"Someone Will Succeed in Deciphering Minoan"
Cyrus H. Gordon and Minoan Linear A

By Gary A. Rendsburg

ALTHOUGH CYRUS H. GORDON'S EARLIEST PUBLISHED WORK ON Minoan appeared.in 1957, his rumination on the problem began as early as 1931. In June of that year the young Gordon was sailing to the Near East for his first visit. His own words tell the story:

One June night as we were sailing along the coast of Crete, I was sitting with a group of companions on deck, and I was impelled to express my thoughts somewhat as follows: "The Minoan inscriptions from this island are the main challenge to the decipherers of tomorrow. Someone with the necessary knowledge will succeed, through hard and honest work, in deciphering Minoan." In retrospect, I realize that is no way to talk to travelling companions on a moonlit night in the Mediterranean, but I was shamed and silenced by a middle-aged businessman named Mr Davis, who looked at me with disgust and said, "You sound like a high school valedictorian." I mention the incident only to bring out the fact that my active concern with the problem twenty-five years later had a quarter century of brooding (much of it subconscious) behind it (Gordon 1971:154-5).[1]

The excavations of Hagia Triada produced about 170 Minoan texts. The abbreviation HT before cited texts refers to this corpus. (Photo courtesy David I. Owen.)

Fast forward to the year 1956. In the intervening years Gordon had produced three editions of his standard works on the Ugaritic language (Gordon 1940; 1947; 1955c), as well as a standard translation of the Ugaritic myths and epics (Gordon 1949). As is well known, Gordon's work on Ugaritic did not end with his contributions on the language and the literature. Gordon saw that Ugarit was much more than a major source of Canaanite literature providing invaluable material for the background of the Hebrew Bible. For Gordon, Ugaritic was a bridge which spanned the worlds of the Hebrews and the Greeks. Thus, during this same period Gordon produced his seminal works on the common background of the two cultures (see most importantly Gordon 1955a). Moreover, it became clear to Gordon that the hub which connected these worlds was Crete (*kptr* is the home of Kothar-wa-Hasis, the Ugaritic god of arts and crafts; his correspondent in the Greek pantheon is Hephaistos, whose home is also Crete; the Philistines of the Bible emigrated to Canaan from Caphtor; and so on). Others in this special issue are discussing Gordon's work on Ugaritic and on the common background of

△ **Partial view of the remains of the palace** at Knossos, the major Minoan center excavated by Sir Arthur Evans between 1899 and 1935. Located on the north coast of Crete, Knossos,the largest Minoan palace site, produced clay tablets inscribed with Linear A as well as tablets bearing Linear B.

▽ **A partial grid of the Minoan syllabary** (Gordon 1966:Plate XI). Other signs appear in the texts, but these are of certain reading based on their close similarity to the Linear B signs used to represent Mycenaean Greek.

	A	E	I	O	U
	a		i		u
P	pa / pà		pi		pu (or)
T	ta / tá	te	ti (or)	to	tu (or)
D	da	de	di	do	du
K	ka	ke	ki (or)	ko	ku (or)
"Q"	qa	qe			
M	ma		mi		mu (or)
N	na	ne / né	ni	no	nu
R	ra (or) / rá	re	ri	ro	ru
S	sa	se			su
Z	za				
W	wa	we			
Y	ya				

Greek and Hebrew civilizations, so there is no need for me to say more on these subjects. Still, it is worth pointing out the obvious, that no portion of Gordon's world is unconnected from the other portions. This singular scholar's work on Minoan did not surface *ex nihilo*; it can only be understood in light of his work on Ugaritic and Aegean interconnections.

In 1956 Michael Ventris and John Chadwick published their important book *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Ventris and Chadwick 1956). A bit of background is necessary to bring us to this important event in modern archaeological and philological research. Starting in 1893 and for several decades thereafter, Sir Arthur Evans excavated at various sites on Crete and there discovered the great Bronze Age civilization of ancient Crete which he called Minoan after the legendary king Minos (Evans 1921-36 is his most comprehensive work). Among his important finds were several hundred clay tablets bearing writing in two different, yet very similar, scripts. Evans called the older of the two scripts Linear A and the more recent one Linear B.[2] Due to the number of signs, it was assumed by all scholars that both scripts were syllabaries (i.e., non-alphabetic).

