



Minoan names

Astrid van den Kerkhof and Peter Rem*

*Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

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Abstract

Greek myth hands down the names of Minoan cities, kings, and goddesses. The Vedic interpretation of these names creates an insight into their meaning, and indirectly into the organization and religion of Minoan society. The most interesting result is obtained from the analysis of *Aphrodite*, the name of the foam-born goddess.

Introduction

In the past century, various authors reported evidence for a link between the Harappan and Vedic civilizations of the Indus Valley and the Minoan culture of Crete (L.C. Fabri 1935; H. Mode 1944; S. Alexiou; R. Kamm 1967). In 1999, V. Sarianidi provided a plausible explanation for the observed similarities between these civilizations by reconstructing a migration route of Near Eastern Aryans into the Indian subcontinent. Sarianidi's theory rests in part on parallels of the archaeological record of the Aryan tribes with Minoan/Mycenaean seals and architecture. His theory therefore implied the possibility that the Minoans were related to the Aryan tribes and that the divergence-time between the Minoan language of the Linear A script and Vedic is as small as a few hundred years. The authors tested this hypothesis on the two best documented words from the Minoan language, KU-LO and PO-TO, and found that both words are indeed meaningful and grammatically correct Vedic in their Minoan context. This paper analyses Minoan names recorded in Greek myth with the help of the Vedic language in order to get an improved insight into the organization and religion of Minoan society.

Minoan names

The Greek myths offer some precisely spelled names of Minoan cities, kings and goddesses. Well-known examples are Κνωσός, Φαίστός, Μίνως and 'Ραδάμανθυς. The amount of information in a name may seem very limited but it sometimes helps to settle interesting questions. An example is the issue concerning the names of the Minoan kings raised by H.J. Rose: "Who Minos really was we probably shall never know, nor whether the word is a proper name or a title." The Vedic stem *mino* or *minu* means *to mete out* and, more specifically, *to judge*. The meaning of the stem fits well with the office of Minos, who was a legendary judge. According to the myth, Minos meted out punishment to the Athenians, visited the cave of Zeus on Mount Ida to receive a new code of law every nine years (Plato's Laws I 624) and ruled as supreme judge in the underworld (Od. XI 568). Therefore, the Vedic interpretation points out that *Minos* is a title rather than a name and suggests that the bearers were supreme judges of the Minoan empire, responsible for the code of law for a limited period of time (cf. Od. XIX 178).

The name of Radamanthus ends on the Vedic *mantus*, which means anything from *adviser*, *manager* to *ruler*, *king*. Since *rādhā* means *prosperity*, the options for interpretation are between *King Rādhā* and *manager of prosperity*. Constructs like *rādhāmantus*, that combine a subject with the authority governing it, are common in Vedic: dhūrta-rāja: *chief of rogues*,

nagara-pati: *protector of the town*, nāvika-pati: *captain of a ship*, rādhas-pati: *lord of gifts or wealth*. Examples like these suggest that *Rādhāmantus* is a title like *Minos*. The Linear A administration of the Minoan marine port at Hagia Triada offers what appear to be similar constructs. Record HT 85 mentions a KI-KI-RA-JA (ciki-rāja: *chief of intelligence*) and a monogram reading PA-TI-PA-TI (pathi-pati: *protector of the (sea-)ways*, cf. Vedic pathi-pa: *protecting the road*): officials of a highly organized society with well-defined responsibilities.

If Knossos (Linear B: ko-no-so; Homer: Κνωσός (f.)) is a Minoan name, there are few options for translation. Only four or five roots in Vedic start with *kn-*. One of them, *knas*: *shine* can possibly fit with Κνωσός, and then only if it is followed by *uso* (from *usā* or *usas*): *of Dawn*. The euphonic rules of Vedic prescribe that the final *-s* of *knas* drops with a hiatus: *kna uso*. In practice, the hiatus often disappears, so that the result is *Knoso*: *Light of Dawn*. Although the translation comes as a surprise, it is actually internally consistent. Some twenty songs of the Rig Veda are devoted to Dawn and more than half of her adjectives have to do with light. She is called *citrā* (shining), *vibhātī* (shining), *rócāmanā* (glowing), *çukrā* (giving light), *çubhrā* (shimmering), *bhadrā* (shining), *devī* (divine), *subhāgā* (lovely), *maghōnī* (generous) and *revātī* (rich).

