Article

Revisiting Keftiu material written in Egyptian hieroglyphs

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Abstract: The paper examines the lexical material belonging to the language that ancient Egyptians called <Ka-f-ti-u> *[kaftiu]. There remain one inscription in the London Medical Papyrus and a set of Egyptian school exercises supposedly designed to write *Kafti* words. The paper proposes to interpret *Kafti* as a Hurrian dialect. The alleged location, the testimonies in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the etymology of *Kafti*, the depiction of clothes, shoes and hairdress, all agree with the Hurrian connection of *Kafti*. The location of *Kafti* in Crete is mostly pegged on the phonetic similarity of *Kafti* with *Caphtor*. This equation is quite certainly erroneous. *Kafti* is preferably located around Cilicia.

Keywords: Keftiu, Hurrian, Cilicia, Crete.

1. *Introduction*

The paper examines the meager lexical material belonging to the language that ancient Egyptians called <Ka-f-ti-u> *[kaftiu], with vowel -*a*-, where the final -*u* logically and probably stands for the Egyptian plural: 'the *Kafti* [people]'. My proposal is to interpret *Kafti*, as it will be called in the paper, as a kind of Hurro-Urartean dialect, very close to Hurrian. The present study includes a bibliographical survey of *Kafti* inscriptions and of their interpretations, an attempt at etymologizing the word *Kafti* itself and at locating *Kafti* in light of Egyptian indications and of its Hurrian affinities. The issue of identifying what *Kafti* stands for entails to determine what relationships it may also have with *Caphtor*, a word that has been associated with Crete. The location of *Kafti* in Crete is mostly pegged on the phonetic similarity: *Kafti* ~ *Caphtor*. As will appear below this equation is quite certainly erroneous.

The Hurrian language is one of the extinct languages which were once spoken in the area around Mesopotamia in the last four milleniums BC. It is attested from the last centuries of the 3rd millennium BC until around the middle of the thirteenth century BC. Hurrian used to be the main language of the Mittanni Kingdom, as is attested by the El-Amarna E24 letter written by Tušratta to the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis III, known as Nimmuʔuria in the letter. Hurrian is thought to have become extinct not long after the fall of that kingdom in the thirteenth century BC, probably around 1000 BC. After the Assyrian conquest of the areas peopled by Hurrians, in northern Mesopotamia, many of them seem to have been deported by Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208 BCE), who needed manpower to build his new capital. These events probably caused major disruption in the survival of the Hurrian language. At the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, Hurrian is attested in southeastern Anatolia and in the Zagros-Taurus region of northern Mesopotamia. In the middle of the 2nd millennium, Hurrian influence is also attested in Syria and in the Cilicia or Kizzuwadna region.

2. *The Kafti inscription*

Friedrich (1932:146) lists some words of *Kafti* attested in hieroglyphic Egyptian. The string is taken from the *Papyrus Brit. Mus*. Nr. 10059, page 11, lines 4-6, the so-called 'London Medical Papyrus'. This document was transferred from the Royal Institution of London to the British Museum in 1860, where it was acquired under the number 10059. A first translation of the surrounding Egyptian text

into German was proposed by Wreszinski in 1912, who did not try to transliterate the string of hieroglyphs in *Kafti*, "Kretasprache" or "Kretisch" as he put it. The first transliteration was proposed by Friedrich (1932) as <ś3-n-tj // k3-pw-pj-w3-j-i3-j-mˁ-n-tj-r3-k3-k3-r3>. As is often the case with foreign words mentioned in Egyptian the sentence is written in explicitly vocalized writing. Once converted into vowels it becomes <śa-n-ti // ka-pu-pi-wa-j-ia-j-ma-n-ti-ra-ka-ka-ra>. The sentence is supposed to have healing properties in this Egyptian document which collects invocations and conjurations with magical properties. The disease is an Asiatic disease, a feature that is in conflict with the Cretan hypothesis. Some people like Vercoutter (1956: 83f) or Haider (2001) have tried to deal with the next invocation (33) of the Papyrus as if it were *Kafti* as well. Wreszinski (1912:XVIII) suggests that the next item (33) is "möglicherweise [possibly]" in the same language as the (32). But it must be noted that the papyrus does not indicate the (33) to be *Kafti*, contrary to the (32) where it is explicitly mentioned: <m ḏd n.f Kaftiu> 'in the language of the *Kafti* people'. The string of hieroglyphs (33) contains sounds like <ˁ> and <q> which do not appear in native Hurrian words. It is therefore more than probable that the item (33) has nothing to do with *Kafti*. And it will not be dealt with in the paper.

