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Michael Ventris

(British Architect and Cryptographer)

Born July 12, 1922, Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire.

Died Sept. 6, 1956, near Hatfield, Hertfordshire.

Ventris, Michael George Francis (1922–1956), British linguist, known for his translation of previously undecipherable scripts and the theory that Linear B was an archaic form of the Greek language. Although born in Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire, he grew up in Switzerland and was therefore able to speak French and German as well as English. From his Polish mother he acquired Polish and he was known to have a talent for learning languages, including the ancient Greek and Latin he studied at school. He had no formal linguistics training and started out as an architecture student.

As a schoolboy, Ventris attended a lecture by Sir Arthur Evans on undeciphered Minoan scripts and he became fascinated by their decipherment and the study of similar ancient texts. The script in question, called Linear B, was found on tablets dating from the middle of the 2nd millennium bc that were discovered by Evans in 1900 in Crete. While Evans ruled out any possibility that Linear B could have been connected with Greek, Ventris noticed some possible similarities in the word endings and, pursuing this clue, he began to outline the structure of the language, which he believed seemed similar to Greek. He was able to decipher much of the text and show that it was Mycenaean (see Mycenae). In doing so he upended Evans's theory that the scripts (and civilization in Crete at the time they were written) were Minoan. Most scholars of today accept Ventris's theory that Linear B was related to the Greek language.

Ventris's life was cut short when he died in a car accident, shortly before a collaboration with John Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (1956), was published.

(Extracted from the Internet with attributes to Encyclopædia Britannica)

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