Phaistos (Linear A: PA-I-TO; Homer: Φαιστός) shows the Greek superlative ending *-ιστος*. Vedic has the same ending: *-istho* for the intensive, but the difference with Greek is that the ending combines with any type of stem. Here, it is probably combined with *bhā(s)*: to glow (Greek: φάε: light). Phaistos then means *Bright Glow*, again an unexpected result.

Aphrodite

The myths, cult and art of the Greek Aphrodite show two essentially different goddesses: a chaste and shy beauty and an Oriental sex-and-fertility goddess. Three early Greek myths, the Kypria, the Homeric hymn on Aphrodite and the Theogony, and the story of Pygmalion by Ovid connect Aphrodite to the (Cypro-)Minoan world by references to Mount Ida and the islands of Cyprus and Cythera (Aphrodite is called Kypria or Cytherea). The story of Pygmalion also relates her to the Minoan custom of offering cows with gilded horns:

“It was the day of Aphrodite, a feast that is celebrated in all of Cyprus. Young cows, their horns covered in gold, had been struck at their snow-white necks and the sacrifices smoked, when Pygmalion, having performed his own, remained at the altar and started: “If you gods can give all things, I wish as my wife...”, not daring to say “the ivory virgin”, he said: “one like my ivory statue.” Golden Aphrodite, who was present at her own feast, appreciated his words as they were meant, and, as a sign of her friendly mood, the flames lighted three times with fiery tongues. As soon as he returned home, he reached for the statue of his girl and, leaning over, gave her a kiss. She seemed warm. He kissed her again, even tried her breasts: the ivory softened and yielded to his touch like the wax of Hymettus softens by the sun...”

Metamorphoseon X, 270

Starting from the possibility that Aphrodite is a genuinely Minoan name, the Homeric hymn and the Theogony hint at the meaning of her name:

“I will sing of the shy, gold-crowned, beautiful Aphrodite. She fitted spears to the guardian walls of her sea-embedded Cyprus, where once the rainy gusts of the western wind had carried her in fragile foam over the waves of the roaring sea. And the Seasons with their golden ribbons had greeted her merrily, and threw a heavenly dress around her: on her divine head, they put a well-forged crown, beautiful and gold, and in her pierced ears they put rings of yellow ore and valuable gold. They arranged golden necklaces around her soft neck and

silvery white breasts, as the Seasons wear themselves when they join the lovely dances of the gods in their father's house. As soon as they had finished laying the jewellery on her skin, they brought her to the immortal gods: and these welcomed her with an embrace and with their hands and every one of them longed to be joined with her in marriage and take her home. So strong was the spell of the looks of the violet-crowned goddess of Cythera.”

May you be happy, sweet-voiced, coy-eyed one!

Homeric hymn II

“And just as he (Kronos) had cut off the members (of Ouranos) with brutal means, he threw them from the land into the wild sea. So they were carried over the surface for a long time: white foam grew from the immortal skin, and in it a maiden formed. First she drifted along holiest Cythera, and then she arrived at the isle of Cyprus, and developed into a shy and lovely goddess, and around her, grass grew under her light feet. Gods and men call her Aphrodite, the foam-born goddess, and well-crowned Cytherea, because she formed from foam, ...”

Hesiod, Theogony, II, 188

The last myth has been the source of much speculation. Many authors, in modern as well as in classical times, think that Hesiod implies that *Aphrodite* means *foam-born*. However, *Aphrodite* in Vedic means *born from the wet (water-laden)*. The construct *abhroditā* is a combination of *abhra* (literally: water-laden, specifically: rainy weather, cloud) and *uditā* (born, risen). The two interpretations *foam-born* and *born from the wet* are so close that it is likely that *Aphrodite* is a Minoan name and that Hesiod indeed meant to explain its meaning. Since the basic meaning of *abhra* is compatible with the specific meaning *foam*, there are two distinct possibilities. In either case, it seems safe to assume that the Greek lent their word for foam, *αφρος* = *abhro* (nominative of *abhra*), from the Minoans and that therefore the meaning of the word must once have included also *foam*. In fact, *αφρος* has no clear Greek etymology. However, did the Minoans mean that their goddess was born from foam or did Hesiod assume this on the basis of the specific Greek meaning? Here, Sanskrit mythology helps out. Monier-Williams writes:

“Lakṣmī (literally Fortune): Goddess of beauty and fortune, according to Ramayana i, 45, 40-43 she sprang with other precious things from the foam of the ocean when churned by the gods and demons for the recovery of the Amṛita.”

The *Ramayana* is a poem like the Theogony:

“Then as the waters foamed and boiled,
as churning still the Immortals toiled,
of winning face and lovely frame,
forth sixty million fair ones came.
Born of the foam and water,
these were aptly named Apsarases.

...

Then from the sea still vexed and wild,
rose Surá, Varuna's maiden child.

...

At length when many a year had fled,
up floated, on her lotus bed,
a maiden fair and tender-eyed,

in the young flush of beauty's pride.
 She shone with pearl and golden sheen,
 and seals of glory stamped her queen.
 On each round arm glowed many a gem,
 on her smooth brows, a diadem.
 Rolling in waves beneath her crown,
 the glory of her hair flowed down.
 Pearls on her neck of price untold,
 the lady shone like burnished gold.
 Queen of the Gods, she leapt to land,
 a lotus in her perfect hand,
 and fondly, of the lotus-sprung,
 to lotus-bearing Vishnu clung.
 Her Gods above and men below,
 as Beauty's Queen and Fortune know.”

RĀMĀYAN OF VĀLMĪKI, 45, translation by Ralph T. H. Griffith

Even apart from the fact that the Vedic beauty goddess is also born from the foam of the wild sea, the parallels with the Aphrodite of the Greek myth are many. Both goddesses are golden, with crown and jewellery, tender-eyed (shy, coy-eyed), and drift to shore to make their acquaintance with the other gods.

Other Minoan-Vedic goddesses

There is evidence for two other Minoan-Vedic goddesses next to Aphrodite. The Vedic snake-goddess is called Manasā. She is usually shown with snakes, a red dress and staring eyes. The snake goddess of Crete is known from two faience statuettes found at Knossos. The statues fit the Vedic details, but more importantly, the name of a goddess ma-na-sa appears prominently on the famous offering tablet Tn 316 from the Mycenaean palace of Pylos, which had strong ties with Knossos.

The Vedic word *idā* means *refreshing drink, libation*. It is also the name of the Vedic libation-goddess Ida. She provides gods and men with her powerful drinks, based on milk and butter, for which she is associated with the cow (like the Vedic Mother goddess Adītī). The word I-DA is one of the most frequently recurring terms in the religious Minoan formulas that are inscribed on tables, ladles and cups used for the libation ritual. The inscriptions show I-DA on its own, as I-NA-I-DA (inā idā: mighty Ida), or as U-PA-MA-I-DA (upamā idā: excellent Ida). The text I-DA-MA-TE (libation-mother) is found on two votive double axes, of gold and silver, offered to a sacred mountain cave (cf. Duhoux 1994-1995 about the Linear A text DA-MA-TE inscribed on a Minoan libation spoon). Greek myth also mentions Ida: as the name of two sacred mountains, one on Crete and one near Troy, both particularly rich in wells (Il. ☉ 47: the Anatolian Ida). The Ida is the seat of the Mother goddess (magna Mater deorum Idaea) according to Ovid (Metamorphoseon XIV, 536) and Apollonius of Rhodes (Argonautika I, 1130).

Conclusion

The Minoan names mentioned in Greek myth can be interpreted fairly easily in Vedic, confirming the close relation between Vedic and the Minoan language. The meaning of the names adds some detail to the information already known from the myths. The analysis of this paper also sets a timeframe for three goddesses that are known both from Crete and from the

Sanskrit literature: the goddesses Aphrodite, Manasa and Ida must have been early Anatolian goddesses, at least as old as the third millennium.

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