Friedrich (1932) also lists a number of so-called Eteo-Cretan inscriptions attested in Greek alphabet. This Eteo-Cretan language seems to be a completely different language, which has little to do with Hurrian or *Kafti*. The phonetic and morphological outlook of this other language is not reminiscent of anything Hurrian. My opinion is that these data in Greek alphabet should also better be dealt with separately. Friedrich himself lumps all the attestations under the heading: *Eteokretisch* but my suggestion is to reserve the word Eteo-Cretan for the presumably autochthonous variety of language which was spoken in Crete before any other language settled there and which may be attested in Greek alphabet. If my survey is correct, it is then probable that *Kafti* does not have and never had any particular connections with Crete, nor with Eteo-Cretan as defined above.

3. *The dating of the Kafti inscription*

Several attempts have been made to date the Papyrus 10059 according to the graphic features of the hieroglyphs or its contents. One rather old approach due to Walter (1925[2003]:37) states that:

> The London Medical Papyrus (British Museum No. 10059), is of the most recent date and is supposed to have been written about 1000 BC. It consists of nineteen columns, largely medical, but with a generous commingling of magic, suggestive of an increased tendency to a reliance on the magical arts, which is said to have characterized this period. This papyrus is in a poor state of conservation.

Recent works usually assume a much older dating for the papyrus, especially because the ductus of the hieroglyphs in the papyrus are coherent with a period before Amenophis III, that is to say before -1400 BC. Afterwards, a change in hieroglyphic graphism occured.

> The first is a reference to a Minoan healing ritual, assuming the association between Keftiu and Crete, and is contained within the fragmentary London Medical Papyrus. This papyrus contains a series of medical prescriptions and incantations, dated to the latter part of the XVIIIth Dynasty, this particular text likely being copied during the reign of Pharaoh Tutenkhamun (1333-1323 BC). Much of the contents, however, are likely to be earlier and extracted from well-known medical handbooks, thus signifying earlier Cretan-Egyptian medical contacts. (R. Arnott *in* Horstmanshoff 2004:165)

What is interesting is the dating circa or before the middle of the 2ⁿᵈ millenium BCE. The equation: *Kafti* = Crete, adopted by Arnott, is independent from the dating and needs not be accepted. It can be noted that this dating corresponds to the period of the Mittanni Kingdom when Hurrians gained maximal political influence in the ancient Near-East.

4. *Interpreting the Kafti inscription*

The item (32) is supposed to have healing properties in this Egyptian document which collects invocations and conjurations with magical properties. In 1912 Wreszinski described the string as a 'sinnlose Zusammenstellung von Silben [a meaningless set of syllables]'. Friedrich in 1932 did not try to interpret it either. He cites Bossert who tried to convert the invocation (32) into a Greek hexameter: <śānti kupāpa wajā : jājā mīntī lekakāli>. The major objection to Bossert's attempt is that his hexameters do not respect the vowels of the Egyptian notation and cannot be accepted. <kupāpa> cannot be acceptably equated with <ka-pu-pi> and the rest is no less troublesome.

