

Hypothesis about the Genesis of the Old European Script

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1 Introduction

In this article we speculate about an observation at Catal Höyük that may give us a hint how the abstract, linear symbols of the Old European (OE) or Danube Script (DS) might have gotten their syllable values [1].



Figure 1: The Gradeshnitsa Tablet with text in symbols of the DS.

First we will have a look at the spread of agriculture and settlement from the Levante to Anatolia, Asia Minor, and finally to Thessalia the Danube valley and the LBK-villages of Central Europe.

In Catal Höyük wall paintings and linear ornaments or even symbols of unknown names and purposes were found. The use of these symbols followed the spread of agriculture into Europe with the settlers.

We will use the handling of arbitrary symbols in completely different cultures as a model to show how names or calls of the symbols stuck to them.

Even though the original purpose of the symbols of Catal Höyük may have gone out of fashion over time it is possible that the phonetic correlation of the symbols has been preserved.

2 Spread of Agriculture and Settlement

Early experiments with agriculture started about 12000 BC in the Natufian culture in the Levante. Early agriculture from 10000 BC was also found around the famous structures of Göbekli Tepe. Catal Höyük (founded about 7000 BC) in southern Anatolia was already a larger townlike agrarian settlement.

The technology of agriculture and domestication jumped over to Europe (first to Thessalia) about 6000 BC and spread along the Danube valley into Central Europe from 5000 to 4900 BC, forming the Danube civilisation and the LBK-culture [2].

Today, in the scientific community the opinion prevails that, as proposed already by the prehistorian Vere Gordon Childe in the 19th century, the technology of agriculture and animal domestication was forced by the settlers, intruding from Anatolia into Europe [3]. It was not willingly adopted by the indigenous hunter-gatherers. The resistance of this, not necessarily homogenous, group of people may also be the reason that the LBK-culture never reached the northern and western coastlines of continental Europe.

The farmers took with them their material and immaterial culture, and therefore also the names and wording coming with the painted symbols.

3 Tattoos, Body Painting, and Object Decor

To scatter abstract lines, decorative ornaments, or realistic symbols over caves, walls, objects, bodies, and even faces is a practice as old as man. This is still far from a writing system but the mechanisms in the usage of symbols might be universal.

The tattoos of the Maori people may serve as a model for this universal handling of symbols. For us only the praxeological aspects of the symbology are of interest, not the particular shape or meaning of the symbols.



Figure 2: Maori men with traditional facial tattoos.

When the author first met with Maori people in 2012 a young man explained the meanings of his tattoos to him: The tattoos are not just beautiful ornaments from his culture but every time something happens in his family and clan the tattoos will be extended. So, birth death, marriage and other events are the reason to get a new tattoo. The tattoos tell the story of the bearer and his relatives.



Figure 3: Polynesian story-telling tattoos.

The type and name of the tattoo and the place on the body depends obviously on the event it describes.

