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978-1-107-04286-5 - A Linguistic History of Ancient Cyprus: The Non-Greek Languages, and their Relations with Greek, c. 1600–300 BC

Philippa M. Steele

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

This book aims to further our understanding of the languages of the settled population of ancient Cyprus in the period *c.* 1600–300 BC, the scripts used to write them and their speakers. Its foundation is primarily linguistic and epigraphic, but related questions and problems are also considered, such as language contact and the wider historical and archaeological context. The focus, as specified in the subtitle, is on the non-Greek languages/scripts, of which three can be identified with certainty: Cypro-Minoan, Eteocypriot and Phoenician. Since these three epigraphic/linguistic groups form distinct entities, this book is organised into three main chapters treating them individually. Cypro-Minoan, the earliest group of inscriptions, is treated first (Chapter I), followed by the Eteocypriot texts written in a related script (Chapter II); finally, the Phoenician inscriptions, which are distinct both epigraphically and linguistically from the other two categories, are discussed (Chapter III).

Ancient Cyprus is universally acknowledged to have been home to a complex multicultural and multilingual situation attested through archaeological remains and a rich epigraphic record. It has been described as a cultural ‘melting pot’,¹ a ‘laboratoire d’écritures’² and a ‘cosmopolitan island’³ with multilingualism as ‘an integral characteristic of the cultural identity’⁴ of ‘une population fortement composite’;⁵ furthermore, ‘the history of script on Cyprus is as complex as the history of the island itself’,⁶ and the same can be said for language use. Nevertheless, there has been a tendency for scholars to concentrate, understandably enough, on restricted sets of material, for example a limited chronological

¹ V. Karageorghis 1988, p. 152.² Olivier 1998, p. 427.³ V. Karageorghis 1981, p. 57.⁴ Iacovou 2006, p. 57.⁵ Dupont-Sommer 1974, p. 87.⁶ Palaima 1989b, p. 50.

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period or a single language or script, rather than taking a comprehensive approach. Attempts to present a broader view, usually originating from the historical and archaeological sectors of scholarship, have inevitably been limited in length and scope, and reliant largely on surveys of material conducted by others. There has been, therefore, a pressing need for the linguistic and epigraphic component to be studied in detail, and owing to the previous work carried out it is possible for it to be integrated into a broader view of ancient Cyprus.

This book, arising from my doctoral thesis, is the result of an interdisciplinary investigation and gives a diachronic account of the non-Greek languages/scripts of ancient Cyprus, which fall into three categories: ‘Cypro-Minoan’ refers to a varied group of syllabic inscriptions dating roughly to the period *c.* 1600–900 BC, showing clear epigraphic affinity with the near-contemporary Linear A and Linear B scripts and representing one or more unknown languages; ‘Eteocypriot’ is the term given to a number of syllabic inscriptions dated between the eighth and fourth centuries BC and written in a language that is demonstrably non-Greek; Phoenician is a Semitic language originating from the Levantine coast facing south-eastern Cyprus, with a considerable body of Cypriot inscriptions dated between the ninth and third centuries BC that constitutes a significant proportion not only of ancient Cypriot epigraphy, but also of extant Phoenician epigraphy in general.⁷ The Greek language is not treated separately, but it is ever-present throughout the book and makes an appearance in all chapters.

In line with its scope, the heuristic and analytical aims of this book are also wide-ranging. Since the extent and type of knowledge we have about each of the languages/scripts is different in each case, which further emphasises the need to treat them individually, the methods of analysis employed in each chapter necessarily vary. Each chapter has three broad aims. The first was to ascertain how many inscriptions have survived, and to map their distribution chronologically and geographically. The second was to

⁷ ‘Cyprus offers the most complete and, for the later period, most conclusively dated sequence of Phoenician inscriptions’: Peckham 1968, p. 13.

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consider epigraphic and linguistic problems specific to each script/language. Finally, the third aim was to consider the context of each script/language through studying the population groups writing/speaking them and the level of contact with other languages, as well as giving overviews of the broader archaeological and historical background.

The Greek language on Cyprus

The title of this book perhaps seems to promise something and then whisk it away: a linguistic history of Cyprus, but one that focuses on the non-Greek languages and not on Greek itself. In some ways this is in keeping with the island's history. Cyprus is not so well known to the student of Classics. Lying far to the east of the Greek-speaking heartland, the island is situated at the very far east of the Mediterranean Sea, tucked under the Anatolian peninsula and much closer to the homes of the Hittites, Phoenicians, Assyrians and Persians than to Athens or the Peloponnese. At some point, perhaps around the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, the Greek language nevertheless started to be spoken on Cyprus, and it has continued to be spoken there to this day. It is hardly surprising that Greek was not the only language spoken on the island in the ancient period, considering its geographical position and also its economically important combination of rich mineral deposits and fertile land that made it an attractive destination to traders and settlers alike. Some of the people who came and went had a more transient stay,⁸ but here we are primarily interested in the settled populations that resided in Cyprus for long periods of time.

