THREE CRETAN GLOSSES OF PRE-GREEK ORIGIN

Abstract: The author proposes Indo-European etymologies for three Cretan words attested in Hesychios' Lexicon. This material confirms (with some reservations) V. Georgiev's discovery of an Indo-European loan-word stratum in Greek.

Apart from the Pre-Greek Cretan place-names and the Minoan-Eteocretan inscriptions, our main source of knowledge of the non-Greek Cretan vocabulary is the lexical material preserved by Hesychios of Alexandria (VI century AD). Of the 50 thousands lemmata glossed by Hesychios, 224 may be Cretan. Some quarter of these are not Greek and some show connections with pre-Indo-European and pre-Semitic sources.

Raymond A. Brown (1985) reviews all the Hesychian glosses, trying to distinguish lemmata of non-Greek origin. He lists as many as 14 Cretan words, which remain "with no certain cognate forms" (p. 93). Among these items, I find at least three words belonging most likely to an Indo-European substratum, namely ἀχνυλα (hazel-)nuts', βήλα 'wine' and θρινία 'grapevine'.

I would like to discuss them below.

I. Pre-Greek ἀχνυλα 'nuts'

Brown (1985:77) classifies the Hesychian gloss ἀχνυλα· κάρυα· Κρήτες (HAL α-8896) as "Non-Greek", adding that "the Cretan word has no known etymology". Though it is uncertain whether the gloss represents an a-stem feminine denoting 'a kind of nut-tree' (καρύα) or rather a neuter plural meaning 'nuts'1, I believe that the word ἀχνυλα is comparable to the Germanic forms:

1 The latter possibility is, of course, more probable for accentual reasons. Greek κάρυον n. denotes 'any kind of nut' (but 'walnuts' are called simply κάρυα). However, the arboreal term καρύα f. 'nut-bearing tree of various kinds' is sufficiently attested in either Greek lexicon (see GEL 880–881) or toponymy (see PN Καρύα f., a place in Laconia with a famous temple of Artemis).
(A) Germanic *hnutō (f.) ‘nut, walnut, hazelnut’, cf. ON. hnot f. ‘nut’, Icel. hnot, Dan. nod, Far. not, OSwed. nyt, not(h), nut, pl. nōtt(t)er, Swed. nōt, Norw. not; OE. hnutu f. ‘nut (fruit)’, usually in the compounds with hazel-, pin- or wealth-, ME. hunte, nute, note, E. nut; MDu. note, nuete, noot f. ‘nut (fruit)’, Du. noot, dial. neut f.; OFris. not, Fris. nōt ‘nut, kernel’; OHG. (h)nuz in the compound haselnuzcherno ‘kernel of the hazelnut’, MHG. nuz f., G. Nuß f. ‘nut (fruit)’.

Further Indo-European cognates are attested in two other Indo-European stocks (see Pokorny 1959:558; Dybo 1989:103–105):

(B) Celtic *knuwā or *knudā (f.) ‘nut(-tree)’, e.g. Mlr. cnu f., Ir. cnō, cnū m. and f. ‘nut’, pl. cnā and cnoite, dial. kru, kro; MCorn. knyfan, MBret. knoen, Bret. kraouenn, Van. keneu; W. cneuen ‘nut (fruit)’, pl. cnau.

(C) Latin nux (gen. sg. nucis) f. ‘nut-tree’, n. ‘nut’ (< *dnuk- < IE. *knud- by metathesis of the consonants).

Judging by the comparative linguistic evidence, the Pre-Greek word in question most probably originates from the Indo-European etymon *₂knud- f. ‘nut-tree’ and n. ‘nut’ (whence nom. pl. neut. *₂knud₂ ‘nuts’). The development of *d > l is acceptable, as it occurs not only in Cretan onomastics (e.g. Myc. Gk. PN da-wo = Class. Cretan PN Δᾶος; Myc. Gk. da-bu-ri-to- = Class. Gk. λαβύρινθος), but also in the Cretan vocabulary (e.g. Cretan θάπτα f. ‘fly’ vs. Polyrrhenian λάττα ‘id.’ < *daptā). The same process (*d > l) is seen in other Indo-European languages e.g. in Anatolian, Italic or Iranian.