A half-century after Evans's excavations, these scripts remained undeciphered. It was the young and brilliant Ventris who changed the picture. He was an architect by training, but he had studied classical languages. Ventris made it his life goal to decipher the Cretan script; he succeeded in the 1950s by solving the Linear B variety, and he then was joined in his enterprise by Chadwick, a professional philologist. Ventris and Chadwick concluded that the language of the Linear B material was Greek, not the classical Greek of the Iron Age, but an earlier form from the Late Bronze Age which they called Mycenaean Greek. Their work was welcomed enthusiastically, and it opened major new vistas in the study of the ancient Greek language and culture. Tragically, the young Ventris died in an automobile accident in 1956, but he had accomplished his life goal. Accordingly, the appearance of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* in 1956, with a full and detailed analysis of the
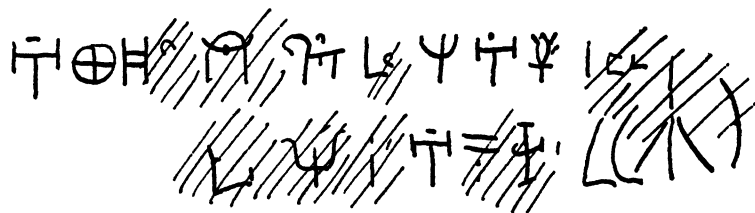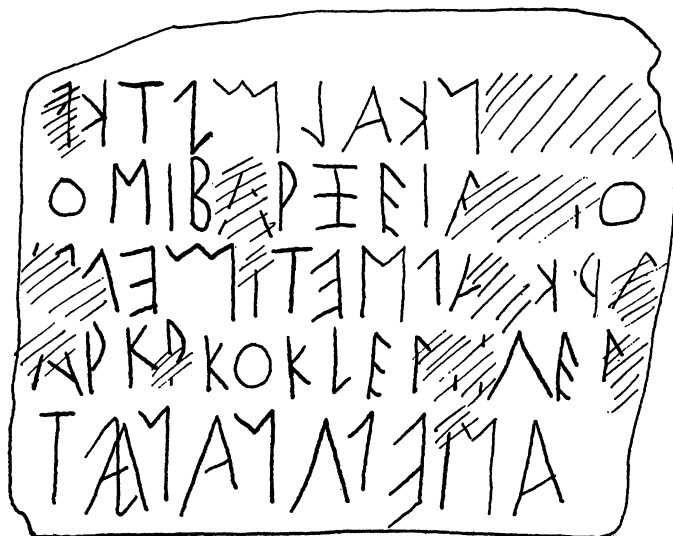
△ **This inscription comes from a magic bowl** found at Knossos (Gordon 1966:Plate IX). The first three signs are *a-ga-nu* (or *a-ka-nu*) corresponding to Hebrew and Aramaic *ʾaggan* "bowl," used in the Aramaic magic bowls of the first millennium CE.

◁ **Line drawing of an Eteocretan unilingual text** from Praisos (Gordon 1966:Plate III), written in boustrophedon format. At the end of line 4 are the letters ΚΛ ΕΣ Υ ΕΣ (both *sigma's* are partially broken) corresponding to the Hebrew idiom *kol ʾîš waʾîš* "every man." Word dividers are used very inconsistently in the text.

decipherment, was truly a major event.

Gordon obtained his copy of the Ventris-Chadwick book in December 1956 and immediately set sight on deciphering the Linear A material. In other words, at the culmination of a decade of research on the interconnections between Greece, Ugarit, and Israel, with Crete as the hub, it was Gordon's good fortune now to be stimulated onward by the work of Ventris and Chadwick. Gordon's method, like that of everyone involved in Minoan studies, was to apply the values of the Linear B script to the Linear A material. As noted above, since the scripts are very similar, the values of the former, i.e., the known, could be utilized to elucidate the latter, i.e., the unknown.

Actually, already Ventris and Chadwick realized this was the case. Indeed they had begun to read some words in Linear A, though they realized that these words were not Greek as in Linear B, but belonged to some other language. For example, Ventris and Chadwick noted that five words for different kinds of vessels in Linear A were *su-po, ka-ro-pa, pa-pa, su-pa-ra,* and *pa-ta-qe*, all of which are accompanied by pot pictograms.[3] They also realized that the word for "total" in Linear A was *ku-ro*, a fact forthcoming from the repeated use of this word at the end of administrative tablets.

For someone familiar with the Semitic languages, and especially for someone who had worked intensively on Ugaritic for twenty years, the identification of four of these words came rather naturally. Thus it is hardly surprising that Gordon saw in three of the vessel names the equivalents to Ugaritic *sp, krpn,* and *spl*, and in *ku-ro* the equivalent to Semitic *kull* "all, total" (note that *r* and *l* are not distinguished in the Linear A and B scripts, as is also the case to some extent in Egyptian and Eblaite). It was these four words which formed the basis for Gordon's claim that the language of the Linear A tablets was Semitic. The result was a short article in the journal *Antiquity* (Gordon 1957b), hailed by its editor O. G. S. Crawford as "'hot news' of a startling new discovery" (Crawford 1957:123). Moreover, to move beyond the pure linguistic issue, Gordon's work in identifying Linear A as Semitic meant that the Minoans, the creators of the high civilization of ancient Crete, must have been Semites.

Gordon continued his work on Minoan and soon identified two more words: *ga-ba* "all" and *a-ga-nu* "bowl." Because these two words were known from Akkadian, Gordon arrived at the more specific conclusion that Minoan was East Semitic (Gordon 1957a). Just as Akkadian texts were found far afield in Anatolia, Ugarit, Egypt, and so on, so could "Akkadian" texts be found on Crete, albeit written in a different script, namely that of Linear A. In the meantime, other scholars began to contribute details that Gordon incorporated into his picture. Thus it became clear that *ku-ni-su*, written with the wheat determinative, was the same as the Akkadian word *kunnisu*, and that the word for "and" was *u*, also known from Akkadian.

