

MYCENAEAN *se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi* AND *se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re*

1. THE MEANING OF *se-re-mo-*

These problematical words describe decorative features made of ivory or gold, found on parts of chairs listed in the Pylos furniture tablets.

The contexts in which they occur are:

PY Ta 707.2

to-no ku-te-se-jo , e-re-pa-te-ja-pi , o-pi-ke-re-mi-ni-ja-pi ,
se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re , qe-qi-no-me-na , a-di-ri-ja-te-qe , po-ti-pi-qe 1

«One chair, ebony, with ivory *opikereminija* carved with a *seremo*-head and a human figure and heifers (?)».

PY Ta 708.2

to-no , ku-te-se-jo , e-re-pa-te-ja-pi , o-pi-ke-re-mi-ni-ja-pi ,
se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi , qe-qi-no-me-na , a-di-ri-ja-pi-qe

«Chair, ebony, with ivory *opikereminija*, carved with *seremo*-heads and human figures».

PY Ta 714.1-2

... o-pi-ke-re-mi-ni-ja
a-ja-me-na , ku-ru-so , a-di-ri-ja-pi , se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re-qe ,
...«the *opikereminija* inlaid with gold human figures and a *seremo*-head».

It may be noted that *se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi* or *-ka-ra-o-re* are always items of decoration on the *o-pi-ke-re-mi-ni-ja*: It is clear that these are parts of the chair, but not exactly what¹. Associated elements of decoration are human figures, animals and *po-ni-ki-pi* «palm trees?». The *se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re* / *-ka-ra-a-pi* appear to have been very prominent elements in the decoration, since they are mentioned first in Ta 707 and Ta 708, and in second place after the human figures in Ta 714.

¹ For suggestions cf. *Docs.*², p. 343; Palmer (1957, p. 67) suspected pre-Greek origin for the second element of the compound.

The words *se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re* and *se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi* are found in completely parallel contexts. They appear to be respectively instrumentals singular and plural of the same words². The plural *-ka-ra-a-pi* can without difficulty be recognised as instrumental plural to a word for «head», which also occurs independently in Ta 722 (*ka-ra-a-pi re-wo-te-jo* «with lion heads»), but the singular poses morphological problems which have caused some to separate it from the plural and translate «with *se-re-mo*—horns»³.

The identification of the first element is also problematical, since there is no Greek word which corresponds with *se-re-mo-*. The various suggestions which have been made require further hypotheses to make them fit⁴. Risch (1966, p. 65), who examined the question very thoroughly, may have come close to the mark in suggesting that the compounds are possessive rather than determinative, and refer to creatures with the heads of s., rather than just the heads themselves. He suggests that *se-re-mo-* may be «mythische oder dämonische Wesen mit Stierköpfen und dergl., also Gestalten von der Art des Minotauros» and goes on to mention ass-headed «Dämonen» in a fresco from Mycenae⁵. The idea that *se-re-mo-* were mythical beings (Sirens) had already been proposed by Mühlestein, but there is another well-known figure in Minoan art which deserves consideration, the one which Evans named the «Minoan Genius».

The Minoan Genius has been recognised as deriving from the Egyptian hippopotamus-goddess Taweret, but has undergone considerable transformation⁶. In Minoan art the Genii acquired new

² The reading *se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-i*, assumed to represent an instrumental dual, has now been abandoned: for the textual question see the discussion in Risch 1966.

³ Nussbaum 1986, p. 239.

⁴ Mühlestein 1956 proposed «siren-heads» (*Σειρημο- with supposed later change of final *-m* > *n*, and use of thematic vowel in composition): Palmer (1957, p. 65) drew attention to the Hesychius gloss σεργοί: ἔλαφοι and suggested «stags' heads», which is archaeologically acceptable (cf. Gray 1959, p. 54) but the source of the gloss is unknown, and the hypothesis requires an additional substitution of *-m-* for *-*w-*. The suggestion *σελμο- found in *Docs.*², p. 343 shows an abnormal spelling as well as introducing an inanimate first term into the compound, in contrast with the animals associated with (-)ka-ra-a-pi, -ka-ra-o-re elsewhere.

⁵ Illustrated in Evans, *PM* IV.2, p. 441.