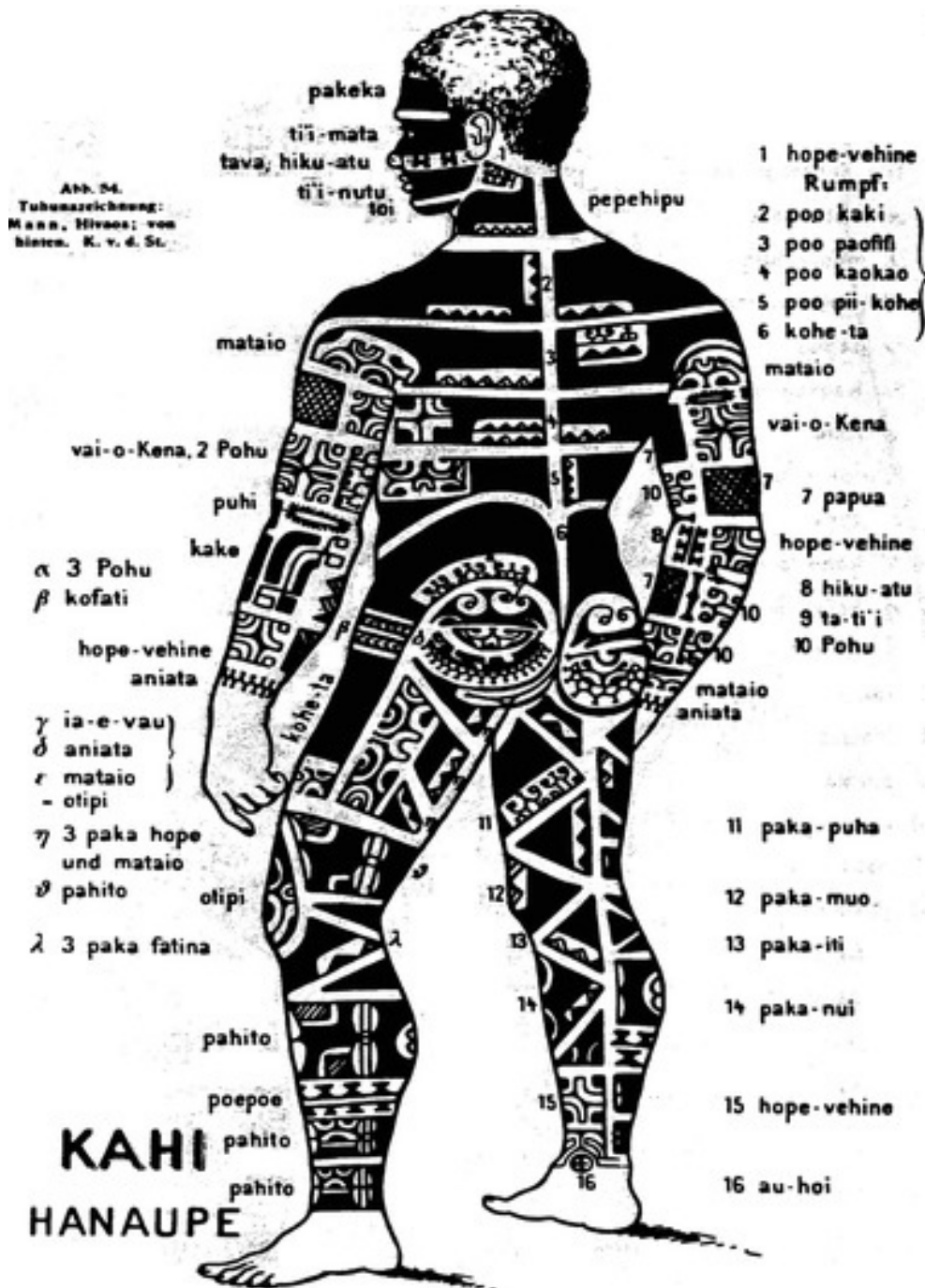


Figure 4: Names and location of Maori tattoos [4].

Therefore, there is a strong connection between a certain symbol and the wording how it is described, or what it describes. This connection of the words used to describe the symbols may over time get "standardized". Especially if the relation of symbol and word is used in a ritual context where often, even if no longer understood, precise wording is essential.

Finally, the word or at least the main syllable used to describe a symbol, and the symbol itself may be seen as the same. That relation could outlive cultural and linguistic change. This is the mechanism to explain the identification of a symbol with a phonetic sound value.

The proposed mechanism may also be at work at more temporarily body paintings. Certainly is this true, if the paintings follow traditional cultural ways. But also modern artist may explain their symbols in a ritualized manner, as the following pictures indicate.



Figure 5: Body painting, traditional culture (left, Cote d'Ivoire) and modern art (right, "Sacred Art of the Ori - Laolu").

4 The Symbols of Catal Höyük

In Catal Höyük reliefs of the so-called "Birth-giving Goddess" were found. It is not clear what this sculpture really depicts, but in our context this is not so important.

One of this wall sculptures displays a painted irregular net of lines and strokes and some recognizable symbols.



Figure 6: The so-called "Birth-giving Goddess".

A drawing shows the symbols better [2].

