THE MYCENAEN CONTRIBUTION TO GREEK ETYMOLOGY

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Note: In this article, tablet references are given by site names (KN = Knossos, PY = Pylos, MY = Mycenae) followed by the alphabetic prefixes used to classify tablets, with the number of the tablet itself, e.g. PY Ta 641. A + after a reference indicates that the word quoted occurs in more than one tablet of the same series. The Mycenaean forms are quoted in Roman transcription, with hyphens dividing off each syllabic group, in accordance with the internationally followed ‘Wingspread’ convention; reconstructed Mycenaean forms are given in Roman script, without hyphens, to distinguish them on the one hand from the transliterated forms, on the other from attested Greek words, which are quoted in Greek script. The abbreviation Myc. stands for Mycenaean.

In references to books and articles, the full title is given, except where the abbreviation of the periodical is generally known or self-evident. The following abbreviations of works of reference have been used:


One of the most valuable contributions of the decipherment of the Linear B script to Greek studies, is the light which it throws on the etymology of a number of Greek words. It is for this reason that I have found justification for including in this article material which has already been discussed elsewhere, so that the most important evidence may be readily available under one head. Only etymologies have been discussed which have had to be...
revised as a result of the Mycenaean evidence, where the evidence itself is reasonably reliable and where identifications with later Greek words have found fairly general acceptance. Where a previously accepted etymology may seem to need revision on the grounds of a personal name alone, this evidence has not been given, since the meaning of personal names cannot be sufficiently controlled by the context, and they are therefore most liable to alternative interpretations.

At first sight the Mycenaean contribution to Greek etymology does not seem to be very spectacular, as in the majority of cases the evidence of the tablets merely serves to confirm the conjectures reached by etymologists on the grounds of comparative study; in these cases it proves the soundness of much of the earlier work. Examples which immediately spring to mind are ἐλαια and κλωφόρος, where the F postulated on the grounds of the Latin loan-words oliua and clauis is confirmed by the Mycenaean forms e-ra-wa, e-ra-wo and ka-ra-wi-po-ro, interpreted as elaiwat, elaiwon and klōiphoros respectively. In other cases, reconstructions formerly rejected by most etymologists have been vindicated by the evidence of the tablets, as in the case of πᾶς, where the proposed connexion with Tokharian A puk, B po, plural ponta 'all' has been confirmed by the absence of the labio-velar in the Mycenaean forms interpreted as forms of the word πᾶς, thus excluding the possibility of derivation from the stem *kyant-. Also, the conjunction o-te in PY Ta 711 confirms the reconstruction of a suffix -te in I.E. as proposed by Brugmann, and shows that the conjunction agrees with Cypriot o-te (Schwyzer, Dialektorum graecarum exempla epigraphica potiora no. 679) and has no connexion with the enclitic τε, Μυκ. τε.

In a number of important cases, the evidence of the tablets necessitates a revision of the generally accepted etymology. There are, for instance, the divine names Ἕρμης and Ἡρα, and connected with the latter, probably also ἱρος. I confine myself here to the linguistic evidence. The etymology of the name Hermes has long been a matter of dispute (see Boisacq, Frisk). The most commonly accepted etymology has been a derivation of the name from ἐρμα 'cairn', as for instance by Wilamowitz 'nach dem Pfeiler der ihn vertritt' and Nilsson 'der vom Steinhaufen'. In the Mycenaean form the name of the god appears as e-ma-a, (PY Nn 1357, Tn 316, Un 219).