⁶ A catalogue of representations of the Minoan «genius» is included in Gill (1964), and a supplement of more recent finds is given in Gill (1970). For some possible Anatolian parallels cf. Mellink 1987.

functions as carriers or leaders of animals or bearers of libations, and may appear in confronted pairs facing each other around a central tree or pillar. They are sometimes associated in scenes with people and animals, and may occur singly, in pairs, or in processions. The heads are variously represented: Evans tended to see them all as lions, but some have a more equine appearance. The origins of the Taweret figure in Egyptian art have been recently discussed by Judith Weingarten (1991), who notes (p. 10) that as well as the recognised lion-headed type «the hippopotamus head lives on in various elongations, roughly boar or ass-headed». Janice Crowley (1989, p. 61) comments similarly «The Mycenaeans... do not change any iconographical details or add any of their own except perhaps slightly to elongate the snout to give a more donkey-like face marking a further degree of removal from the hippopotamus form».

From Pylos itself comes a small ivory figure of a «genius», described by Blegen and Rawson 1966, p. 202 and illustrated in Fig. 284, no. 4. The authors comment «Perhaps it served as an inlay, since the back is flat, or it may have been fastened onto a background». It is described as «lion-headed», and strongly resembles the figures on the great gold signet ring from Tiryns who carry ewers in procession towards a seated goddess⁷.

This puts beyond doubt the artistic presence of such creatures at Pylos⁸, and suggests that they could have figured in decorative inlays, but we do not know whether there was a generic term for them⁹ or if they were identified as beings with the heads of various animals¹⁰.

⁷ An ivory plaque from Thebes contains another representation of the Genius with palm branches (cf. *po-ni-ki-pi*, associated with *se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi* in Ta 714): it is described and illustrated by Crowley (1989, pp. 236 and 501).

⁸ A further incomplete example in a fresco fragment from Pylos has been recognised by Gill (1970, p. 404); the head is missing, and the «hand» resembles a «paw or hoof».

⁹ Marinatos 1966 suggested that they were to be identified with the *di-pi-si-jo-i* who were recipients of offerings in PY Fr 1220.2, Fr 1231, Fp 1232, but the Genius figures are represented as providers of refreshment rather than «thirsty ones» and the interpretation of *di-pi-si-jo-i* by Guthrie (1959, p. 49) as the 'thirsty dead' seems more attractive.

¹⁰ Gill (1964, p. 4) comments «On the one hand heads were produced unidentifiable with any living animal, but having certain common characteristics, the most obvious being the large eye, exaggerated downward curl of the lower and the long pointed ear jutting horizontally from the back of the head, and on the other hand, some heads were drawn to resemble those of hippopotami, boars, lions and perhaps asses».

Any tentative identification with the *se-re-mo-* of the Ta tablets must include an attempt to identify the word itself. Since it does not match any known Greek word in an entirely satisfactory way it is perhaps legitimate to look further afield and think in terms of a loanword which might have come into Mycenaean Greek either directly or from a pre-Greek language of Crete. Akkadian provides a possible candidate in the form of *sirrimu* or *serremu* «wild ass»¹¹. The onager was well known in Mesopotamia and Syria; in Mesopotamia it was used as a draught animal, as well as being hunted for food, before the introduction of the true horse, and is represented in art and literature¹². It had shorter and more horse-like ears than the domesticated ass and a short, upright mane and a tail ending in a tuft. To the Greeks it was apparently an exotic creature¹³.

It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that the other example of *-ka-ra-o-re* from Pylos is in a place-name *o-no-ka-ra-o-re*, which occurs twice in incomplete form: Mn 1412 *o-no-ka-ra[-o-re]* and Na 1038 [*o*]-*no-ka-ra-o-re* «donkey-head» or «creature with a donkey's head»? *se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re* «(creature with) onager's head» would provide a suitable parallel.

2. *-ka-ra-a-pi* AND *-ka-ra-o-re*: «HEADS» OR «HORNS»?

If the above interpretation of *se-re-mo-* is correct, the interpretation of *-ka-ra-o-re* as «with horns» must be ruled out: it is already suspect both because of the difficulty of dissociating it from *-ka-ra-a-pi* and because of [*o*]-*no-ka-ra-o-re* / *o-no-ka[-ra-o-re]*, since donkeys do not have horns¹⁴. Yet the morphological difficulty of explaining *-ka-ra-o-re* as belonging to the same paradigm as *-ka-ra-a-pi* has been felt to be so great that the interpretation «with horns»

¹¹ *AHW* vol 2, p. 1038 *s.v.* *serremu*. The reading of the first sign as *sir/ser* rather than *pu* was established by Nougayrol 1948, and has since been confirmed: cf. Cooper (1971, p. 15). I am indebted to Dr. Jeremy Black for drawing my attention to this word.

¹² For descriptions and illustrations see Van Buren (1939, pp. 28 ff.).