Gordon continued along the East Semitic path for several years, until he received copies of two books published in 1961: W. C. Brice's *Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A* (1961) and Sidney Davis' *The Phaistos Disk and the Eteocretan Inscriptions from Psychro and Praisos* (1961). The first of these volumes was especially important. Until this time Gordon and others had worked from Evans's original publications of Linear A. Brice's work was a great improvement, because it included not only photographs but clear line drawings and valuable indices. In Gordon's words: "The very appearance of Brice's copies was enlivening" (Gordon 1971:163). More importantly, Brice's volume allowed Gordon to read more of the texts than had been possible previously. Among the new words that Gordon identified were *ki-re-ya-tu* "city" and *re* (i.e., *le*) "to." In addition, he noticed that a pithos from Knossos bore the inscription *ya-ne*, no doubt the word for its contents "wine." It was these words, and others like them, that led Gordon to realize that he had been off course for the past few years. For these words do not appear in Akkadian, they are strictly West Semitic. Gordon's next important article included all this information and argued strongly for the West Semitic identification of Minoan (Gordon 1962b). From that point on Gordon continued to produce a stream of articles on the subject, arguing persuasively that the language of Minoan Linear A was a West Semitic dialect.

Davis' book sent Gordon in a different direction. Although

△ **One of the first Minoan words** to be read was the word *ku-ni-su* "emmer wheat," corresponding to the Akkadian word *kunnisu*. It appears twice, for example, in Hagia Triada (HT) 86 (Gordon 1966:Plate VIII). The first three signs (read left-to-right) are the syllables *ku, ni,* and *su*; they are followed by the wheat determinative and an undetermined sign.

▽ **Appearing on a wine pithos from Knossos** is an inscription which includes the two-syllable word *ya-ne* (note the word dividers on either side), corresponding to Hebrew *yayin* and Ugaritic *yn*. The discovery of this word and other strictly West Semitic words led Gordon to realize that the language was not, as he first had thought, Akkadian. Gordon began to assert the West Semitic identification of Minoan (Gordon 1966:Plate X).

The large, labyrinthine palace at Knossos included magazines lined with huge, elaborately decorated pithoi. *Photograph from the Beegle Collection.*

Davis argued that Minoan was Hittite, and thus disagreed with Gordon's conclusion, he made an important contribution. Davis wished to see one continuum for a whole series of inscriptional material found on Crete. He believed that the Linear A tablets, the Phaistos Disk (a unique text), and the much later Eteocretan material all represented the same language. For Davis this language was Hittite, which Gordon could not accept. But Davis' approach led Gordon to tackle the Eteocretan texts. These texts required no decipherment per se, for they are written in the Greek alphabet, although the language is not Greek. Moreover, two of the Eteocretan texts are bilinguals, with the Greek supplied alongside the Eteocretan. Armed with his renewed understanding that the Minoan

△ **Line drawings of the two bilingual Eteocretan-Greek inscriptions** from Dreros (Gordon 1966:Plate II). In the first inscription, the first two lines are the Eteocretan version running right-to-left and written with word dividers; the last three lines are the Greek version written boustrophedon (starting right-to-left) and without word dividers. In the second inscription, the first line (except for the last three letters) preserves the end of the Eteocretan version running right-to-left; then the Greek version follows with the three letters at the end of the first line and continuing in boustrophedon style over the next two lines. Only one word divider is used, after the first legible letter (*sigma*) in the Eteocretan text.

texts represented a West Semitic language, Gordon began to make sense of the Eteocretan texts as West Semitic as well (Gordon 1962a). The Eteocretan texts, in fact, are not unlike Phoenician and Punic texts written in Greek and Latin letters (see Gordon 1968).

Gordon synthesized his work on Minoan and Eteocretan in a comprehensive work entitled *Evidence for the Minoan Language* (1966). Together, about fifty or so words are identified in these texts, not including various personal names well known from Ugaritic and Hebrew. More significantly, as demonstrated already in some of the earlier articles, entire phrases in Minoan now could be read, and in the case of the Eteocretan texts, entire texts could be read.

Gordon, of course, never views language as a means unto itself, but sees it as the key to understanding culture and to realizing "the big picture" (Gordon 1955b). For him, the evidence of language from Crete pointed to the presence of Semites on the island throughout antiquity. The Minoans were Semites who had migrated from the mainland of the Near East (perhaps from the Levant, perhaps from the Egyptian Delta) sometime during the Bronze Age. As the Bronze Age came to a close, they were pushed out of Crete by the increasing presence and power of the Mycenaean Greeks. The descendants of the people who wrote the Linear A tablets were part of the Sea Peoples movement (Philistines and others) who returned to the mainland, first attempting to attack Egypt,

A map of Crete with the location of the various sites at which were found either Minoan or Eteocretan texts.

then settling on the Levantine coast. But other "latter-day Minoans" remained on Crete and continued to use their Semitic language into late antiquity. The Eteocretan tablets date from ca. 500 BCE to ca. 300 BCE, and there is evidence from Nero's time concerning the Semitic language of Crete as well (Gordon 1981).