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such as *di-we* and *e-ra*, as the recipient of offerings consisting of a gold cup and a man. In the other cases he is not so obviously divine, apparently being excused a contribution of flax in NN 1357, and appearing in a list of divine and human names in Un 219. However, the identification with Hermes has found fairly general acceptance. The absence of the initial *F- in the Mycenaean form would disprove the etymology from ἔρμα, if this is from *yers-mn* (Boisacq, Hofmann) or *syer-mm* (Frisk); but Chantraine argues that the lack of *F- does not necessarily preclude the connexion with ἔρμα as the *F- postulated for the latter is by no means certain. Elsewhere he argues that the word is not I.E. at all. Attempts have been made to give the word a near-Eastern origin (though still remotely I.E.), as by Kretschmer who postulates a connexion with the Lydian river Hermus, and with Lycian personal names in *Ern-, Arm-*. The Greek origin of the god has been called into question by writers on Greek religion also, and in our attempts to provide an I.E. etymology for his name, ‘we must not forget the possibility . . . that his name is not Greek at all’ (Rose). The Mycenaean form brings us no nearer to an undisputed etymology of the name, but the lack of initial *F- at least shows that any etymology connecting the name with Skt. *vārśma*, ‘height, hill’, Lat. *uerrūca* ‘wart’, also ‘height’, or Lith. *svaris* ‘heavy’, Germ. *schwer* should be abandoned.

A *F* was also formerly postulated for the name Hera, from ***HrFa, showing connexion with Lat. *seruare, Av. hauraiti*; according to this etymology, Hera would mean the ‘Mistress’, the ‘Protectress’, as ἥρως would be the ‘Protector’. The presence of the *F* was supported by the form *ErFaioi*, an ethnic derivative of Ἡρα in an Elean inscription, though doubts had been cast on the correctness of the spelling by the absence of the *F* in Arcado-Cyprian inscriptions, e.g. Cypr. *Epa*14, and by the retention of the -a in Attic *Hpa* (contrast Att. κόρη < *kóρά). The Mycenaean form *e-ra* (PY Tn 316), in context with *di-we* and other divine names, disproves the proposed etymology from ***HrFa (Frisk). Similarly, the *F* is absent from *ti-ri-se-ro-we* (PY Fr 1204, Tn 316) interpreted as dative *Trisérōei*, probably the name of a minor deity derived from ἥρως, in the tablets the recipient of oil and a gold cup. Attempts have subsequently been made to provide a new etymology for Ἡρα and ἥρως, connecting

13. Schweyer, op. cit. no. 413.
them with the root *for-joir-, found in Gk. ὑφα, Germ. Jahr etc.\textsuperscript{17} Tempting as this reconstruction may be, it has not been established beyond doubt, and it may well prove that both the goddess and her name, as well as the cognate ἱππας belong to the pre-Greek substratum of belief and language, and that all attempts to provide them with an I.E. etymology are in vain.

As the above examples show, the commonly accepted etymologies have had to be rejected on the grounds of the absence of the F in the Mycenaean forms. Since the F seems to be noted punctiliously in the Mycenaean script, its presence or absence there can be taken as a fairly sure indication of the form of the word at this early period. An important example where the absence of the F has necessitated a revision of the etymology is the preposition ἐνεκα, formerly derived from ἐν-*Feκα or ἐν-*Feκα.\textsuperscript{18} The use of the word e-ne-ka with the genitive in Mycenaean (KN As 821, PY Ae 303, An 37, Ea 805, Eq 59), whatever its exact meaning, makes it hardly likely that the identification with the later ἐνεκα is mistaken, particularly as the group -nw- seems always to be written in Mycenaean (cf. pe-ru-si-nu-wo, pe-ru-si-nwa etc., ke-se-nu-wo etc.).\textsuperscript{19} Hence the identification has been accepted by most Mycenologists; see in particular the article by Chantraine, who, after earlier doubts, accepts the identification and connects the word with the root of ἐνεγκεῖν (*αν-ek-), explaining the form as an adverb of the type κάρτα, λίπα, and the rough breathing as analogy of ἐκτι or perhaps rather ὀβεκα (cf. τοῦνεκα without aspiration).\textsuperscript{20}