Why is Greek not considered as a separate entity in this book? There are two important reasons. The first is that the non-Greek languages are not as well understood as Cypriot Greek, and have been subject to quite haphazard scholarship over the years, all too often as the focus of decipherment attempts or similarly narrow approaches. This had left them much in need of reappraisal and

⁸ For example, the languages of external powers that never acquired a longstanding physical presence on the island, particularly Assyria, Egypt and Persia: see Reyes 1994, pp. 49–97; Caprez-Csornay 2006, pp. 218–19; Knapp 2008, pp. 344–5.

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further study. The second reason is that significant research on the Greek language in Cyprus was already taking place, and the fruits of that research have already begun to appear in print. Most importantly, Markus Egetmeyer's already seminal work, *Le dialecte grec ancien de Chypre*, appeared in 2010 and provided a full description and analysis of the Cypriot Greek dialect (vol. I *Grammaire*), as well as a list of all the Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions then known to him (vol. II *Répertoire*).⁹ The forthcoming corpus of Cypriot Syllabic inscriptions, in preparation by Egetmeyer alongside Artemis Karnava and Massimo Perna, will also greatly improve the resources available for the study of Cypriot Greek when it appears in print.¹⁰ Currently, more than 1,000 surviving Cypriot Syllabic texts are known, but of these many are too short and/or damaged to interpret, and others do not have a plausible Greek reading, leaving around 650 texts that can be confirmed to be Cypriot Greek.¹¹

There are still some issues that need to be resolved for Cypriot Greek. One is that of its dialect, which is traditionally seen as part of an Arcado-Cypriot group.¹² Another is the question of when and how it arrived on Cyprus, though the evidence for this period is severely limited, and it is correspondingly difficult to understand the mechanisms by which it was transmitted, either by a sudden migration or by smaller population movements over time (considered in Chapter I). The chronological and geographical distribution of the surviving Greek inscriptions on Cyprus is a further factor that is important to the study presented in this book, and is discussed in the Conclusion alongside the distribution of extant epigraphy in the other languages under consideration.

Terminology

The field of 'Cyprology'¹³ is something of a terminological mine-field, with a number of terms originating in the late nineteenth or

⁹ Egetmeyer 2010a. ¹⁰ Egetmeyer, Karnava and Perna in press.

¹¹ Personal count, based on Egetmeyer 2010a vol. II. Included in this number are single-word inscriptions that contain only a Greek name.

¹² See Chadwick 1988.

¹³ Olivier 2008, p. 612: 'la cyprologie' by analogy with terms such as 'Mycenology' for the study of the Linear B inscriptions.

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early twentieth centuries and displaying anachronistic prejudices. For example, what is often referred to as ‘the Cypriot Syllabary’ (i.e. the syllabic script used to write Greek and Eteocypriot during the first millennium BC) is certainly not the only syllabic script of Cyprus; since the term is only descriptive and could equally apply to the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, which are also syllabic and Cypriot, this could be problematic.

The debate over how to classify Cyprus’ syllabic scripts has been especially lively in recent years, with a number of scholars suggesting alternatives to the traditional division of Cypro-Minoan and the Cypriot Syllabary. Olivier has referred to them respectively as the second millennium and first millennium syllabaries,¹⁴ while Duhoux argues that this chronological distinction does not take account of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions that probably date to the early first millennium, and may prove to be inaccurate in light of future epigraphic finds, and so resorts to the terms ‘Cypro-Minoan’ and ‘non Cypro-Minoan Cypriot syllabaries’ (though he admits this is complicated terminology).¹⁵ Egetmeyer has preferred to use alongside ‘Cypro-Minoan’ the term ‘Cypro-Greek’, on the assumption that the later syllabic script was created for the Greek language,¹⁶ though the disadvantage of this division is that at least one other language, Eteocypriot, is known to be written in ‘Cypro-Greek’. Sherratt has argued for dropping the term ‘Cypro-Minoan’ in favour of such a term as ‘the Bronze Age Cypriot script’ to avoid an emphasis on any possible link with the Minoan language (i.e. that of Linear A),¹⁷ though again this is not perfect given that some Cypro-Minoan inscriptions date to the Cypro-Geometric period.

