

## REVIEW

*The Language of the Sea Peoples*, Woudhuizen, Fred (with a Foreword by Jan Best), Publications of the Henri Frankfort Foundation 12, Amsterdam, Najade Press, 1992.

With his latest book *The Language of the Sea Peoples* (1992) Fred Woudhuizen has completed the triptych on ancient Mediterranean scripts and languages which started in collaboration with Jan Best with the publication of *Ancient Scripts from Crete and Cyprus* in 1988 and of *Lost Languages from the Mediterranean* in 1989. The first book showed in a tentative way to the reader the scrupulously motivated process of decipherment and interpretation. It concentrated on two points: (1) the Phaistos Disc and its Anatolian (Old Luwian) Hieroglyphic background and (2) the affiliation between the Cretan and Cyprian Linear scripts and their Semitic ancestor scripts (viz. Old Phoenician).

It was to be expected that this frustrates the traditionally accepted view of Crete and Cyprus as from the beginning predominantly imbued with Greek culture. Accordingly the book was sometimes reviewed as being unheard of.

The second volume elaborated upon the material broached in the first one, refining the readings in the light of further investigation and moreover presenting other material to prove that the language of the Phaistos Disc is to be found on more Bronze Age Luwian Hieroglyphic documents from Crete. Attention is also paid to inscriptions from Lemnos and Etruria as representatives of the Tyrrhenian branch of the Luwian language family.

Some critics, *not having read the first volume*, did blame the book for stating that these scripts with strong Syro-Palestinian and Anatolian affiliations appear to contain Old Phoenician and Luwian languages respectively *without first demonstrating* (N.B.) their Syro-Palestinian and Anatolian connections!

In his third and latest book the author presents more definite results. Referring to the finds put forward in the earlier volumes he invites the reader to follow him on the, sometimes too tentatively proposed, road to his conclusion: the deciphered documents from Crete and Cyprus prove

beyond any doubt that a conglomerate of Sea Peoples had a foothold on these islands: at last they speak to us in their own Old Luwian language; and concerning the Etruscan documents, to his interpretation of them as Luwian on the basis of his identification of the Etruscan alphabet characters with their Anatolian ancestors.

This volume is criticised because it makes visible the process of interaction between the users of Phoenician and Luwian dialects to be read in their writings. The reviewers for the most part being hellenists, one wonders whether their deep-rooted distrust of the use of other languages than Greek in the islands of Crete and Cyprus does not rather reflect their reluctance to define the many non-Greek lexical items—some 40% in all—in the Cretan Linear B scripts as Semitic and Luwian loan-words respectively. An attitude possibly resulting from their wish to retain the “pureness” of the Greek language in Linear B?

Before the appearance of Martin Bernal's Black Athena books such a question could hardly be put in the academic world. Nowadays it certainly can!

Johan W. Jong