Another identification which, if correct, would demand a revision of the hitherto accepted etymology, is that of the occupational terms ra-pte (PY An 172, Ea 28+), plural ra-pte-re (KN Fh 1056, V 159, PY An 209+) and ra-pi-ti-ra (PY Ab 555) as forms derived from the verb ἅπτω. The etymology proposed for this word is from *ιρφ-ιό (Boisacq, Hofmann), giving as cognate Lith. įerpiū ‘spin’. The identification of the Mycenaean forms with ἅπτω has been attacked on the grounds that the meaning of ra-pte as ‘one who sews’ is by no means certain,\textsuperscript{21} and other interpretations have been proposed. So F. Adrados and J.-P. Olivier connect the words with λάμπω.\textsuperscript{22} The criticism of Winter\textsuperscript{21} takes no account of a tablet found at Pylos in 1957 (Sb 1315) on which the form ra-pte-ri-ja occurs. It is an

\textsuperscript{18} Brugmann, IF 17 (1912), pp. 1 ff.; Boisacq; Frisk, who mentions the Myc. form, but without comment; Bechtel, Lex. 115 f.
\textsuperscript{19} See MGV, s.v. τῆρων, ἔνεκος.
\textsuperscript{20} Chantraine, Rev. de Phil. 36 (1962), pp. 15–22; cf. Whatmough, Class. Phil. 54 (1959), p. 125.
epithet of ἱνα in a list of words concerned with harness, and has been interpreted as ῥαπτεῖρια 'with saddlers' work'23 or 'stitched'.24 Further, there is the form e-ra-pe-me-na as a description of textiles in KN L 647, interpreted as erra-pmena 'sewn', which also lacks the F. These forms, which cannot easily be separated from ra-p-te, ra-pi-ti-ra, make the identification with ῥάπτω more probable. There would seem to be no reason to reject the identification on the grounds of the spelling of the personal name wa-ra-pi-si-ro (MY Au 102; interpreted as Wrapsilos and derived by Heubeck from ῥάπτω)25 in view of the uncertainty inherent in the interpretation of personal names.

In a number of cases the check on the etymology of a Greek word is provided by the presence or absence of the labio-velar in the Mycenaean form, since it has long been established that Mycenaean has a special series for the labio-velars. Most scholars now also accept the value qa for the sign formerly transcribed pa, since it has become clear that original labials and labio-velars were not confused before -a.26 Notable cases here are πᾶς (see above, p. 2) and πάλαι.27 The early identification of pa-ra-jo, pa-ra-ja with παλαιός in a number of tablets was at first strongly attacked both on etymological grounds (παλαιός from *qʷal-, cf. τῆλε (Boisacq, Hofmann)28) and on grounds of context in the PY Cn tablets,29 but it has now gained almost general acceptance.30 It is found in the tablets as an epithet of men, textiles, chariot-frames, wheels and reins, and perhaps also as abbreviation pa applied to women and sheep at Knossos. It is also contrasted with ne-wa 'new', as in PY Sa 787 to-sa pa-ra-ja we-je-ke-a and Sa 843 to-sa we-je-ke-a ne-wa, both with ideogram representing wheel.31 In the PY Cn tablets, where the meaning 'old' does not seem to fit the context, it is possible that pa-ra-jo represents another word, but for the other cases the opposition of pa-ra-ja to ne-wa seems to put the identification beyond all doubt.

Another example where the presence of the labio-velar in the Mycenaean form enables us to reconstruct a more certain etymology, is found in the word φέρβα. It was hitherto impossible to be certain of its original form, as tentative identification with words in other languages (<<bher-b-, see Boisacq, s.v. φέρβα) was by no means certain. The presence of the labio-velar

27. See MGV s.v. πάλαι and Preface, p. 159.
in the forms po-qa (KN Gv 862, PY Un 138), an annotation to olives, probably \( = \text{phorg}^\text{w} \text{ā} \text{food}'\), po-ge-wi-ja (PY Sb 1315), po-ge-wi-ja-i (An 1282) in context with reins and chariots, probably \( \text{phorg}^\text{w} \text{ei} \text{ai} = \text{φορβεία} \), and i-po-po-go-i (PY Fn 1192) interpreted as hippophorg\(\text{oi}' \text{horse-pasturers}', \) enables us to reconstruct \( \text{bhergw} \) as the base of this word.\(^{32}\)