¹³ The «wild mules» referred to in Homer as originating in Paphlagonia (*Iliad* 2.852 ἐξ Ἑπειτῶν, ὅθεν ἡμιόνων γένος ἀγροτεράων) could well have been onagers. Mention should also be made of the miniature clay figure from Phaistos of an ass-like animal carrying panniers, described and illustrated in Evans, *PM II*. 1, p. 157 with fig. 79, which has a stiff mane and shorter ears than those of the domesticated ass.

¹⁴ Herodotus 4.191 mentions with scepticism ὄνοι οἱ τὰ κέρεια ἔχοντες as reported by the Libyans among other improbable creatures supposed to inhabit western Libya.

has been strongly advocated, both by Alan Nussbaum (1986, pp. 237-239) and by M. Peters (1980, pp. 235 ff.), although they reach this conclusion by different routes. The rival claims of «heads» and «horns» from the morphological point of view are therefore in need of reconsideration.

It does not seem that there are many positive indications in favour of the meaning «horns», apart from the similarity of the *-r-* stem found in the later *-κραιρα*, which has both «head» and «horn» meanings, and therefore gives rather weak support¹⁵.

The Greek words for «horn» are peculiarly problematical as Nussbaum has shown. He is no doubt right in dissociating Greek *κέρας* «horn» from Skt. *śīras* «head», since they differ both in meaning and in form, although they have points in common: both are *s-* stems and their phonology points to a suffix *H₂* following the *-r-*. This suffix is common in words for «head», but not in words for «horn», so that Nussbaum constructs a more complicated explanation for the existence of Greek *κέρας*, deriving it from a base meaning «head-bone substance»: he aims to derive *-ka-ra-o-re* from this same base, although independently of *κέρας*. Most of the words for «horn» in the IE languages are derived from an anit root **k₁er*, with suffixes in *-u-* and/or *-n-*. Greek *δίκροος* «forked» < **dwi-k₁erowos* conforms to this pattern. Apart from forms of *κέρας* itself¹⁶ Mycenaean has *ke-ra* (dative-instrumental singular of a noun meaning «horn» the material, where one might expect *ke-ra-e*)¹⁷ and *ke-ra-ja-pi*, instrumental plural feminine of an adjective «made of horn», once spelled *ke-ra-i-ja-pi*¹⁸. Nussbaum argues that neither *ke-ra* nor *ke-ra-ja-pi* is based on an *s-* stem, but that they presuppose an *ā-* stem and an adjective in *-aios* based on it. Derivation from an *s-* stem, he maintains, should have yielded a form *ke-ra-i-ja-pi*, which does in fact occur once alongside the frequent *ke-ra-ja-pi*. The evidence for an *-ā* stem alongside the *-as* stem is not, however, entirely convincing, since there is only clear example of an instrumental singular *ke-ra*, and the spelling *ke-ra-ja-pi* could have a different explanation¹⁹.

¹⁵ Although Nussbaum argues for the priority of the «horn» meaning (1986, pp. 224 ff.).

¹⁶ (*ke-ra-a* nominative-accusative plural KN K 872.1; *ke-ra-e* instrumental singular or nominative dual? PY Sa 840).

¹⁷ KN X 9484.2.

¹⁸ KN Sd 4450.

¹⁹ Ruijgh (1967, p. 216) finds the usual form *ke-ra-ja-pi* surprising in an *s-* stem, but points out that it would be theoretically possible to derive it from **kerasyos* with the

Nussbaum does not try to associate *-ka-ra-o-re* directly with words for «horns» in Mycenaean Greek, or in other IE languages²⁰. Instead he proposes to derive it from a stem $*\acute{k}r(e)H_2s(e/o)r$, which is supposed to have originated in an endingless locative of a word for «head» and thus to mean «what is on or about the head, head-gear», which yields «horns» as a possible interpretation. A feminine form with suffix $*-iH_2$ is taken to underline *-κραιρα* (as in Homeric ὀρθοκραιράων), where the meaning «horn» is clear enough. The second element of compounds in *-κραιρα* is assumed to go back to a feminine $*-\acute{k}reH_2sriH_2$, though the phonology is not entirely straightforward²¹. To sum up, the main reason for choosing the «horn» meaning for the Mycenaean compounds is the difficulty of explaining them as belonging to a word for «head», but I think that there are good reasons for preferring that interpretation.