It can be noted that there is a widespread and illogical tendency to remove the vowels from Egyptian, even when they are indicated. This apparently proceeds from the idea that Egyptian did not notate the vowels, a kind of dogma that conflicts with the reality of Egyptian documents. One consequence of vowel removal is increased leeway for readings that would never be thinkable otherwise. Vowel removal in <sntkppwymntrkkr> enabled Gordon to see a rosary of divine names in the sentence, with <ka-pu-pi> reread as <kpp> being *Kubaba*. In all cases the vowels written in Egyptian preclude this reading <ka-pu-pi> for *Kubaba*. Gordon also equated <sa-n-ti> with another deity *Santa* after vocalic removal as <snt>. This is not acceptable either. Even though these identifications point at a location around Cilicia for *Kafti* they are wrong in the first place and cannot be used as evidence. In a similar line of thinking Woudhuizen (2006:141) cites the inscription as <sa-n-ta-ka-pu-pi-wa-ya-'a-ya-ma-n-ta-ra-kú-ka-ra>, a reading proposed by Helck according to him. In all cases the vocalization <kú-ka-ra> is impossible. The distortion of the explicitly notated Egyptian phonetics enables him to find the three deities *Santa*, *Kupapa* and *Tarhu*, in addition to a Phoenician word, leading to the following translation: '*Santas, Kupapa, and with us Carian Tarhu(nt)*'.

The original transliteration of Friedrich (1932) was <ś3-n-tj // k3-pw-pj-w3-j-i3-j-mˁ-n-tj-r3-k3-k3-r3>. Before any attempt at making sense out of the invocation it is necessary to review and improve the transliteration. To start with the exact string of hieroglyphs is <AA18⬠ Z1〳 N35〰 Z2⦙⦙ U33〡 V31⌒ G1🐦 Q3⬭ Z4〵 Q3⬭ Z4〵 V4𓎡 G1🐦 M17b𓏏 N31〰 M17𓏌 A2𓀁 M17𓏌 A2𓀁 M17b𓏏 G17🐦 D36〳 N35〰 Z2⦙⦙ U33〡 M17𓏌 D21⌒ Z1〳 D28⊔ Z1〳 V31⌒ G1🐦 A2𓀁 D21⌒ Z1〳 >. It can be noted that the string contains twice the Plural sign <Z2⦙⦙>, a feature that has been constantly ignored by interpreters so far. Another point is that Friedrich considered <Z1〳> and <A2𓀁> to stand for nothing. A number of signs have only one possible reading so that a first transliteration is <sa-Z1-n-(Pl)-ti-ka-pu-pi-wa-a-i-N31-a-A2-i-mâ-n-(Pl)-ti-ar-Z1-ka-Z1-ka-A2-ra-Z1>. N31 is read <i3> (or better <w3>) by Friedrich, but it can also stand for <ḫr> or <mi>. It can also be wondered if <V31⌒ G1🐦> = <ka> is a decomposition of <D28⊔> = <ka> or a separate syllable. Based on Hurrian words the following segmentation can be proposed:

- <sa-Z1-n-(Pl)-ti> *šu anti* 'all this'
- <ka-pu> *kappu(b)* 'is filled, poured'
- <pi-wa> *biwa* 'for you'
- <a-i-N31-a-A2>
- <i-mâ-n-(Pl)-ti> *emandi* 'ten (times)'
- <a-r-Z1-ka-Z1-k-a-A2-ra-Z1>

It can be noted that this interpretation takes into account the two Pl. signs because *šu anti* 'all this' and *eman* 'ten' have a relationship with plurality. If Z1 is ignored then <sa-Z1-n-(Pl)-ti> is the contraction: *šanti*, otherwise it stands for *ša(w)anti*. Apparently this sign would be best ignored. Next when N31 is read <ḫr> <a-i-N31-a-A2> could have a relationship with *ahari* 'incense'. If A2 is taken to be in fact A1 then the word can be the Instrumental case: *ahrae* 'with, by the incense'.

The last section of the invocation depends on what is made of Z1 and A2. If Z1 is ignored, then <a-r-ka-(k-a)-A2-ra> could be the Comitative case of *Argaba*, a form of Teššub in Alep. The invocation would then mean: *š(u) anti kappu(b) biwa ahrae emandi Arga(b)ara* 'all this is poured for

you with the incense ten times with (the grace of) Argaba'. If accepted this translation makes *Kafti* a Hurrian dialect located somewhere near Alep in Syria.

