1 Introduction

Around the middle of the fifth century BCE, royal authorities in the inland town of Idalion, on the island of Cyprus, commissioned a large bronze plaque to be placed in the sanctuary of Athena, a prominent section of the civic and ideological center (ICS 217). The inscription, forged with a side handle, was written on both sides in Greek using the local Cypriot syllabic script and found near the acropolis of Idalion during the nineteenth century (Figure 1.1). It records the deeds of a doctor, Onasilos, who, along with his brothers, was conscripted to give free medical relief to the wounded during a siege of the town by the Medes, or Persians, and by Kition, a prominent town on the eastern coast. As compensation, Idalion’s king, Stasikypros, along with the city (polis), decided not to give the customary monetary prize, a silver talent from the city’s treasury, the “house of the king.” Instead, this authoritative collective granted productive agricultural land outside Idalion in a district called Alampria to Onasilos and his extended family, for posterity. In the provisions associated with the land, the king and city outline the rights to exploit it and its produce, the entitlements associated with its tax-exempt status, and the purview of enduring ownership (lines 1–13).

When the Medes and Kitians had the city of Idalion under siege, in the year of Philokypros, son of Onasagoras, King Stasikypros and the city (πτόλις) – the Idalians – called physician Onasilos, son of Onasikypros, and his brothers, to treat people who were wounded in battle, without payment. And so, the king and the city agreed to give Onasilos and his brothers, instead of payment and additional gratuity, a talent of silver from the house of the king and the city (εἰκῶι τῶι βασιλῆϝος). But instead of that silver talent, the king and the city gave to Onasilos and his brothers land of the king which is located in the district of Alampria: the piece of land (χῶρον) that is in a swampy meadow (ἕλει) – that which adjoins the vineyard (ἅλϝω) of Onkas – and all the new plants (τέρχνια) there, to possess them with absolute right to sell, forever, without taxes. If ever someone evacuts Onasilos or his brothers or Onasikypros’ children’s children from that piece of land, then, he who will expel them shall pay Onasilos and his brothers or their children the following amount: a talent of silver.
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In the following sections the contract continues, this time gifting land in a nearby valley solely to Onasilos and his immediate family. It borders the productive plots of someone named Amenia, the Drymios River, a sanctuary of Athena, and a garden in a field of Simmis, potentially another place name (lines 14–31).

And for Onasilos alone, without his brothers, the king and the city agreed to give, instead of additional gratuity, besides payment, four silver pel- skeis and two double mnas of Idalion. But instead of that silver, the king and the city gave Onasilos land (γα[?]) of the king which is in the plain (πεδίας) of Malania: the piece of land that adjoins the vineyard of

Figure 1.1 Idalion Tablet, (a) Face A and (b) Face B (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 2297)
Amenia and all the new plants there, (land) that reaches the river Drymios until the sanctuary of Athena and the orchard (κάπον) that is in the field (ἀρούραι) of Simmis – the one that Diweithemis the Armaneus had as orchard, contiguous with that of Pasagoras, son of Onasagoras – and all the new plants there, to possess with absolute right to sell, forever, without taxes. If ever someone evicts Onasilos or Onasilos’ children from that land or that garden, then, he who will evict them shall pay Onasilos or his children the following amount: four silver pelekeis and two double mnas of Idalion.

And this cartouche, which is inscribed with these words, the king and the city submitted it to goddess Athena, she (who protects) the area around Idalion, with vows not to violate these terms, ever. If someone violates these terms, may the curse fall upon him. These lands and these gardens, the children of Onasikypros and his children’s children will own them forever, those who shall stay in the area of Idalion.

The inscribed contract locates the land donated to Onasilos and his brothers among a constellation of private plots, landscape features, sacred groves, and royal properties, providing a detailed window into the intersections of the state and its control of the surrounding agrarian landscape. The terminology reflects this diversity, a kind of literacy of place: while plot shapes and sizes are unclear, segments of land are described as choros (plot, field, or ground), ga (land), and aroura, distinguishing the latter as arable or ploughed land, as well as alwos and kapos, vineyards and orchards or gardens (Van Effenterre and Ruzé 1994: 136; Georgiadou 2010: 180–181). The representations of the land not only mark its location within a territorial administration, but also its capacity for productiveness, particularly for young trees and plants (terchnea), which Onasilos and his male household could use or perhaps sell. The first parcel of the king’s land intended for the larger extended family would be situated within marshlands, near water, and adjacent to a private plot of someone named Onkas. The naming of the Alamprian district further signals a larger aggregation of administrative regions that Idalion organized through networks of transaction in land holdings beyond its immediate countryside, or chora (Satraki 2019: 233; see also Georgiadou 2010: 179).

