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ISSASARA'S WILL

Novel

PROLOGUE

The finger hovering above the mouse button, Aristotle Kondopoulos hesitates one last time before clicking on “Send” with a small smile of satisfaction. He knows his message will spread far beyond the microcosm of specialists in Minoan civilisation, reaching archaeologists, historians, sociologists, and linguists worldwide. It must be said that he managed his effects well. He simply wrote: *“I am pleased to inform you that following an exceptional discovery at the site of Aghia Triada, we have been able to unveil most of the great mysteries of Minoan civilisation. You will soon be informed of the date and location of a conference we will hold on this subject.”*

Six months later, he insisted that the presentation take place in Santorini, at the Petros Nomikos conference centre, even though it was far too small to accommodate all the scientists who would not want to miss the event. He assured everyone that his choice would make sense during his presentation.

The excitement of major scientific events reigns in the packed conference room. Despite technical difficulties and logistical challenges at the entrance, the event is already two hours

behind schedule. Many are standing or even sitting on the floor, but no one complains, thrilled to witness the event live. To handle the overflow, video broadcasts have been set up in every annex of the conference centre, with additional streams organised hastily in hotels on the island equipped with projection facilities.

Finally, the main hall doors close. Aristotle takes the podium. Silence descends. While the lights dim, the first slide appears behind him. As the image becomes legible, murmurs ripple through the room. When everyone can clearly read "WELCOME TO HATTIARINA," the hubbub is at its peak. Jubilating, Aristotle starts with the immutable phrases of welcome and thanks to which speakers oblige themselves before their presentation. Usually, no one listens to these foreplays. That day, you can't even hear them. Aristotle has all the difficulty in the world to calm his audience.

"Well! I think it's time to end the suspense before we have a riot. Welcome to Hattiarina! This message alone summarises the extraordinary results we have achieved. Ladies and gentlemen, we now know the name the people we call Minoans used for themselves, we know the names of their islands and cities, we know their language, and we even know where they came from."

It looks like a freeze frame. Excitement has given way to stupefaction.

"You may wonder how such a result is possible from a single discovery. Well, here it is: three years ago, I was working on the site of Aghia Triada. While trying to clear an oil press, I

discovered a pot hidden in the wall of the workshop where I was digging. It was filled with wood ash in which six documents were perfectly preserved: two papyri and four clay tablets.”

“The papyri have been dated to between 1550 and 1600 BCE. The tablets are disks, similar to the Phaistos Disk but slightly larger, with text written in a spiral on both sides. Together, they constitute what we have all dreamed of: the same text written using two scripts, one known and one unknown. Specifically, two discs are written in the Minoan language using Linear A script. and the other two in archaic Greek using Linear B script.”

The audience immediately understands that Aristotle has succeeded in deciphering Linear A, the famous Minoan script that has long resisted the best experts. Conversations break out across the room.

“I see that I do not need to explain to you the first consequences of our discovery. Indeed, the text of the tablets was long enough that, thanks to the invaluable collaboration of Yves Duguy, we were able to establish the rules for deciphering Linear A. The technical details of this remarkable achievement will be presented shortly, but I first want to explain why these documents reveal so much about the Minoans. They have the same author, in this case a woman. The tablets constitute what she herself calls her will, while the second ones contain her memoirs. She dictated her will to two scribes, one for each language, with the mission of copying it and ensuring that every household in Crete had a copy in its language. In contrast,

she wrote the papyri herself, totalling more than 60 meters of text of remarkable quality. Reading these memoirs allowed us, as I announced in my email, to reconstruct the history of the Minoans almost in its entirety. Of course, we lack information on what happened after the author's death, but you will see that she anticipated what was to come."

"So far, we have only focused on deciphering Linear A and translating the papyri and tablets. You now hold printouts of the complete versions of both documents. I won't reveal their contents here: it would take too long, and it would be a shame to deprive you of the joy of discovering them for yourselves. In the future, specialists will study these texts and their implications for our understanding of Minoan civilisation. To whet your appetite, I can already share a few names you'll need to familiarise yourselves with. First, you'll no longer call them Minoans but Hattiantians, as that's the name they gave themselves. Additionally, as you already know, we are not on the island of Santorini but on Hattiarina. Its main city, revealed by Spyridon Marinatos's excavations at Akrotiri, was called Urukinea, meaning the new Uruk."

Aristotle pauses to allow the astonishment created by this reference to the city of ancient Mesopotamia to pass.

"I won't say more on that for now. In the translations, we've used the Hattiantian names for cities rather than the Greek names of current excavation sites. At the beginning of the memoirs, you'll find maps and correspondence tables to help you navigate."

“One last point before Yves Duguy takes the floor to explain the fascinating process of deciphering Linear A. The texts tell us that each Minoan city was ruled by a woman whose title we have had difficulty translating because we also did not know the corresponding term written on the Linear B tablet. She wasn’t a queen or priestess, as those terms are familiar in archaic Greek. Reading the memoirs, we understood she was essentially a moral authority recognised by all. She does not intervene directly in the administration of the city, which is ensured by a person qualified as General Intendant. On the other hand, she alone assumes the exercise of justice. We ultimately chose the term Matriarch, particularly because people addressed her as “Mother””.

“That’s all for now. I pass the microphone to Yves, who will explain our discoveries on Linear A far better than I could.”