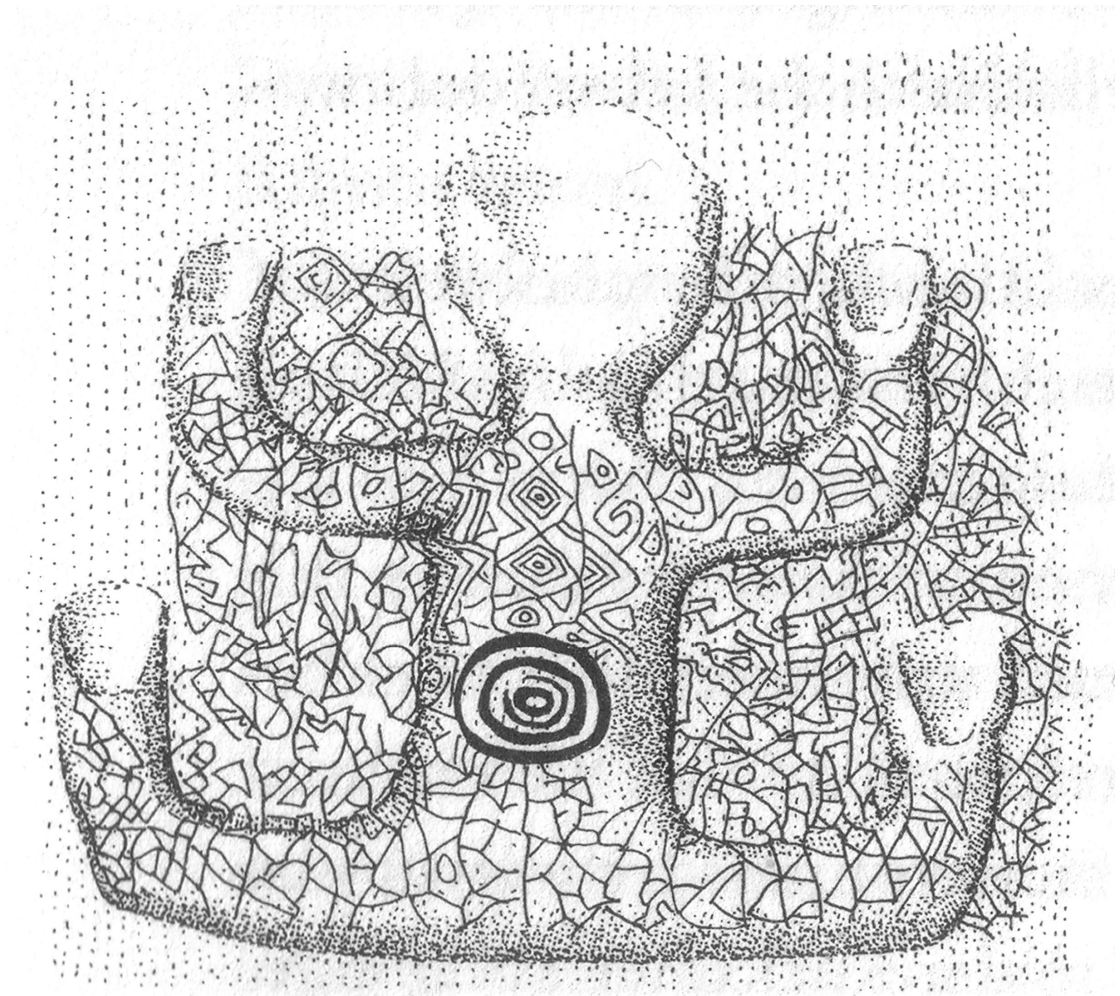


Figure 7: Drawing of the "Birth-giving Goddess".

Here it becomes obvious that it cannot be a regular writing, although beginnings of vertical columns are recognizable. The circumstances and why this painting was applied to the sculpture may remain ever unclear. Everything is possible, from simple scribbles to magical signs or religious-ritual symbolic acts, combined with recitation of "sacred texts".

But we recognize symbols in the somewhat chaotic painting, symbols which appear in the much later Danube Script. Prominent are the concentric circles, the pair of eyes, as well as the stacked V-signs, hour-glass shapes, and others.