In this book, I argue that rural plots, plains, and perimeters such as those of Onasilos emerged through the interactions of different social groups, their land use and resource practices, and shifts in climate and ecology, and that they in turn shaped novel political institutions and forms of inequality in tandem with the growth of the Cypriot urban polity. Towns such as Idalion were dynamically interrelated with the communities...
living and working in diverse landscapes around them. In its discursive mapping of a political landscape, and as one of the few extant texts about Cypriot land use in antiquity, the Idalion inscription raises fascinating questions about the development of these forms of authority and economy during the early first-millennium BCE. How did the polity of Idalion come to create and institutionalize these royal, civic, and private places, and how were their conditions of economic productivity measured or evaluated? How did ownership or management of property in productive fields, orchards, or extractive industries instigate or mediate forms of social difference, and how did the state help protect property claims? How did these countryside places become integrated in political and cultural ways with those of the town? And which subjects and landscape features of the polity’s oikoumene, its “known inhabited world,” does the Tablet exclude?

To answer questions such as these, we need to push back before the fifth century BCE, to ask how fields and countrysides grew alongside, and helped define, centers of authority such as Idalion or Kition in the horizon of major social, cultural, and political transformations commonly called the Iron Age (ca. 900–475 BCE). This book contextualizes the historical processes that established the local and regional changes in household structures, communities, and investments in agropastoral settlements evident in more consolidated political form by the fifth century BCE. The social actors and groups instigating these transformations were, I argue, differentially experiencing and making sense of the precarity and dynamics of Cypriot environments. Amassing a range of archaeological, textual, and scientific evidence, this book uses new interpretive lenses on landscapes, environmental history, and rural communities to argue for their collective instrumentality in the processes driving novel political formations. Positioning the Idalion Tablet as an opening frame, I fashion questions for Mediterranean archaeology that seek landscape developments outside the central place or town (polis): the lived and worked chorai, the oikoumene, and rural and wild extremes, or eschatiai (Snodgrass 1987: 73). I theorize environmental changes as important aspects of the interactive formation of societies and meaningful places – relationships that were uneven and fostered unequal social change.

The Idalion Tablet emphasizes these politics by braiding the privileged position of Onasilos and his family within the spatial concerns of the state. The doctor’s personal estate, for example, was circumscribed within a social and economic field full of inherent value to the royal household, the civic body, and the broader authoritative scope of Idalion’s landed interests, from the polis to the farther plains. His family would own plots bound
by institutions vital to the polity: fruitful orchards and arable fields managed through royal and inheritance property laws and surrounded by ritual spaces connected to the central acropolis through processional routes, festivals, and border features such as rivers and valleys. These conditions reproduced Onasilos’ family as an important intergenerational asset of the state, which could promote its rule beyond the events of the siege into the security of land for Onasilos’ future descendants. The properties and the productive crops granted to Onasilos’ kin would be tax-exempt and protected by the regime – but also guarded by curses enacted against anyone who might try to take possession of the fields in the future. Moreover, the intentional placement of the inscribed decree within a central sanctuary of Athena, and its shape fashioned with a handle to be hung for viewing, made public and legible these values of territory to Idalion’s citizens. It also enveloped Onasilos and the wider citizen body within the care of Athena, whose divine protection operated in “the area around Idalion.” Beyond Onasilos’ new farms and orchards were of course numerous other rural actors, from Alampria and elsewhere, who lived and worked within the polity and whose less privileged land use and environmental practices are much harder to identify and interpret but no less integral to the making of Idalion’s landscape.