As the reader is no doubt aware, Gordon's decipherment of Minoan as Semitic created a major controversy. Some scholars were willing to accept the view that Minoan was Semitic. A good example is Armas Salonen (1966), who incorporated the Minoan evidence into his important book *Die Hausgeräte der alten Mesopotamier* and classified Minoan as a Semitic language in the index. Another example is Frederik E. L. ten Haaf (1975), who proposed reading Hagia Traida text 11b as a record of commodity distributions to officials with titles such as *šār* "chief, ruler" and *rôzēn* "prince, ruler" (to give the more familiar Hebrew forms).

To be perfectly honest, however, most of the scholars who supported the position that Minoan is Semitic were Gordon's own students (M. C. Astour, D. Neiman, G. A. Rendsburg, R. Richard, J. M. Sasson, R. R. Stieglitz, and E. Yamauchi; for partial bibliography see Gordon 1971:168 n. 32). Loyalty to one's mentor no doubt played a role here, but an equally important factor is the training that Gordon's disciples received. Gordon's unique view of the ancient world, with sightlines recognizing interconnections over large swaths of both time and place, was transmitted to his students in the classroom. Thus, when they became scholars in their own right, they were in a unique position both to understand Gordon's approach and to accept his conclusions.

Other scholars were less than accepting.[4] Some researchers at least offered alternative views, looking typically to Indo-European, especially Hittite and other Anatolian languages, for the interpretation of Linear A. But others simply rejected the notion that Minoan was Semitic on the grounds that it simply could not be so. Many of these were the same individuals who rejected Gordon's contributions to the Homer and Bible question, so it was hardly surprising that they rejected the idea that the pre-Greek language of Crete was Semitic. Throughout all of this, however, it is important to keep in mind a crucial point. Those who rejected Gordon's position typically were scholars in the field of classics, with no training whatsoever in Semitic or other Near Eastern languages. The fact is that the average classicist knows Greek and Latin, but does not know any Semitic or other Near Eastern languages; whereas the average Semitist knows not only various Semitic languages, but also Greek and perhaps other languages such as Latin, Hittite, Sumerian, Egyptian, and so on. Thus, the classicists, and they typically were the ones rejecting the view that Minoan is Semitic, were in no position even to judge the matter.

The following story related by George Bass is illustrative:

The hostility goes deeper. I'm going to talk about this because we're too polite as scholars. I get very angry. Twenty years ago I sat next to a scholar who is an extremely well-known classical archaeologist—one of the best in the world—whose knowledge of Greek and German and any other language is pathetic. Although he is a good archaeologist, he can barely read any language other than English. He was sitting next to me at a lecture by Cyrus Gordon, snickering all the way through. Of course he didn't understand it. But he'd been taught to snicker. It angered me
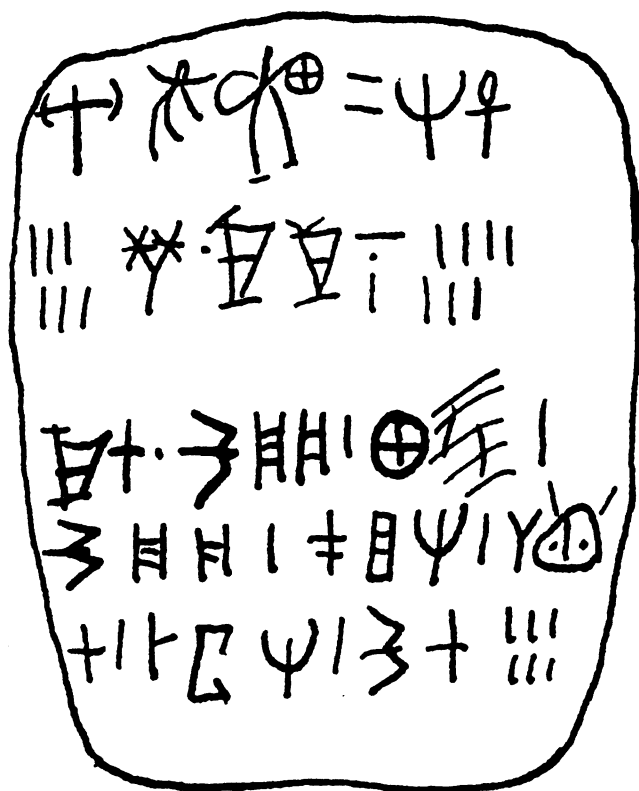
The second half of HT 88, depicted here (Gordon 1966:Plate VIII), is a list of six individual items which then are totaled at the end. Note the six single strokes indicating the numeral "one" in lines 3-5 of this text. The sixth "one" is followed by the signs *ku-ro*, corresponding to Hebrew *kol* "all, total," and the six strokes grouped together to indicate "six." Parallels to this accounting system occur in the Bible; see especially the list of defeated kings in Joshua 12:1-24.

twenty years ago; it angers me today (Bass 1989:112).