5. *Etymologizing the ethnonym Kafti*

Strange (1980) is one of the most exhaustive investigations of the occurences of <Keftiu> *Kafti*, as compared to Hebrew *Caphtor*. As a matter of fact it is exhaustive to the point that it sometimes reads <Keftiu> *Kafti* in inscriptions where I cannot read it myself and that occurences listed by Strange (1980) would need to be carefully reviewed. Strange's (1980) approach of *Kafti* as compared to other ancient ethnonyms is expressed in the following paragraph:

> [I]n Semitic the original form is *kap-ta-ra* known from Mari, other forms are Hebrew תְּפַכּר [written without ו in the book], Ugaritic *kptr*, and KUR.DUGUD.RI (to be read as Kabturi) as in Greek *Κάβδηρος* in a text originating in Cilicia. All these different names have in this study been presupposed to derive from the same place name, the Semitic *Kaptara* being closest to its original form. (Strange 1980:12)

The conclusion proposed by Strange has it that Semitic *kaptara* should be accepted as the original ethnonym, that is to say the most ancient form. It must be noted that Greek has a strangely voiced cluster /bd/ in the word *Κάβδηρος*, a feature that is hard to explain. In all cases alphabetic Ugaritic, which I would readily hold to be a reliable testimony, points at a voiceless cluster in <kptr>. It must be noted that the Egyptian rendition of the ethnonym is *Kafti* with <f>, not with <p>, <w> or <b>, which can all be disintinguished in Egyptian. This feature makes the identification: *Kafti* = *Kaphtor* very hard to accept, as it would seem that Proto-Semitic had no phoneme /f/ in contrast with /p/, but *Kafti* does have a phoneme /f/ that precludes /p/. As noted by Vercoutter (1954:69), who nevertheless prefers the Cretan hypothesis: "The transcription with *-f-* is, if not abnormal, at least unexpected." In addition the equation *Kafti* = *Kaphtor* cannot be accepted because of the absence of the syllable *or* in *Kafti*.

As noted in Friedrich (1932) the old and secret name of the Urartean people, named after the profane word *Urarṭu*, is based on the theonym *Haldi*, which explains their ancient name as *Chaldeans*. This ethnonym was later attributed to Assyrians but originally this is the name of the Urartean people with whom Hurrian people have the closest genetic relationship. The lateral of the words *Haldi* or *Chaldean* is attested in Hebrew as a *śin* [שׂ]: *kaśdīm* [כַּשְׂדִּים] 'Chaldeans'. The fricative of Egyptian *Kafti* does not stand for the *p* of *Kaptara* but for the *ś* of *Kaśdim* in my opinion. Egyptian had no straightforward equivalent of /ś/ and it resorted to /f/ for that purpose. This means that *Kafti* stands for **Kaśti* 'Chaldean = Hurro-Urartean'.

6. *The location of Kafti according to Egyptian sources*

The possible wherabouts of Kaftiu have arisen a considerable amount of speculations and much ink has been devoted to that issue. Vercoutter (1954:97) lists four possible locations:

- Crete alone (A.H. Gardiner, H. Gauthier, J. Vercoutter himself),
- Cilicia (G.A. Wainwright, A. Furumark),
- Crete and Cilicia (A. Evans, Pendlebury, Hall),
- northern Syria (C.F.A. Schaeffer, Ms Welker, L. Christophe).

As noted by Vercoutter, the third possibility is geographically impossible and the fourth is more or less a variant of the second. A fifth possibility proposed by Chabas and Maspero and mentioned by Vercoutter was Phoenicia, but this identification seems to be very difficult, as *Kafti* does not seem to be either Phonecian nor Semitic. Although he changed his mind between 1893 and 1904 the first person to propose Cilicia was Max Müller in 1893. For the most part the direct documentation about *Kafti* location is in Egypt:

1) *Kafti* is mentioned on the lower part of a statue in Kom El-Hetan, in the forecourt of Amenhotep III's funerary temple, together with another place name or ethnonym, *Tiˀnayu*, of unclear location, which may have some relationship with the town *Adana* in Cilicia. It can be noted that on this statue the names *Kafti* and *Tiˀnayu* are graphically separated from a list of names which are usually identified with a sea-borne route around places in Crete. Vanderdesleyen (2002:111-112) concludes from the graphic disposition of the statue basis that *Kafti* and *Tinayu* on the right describe places that are geographically distant from the Aegean sea-borne route. People who support the equation *Kafti = Crete* tend to interpret *Kafti* as a kind of title encompassing the Aegean names, but then, what is to be made of *Tiˀnayu*, listed together with *Kafti*? This idea does not seem to hold.