This book continues to use the terms ‘Cypro-Minoan’, to refer to the syllabaries used to write one or more unknown languages and attested between the sixteenth and tenth centuries, and ‘Cypriot Syllabary’, to refer to the syllabaries used to write Greek and Eteocypriot (and possibly one or more other unknown languages) attested from around the eighth century onwards. This terminology is far from ideal but has at least the advantages of brevity and tradition. It would be difficult to select new terminology that does not fall foul of one or another unfavourable association (an overemphasis on assumed origins, or a

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 605. ¹⁵ Duhoux 2013. ¹⁶ See Egetmeyer 2013. ¹⁷ Sherratt 2013.

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falsely drawn chronological dichotomy, for example). Nevertheless, it is important to apply some classification if we are to discuss the scripts at all. We may as well label them *X* and *Y*, because they are two distinct entities of which our understanding varies considerably (Cypro-Minoan being mostly undeciphered, while the Cypriot Syllabary is deciphered much more completely). This situation only becomes complex when there is some dispute as to whether a particular inscription is written in one or the other script, or when we wish to speak in terms of how one is related to or descended from the other; for these matters, a simple dichotomy is useful in order to distinguish between the two different concepts. Any terminology we apply to these scripts is modern, artificial and informed by our own biases.

Both ‘Cypro-Minoan’ and the ‘Cypriot Syllabary’ have epigraphically defined sub-divisions, usually based on variations in the structure of the syllabary. Cypro-Minoan has been divided into CMO, CM1, CM2 and CM3 (see Chapter I). The Cypriot Syllabary is divided into ‘Paphian’ and ‘Common’ variants, with the former attested primarily at Paphos and usually read from left to right (dextroverse), while the latter is used to refer to inscriptions from elsewhere on the island and is usually read from right to left (sinistroverse). The Paphian and Common syllabaries have repertoires of approximately the same number of signs (which is not the case for the Cypro-Minoan sub-divisions), but have different sign shapes for a small number of the signs, while the rest are the same in both signaries.

The Phoenician script (often erroneously called an alphabet) is an abjad, representing consonants but not, for the most part, vowels. This, alone of the scripts considered in this book, does not contain any sub-divisions and presents no terminological problems. The Greek alphabet is also mentioned occasionally, appearing late on the island and then used to write Koine Greek rather than the Cypriot dialect,¹⁸ but its situation is complicated by the attestation of bilingual and bidialectal texts containing this script alongside the Cypriot Syllabary (in which we can identify at least two languages, Greek and Eteocypriot).¹⁹

¹⁸ It has been argued that the Greek alphabet was created on Cyprus (Woodard 1997, 2010), but the island’s stubborn resistance to the alphabet for most of the first millennium militates against this suggestion.

¹⁹ For overviews of Cypriot bilingual and bidialectal inscriptions, see Consani 1988 and 1990.

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The terms ‘undeciphered scripts’ and ‘unknown languages’ are also in themselves problematic. Cypro-Minoan is usually referred to as undeciphered, but in fact it is partially deciphered in the sense that the approximate phonetic values of a small number of its signs can be recovered with a reasonable degree of certainty through internal analysis and a study of relations with more completely deciphered scripts. Similarly, the values of Linear A signs are often assumed to be known, via a comparison with the values of Linear B signs. Meanwhile, Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary are not wholly deciphered scripts, since there are still uncertainties regarding some of the rarer signs. Again, unknown languages may not be wholly unknown, as is demonstrated by the progress that may be made in identifying lexical and morphological features of Eteocypriot (examined in Chapter II).

Problems of terminology will be revisited in later chapters.

Conventions

The following conventions are employed in this book.

- I All dates are BC, unless stated otherwise. In some cases, references are made to periods rather than absolute dates, and for these the following approximate chronology may be consulted:²⁰

Late Cypriot IA	1575–1525
Late Cypriot IB	1525–1425
Late Cypriot IIA	1425/1400–1375
Late Cypriot IIB	1375–1300
Late Cypriot IIC	1300–1230
Late Cypriot IIIA	1220/1210–1150
Late Cypriot IIIB	1150–1050
Cypro-Geometric	1050–750
Cypro-Archaic	750–480
Cypro-Classical	480–310
Ptolemaic/Hellenistic	310–30
Roman	30 BC–AD 330

²⁰ This is based predominantly on Dikaios 1969, 1971 and Iacovou 2008, p. 626, but see also Aström 1972; Wiener 2003; Knapp 2008; Ferrara 2012 vol. II *Corpus*.