A tempting interpretation which has, however, not been established beyond all doubt, points to the identification of the verb \( \text{ālē} \text{w} \) with the root \( *\text{mel} \) and its Ablaut forms \( *\text{mol} \), \( *\text{ml} \), which are at the base of words in many I.E. languages connected with grinding, as Lat. \text{molo}, Early Irish \( \text{melim} \), Goth. \text{malam}, Arm. \text{malem} 'crush', Gk. \( \text{μύλη} \); Gk. \( \text{μύλλω} \) only in sens. obsc. The Greek verb \( \text{ālē} \text{w} \), also \( \text{ἀλευρον} \), are usually connected with words in other I.E. languages meaning 'flour', as Arm. \text{alew'r}, M. Ind. \( \text{ātā} \) etc. (see Boisacq, Frisk). In Mycenaean, the forms which may show the \( *\text{mel} \) root are me-re-u-ro (PY Un 718), a commodity in a list of offerings, interpreted as meleuron 'flour' (cf. \( \text{ἄλευρον} \), dial. \( \text{μάλευρον} \)),\(^{33}\) and me-re-ti-ri-ja (PY An 62+), a description of women, interpreted as \( \text{melerai} \) 'corn-grinders' (though not without an element of doubt).\(^{34}\) If these forms have been correctly identified, it is likely that the Greek verb \( \text{ālē} \text{w} \) (from the \( *\text{ml} \) grade of the root) is to be connected with the 'mill' words in other I.E. languages and in Greek itself, which is a more economical hypothesis than to seek cognates from another root such as that underlying M. Ind. \( \text{ātā} \) where the correspondence is not so clear. The dialect form \( \text{μάλευρον} \) could also then be explained as contamination of \( \text{ἄλευρον} \) and \( *\text{mēlευρον} \).

In some cases, the Mycenaean evidence suggests that more than one root has been confused in certain classical Greek words. Several forms in Mycenaean have been identified with the root of \( \text{τρέπω} \), though not with absolute certainty. First there is to-ro-ge-jo-me-no (PY Eq 213), in the heading to a tablet recording amounts of seed. In the context it seems to be a middle/passive participle agreeing with the personal name \( \text{a-ko-so-ta} \), probably \( \text{Axotas} \), which has in its turn been taken as the subject of \( \text{o-wi-de} \) 'thus A. saw'. The participle has been interpreted as \( \text{troqw skips} \) from \( \text{τρέπω} \), but with uncertain sense: Ventris-Chadwick tentatively suggest 'on his tour of inspection',\(^{35}\) while Palmer suggests \( \text{troqweomenos} \) 'causing to plough' or \( \text{strokweomenos} \) 'on a tour of inspection'.\(^{36}\) There is also the form to-ro-go (KN Od 563) in obscure context, interpreted as \( \text{troq} \text{w} \text{on} \),\(^{37}\)

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and the personal name e-u-to-ro-qa (PY Jn 478), possibly Eutroq"hos,\(^{38}\) which alone would be insufficient as evidence, but can be used in conjunction with the other forms. Possibly connected is also to-qi-de (PY Ta 642+) with its adjectival derivatives to-qi-de-jolja (Ta 709, Ta 715) and to-qi-de-we-sa (Ta 711), which would be formed from the zero grade of the root with -or- from -r-. It is found as a decorative element on furniture and has been interpreted as 'spiral'.\(^{39}\) If these forms have been correctly identified with the root of τρέπω, it seems to be necessary to reject the connexion with Skt. trāpate 'be ashamed', O. Lat. trepit, usually explained as uertī = Gk. τρέπει (see Walde, Ernout-Meillet) and to accept the proposed connexion with Lat. torqueō (Schwyzer, Meillet). Further support may be given to the etymology with the labio-velar by the synonyms ἄτροπος/ἄτρεκκης, and by the entry in Hesychius, Cypr. εὐτρόφος/εὐτρέκκης with Cypr. ἑν- for ἑπτ- and -σε- from -q"i-.\(^{40}\) The root *treq"- would then replace *trep- as the base of Greek τρέπω. On the other hand, there is the possibility that these two roots have been confused in classical Greek. If that is so, the connection with Skt. trāpate, Lat. trepit on the one hand, and Latin torqueō on the other, could be retained.

