

Re: Cattle DNA supports Anatolian origin for Etruscans

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- *From:* "Jack Linthicum" <jacklinthicum@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 18 Feb 2007 15:49:00 -0800
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On Feb 18, 5:49 pm, Hayabusa <peregr...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Sat, 17 Feb 2007 21:45:02 +0000, Doug Weller

<dwel...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

I think to some degree he does have a point though. Minoans were surely aware of the Egyptians, the Hittites and the Levantine city states all of which were writing cultures. Writing brought very high social esteem, and I think we can sure the Minoans noticed that on their visits to the eastern Med. So why didn't the rulers of whichever nature in Knossos etc. use writing much more than they did?

At the very least I think his question is not a stupid one.

I don't think it is anything but a rhetorical question, it is actually a statement or at least a claim. We don't know the language, although some translation is possible, and the fact that there are no obvious huge signs naming kings -- or queens -- is no proof there were no kings, which is what he is claiming.

re the latter: surely not. And there may be reasons why they did not adopt writing in grander style. -- Or else they only wrote on perishable materials. Unlikely though, papyrus had to be imported, clay is found everywhere. -- But I am not asking for the language, simply for the art of writing. After all, AFAIK a copy of a letter

Re: Cattle DNA supports Anatolian origin for Etruscans

from presumably some Aegean ruler has been found in Hattusa.

I drop the subject. We don't know, this is one of those cases where I want a time travel machine.

Hayabusa.

You may get some amusement from reading a modern scholar's rendition of the Odyssees verses one and two in Linear B

http://srs.dl.ac.uk/people/pantos/Od_I_1-2LB.html

The Odyssey in Linear B
Book 1, verses 1-2 (Draft 1, August 97)

QWERTY keys for Curtis Clark's Linear B font

qAN L wXj :z l<f>l r H% l%
h\$d wke fRw ewR lf<wR wjx

READER PLEASE NOTE: The views expressed in this article first written August 1997 contain a small measure of un-Homeric humour which might not travel well on the internet. Please add a pinch of two of salt, according to taste.

I was delighted to receive constructive criticism and very positive suggestions from an e-friend from The Netherlands, knowledgeable on Linear B and Homeric studies. In gratitude for his contribution I have inserted almost the whole of his observations (marked as [Note #]) with the minimum of alteration for the benefit of the reader interested in the topic.

How likely is it that Homer actually wrote his epics? Homerists have argued for centuries, particularly in the last century where strong evidence has been presented for the existence, of a thriving oral tradition in the Balkans as recently as the 1930's. The oral traditionists have a strong case. Homer was certainly very gifted. One in a long line of bards that made a living by singing their works, not reading them.

Two of the most prosaic arguments in favour of oral transmission (through the school of the Homerids) are:

1. In Homer's time there was no paper to write on. Papyrus was very expensive and stone tablets were too heavy to carry around. Remember, the Iliad has 16000 lines of verse and the Odyssey 12000. A single verse of hexameter is quite long (about 18 imperial feet), too. Some

Re: Cattle DNA supports Anatolian origin for Etruscans

twenty syllables. Homer would have needed a fleet of fork–lift trucks (and black–bottomed container ships) to carry the script from performance to performance throughout the Aegean.

2. The Greek alphabet had not been invented yet. Homer must have been illiterate! More to the point, his audience were illiterate. No publisher would have taken on the Iliad and the Odyssey as viable economic propositions.

[Note 1] Here are my counter arguments:

1. The writing medium: Writing was needed during composition, not during performance. In this case, what was the writing medium? Surely not stone. Although stone inscriptions date not long after the time Homer is supposed to have lived, it is hardly the medium the Muses would have approved of. Stone was reserved for law–givers and politicians in control of the public purse strings.

Papyrus? An expensive Egyptian import well beyond the means of a travelling artist. The rats would have eaten it anyway. Parchment, a later invention, was also rather expensive and only an enlightened Athenian tyrant, Peisistratos, could afford to pay for it (one drachma a page, a week's wages) out of the proceeds of the silver mine in Lavrion.

What then? Homer himself, the source of all wisdom and knowledge in the ancient world, mentions writing only once, and even then rather obliquely. The celebrated story in the Iliad (6, 160) of young prince Bellerephon who, having resisted the amorous desires of queen Anteia, wife of King Proitos of Argos, ends up being sent on an errand to Proitos' father–in–law King of Lycia carrying a "folded tablet bearing magic signs", his death warrant.

What was this "folded tablet"? One such folded tablet was found recently on the "Oldest Known Shipreck" (National Geographic, Vol. 172, No 6, December 1987) dated by dendrochronology to 1216 BC. Sailors used wax tablets to list the cargo they were carrying. Very sensible. And very cheap. And very water–proof, too. Wet clay tablets would have been a reasonable alternative for poetry on dry land, after which the contents were committed to memory and the tablet recycled. The (allegedly) Homeric poem, Vatrachomyomachia (The Battle of the Frogs and the Rats) begins with "

Here I begin: and first I pray the choir of the Muses
to come down from Helicon into my heart to aid the lay
which I have newly written in tablets upon my knee.

[Note 2] 2. The script: If wax or clay tablets were the writing medium for the poet's own use, what script could he have used? Up to 1952 the world believed that the Greek alphabet had scarcely been invented at the time of Homer. Herodotos is the first to mention that it was the Phoenician King Kadmos, the founder of Thebes in Boiotia, who "brought

Re: Cattle DNA supports Anatolian origin for Etruscans

letters to Greece". This has been taken to mean that the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet and developed the "archaic Greek" letters (phoenikia) which were very much the same as the ones in use today (upper case characters only, lower case characters, aspirations and accents were an Alexandrian invention to aid foreigners pronounce Greek proper and burden Greek school children with rules of orthography). The first archaic Greek inscriptions (on stone) date from ca. 7 century BC, not earlier.

[Note 3] Kadmos lived before Homer and the Trojan War. If he had "brought" Phoenician letters, archaeologists should have found Phoenician inscriptions in Thebes. Recent excavations have unearthed a bagful (~300) of Linear B tablets, in the ruins of Kadmos' palace. The same Linear B found in Mycene, Tirynths, Pylos, Knossos and other places named by Homer. Furthermore, we now know since Michael Ventris' decipherment of Linear B in 1952 (long after the oral-composition and Phoenician origin of the Greek alphabet theories had taken hold) that Linear B is not only a Greek script, but that many of the words have a strong Homeric flavour. Names such as Potnia (the Lady), Hector, Achillees, Alexander as well as fine points in the Homeric syntax have been unambiguously identified. Alas, no such names as Agamemnon, Menelaos, Nestor or Odysseus. What a pity.

The conclusion has to be that, if Homer needed to, he could have used a script. Just like the Sumerians and Hittites, a millennium or so before him, had used cuneiform to keep detailed accounts of excruciatingly boring commercial transactions on clay tablets, as well as diplomatic letters, treaties, and, wait for it, literature. Of the quarter of a million or so clay tablets unearthed in Mesopotamia, only 1% can be classified as literature. Amongst them, the most amazing of archaeological discoveries: The Story of the Flood. So similar to the account given in the Bible that Victorian Bible fundamentalists went bananas with excitement. The Gilgamesh Epic, a couple of millennia or so older than the Odyssey, was also found written down, in several copies, on clay tablets. Just like school children in classical Greece used the Iliad and the Odyssey as The Textbooks, so did the Sumerian children copy stories handed down to them from generation to generation onto clay tablets, not unlike the slate tablet I and my generation used in primary school to scratch our first letters. <more>