# INTRODUCTION: SYLLABIC WRITING ON CYPRUS AND ITS CONTEXT

PHILIPPA M. STEELE

The papers that comprise this volume focus on the syllabic scripts of ancient Cyprus, which fall into two principal groups: the small number of undeciphered texts mostly dated to the second millennium BC (usually termed 'Cypro-Minoan'); and the somewhat larger number of texts dated to the first millennium BC (traditionally labelled the 'Cypriot Syllabary'), most of which are written in the Greek language, while a few are demonstrably non-Greek, although their language remains unidentified.[1] The contributing authors take a number of different approaches to these scripts, be they epigraphic, linguistic, palaeographic, contextual or archaeological. The result is not intended to be a single, unified view of the scripts and their context, but rather a varied collection that demonstrates a range of interpretations of the evidence and challenges some of the longstanding or traditional views of the population of ancient Cyprus and its epigraphic habits.

The volume was conceived in the wake of a conference of the same name, held in December 2008 with the generous support of the John Chadwick Fund and E Caucus Fund of the Faculty of Classics, and the Graduate Exhibition Fund of King's College, Cambridge; a great many thanks are owed to everyone who made that meeting possible, and especially to the speakers, who kindly agreed to contribute their papers to this volume. It was obvious when the conference was convened that there was some gap to be filled in the published scholarship on Cypriot epigraphy. As far

[1] For further comment on the terminology applied to these two groups, see below. At least one first-millennium BC unidentified language can be found in inscriptions from the western part of the island (primarily at Amathus on the south coast) and is usually termed 'Eteocypriot' (see Steele 2011; in press: ch. 2), and there may be a second in the eastern area around Golgoi (see Egetmeyer 2012).

back as 1986, a conference entitled 'The History of the Greek Language in Cyprus' took place in Larnaca, bringing together some of the most prominent scholars working at the time on Cypriot Greek in various contexts, with an overwhelming focus on dialectological and similar concerns; its proceedings, edited by Jacqueline Karageorghis and Olivier Masson, appeared two years later.[2] Since then, however, there has been no published single meeting that has concentrated on Cypriot epigraphy or linguistics, even though archaeologically based symposia treating Cyprus during various periods of the second and first millennia BC have been relatively frequent. The published study of ancient Cypriot languages and scripts in the last twenty years has been largely confined to articles appearing in relevant journals and 'Mycenological' colloquia, as well as a few monographs treating particular groups of texts.[3] A meeting focusing on the Cypriot epigraphic material was a clear desideratum, and it was the inter-disciplinary discourse arising from the conference that formed the basic idea for this book.

## The structure of this volume

The volume is arranged so that, following an initial chapter whose aim is to present the current state of knowledge of the syllabic Cypriot scripts, a broadly chronological approach is taken, with the writings of the Late Bronze Age tackled before those of the Bronze to Iron Age transition and later the Iron Age itself. However, many of the chapters overlap, and not only chronologically but also in terms of the material treated and sometimes of the approach applied to that material. The reader may wish to peruse the whole volume as a continuous account of the current debates on Cypriot epigraphy and related disciplines, or he or she may dip into one chapter or another as preferred.

The opening chapter, 'The development of Cypriot syllabaries, from Enkomi to Kafizin' by Jean-Pierre Olivier, gives a comprehensive account of the syllabic scripts of ancient Cyprus in the

[2] J. Karageorghis and O. Masson 1988.
[3] E.g. Egetmeyer 1992; *HoChyMin*; Egetmeyer 2010a.

second and first millennia BC, detailing the surviving evidence and our current understanding of it. A large part of this chapter was drawn from Olivier's contribution to the as yet unpublished third edition of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (*Docs*$^3$), and is reproduced here with the kind permission of Cambridge University Press.

A second chapter by Yves Duhoux follows, 'Non Greek languages of ancient Cyprus and their scripts: Cypro-Minoan 1–3', which highlights some areas of Cypriot epigraphy where there remains some room for dispute, in particular the relations between different categorisations of Cypro-Minoan, approached from an orthographic/linguistic point of view. The emphasis here is shifted to specific methodological concerns, which are of considerable importance when dealing with undeciphered and poorly attested scripts.

Silvia Ferrara's chapter on 'Writing in Cypro-Minoan: one script, too many?' (Chapter 3) then takes a pointedly interdisciplinary approach, looking at palaeography and demonstrating the importance of considering the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions not only as texts but also as objects, with a full archaeological and cultural context. Chapter 4, by Susan Sherratt, on 'Late Cypriot writing in context' follows, presenting an important challenge to common conceptions – potentially misconceptions – about the origins of scripts within a backdrop of the complex political geography of the second millennium BC Aegean and eastern Mediterranean.

