MA 1b) and 256 (L No 52.95): A.MA; 153 (A1 108.3), 266 (L No 58.78): RA2TI.