I continue with another story to demonstrate the point. Recently there was an exchange on one of the computer networks about the whole question of Linear A. A leading scholar of Aegean archaeology and epigraphy was among the participants in the exchange. He not only was quoted by others as a great authority on the subject, he clearly presented himself as such as well. In a private e-mail message to him, I asked him whether or not he knew any Hebrew or other Semitic language in order to judge the matter objectively. He replied to me that he did not.

To be fair, it is important to note that some scholars who do know Semitic, including some leading researchers in the field, also rejected Gordon's position. Their objection was that in Gordon's work on Linear A, some elements of Minoan link up with Canaanite (Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew, etc.), some with Aramaic, some with Akkadian, and so on. Thus, Minoan could not be identified with any Semitic language, and therefore Gordon's interpretation was deemed a failure. The close-mindedness of this approach is readily apparent. This

view was not a misrepresentation of the facts; it was perfectly correct that Minoan displayed isoglosses connecting it with different Semitic languages (see my earlier remarks on how Gordon himself had looked first at West Semitic, then at Akkadian, and then back to West Semitic). However, the truth is that any given Semitic language has isoglosses going in different directions connecting it to all other Semitic languages.

It is helpful to compare the approach taken by scholars regarding Eblaite. When this Semitic language first came to light in the 1970s, it was clear from the start that certain features of Eblaite showed an affinity with Akkadian, while at the same time other features of the language showed a close relationship with West Semitic. Scholars debated—and continue to debate—the position of Eblaite within Semitic, but no one denies that Eblaite is Semitic because it cannot be fitted neatly into our preexisting notions about the subdivisions of the language family. One hardly needed the discovery of Eblaite to demonstrate the weakness of the aforementioned argument regarding Minoan, but now that we have Eblaite before us, the contrast is bright.

Indeed, my colleague David I. Owen saw immediately that the discovery of Eblaite could influence the way people viewed the Minoan problem. In a letter to Gordon dated December 12, 1976, Owen wrote,

Eblaite has those numerous intra-Semitic features that so often confuse us in Linear A. There is a regular *r/l* interchange! No need to look to Egyptian. There are both East and West Semitic features in the verbal system. In fact many of the criticisms of your decipherment by Semitists no longer will hold water in view of the Eblaite texts (Gordon 1980:209 n. 20).

The greatest praise for Gordon's work on Minoan was forthcoming in a rather bizarre way. In 1972 Jan Best wrote of his acceptance of Gordon's decipherment of Minoan, calling Gordon "the first and most ardent advocate" of the Semitic identification of the language (Best 1972:13). But in the years to follow Best produced a series of works in which he presented himself as the decipherer of Minoan as Semitic, with no reference whatsoever to Gordon's prior work (Best 1982). Such academic dishonesty required a strong reproach, and I was happy to comply with a detailed review article of Best's monograph (Rendsburg 1982). Gordon wrote a shorter piece (Gordon 1984). I repeat here a sampling of what I wrote:

the material presented is virtually the same as that published by Gordon, and yet Gordon's Minoan studies go uncited…[Best] repeats without acknowledgement material published by Gordon more than two decades ago…Clearly, Best's actions cannot be tolerated, least of all in the scholarly community which has brought to the modern world a better understanding of our classical, biblical, and Near Eastern heritages (Rendsburg 1982:79, 86, 87).

My denunciation of Best was an absolute necessity, and

I am glad that I took the initiative to pen it. Yet while his dishonesty needed to be denounced, Best's appropriation of Gordon's work represented praise of the highest type, albeit in a strange and of course most unprofessional manner.

The application of Minoan and Eteocretan to biblical studies merits our final attention. Obviously, as the least known of the Semitic languages, Minoan/Eteocretan cannot be expected to shed major light on problems confronting the biblical scholar. And yet occasionally small rays of light nevertheless shine forth. I include here a small sampling.

Gordon (1966:27) noted that the use of *ku-ro* "all, total" at the end of Minoan administrative texts is paralleled by the use of *kôl* or *hakkôl* "all, total" at the end of several biblical lists (Joshua 12:24, Ezra 2:42). R. R. Stieglitz (1971) noted several other examples of the phenomenon (Genesis 46:26, 2 Samuel 23:39). What has not been pointed out yet, as far as I know, is the overall structural similarity between the Minoan and biblical lists. Most striking is the parallel between the second half of Hagia Triada text 88 and the list of conquered kings in Joshua 12:1-24. Both texts present lists of individual items followed by the notation for "one"; at the end of the list appears the word for "all, total" and the total number of items. Remarkably, most biblical scholars assume that the Joshua list is a late addition to an earlier version of the conquest narrative and thus assign the list to either so-called Dtr² or so-called P (see Boling and Wright 1982:322). But the Minoan parallel argues for the antiquity of the Joshua list. Not only is it integral to the book of Joshua, it should be considered an early source. Note further that the expression *kol mĕlākîm* (v. 24) lacks the expected definite article, another linguistic point in favor of the list's antiquity.