Read as an object of political history, the Idalion Tablet has largely served to anchor scholarly interpretations of state organization, dynastic sovereignty, and even the historical contexts of doctors during the first-millennium BCE (Stylianou 1989: 402; Georgiadou 2010; Lejeune 2010; Cannavò 2011: 92–96; Hatzopoulos 2014; Papasavvas 2014; Pestarino 2022: 48–77). This Iron Age period witnessed the rise of Phoenician city-states, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the Greek polis following a context of apparent settlement displacement, population change, and increased mobility after the close of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1700–1050 BCE; Killebrew 2014; Lemos and Kotsonas 2020; Knodell 2021). As the longest Cypriot syllabic inscription, the Idalion Tablet has illuminated institutions of Cypriot politics whose origins scholars trace back to this Iron Age horizon. In the repetitive conjoining of a magistrate king and city, as a decision-making collective, the Tablet attests to a complex governing structure that accommodated the agency of the civic body in tandem with the royal house (Lejeune 2010; Fourier 2013: 104). The Tablet has also provided evidence for the legitimation and dating of the rise of Kition and its domination over inland centers such as Idalion during the Classical period (ca. 475–330 BCE; Satraki 2019: 233). Consequently, the histories of these cities have guided scholarship, linking evidence such as the Tablet to arguments for political topography and
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structural continuities from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age and later Classical period (e.g. Iacovou 2007, 2008). But the Tablet also makes compelling claims to fix a newly honored member of the civic community within the established transactional powers of the state. In doing so, it offers ways to move beyond particularist history into new theoretical and comparative approaches to ancient landscapes.

Landscapes – the places, practices, and materials through which people dynamically and differentially experience and perceive their environments, which connote the living things and geophysical phenomena that create their surroundings – were vital to the making of towns such as Idalion, and archaeologists have become adept at studying the traces and spatial distributions of settlements, work sites, monuments, or other socially constructed features that made them up. But archaeologists generally follow these traces to explain urbanism. Small rural sites or villages may be the more stable forms of inhabitation that we find in the archaeological record, the “workhorses” of any settlement pattern,” but towns and cities tend to fascinate us and shape our research (Fletcher 2020: 41). In Cypriot archaeology, a preoccupation with detailing the spatial extent of independent polities such as Idalion and Kition has privileged the study of first-millennium BCE towns. There are several reasons for such an imbalance, including the history of archaeology on the island and the methodological difficulties in finding and identifying evidence of rural settlements (e.g. Given and Smith 2003; Janes and Winther-Jacobsen 2013). Scholars also cite the problem of an “urban palimpsest,” in which the continuously occupied settlement formations of the Iron Age sit beneath the island’s current urban fabric (Brown 2011: 5, 138).

For these reasons, the study of Iron Age landscapes on Cyprus has typically leaned towards urban history and topography. The later Geometric (ca. 900–750 BCE) and early Archaic periods (ca. 750–600 BCE) signal a watershed in such settled landscapes across the island. Scholars posit that during these centuries, towns such as Idalion consolidated into autonomous powers, so-called city-kingdoms, in a segmented arrangement around the island (Iacovou 2002a, 2005a; Satraki 2012; Fourrier 2013; Cannavò and Thély 2018). Consisting of a series of capital centers, positioned mostly along the coasts and with hierarchical settlement networks stretching inland, a prevailing city-by-city vision of Cypriot Iron Age geography has tended to obscure the complexity of interstitial, non-urban landscapes (cf. Sørenson and Winther-Jacobsen 2006; Toumazou et al. 2015; Figure 1.2). Archaeologists regularly presume that dependent hinterlands, the productive areas tied through trade to urban centers, were controlled by ruling
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authorities (Iacovou 2005a; Satraki 2012: 333–334). The Idalion Tablet’s near-cadastral recording of districts and histories of land ownership confirms, in these interpretations, the centripetal power of the city and its dominance and administrative grip over smaller-order villages (e.g. Hatzopoulos 2014: 225). This interlocking of the constitution of the classical polities with the “very stable urban topography” of capitals, some of which stretch back into the fourteenth century BCE, has cleaved the surrounding countrysides from the interrelationships that generated landscapes, economic growth, and political power (Fourrier 2013: 113).

