

7. Short Article/Review

"Jan Best and Minoan Linear A."

Gary A. Rendsburg, Canisius College, Buffalo, New York.

For slightly more than a decade now, Jan G. P. Best has been publishing material towards the decipherment and interpretation of Minoan Linear A. This work has culminated in TAAANTA: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society, Volume XIII/1981, Supplementum Epigraphicum Mediterraneum (Middelie, The Netherlands: Studio Pieter Mulier, 1982). The academic community should be apprised that this volume in large part appropriates material previously published by a fellow scholar.

The main thrust of Best's work is that the Minoan Linear A inscriptions are Semitic, closely related to Ugaritic. Anyone with but a superficial knowledge of Minoica, Semitics, Classics, or Mediterranean archaeology will immediately realize that such a statement is nothing new and revelational, but merely in agreement with the published work of Cyrus H. Gordon during the last quarter century. The Linear A examples adduced by Best and the Ugaritic material garnered to defend the Semitic nature of Minoan are often exactly the same as those utilized by Gordon. The correspondences in Best's and Gordon's works clearly are not coincidental, for in previous publications (e.g., Some Preliminary Remarks on the Decipherment of Linear A (Amsterdam, 1972)) the former actually cites the latter and even claims him to be "the first and most ardent advocate" of the Semitic character of Linear A. One can only conclude that Best now wishes to deflect credit for the decipherment of these texts from Gordon to himself.

Best does present new material, but it reflects an apparent inability to handle Semitic philology. Among the Ugaritic forms he cites are emphatic -y, vocative -m, and enclitic -m following possessive suffix, but the existence of each of these usages has never been confirmed in Ugaritic studies. At one point Best forwards uky in UT 1018:5 to elucidate a Minoan text, but to use this rare and enigmatic form in the decipherment of Linear A is an example of ignotum per ignotius.

Best's modus operandi is clear: he repeats without acknowledgment material published by Gordon more than two decades ago, occasionally altering it or supplementing it with Ugaritic evidence which evaporates upon closer examination. Best deserves criticism not only from those who accept Gordon's work, but also from those who have argued for other identifications of Linear A (Luwian, Hittite, etc.). A more fully developed and detailed article will be forthcoming in another journal.