Dealing with Late Biblical Hebrew, I was able to cite Eteocretan evidence as tangential support for a point regarding the history of the Hebrew language. Avi Hurvitz earlier demonstrated that the *kol X wĕ-X* syntagma was a feature of Late Biblical Hebrew (Hurvitz 1972:70-73). In my discussion of the evidence, I put forward the phrase ΚΛ ΕΣ Υ ΕΣ (=*kol ʾîš wāʾîš*) attested in an Eteocretan inscription from ca. 500 BCE as an additional example of this usage (Rendsburg 1980:69; for the text see Gordon 1966:10).

As a third example, I cite another of Gordon's observations. In the above cited Eteocretan phrase, the word for "man" is written *EΣ*, as opposed to the expected *i* (compare *ir* "city"). Here then we have a parallel to the initial element in the name *ʾešbaʿal* "Eshbaal" (1 Chronicles 8:33, 9:39), literally "Man-of-Baal," corresponding to the more familiar *ʾîšbōšet* "Ishbosheth" (2 Samuel 2:8 etc.), literally "Man-of-Shame" (Gordon 1992:193).[5]

In the years following 1966, Gordon's work on Minoan and Eteocretan lessened. The major contribution had been made in the period 1957-66. However, I know from personal experience that his interest in the subject never waned. During my years as a graduate student with Gordon in the 1970s, his seminars were peppered with information about the Semitic language of Crete. And from recent discussion and correspondence with my mentor, I know that he remains an active participant in developments. In 1991 he visited Oslo to meet personally with Kjell Aartun and Rudolf Macuch, two leading European Semitists engaged in the study of Minoan. The former's recent book (Aartun 1992) is another example of a scholar's acceptance of Gordon's basic understanding of Minoan as Semitic.

Finally, as I write these words I am in contact with Gordon about his most recent horizon in the field of Minoan studies. Gordon informs me that he accepts the view of Harold Haarmann (1990) and Marija Gimbutas (1991:308-21) that the Minoan Linear A script derives from the Old European script of the Danube valley of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages. The following scenario thus results. The Old European/Linear A script developed in southeastern Europe in the Neolithic Age and remained in use in the region through the Late Bronze Age (in its Linear B form). Semites who arrived on Crete earlier in the Bronze Age (Early Bronze? Middle Bronze?) utilized this script for writing their Semitic language. It is obvious that almost forty years after his initial steps in Minoan studies, Gordon continues to view the field as fertile ground for future discovery. There is much more to be done on the Linear A texts, the Phaistos Disk awaits interpretation (though see now Aartun 1992), and the newly posited connection with the Old European script opens still further avenues. Sixty-five years after Gordon sailed past Crete on his first visit to the Near East, the inscriptions from the island continue to allure.

Notes

[1] This passage appears within an autobiographical section of Gordon's book *Forgotten Scripts* (Gordon 1971), roughly pp. 144-68. My treatment herein is greatly indebted to these pages. However, this material was not included in the revised version of the book (Gordon 1982).

[2] The Cretan site that yielded the largest number of Linear A tablets (about 170 in total) was Hagia Triada.

[3] Pictograms are special signs used to identify the class of words that a particular word belongs to. Students of Egyptian will be familiar with this system, for pictograms or determinatives are used widely in this language. Students of cuneiform will be familiar with the basic system too, though determinatives are used in a more limited way in Akkadian, Eblaite, and other languages.

[4] In what follows I desist from mentioning the names of individual scholars who opposed Gordon's view.

[5] The name is attested in Ugaritic too as *išbʿl* (Gordon 1965/67:367). The spelling with *š* indicates that the first element in the name Eshbaal cannot be equated with *iṯ*, the particle of existence in Ugaritic, as often is suggested by scholars.

Bibliography

Aartun, K.
  1992 *Die Minoische Schrift: Sprache und Texte*, Vol. I. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
Bass, G. F.
  1989 Responses. *Arethusa*, Special Issue. Fall:111-13.

Best, J.
   1972   *Some Preliminary Remarks on the Decipherment of Linear A*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert.
   1982   *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*. Vol. 13: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Mediterraneum*. Middelie: Studio Pieter Mulier.

Boling, R. G. and Wright, G. E.
   1982   *Joshua*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Brice, W. C.
   1961   *Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Crawford, O. G. S.
   1957   Editorial Notes. *Antiquity* 31:121-3.

Davis, S.
   1961   *The Phaistos Disk and the Eteocretan Inscriptions from Psychro and Praisos*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Evans, A.
   1921-36 *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*. 4 vols. London: Macmillan.

Gimbutas, M.
   1991   *The Civilization of the Goddess*. San Francisco: Harper.