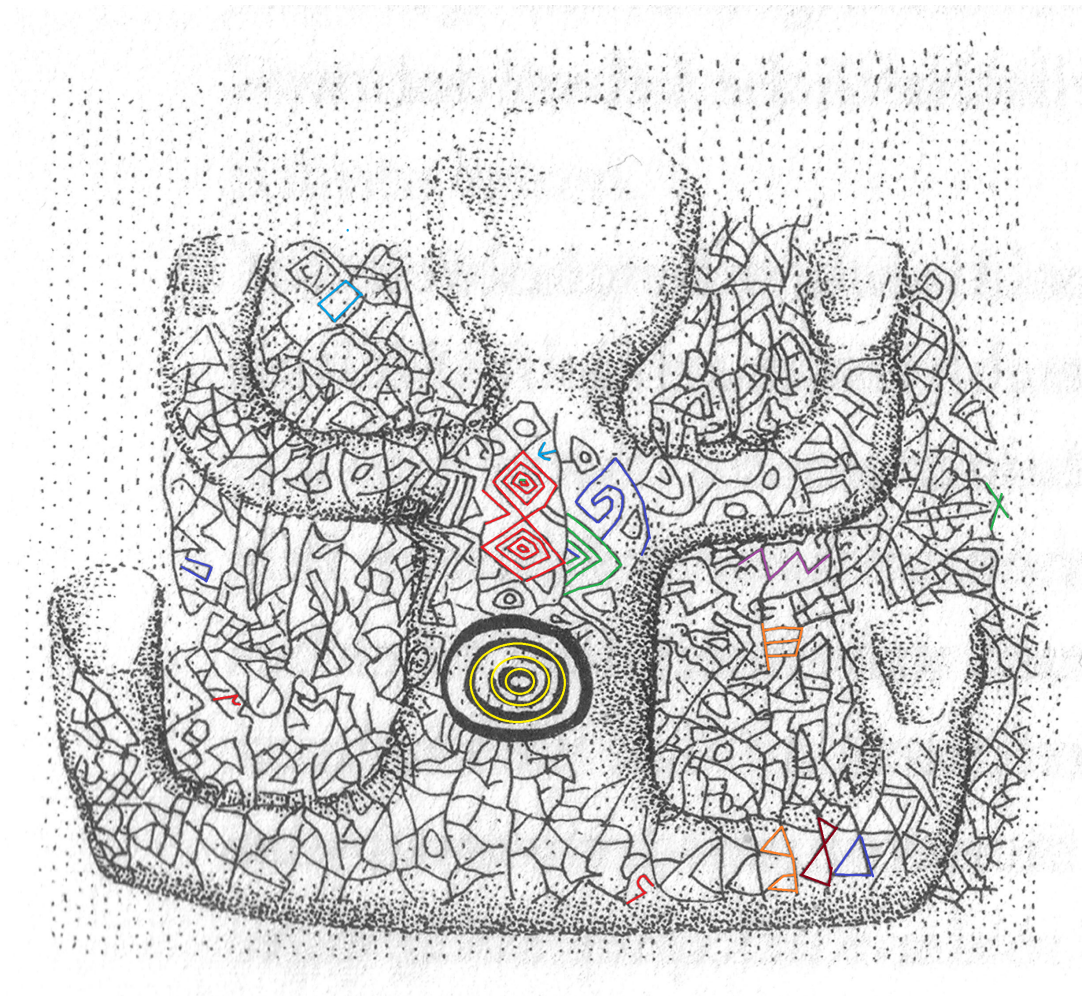


Figure 8: Some symbols that appear later as DS-signs.

Here are some of the DS-signs that we can recognize.

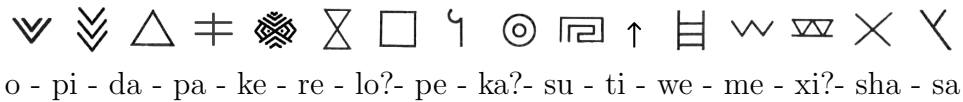


Figure 9: Some symbols of the Danube Script (reading acc. to [1]).

It is true that in every scribbling "signs" like circles, squares, triangles, crosses, etc. may appear. But the farmer culture of Catal Höyük can be seen as direct predecessor of the agricultural Danube civilization. Therefore the reading connected with this signs may be unique and might have been

transferred to the latter culture.

And so the linear signs of the DS might have gotten their phonetic values.

5 Hypothesis about the Language of the Danube Script

Due to the evolution of farming in the Middle East the language of the first Natufian farmers might have been part of the afro-asiatic family, may be, more specifically, proto-semitic.

Because it is highly probable that agriculture was carried by the settlers into Europe, and only reluctantly adopted by the indigenuous population of hunter-gatherers, the language of the first European farmers may also have been a form of semitic. This seems to be a good working hypothesis for the understanding of the language of Linear A ([5]).

Because it will be possible to consistently read the Danube Script ([1]), this hypothesis may help to understand what is written, especially because we see Linear A as closest to the Old European Script.

6 Sources

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