Moving on to the first millennium BC, Markus Egetmeyer contributes Chapter 5, 'From the Cypro-Minoan to the Cypro-Greek syllabaries: linguistic remarks on the script reform', which tackles the issue of the elusive 'script reform' that must be assumed to have taken place to account for the transition from Cypro-Minoan to a new script adapted for the Greek language. Maria Iacovou's chapter, on 'The Cypriot syllabary as a royal signature: the political context of the syllabic script in the Iron Age' (Chapter 6), follows, giving an account of the administrative background of the use of this new script in the first millennium BC Cypriot city states. As well as demonstrating the close links between visible writing and political power, this chapter emphasises the importance of

considering the political geography of Cyprus over time, since it is clear that the major Cypriot polities known from the Iron Age historical record had their origins in the Late Bronze Age.

The final chapter is contributed by Massimo Perna on 'Rethinking some alphabetic and syllabic Cypriot inscriptions' and provides a thought-provoking postscript to the study of ancient Cypriot scripts, highlighting and correcting some misinterpretations of epigraphic evidence. He also gives some indication of the future prospects of the study of Cypriot epigraphy, reporting on a collaboration that in time will produce the first full and comprehensive corpus edition of Cypriot syllabic inscriptions of the first millennium BC.

## A note on terminology

One potentially problematic feature of modern discussions of ancient Cyprus such as those found in this book, owing not least to the complex and multidisciplinary history of the study of the island, is that there will often be some significant variation in terminology used from author to author. The variation is by no means random; indeed, for at least some of the authors in this volume the issue of terminology is important or even central to their argument. However, for the unversed reader who may want to dip into one or another of the chapters, or for a scholar with experience from only one side of the multidisciplinary sphere or the other (an epigraphist with little experience of archaeological scholarship, for example, or vice versa), there follows a brief guide to the terminology that will be encountered in this book.

The syllabic scripts of ancient Cyprus have been divided broadly into two groups. From the earliest appearance of writing on the island around the sixteenth or fifteenth century BC down to the period around 900 BC, a group of rather disparate inscriptions have survived, written in a script that is evidently related in some way to Linear A and B and has traditionally been labelled 'Cypro-Minoan'. Although preserving labels such as CM 1, CM 2 and CM 3 (where CM = 'Cypro-Minoan') for the sake of convenience, Olivier prefers to use a temporal reference to 'second-millennium syllabaries' (in the plural because it seems that multiple similar

writing systems are represented).[4] Similarly, Sherratt eschews 'Cypro-Minoan', arguing that, as a biased term emphasising the hypothetical link between this and the Cretan linear scripts, it should be dropped in favour of a term such as 'Bronze Age Cypriot'. However, Duhoux, Ferrara and Egetmeyer continue to use 'Cypro-Minoan', as do many other scholars outside of this volume.

The other group of inscriptions, whose main body dates from the eighth to third centuries BC, has traditionally been referred to as the 'Cypriot Syllabary' (or also 'Cypriot Syllabic', 'Classical Cypriot' or the 'Classical Cypriot Syllabary'), with two sub-divisions of 'Paphian' (usually reading from left to right and found in the south-western area around Paphos) and 'common' (usually reading from right to left and found across the rest of the island) comprising slightly different repertoires of signs. Olivier again prefers a temporal categorisation ('first-millennium syllabaries'; a similar term appears in Perna's chapter), while Egetmeyer introduces 'Cypro-Greek' (abbreviated to CG; in parallel with Cypro-Minoan, and emphasising that the script was adapted specifically to write Greek), and Duhoux uses the more complex 'nCMCs' ('non-Cypro-Minoan Cypriot syllabaries'). Although the reasons for questioning and even overhauling terminology in these areas are obvious, many scholars today continue to use traditional labels, and it is as yet uncertain whether any of the currently proposed replacements will find lasting popularity. For now, however, 'Cypro-Minoan' remains a common choice for the earlier group of texts, and for the later group the publication of Egetmeyer's recent definitive account of the Cypriot Greek dialect, *Le dialecte grec ancien de Chypre* (Egetmeyer 2010a), which uses 'Cypro-Greek' rather than the 'Cypriot Syllabary', will undoubtedly have considerable influence.