Gordon, C. H.
   1940   *Ugaritic Grammar*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
   1947   *Ugaritic Handbook*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
   1949   *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
   1955a Homer and the Bible. *Hebrew Union College Annual* 26:43-108.
   1955b Language as a Means to an End. *Antiquity* 29:147-9.
   1955c *Ugaritic Manual*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
   1957a Akkadian Tablets in Minoan Dress. *Antiquity* 31:237-40.
   1957b Notes on Linear A. *Antiquity* 31:124-30.
   1962a Eteocretan. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21:211-14.
   1962b Minoaca. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21:207-10.
   1965/67 *Ugaritic Textbook*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
   1966   *Evidence for the Minoan Language*. Ventnor, NJ: Ventnor Publishers.
   1968   Northwest Semitic Texts in Latin and Greek Letters. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88:285-9.
   1971   *Forgotten Scripts: The Story of their Decipherment*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
   1980   New Light on the Minoan Language. Pp. 205-9 in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Cretological Congress*. Vol. I. Athens.
   1981   The Semitic Language of Minoan Crete. Pp. 761-82 in *Bono Homini Donum: Essays in Historical Linguistics in Memory of J. Alexander Kerns*, edited by Y. L. Arbeitman and A. R. Bomhard. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
   1982   *Forgotten Scripts: Their Ongoing Discovery and Decipherment*. New York: Basic Books.
   1984   Reflections on the Decipherment of Minoan. *Orientalia* 53:453-5.
   1992   The Mediterranean Synthesis. Pp. 188-96 in *The Crisis Years: The 12th Century B.C.*, edited by W. A. Ward and M. S. Joukowsky. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

ten Haaf, F. E. L.
   1975   A Note on the Linear A Tablet HT 11. *Kadmos* 14:175-6.

Haarmann, H.
   1990   Writing from Old Europe to Ancient Crete—A Case of Cultural Continuity. *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 18:251-75.

Hurvitz, A.
   1972   *Beyn Lashon le-Lashon*. Jerusalem: Bialik.

Rendsburg, G. A.
   1980   Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of 'P'. *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 12:65-80.
   1982   On Jan Best's "Decipherment" of Minoan Linear A. *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*. 14:79-87.

Salonen, A.
   1966   *Die Hausgeräte der alten Mesopotamier*. 3 vols. Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Sciences.

Stieglitz, R. R.
   1971   Minoan and Biblical Totals. *Studi Miceni ed Egeo-Anatolici* 14:217-18.

Ventris, M. and Chadwick, J.
   1956   *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*. London: Cambridge University Press.
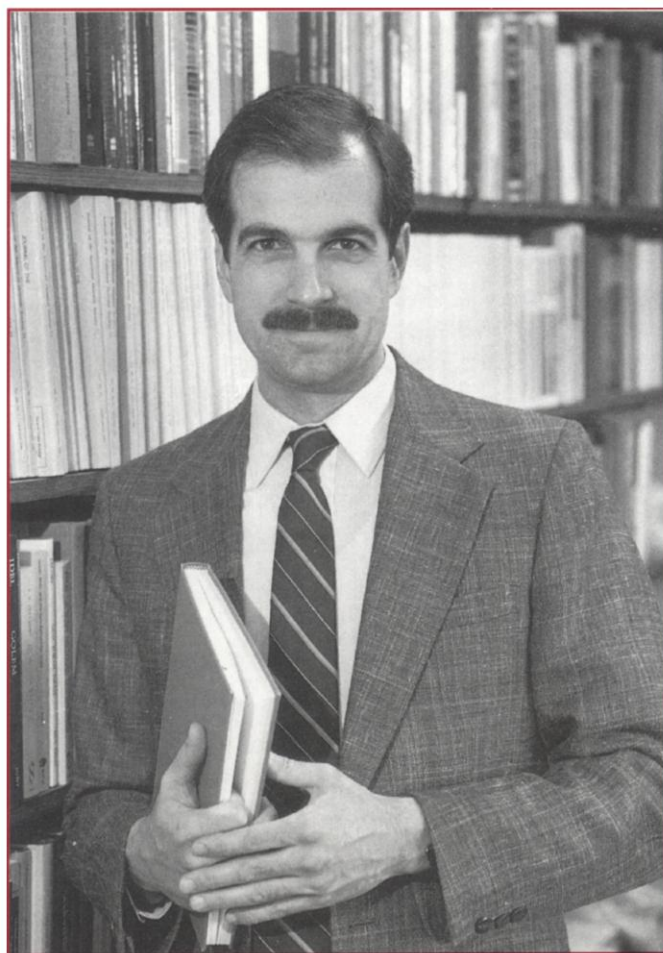
Gary A. Rendsburg is professor of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. He is a specialist in the Northwest Semitic languages and associated literatures. Rendsburg earned his Ph.D. in 1980 at New York University, where his mentor was Cyrus H. Gordon. Dr. Rendsburg edited the 1980 Festschrift, *The Bible World:Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon* (KTAV). He is the author of three books, including *Linquistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (Scholars Press, 1990), and dozens of articles covering a wide range of issues relevant to the study of the Hebrew Bible.