2) Another list of names dates back to Ramesses II (ca. -1300 BC). The names are arranged in an anti-clockwise order from a starting point in Mesopotamia evolving toward the west. This document is doubtless extremely valuable. The names are not written in plene writing and only the consonants appear:

- [n ḫ r n], quite certainly *Niḥarina* 'Lower Mesopotamia', a place frequently mentioned in Egyptian at that time,
- [s n g r], unclear, but it seems logical to propose a Hurrian-inhabited area, somewhere in the vicinity of the Sinğar River. *Sinğar* or *Sindjar* (Arabic: سنجار, Kurdish: *Şengal*) is the name of a region and a town in northwestern Iraq's Ninawa Governorate near the Syrian border. Vercoutter (1954:99) identifies *Sangar* with *Babylone*.
- [x t], quite certainly the Hatti kingdom, which would be Hittite-speaking at that time,
- [k f t i u], quite obviously the region where *Kafti* was spoken,
- [ˀ s b y], unclear,
- [š 3 ḏ w], unclear,
- [ˀ s r w], unclear,
- [p t u s u], unclear,

This item is extremely precise and indicates that *Kafti* is located somewhere close to *Hatti* and *Mesopotamia*. This is coherent with Cilicia. In all cases, Crete is completely off the map described here. Vercoutter, who nevertheless stands for an identification with Crete, notes that "unfortunately, the nature of the Egyptian epigraphic documentation does not permit to prove it with certainty."[1] In fact, it is more adequate to say this document clearly proves that Crete is *not* the right place. Another list dating back to Amenophis III in Vercoutter (1956:78) has : Ugarit, Kafti, Sangar, Naharina, Khiti, with similar geographic consequences.

4) Wachsmann (1987:34) also mentions the top register of a scene where foreign kings are representing paying tribute to the Pharaoh in Rekhmire's tomb (ca. -1450 BC):

> The register is introduced by three Syrians facing the display, the first prostrate, the second kneeling and the third standing upright. These are identified [by Egyptian cartouches] respect-ively as the kings of Keftiu [k f ti u], Hatti [ḫ t i u] and Tunip [t n p u]. The second register is introduced by the same three figures.

The *Kafti* king is represented in the most subdued position of all. It is hard to figure out how such a situation could ever be possible if *Kafti* were Crete. *Kafti* must be a place that the Egyptians could easily threaten or influence and must be close to Hatti and Ṯnpu, and presumably closer to Egypt than Hatti. The reverse is true: Vercoutter (1956:61-63) acknowledges that if *Kafti* people are requesting the protection of the Egyptian pharaoh Thoutmosis III, then it must be coherent the sheer geographical possibility that he could indeed provide such a protection and concludes that "on the

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[1] Vercoutter (1956:XV): "Mais si l'identification du pays Keftiu avec la Crète reste vraisemblable, elle nécessite pourtant une démonstration. Malheureusement, la nature de la documentation épigraphique égyptienne ne permet pas, par l'étude des seuls textes, d'arriver à une certitude."

surface, then, the request of protection by the Pharaoh made by *Kafti* envoys would rather support a location in Asia."[2]

In another tomb, that of Kenamun, *Kafti* is listed with Naharina [=Mesopotamia], Mennus [?] and Upper Retenu [=Syria]. In order to maintain the equation *Kafti* = Crete, Wachsmann (1987:40) is compelled to negate all the graphic features of the scene, which must have been relevant as each place is depicted in a specific way:

> This figure [that of Kafti] is a hybrid. His clothing is based on a misrepresentation [sic] of the robe commonly worn by Syrians portrayed in tombs dating to the reigns of Thutmose III - Amenhotep III - Amenhotep II. [...]
> This figure wears shoes, with sharply upturned toes. This is a Hittite characteristic [sic].