Another aspect of terminology that has the potential to cause confusion is in the area of dating. Two types of date will most often be encountered: relative (usually based on ceramic phases, for

[4] For varying viewpoints on the issue of multiple writing systems (and potentially languages) present in Cypro-Minoan, see the chapters by Olivier, Duhoux and Ferrara in this volume.

example LC III or CG I, i.e. Late Cypriot III and Cypro-Geometric I respectively) and absolute (for example 'twelfth century BC' or 'c. 1000 BC'). The assignment of absolute dates to ceramic sequences is a matter of some contention, especially when it comes to comparing dating sequences in different areas of the Mediterranean and trying to align stratigraphy in Cyprus with that seen in, for example, Greece or Phoenicia.[5] The following table may be consulted for a rough and generally accepted estimate of the absolute dates to be assigned to the ceramic phases on ancient Cyprus (after Iacovou 2008a: 656):

| | |
|---|---|
| Late Cypriot I–II | 1700–1450 |
| Late Cypriot IIA–B | 1450–1300 |
| Late Cypriot IIC | 1300–1200 |
| Late Cypriot IIIA | 1200–1125/1100 |
| Late Cypriot IIIB | 1125/1100–1050 |
| Cypro-Geometric I–III | 1050–750 |
| Cypro-Archaic | 750–480 |
| Cypro-Classical | 480–310 |
| Ptolemaic/Hellenistic | 310–30 |
| Roman | 30 BC–AD 330 |

The very fact that the terminology and indeed the categorisations used in the field of Cypriot epigraphy and related disciplines are not straightforward in itself may be taken to demonstrate the importance of the discourse found in this book. The contributors each approach ancient Cyprus from a slightly different point of view, privileging the evidence and methodologies that are most important to their argument. But they also make their approach accessible to scholars of different backgrounds and different viewpoints, and it is through this overarching interdisciplinary dialogue that this volume will, I hope, be of use and of interest to any student of ancient Cyprus and its languages, scripts and material culture.

[5] For example, the famous eleventh- or tenth-century BC inscription from Palaepaphos bearing the name *Opheltas* is just one of the important objects whose dating might be called into question based on potential reassessments of alternative chronologies for Cyprus and other areas such as the Levant; see Gilboa and Sharon 2003: 72.

1

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF CYPRIOT SYLLABARIES, FROM ENKOMI TO KAFIZIN

JEAN-PIERRE OLIVIER

This contribution is largely inspired by the section 'The Cypriot syllabaries' which I wrote in 2005 for the chapter on 'Syllabic scripts in the Aegean and Cyprus of the second and first millennia' in the forthcoming third edition of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, edited by John Killen and Anna Morpurgo Davies = *Docs*[3].

The parallel and subsequent redaction and publication of the 'holistic' edition of the Cypro-Minoan scripts (*HoChyMin*) allowed me to refine the tables of signs, but my fundamental views about the development of the Cypriot syllabaries remained unchanged: they are the result of fifteen years of work on these still insufficiently studied scripts.

## The Cypriot syllabaries of the second millennium

### *1 The pre-fifteenth-century origins and the syllabaries in general*

Evans 1909,[1] on the basis of only fifteen different signs on three inscribed 'balls' and on an engraved ring from Enkomi, already glimpsed the relation between the Cretan writings and what he dubbed 'Cypro-Minoan'. The question of the route by which Linear A arrived in Cyprus is a debatable one, as J. Karageorghis showed;[2] and one can argue about 'eastern' influences on the handwriting, appearance, lay-out and even 'contents' of the first Enkomi tablet (Figure 1.2), as Godart and Sacconi 1979 have done. Their thesis is convincingly refuted by Palaima.[3] Nevertheless, there can be no doubt about the Cretan origin of the Cypriot syllabaries.

[1] *SM* I 70–3. [2] J. Karageorghis 1958: 14–16. [3] Palaima 1989a: 136–41.

Table 1.1 *Linear B (B) and first-millennium Cypriot (C): homomorphs and homophones (basically following O. Masson 1956b: 202 and* Docs[2]*: 388). Linear A (A) and Cypro-Minoan (CM) forms are added on the left*

| A | CM | B | C | Phonetic value B/C |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AB 01 | | | | *da/ta* |
| AB 02 | | | | *ro/lo* |
| AB 03 | | | | *pa* |
| AB 05 | | | 'common' Paphian | *to* |
| AB 06 | | | | *na* |
| AB 08 | | | | *a* |
| AB 09 | | | | *se* |
| AB 10 | | | Paphian | *u* |
| AB 11 | | | | *po* |
| AB 31 | | | | *sa* |
| AB 37 | | | | *ti* |
| AB 60 | | | | *ra/la* |
| AB 67 | | | | *ki* |
| AB 75 (= A 319) | | | | *we* |

The dozen or so homomorphous and homophonous signs in Linear B and in the Cypriot syllabaries of the first millennium (Table 1.1) can only have originated both graphically *and* phonetically in a Linear A that was the ancestor of both Linear B and the syllabaries of the first millennium (via Cypro-Minoan, in the case of the latter).