This book contains little (if any) hard archaeological data on Israelites and their natural surroundings. For specifics on that, the reader would be far better served to read David Hopkins' *The Highlands of Canaan* (Decatur, GA: The Almond Press, 1985), which Simkins cites often in his own work. Rather, Simkins constructs a number of models for evaluating any particular culture's interaction with its environment (usually illustrated by helpful diagrams), then applies those measures to ancient Israel. He is very careful to explain what he is doing every step of the way, so that even if the reader disagrees with Simkins' interpretations or methodology, she or he still understands Simkins' conclusions and how he arrived at them.

In his early chapters, Simkins establishes that humans can relate to the environment in harmony, mastery, or subjugation contexts—a standard for evaluation which he uses throughout the book. He urges the reader not to project modern concepts backwards, but to try to let the texts speak for themselves. He pulls in creation accounts from a variety of other ancient Near Eastern cultures in order to create a broader context within which to examine the Genesis records. Though he has produced a helpful compilation of texts, Simkins' enthusiasm for parallels leads to too many conclusions which only allow for the biblical text to be seen in the mold of other writings. For example, Simkins writes that it is only the process of abstraction which has over the years separated Yahweh's production by divine fiat from the underlying notion that intercourse was involved in the production of the earth and all that is in it (p. 80). Though Simkins warns often against anachronism, ethnocentrism, and any number of other dangers, it seems that he has a modern penchant for denying any possibility for uniqueness in the biblical text.

Indeed, in Chapter Three, Simkins takes to task those who would emphasize the differences between the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts. He alleges ulterior motives to those who perceive differences, but sometimes his examples of continuities seem lifted from their contexts in order to support his presuppositions. Many of his conclusions thus derived provide no room for alternative interpretations. In Simkins' depiction of virtually all Yahweh's battles as "cosmogonic struggles," there are no comparison/contrast evaluations in regard to other ancient texts; rather there are absolute statements such as (in reference to the Re(e)d Sea episode of the Exodus), "these battles are modelled after God's victory over chaos in the primordial battle of creation" (p. 112). Period.

These critiques aside, Simkins effectively establishes a model for understanding Israelite perspectives on the natural world in which humans and the natural world are both seen to be of the same order, though distinct from one another, and certainly, both distinct from Yahweh. At several points, Simkins despairs over those who interpret the background of Israel only in historical terms, seeing the natural world merely as a backdrop. He cites theophanies as prime examples of Israel relating to God within the natural realm and creates helpful diagrams indicating ancient Israel's concepts of sacred space. Simkins demonstrates how such concepts as "Zion" and "our land" had actual geographical antecedents in the land of Israel.

Threats to Israel's security were often portrayed in environmental terms, Simkins notes in examining the words of the prophets, though I do not feel that projecting eschatological content into environmental threats would have been necessary to terrify these frontierspeople who virtually always lived on the very edge of existence.

Simkins does an admirable job of compiling a huge number of texts which demonstrate a variety of perceptions about the environment and its relationship to the Israelites at various points of their history, while emphasizing throughout the distinctions always maintained between creator and creation. He establishes well that the environment is not just an occasionally changing backdrop to the "real story," but that it is itself a significant presence on the stage. Simkins is accurate in his concluding chapter when he states that, "these models [introduced throughout the book] take seriously the Bible's numerous references to the natural world and enable the interpreter to place these references within a meaningful framework" (p. 255).

Both the beginning and the end of the book address the present state of the environment and reflect on various theological perspectives dealing with the earth itself attributed to Scripture. Simkins rebuts the concept that it is Judeo-Christian theology which has created the current crisis and offers some suggestions for dealing with the earth based on a broader perception of the biblical perspective regarding nature. But this book is much more than a pop volume designed to offer some simple answers for those Jews and Christians who feel a vague sense of guilt about the environment. Simkins has crafted a map and a compass that will enable the reader to navigate more perceptively and accurately what the Bible has to say about the natural world. Those who read *Creator and Creation* will never again read Scripture with a lack of attention to its relationships to the natural realm.

David Embree
Southwest Missouri State University

Corrigenda and Obscurus

In "Someone Will Succeed in Deciphering Minoan" (p. 42, para. 5, line 3), Professor's Rendsburg's third example of an application of Minoan and Eteocretan to biblical studies was rendered less than comprehensible by inadvertent font loss. With the correct fonts in place, Rendsburg notes Gordon's observation that in the Eteocretan phrase ΚΛ ΕΣ Υ ΕΣ , "the word for 'man' is written ΕΣ, as opposed to the expected ΙΣ (compare IP 'city')." The phrase thus offers a parallel to the Eshbaal–Ishbosheth correspondence.

We apologize to our readers and to author Professor Tsumura for the unfortunate way that the background of his article obscured the text of the article itself. Design should enhance the reading experience, not turn it into a optic endurance examination. Please also accept our pledge not to use backgrounds in this fashion again.