In the first place, there is overwhelming contextual pressure for the meaning «head» in the Ta series: *se-re-mo-ka-ra-o-re* stands in the same relation to *a-di-ri-ja-te* as *se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi* does to *a-di-ri-ja-pi*, and nobody doubts that the *-ka-ra-a-pi* compound refers to heads, not horns, since this is the necessary interpretation of the simplex *ka-ra-a-pi* in Ta 722. This instrumental plural²² is the only evidence in Mycenaean for the independent word for «head», the others all occurring in compounds. The nominative singular *qo-u-ka-ra* (PY Ta 711.2, 3) is variously interpreted: it could be either an adjective qualifying *qe-ra-na*, and meaning «of bull's head shape» (i.e. a rhyton) or «decorated with bull's head», or possibly a noun in apposition to *qe-ra-na*. An adjective seems more probable. Since it is a compound, a feminine \bar{a} -stem seems less likely than a form $*gwoukrās$, for which there are parallels in the Hesychian glosses λευκόκρας· λευκοκέφαλος and εὐκράς· εὐκέφαλος. Like post-Mycenaean κάρρα, κάρη, it provides evidence for the existence of a stem unextended by *-r* or *-n-* in Greek, and supports the view that Mycenaean had the independent noun κάρρα as well. The *-n-* stem in

-yo- form of the adjectival suffix. This seems feasible if the adjective had been accented κραιῖός (like γεραιῖός): for the effect of accent on the development of the *-(i)yo-* suffixes see Nagy (1970, pp. 113 ff.).

²⁰ The link with Hittite *ka-ra-a-wa-ar* «horn(s)» is remote, since this *r/n* heteroclitic word has a different suffix without *-s-*. It is far from certain that it contained a laryngeal suffix either, but the Anatolian words for «horn» are very problematical and deserve a separate treatment.

²¹ Peters (1980, pp. 250 ff.) discusses the derivation in great detail.

²² In Homer it is replaced by κράτεσφι.

Myc. *a-ka-ra-no* and *ka-ra-a-pi* is also paralleled in later Greek, which has the usual *-t-* extension in the simplex: it is not certain whether this extension was already present in Mycenaean²³. The coexistence of root noun and *-r* stem neuter as well as (in this case feminine) *-ā* stem can be paralleled by Homeric ἀλκί, ἄλκαρ, ἀλκή, so there is no need to reject an *-r* stem noun for «head» on the grounds that there was also a noun without this suffix.

In the second place, the morphological objections to an *r/n* heteroclitic as the ultimate source of *-ka-ra-o-re* may be exaggerated. It is true that heteroclitic neuter nouns normally use the *-n-* stem, rather than the *-r-* stem, in the oblique cases of the singular, although levelling in favour of the *-r-* stem is not unknown in Greek. On the other hand, it is not certain that *-ka-ra-o-re* is actually neuter. The prominent mention of *se-re-mo—x* at the beginning of the list of motifs does not suggest that they are minor elements of decoration or space-fillers, but rather that they are complete and important figures. This very much favours an interpretation of the compound as possessive rather than determinative, i.e. «beings with *s*-heads», as Risch suggested. But a compound of this kind would presumably be non-neuter, and its second element would inflect as an adjective like εὐήνωρ beside ἀνήρ²⁴. This would account for the form of the instrumental singular in a satisfactory way, but would cause a new difficulty with the instrumental plural, which is identical with that of the independent neuter *n*-stem. This difficulty, however, may not be insuperable. If the compound was of relatively recent formation, as seems to be the case with Homeric μεγαλήτορα, Hesiodic χρυσάορα (if genuine)²⁵ it is possible that

²³ It is unlikely that the instrumental plural would have had a *-t-* extension in any case: cf. Ruijgh (1967, p. 87).

²⁴ This question is discussed at some length by Peters (1980, pp. 230 ff.). He argues that all the compounds are determinative, and are therefore inflected in the same way as the simplex nouns: therefore there must have been a simplex **krāhor* which was different from **κάρα* and therefore did not mean «head» but «horn». He maintains that a bahuvrihi compound based on an *r/n* heteroclitic should be in *-ων* rather than *-ωρ*, though the evidence quoted is not conclusive. It is not necessary to assume that the compounds in *-ka-ra-o-re* were inherited from Indo-European: they could have been created in Mycenaean Greek at a time when sonant *-r̥* had already become *-ωρ*, in the same way as Homeric μεγαλήτορα to ἦτορ. Possibly they were recent enough not yet to have developed plural cases distinct from those of the underlying *r/n* heteroclitic neuters.

²⁵ Hesiod, *Op.* 771: Edwards (1971, p. 83) believes that for metrical reasons Hesiod created this athematic form in place of the thematic χρυσάορον found in Homer.

compounds which maintained a strong connection with the simple neuter nouns on which they were based had not yet generalised the *-r-* stem to all their cases. An analogous stage may be shown by the neuter *θέναρ*, which generalised the stem *-αρ-* in the singular (*θέναρος*: *Iliad* 5.339), but still had an *-n-* stem plural (*παραθένατα* Hsch.).