One will notice that in the column corresponding to Cypro-Minoan, to date, no syllabogram equivalent to *po* has been discovered, very probably due to chance, just as, up until 2005, in Linear A we lacked the sign AB *48* = H *006*, the existence of which had nevertheless been predicted in *Docs*[1].[4] And in 2005, it was read on a libation table found in Kato Symi in 1988 by Lebessi, a complete inscription (SY Za 4)[5] showing the missing A 48 (Figure 1.1, tenth sign):

[4] *Docs*[1]: 40. [5] Cf. Muhly and Olivier 2008: 207–8.

1.1 SY Za 4 with the sign AB 48 (after Muhly and Olivier 2008).

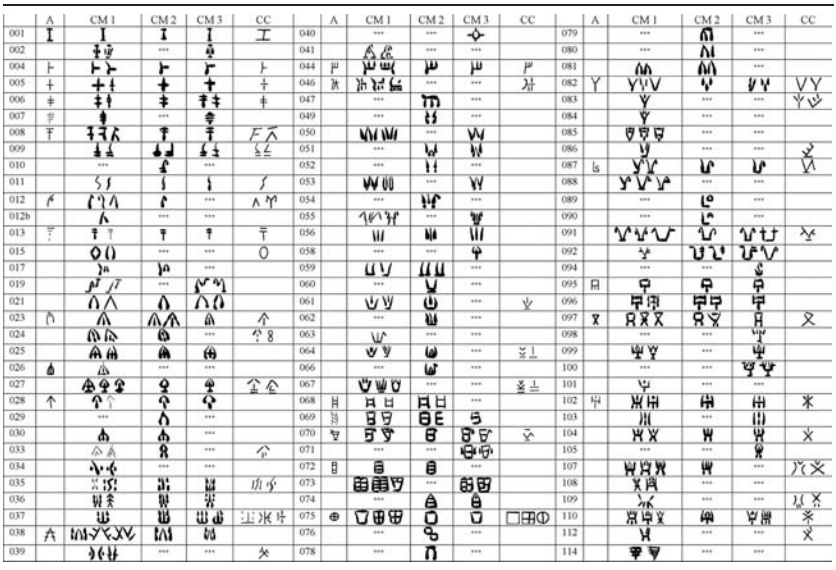
1.2 The first Enkomi tablet (*HoChyMin* ##001).

What we have displayed in Figure 1.2 is no longer Linear A but not yet Cypro-Minoan.[6] E. Masson was wrong to combine the signs of this inscription with those of two other inscriptions,[7] which she dated to the fifteenth century; she described this set as 'archaic' but was relying on an unjustified amalgamation of disparate items.[8] The major differences detectable between the syllabary of this tablet and the signs of *all* the other Cypriot documents of the second millennium (cf. Table 1.2) are hard to explain, even if one supposes there to have been a very rapid evolution. Given that it was found at Enkomi, the writing is, in some way, an ancestor of Cypro-Minoan, but here the mutation is not complete, and the new writing with which we are familiar elsewhere has not yet been created.

The fourth question is destined to remain unanswered until such time as other documentation has been discovered – somewhere between Crete and Syria (but even such a discovery might not be adequate).

[6] That is why I dubbed it 'CM 0' in *HoChyMin* in order to avoid any confusion.
[7] *HoChyMin* ##129 and ##095.
[8] E. Masson 1974: 11–12; nonetheless the date itself, though questionable, is not impossible.

Table 1.2 *The second-millennium* BC *Cypriot syllabaries (CM 1, CM 2, CM 3) compared with Linear A (A) at left and the first-millennium Cypriot syllabaries (CC) at right*



Three decades after Evans, Daniel began to individualise and classify the signs of Cypro-Minoan on the basis of the main evidence at his disposal, namely the marks on vases.[9] Olivier Masson 1957c drew up a list of the inscriptions, and Emilia Masson published most of the documents and then compiled tables of the signs (in 1974 and 1985).

She distinguished three syllabaries:[10]

*Cypro-Minoan 1* (CM 1) from the fifteenth century to the eleventh, used throughout the island, on all kinds of objects; 206 documents with *c.* 1,300 signs

*Cypro-Minoan 2* (CM 2) from the twelfth century, at Enkomi, on 3 large fragmentary clay tablets bearing *c.* 2,000 signs

[9] Daniel 1941: 249–82. [10] E. Masson 1974: 11–17.