The Mycenaean evidence is further complicated by other forms showing a labio-velar which might possibly be connected with the above. J. Kerschensteiner, followed by A. Heubeck,\(^{41}\) interprets to-ro-qa-jo-me-no as trophēmeno-, participle from *tropheō from root *dhregwh-,\(^{42}\) to which Heubeck attaches the meaning 'gewachsen, geerntet'. He further connects with this word forms like to-ro-qa (KN Fh 358-) and ku-su-to-ro-qa (KN B 817, PY Ec 411, Er 880). to-ro-qa, a word used to describe oil, is by most scholars derived from the root of τρέφω (*dhregwh-), in the sense of 'food', 'for consumption'\(^{43}\) or 'Ernte'.\(^{44}\) The problem of ku-su-to-ro-qa is rather more difficult. It is used to introduce summations and the meaning is something like 'aggregate', closely approximating to the meaning of later συστρεφή. Heubeck derives this word also from the root of τρέφω, as a compound of to-ro-qa in the sense of 'Gesamtnahrung' or 'Gesamternte',\(^{44}\) while most other scholars connect it with σύστρεφω.\(^{45}\) Either the derivation of συστρεφή from σύστρεφω is to be abandoned, or the etymology of σύστρεφω from *strebh- should be revised. As there are no really satisfactory cognates showing the

\(^{38}\) This could also be Eutroghhos from *dhregwh-; see Heubuck, IF 63 (1958), p. 123.

\(^{39}\) Docs., p. 336.

\(^{40}\) Docs., p. 416; Palmer, BICS 2 (1955), p. 44.


\(^{42}\) Earlier proposed by Meillet, see Boisacq, s.v. ὃρδημος.


\(^{44}\) Heubeck, IF 63 (1958), p. 120.

\(^{45}\) Docs., p. 408; Chadwick, Athenaeum 46, p. 303; Palmer, Interpretation, pp. 218, 432; Pisani, Paideia 12 (1957), p. 170, suggests connexion with troqw-.
root *strebh- in other I.E. languages, except perhaps Latin strebula, an Umbrian loan-word meaning the flesh round the thigh of the sacrificial animal (see Walde, Ernout-Meillet), the second alternative is perhaps preferable. Or have we here also a case of the confusion of more than one root in Greek? 46

The decipherment of the Linear B script has by no means solved all problems of etymology; sometimes the Mycenaean form raises new problems, as in the case of qe-to (PY Ta 641, MY Ue 611), the name of a vessel, with its diminutive qe-ti-ja (MY Ue 611, Wt 504). This was at first joyfully equated with Greek πιθος, until it was pointed out that the identification was in conflict with the generally accepted etymology of πιθος from *bhidh- (cf. Lat. fidelis, Icelandic bida ‘pot for butter’). 47 In view of the fact that there is no evidence of the size of qe-to on the Mycenaean tablets, and in the absence of a better attested etymology, we are forced to leave the equation qe-to/πιθος with a large question mark.

46. For a further possible case of the confusion of more than one root in Greek, see MGV, s.v. ὀφεῖλα, ὀφεῖλος. The verbal forms identified as forms of ὀφεῖλα do not show the τ usually postulated for the word, and it is therefore possible to connect them with the form ὀ-πε-ρο, apparently used in the tablets to denote a deficit and probably formally equivalent to ὀφεῖλος. It is not clear whether Myc. ὀ-πε-ρο ‘deficit’ and Homeric ὀφεῖλος ‘help, assistance’ originated from two different roots, or whether the different meanings developed from an original sense of ‘that which is needed’.

47. For a fuller discussion of the difficulties, see Chadwick, Studii Clasice 2 (1960), p. 62 f.; for the alternation of ἰ and ε in Mycenaean, see D. A. Hester, Minos 6 (1958), pp. 24-36.
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