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- 2 Inscriptions are referred to via their main place of publication. For the Cypro-Minoan corpus, the numbering of *HoChyMin* is used, prefixed with ##. Some inscriptions are referred to using an abbreviation of a book title in italics (e.g. *ICS* or *Kourion*), and those appearing in Egetmeyer's *Répertoire* (2010a vol. II) are listed by their site and number (e.g. Amathus 6). Eteocypriot and Cypriot Phoenician inscriptions are also given numeration unique to this book (e.g. **EC 1, Ph 1**).
- 3 References to Cypro-Minoan signs are given in **bold** following Olivier's revised numeration (*HoChyMin*). Cypriot Syllabic signs are given in *italics* (e.g. *pe*), and Phoenician signs in *italicised* upper case (e.g. Š).
- 4 Transliterations are given in *italics*. Uncertain Cypro-Minoan and Cypriot Syllabic signs are given underdots, while in Phoenician transliterations uncertain signs are marked with a circle (since the standard transliteration of some signs, such as Š, employs underdots); where it is impossible to guess at what a sign might be, a question mark (?) is used. Word dividers are represented by a small line ('), and intentional spaces by two slashes (/). Erasures are marked by double square brackets ([[]]).
- 5 Sections of this book are referred to by alphanumeric notation: a combination of the number of the chapter in capitalised Roman numerals (e.g. I, II), and the section in Arabic numerals and upper-case Roman letters (e.g. 1.A, 2.B). Subsections are then represented by lower-case Roman numerals (e.g. i, ii).

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I

CYPRO-MINOAN

I.1 The Cypro-Minoan corpus

‘Cypro-Minoan’ is a modern term that has been applied to a number of Late Bronze Age (along with a few Early Iron Age) inscriptions found mostly in Cyprus (along with a few in modern Syria) that have clear epigraphic affinities with the Linear A and Linear B scripts of the Aegean, as well as with the later Cypriot Syllabic script used to record Greek and Eteocypriot on Cyprus. It has thus far not been possible to establish with certainty in what language or languages these texts are written, despite many attempts over the years at full decipherment, because of the relatively small number of inscriptions discovered (fewer than 250). Despite the limited nature of the corpus, it has been argued that the extant inscriptions give evidence of multiple writing traditions (distinguished by chronological, geographical and epigraphic criteria; see section I.1.E), as well as being palaeographically diverse, so that Cypro-Minoan cannot be studied as a single and comprehensive entity.¹ In some cases it seems possible to isolate small groups of inscriptions as perhaps belonging to a single tradition, and quite apart from the usual considerations of geographical and chronological variation normal to any attested script, it appears that in the few longer Cypro-Minoan texts there is substantial variation both in the repertoire of signs in use and perhaps also in lexical items (inasmuch as we can isolate sign sequences because of the use of word dividers) and possible linguistic or grammatical features (particularly potential word endings). However, on the whole it is very difficult to apply rigorous classificatory criteria to the majority of texts because of their short length and heterogeneous types and origins.

¹ Steele 2012.

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The Cypro-Minoan inscriptions cannot simply be studied together as though they all originate from a single population using a single version of the script and recording a single language. They are examined here from several different angles in an attempt to clarify classificatory, epigraphic and even potentially linguistic factors, as well as to set Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Cypriot writing in its broader context.

1.1.A Defining Cypro-Minoan and establishing the corpus

The term ‘Cypro-Minoan’ was coined in 1909 by Arthur Evans, who established, based on a small amount of data drawn from only a few inscriptions, that there were relations between Late Bronze Age Cypriot writing and the Aegean linear scripts.² From that point onwards, the Cypro-Minoan texts have been subject to a great deal of scholarship, with finds of inscriptions gradually increasing over the years. Evans himself conducted further research on a broader range of texts,³ as did others,⁴ and following further finds and publications of inscriptions during the 1930s,⁵ scholars such as Stanley Casson and Axel Waldemar Persson were able to conduct epigraphic studies.⁶ However, it was John Daniel who drew up the first convincing Cypro-Minoan signary, based on a more rigorous analysis of inscribed objects and sign shapes than had previously been attempted, thereby creating a much firmer foundation for future research.⁷ It has been pointed out that for many years nobody attempted to follow up his *Prolegomena* with the full contextual analysis of inscriptions that it implied was needed.⁸

After Daniel, the scholarship on Cypro-Minoan was taken up first by Olivier Masson⁹ and then dominated until the late twentieth century by Emilia Masson, who, in a succession of articles, produced transcriptions of the texts, analyses of palaeographic factors

² Evans 1909, pp. 68–77; see also Evans 1900, where he first recorded discoveries of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions.

³ Evans 1935. ⁴ E.g. Markides 1916, which had some influence on later studies.

⁵ See e.g. Schaeffer 1932, 1936. ⁶ Casson 1937; Persson 1937. ⁷ Daniel 1941.

⁸ Palaima 1989a, p. 147. The ‘corpus’ promised in Smith and Hirschfeld 1999 (which has not yet appeared) was evidently intended as such a treatment.

⁹ First in O. Masson 1956.