The consonantal shift of *k > kh is suggested for the ‘Prehellenic Indo-European’ substratum.

II. Eteocretan βῆλα ‘wine’.

The Hesychian gloss reads: ἰβήνα· τὸν οἶνον· Κρήτης· οἱ δὲ βῆλα (HAL 1–123). Beside the Greek term ἰβήνα, an addition of οἱ δὲ βῆλα is listed. According to Brown (1985:61), it presumably means that „some Cretans used the term βῆλα (= wine) instead of the more widespread ἰβήνα”. Being unable to find obvious cognates, he concludes that βῆλα „may be a Pre-Greek survival”.

I think that βῆλα was borrowed from the same stratum, to which we earlier included Cretan ħγυλα. As the consonant shift is a typical feature of this Indo-European stratum, I am inclined to connect Eteocretan βῆλα ‘wine’ with Sanskrit hālā- f. ‘brandy’ and Thracian żēlā > žilā (transcribed ζήλας, ζέλας, later ζειλά, 2 See Witczak (1995:21–22).
ζίλαι)\(^3\) f. ‘wine’ (as if from IE. \(*ghw^e\lambda\) f.). This derivation is semantically impeccable. Also phonological aspects are acceptable\(^4\), as the letter \(\zeta\) may reflect Late Thracian \(*\ddot{z}\) which develops from Thracian \(*g\) (\(<\) IE. \(*ghw\)) before a front vowel as the result of a secondary palatalization, cf. the ethnicon Giridavienses and PN Ζιριδάυα (\(<\) IE. \(*G^w\ddot{i}-dh\ddot{e}g^w\ddot{a}\) ‘upper city’, liter. ‘city on the hill’\(^5\)).

III. Eteocretan θρινία ‘grapevine’.

The Hesychian gloss θρινία: άμπελος ἐν Κρήτῃ (HAL θ-757) has no convincing explanation. Furnée (1972:191, 392, 398) connects θρινία with two Greek expressions: τορνία σταφυλή (Poll. 6.82) and τόρνιος οίνος (Hp. Morb. 2.47). He treats the alternation \(\theta \sim \tau\) as an evidence for a non-Greek substratum. Brown (1985:59) points out, however, that „the alternation of -πτ ~ -οπ- is otherwise unattested and also the meaning of τορνία / τόρνιος is uncertain”.

In my opinion, Eteocretan θρινία and Greek τορνία (σταφυλή) are two close cognates derived from one and the same etymon \(*\ddot{t}n\ddot{i}y\ddot{a}\). Both are probably connected with Sanskrit \(\ddot{t}n\ddot{a}\) (n.) ‘herb, grass’ and Khotanese \(\ddot{t}\ddot{a}rr\ddot{a}\) ‘grass’ (Emmerick 1980:167).

The Prehellenic Indo-European substratum may be characterized by a consonant shift (e.g. IE. \(*k > \chi\), \(*t > \theta\), \(*ghw > \beta\) and two other phonetical processes (IE. \(*d > \lambda\) and \(*r > -\rho t\)). I believe that it could be called „Pelasgian”, but I follow E. P. Hamp’s opinion that „Prehellenic Indo-European” belonged to the centum subgroup (and not to the satem division). In fact, the most credible etymologies by Georgiev are of centum nature, e.g.

(a) Pre-Greek („Pelasgian”) πύργος m. ‘tower’ \(<\) IE. \(*bh\acute{y}ghos\) (sic!), cf. G. Burg f. ‘stronghold, castle’, OChSl. brēgā ‘bank, hill’, Alb. burg ‘mountain’ (see Katičić 1976:71–72, esp. n. 91).

In other words, I agree with E. P. Hamp’s opinion, expressed in a series of notes over the past decade, and more, in Živa Antika and elsewhere (see, e.g., Hamp 1983), that there is no reasonable evidence for the satem character of Georgiev’s „Pelasgian”. The Prehellenic layer, as indicated by phonological and lexical evidence,
"reflects a North European IE substratum anterior to Greek in the Aegean" (Hamp 1990:191).

REFERENCES

Brown, R. A. 1985. Evidence for Pre-Greek speech on Crete from Greek alphabetic sources, Amsterdam.