In other words, Kaftiu people are clothed like Hittite and Syrian people. Wachsmann (1987:93) furthers notes that:

> In Thutmose III's Hymn of Victory Keftiu is mentioned in the fourth line, while the 'Islands in the Midst of the Sea' [Presumably Aegean Islands] appear in the sixth strophe. Since these two terms are separated by line five which deals with the north (the 'marsh-dwellers' and Mitanni), Strange [whom Wachsmann criticizes] concluded that Keftiu and the 'Islands' were separate and distinct entities in the Egyptian geography.

It is hard to see how this conclusion can indeed be avoided. *Kafti* clearly and repeatedly has nothing to do with Crete in the portrayal drawn by Egyptians themselves. It takes a considerable amount of distortion and dismissal of what Egyptian people wrote on *Kafti* location, neighbors, clothes, shoes, hairdress, to maintain the equation *Kafti* = Crete. As noted by Vandersleyen (1994:41), in most cases, *Kafti* people are represented in the same way as Syrians. Moreover, even Vercoutter (1956:85) who promotes Crete as the location of *Kafti* notes that "the relationship between Kaftiu and the Aamu, or Asian Beduins, were rather strong, as the people of Kaftiu know a magical incantation against an illness specific to that Asian population."

5) Another text relevant to the location of Kaftiu is found in the tomb of Rameses VI (ca. -1150 BC). Duhoux (2003:32) cites Vercoutter (1956:98-99):

> (They are the lords of the Busirite nome), they live in a country whose name is *Peb*, in northern *Ta-neter*, their city is called *Kafti*; they appear in the islands of the sky, in the sea; the northern region belongs to them, this is their northern homeland."[3]

Duhoux considers *Peb* to be a probable mistake for *Kpn* 'Byblos' and translates *Ta-neter septentrional* by *Syria*, which enables him to wonder why *Kafti* is erroneously located in Syria. The text says that *Kafti* is the northernmost people whom Egyptians knew and that this place is located near the sea. There is no reason to interpret *Peb* as being a mistake as this can perfectly stands for Hurrian *paba(na)* 'mountain', the unsuffixed form is attested in Urartian *baba*. The geographical clues contained in Egyptian texts are that *Kafti* is a mountainous area close to the sea and Hatti.

Duhoux (2003:33) also cites another document, a decree dating back to -238 BC, which equates *Kaftiu* (written in hieroglyphs) = the land of *Kharou* (in demotic) = Phoenicia (in Greek). Even though this late document seems to be a bit dubious, *Kaftiu* is interestingly identified with another name *Kharou*, reminiscent of *H3ru* itself, used in Egyptian for Hurrians.

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[2] "à première vue, donc, la demande de protection du pharaon de la part des envoyés Keftiu serait plus favorable à une localisation de celui-ci en Asie."
[3] "(Ce sont les seigneurs du nome Busirite), ils sont dans le pays dont *Peb* est le nom, en *Ta-neter septentrional*, leur ville est *Kaftiu*; ils apparaissent dans les îles du ciel, dans le Grand Vert; le nord leur appartient, c'est leur pays septentrional."

The conclusion reached by Wainwright in 1932 that *Kafti* was spoken in Cilicia is certainly correct, even though he may have reached this conclusion for partly wrong reasons: Cappadoce, which happens to share the segment #*kap*-, does not seem to have anything to do with *Kafti* < **kaśd*-, in spite of the similar initial syllable.

8. *Conclusion about Kafti*

The paper has studied the lexical material belonging to the language that ancient Egyptians called <Ka-f-ti-u> *[kaftiu]: one inscription in the London Medical Papyrus, a set of Egyptian school exercises supposedly designed to write *Kafti* words. The translations and comparisons proposed in this survey support the interpretation of *Kafti* as a kind of Hurro-Urartean dialect, very close to Hurrian. The alleged location, the testimonies in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the etymology of *Kafti*, the depiction of clothes, shoes and hairdress, all agree with the Hurrian connection of *Kafti*. The location of *Kafti* in Crete is mostly pegged on the phonetic similarity of *Kafti* with *Caphtor*. This equation is quite certainly erroneous and *Kafti* should be located in Cilicia.

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