It is clear that *r/n* heteroclitics were archaic and unproductive in Greek. Their non-neuter derivatives formed in Mycenaean and Homeric Greek (as opposed to PIE) appear to have made their nominatives singular by lengthening the suffixal vowel, perhaps on the model of the extremely common bahuvrihi compound adjectives in *-ης* beside the related neuters in *-ος*, though without the inherited difference of qualitative ablaut. This process would naturally work only in dialects which had *-op* as the outcome of vocalic *-r*. While the singular cases show a tendency to generalise a stem in *-op-* (for which a model was available in the pattern *-τωρ*·*-τοπος*) there is remarkably little evidence in the early period to cast light on the expected form of an instrumental plural, apart from the Mycenaean forms themselves²⁶. It is possible that the simple neuter noun with instrumental plural attested in Mycenaean *ka-ra-a-pi* had influenced the compound, giving *se-re-mo-ka-ra-a-pi* on the analogy of *ka-ra-a-pi*.

Thirdly, the support for a word for «head» of the form **k̑reH₂sŕ* / *k̑rH₂sn-*, belonging to the same paradigm as the oblique stem in *-sn-* found in Skt. *śr̥ṣṇās*, may be better than is often supposed. The Hittite word *ḫaršar* «head» (an *r/n* heteroclitic with plural *ḫar-ša-a-ar*) looks impeccably Indo-European from the point of view of its morphology: the problem is with the phonology, since PIE **k̑-* does not give Hittite *ḫ-* but Hittite *k-*, and the laryngeal expected after the *-r-* is missing.

This twofold anomaly may hold the key to a solution. A conditioned change of **k > ḫ* is conceivable, and attempts have been made to account for such a change in terms of a assimilation of *k...ḫ > ḫ...ḫ* followed by a dissimilatory loss of the second *ḫ*²⁷. Not

²⁶ The question is complicated by the treatment of sonant nasals in Mycenaean, and the possibility that analogical levelling was already taking place between stems with *-or* from syllabic **-r* and accompanying stems in *-a-* from syllabic **n*, with the additional possibility of conditioned development of syllabic *n̥* to *o* after a labial. The problem is discussed in detail by Ruijgh (1967, pp. 69 ff.) with references to earlier literature.

²⁷ Thus Oettinger (1979, p. 367 n. 224; 548).

surprisingly, objections have been raised against this formulation in terms of a sequence of opposite processes, but the etymology may nevertheless be justifiable. That *ḥ...k* was an awkward sequence is demonstrated by what happened to the Hittite word for «tear», *išḥapru*, where the second *-ḥ-* corresponds to PIE **k̑* (Greek δάκρυ, Latin *lacrima*, Skt. *āśru* etc.), whatever the first consonant may have been, so it would not be surprising if a sequence *k...ḥ* also presented difficulties. Rather than assimilation followed by dissimilation after some lapse of time one might think of a single process whereby the fricative character of the laryngeal was anticipated as a result of attempting to utter a dorsal plosive while preparing to produce a fricative in a similar position of articulation: the result could have been an initial affricate combined with abandonment of any attempt to pronounce the medial *ḥ*. This affricate, being strange to the phonemic system of Hittite, would then no doubt have been simplified, probably rather quickly, to *ḥ-*. Whatever the precise phonetic processes involved, which can only be guessed at, the idea of a conditioned change has some evidence in its favour²⁸.

The one-time existence of an *-sVr* suffix in the word for «head», added to the base **k̑reH₂/k̑rH₂*, is thus directly supported by Hittite and Mycenaean, and indirectly by post-Mycenaean Greek with the derivatives in *-κραρο-* such as ναύκραρος «ship's captain». The associated *-sn-* stem is, of course, well attested both in Mycenaean and later Greek, for example in Mycenaean *ka-ra-a-pi*, *a-ka-ra-no*, and in post-Mycenaean words such as κρᾶνίον.

It may therefore be concluded that the compounds in *-ka-ra-o-re* can belong to the same paradigm as those in *-ka-ra-a-pi*, and that the second element refers in both cases not to horns but to heads.

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²⁸ The etymology is accepted by Peters (1980, p. 230 n. 176a), and by Puhvel *HED s.v.* It is rejected by Nussbaum (1986, p. 21 note 4). For discussion of this and other proposed etymologies cf. also Tischler (1977, pp. 184-186).

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