This book examines how the rural infrastructure of these landscapes might have developed alongside the substantial social and political transformations of urban authorities across the ninth to fifth centuries BCE, what I will call a long Archaic timescale. It further advocates the study of the region’s environmental history as recursively shaping those changes. For the plots that Onasilos was to acquire and pass on to his descendants were shaped not just by land use technologies and forms of resource management, but by shifting environmental constituents such as soils, rivers, vegetation, and drought and storm frequencies. Those who commissioned the Tablet were focused on property transactions and yields, but also on

Figure 1.2 Map of Cyprus showing its position in the eastern Mediterranean, the central Troodos massif, and major historical sites. 75 m DEM
longer-term environmental practices and knowledge of land tenure. How did communities with unequal access to “good land” and freshwater or stable soils help condition these systems? Taking the Idalion Tablet’s urban history at face value and reading it only as an event of political patronage risks an approach that regards Cypriot landscapes as unchanging. A common scholarly concession that Mediterranean environments are largely the same as they were four millennia ago can render any “natural” or environmental changes as gratuitous for understanding historical progression (Rackham 1996; Kearns 2013: 109; Manning 2022b). Within studies of the regeneration of social complexity on Cyprus during the Iron Age, scholars tend to conceive of the island’s economically valuable natural features as immutable (sensu Iacovou 2013a), or, constrained by systematic irregularities in semiarid soils and water availability. In this view, resources such as copper from the central Troodos massif provided lasting and “inexhaustible” opportunities for economic control over metal production, even as political boundaries may have changed (Georgiou and Iacovou 2020: 1134; see also Kassianidou 2013, 2014). The compelling longevity of several sites and cemeteries established in the centuries surrounding the collapse of the Late Bronze Age system, around 1200 BCE, and persisting in various forms until the Roman and Late Roman periods (first centuries CE and on), can further make the surroundings of these towns seem like stagnant backgrounds (Counts and Iacovou 2013).

As the fields of archaeology and ancient history have turned in recent decades to reassessing past climatic shifts, through increasingly available scientific data and proxies, it is becoming clear that the environments of the first-millennium BCE were not only dynamic, and more fitful than previously assumed, but are key to a more robust understanding of historical transformation (e.g. Blouin 2014; Izdebski et al. 2016; Haldon et al. 2018a; J. G. Manning 2018). Idalion’s transactional landscapes formed through human investments in and relationships with the soils, marshes, and settled places of communities, as well as through shifts in water availability and drought cycles and the growth and reduction of forests and vegetation. The environmental history of the Idalion Tablet, in other words, hints at the fissures and underlying tensions in the seemingly stable semiarid terrain we often assume for ancient Cypriot polities. What were the economic, social, or political costs of maintaining such a lively landscape? What were the processes and landscape interventions through which some in Idalion came to control more land? How were the intergenerational claims of households integrated within its political economy, and who might have been left out?
In the wording of the inscription, the king of Idalion and his citizen constituents acknowledged the probability of a changed agricultural landscape and its implications for the kin network of Onasilos. The sovereign authorities allowed for the possibility of commercial use of crops and land, or even the forcible removal of Onasilos, and accounted for such future events by prescribing fines. Indeed, the redistribution of these plots to Onasilos and his family tacitly implies prior ownership of the land, whether royal, public, or private, or more directly references previous contracts with the field of Simmis, earlier owned by someone called Diweithemis. Together, the land is defined not through fixed boundaries but through the dynamic interests of the state and the flexibility of property claims (Mackil 2017; Foxhall 2020; see also Ludden 1999: 73). Most provocatively, the prescribed gifts are directed at “those who shall stay in the area of Idalion,” anchoring Onasilos’ new lands and gardens through his household’s service, inter-generational stability, and long-term affiliation with Idalion, perhaps in his duties as a local doctor (Georgiadou 2010: 181). Through such control over who owned or managed what, the polity could foster allegiance by catering to the privileged and could inculcate collective beliefs in the values that sustained their social order. The Tablet imagines a landscape of change, captured as a performative and likely public episode of joint royal and civic concession. It speaks not just to a viable arable possession, but to a fifth-century evaluation of land planning, property boundaries, sacred spaces, and collective decision-making, at least in appearance.

The flexibility and historical textures of these features created what J. B. Jackson (1984) called a vernacular landscape, one shaped over generations by communities living, moving, and working within the material environments of the region of Idalion and central Cyprus. This book privileges the study of landscapes in order to access more fully how rural groups engaged with and experienced the social and environmental changes driving political formations. Our urban frameworks tend to highlight instead the official, utilitarian nature of the Tablet, which can externalize rural landscapes and their temporal and spatial complexities. Looking at the city also usually emphasizes the language of power, the Idalion king and his sovereignty, rather than the vernacular: the locally grounded practices of those who may have lacked certain kinds of power yet who participated in, reproduced, or resisted political change. Biases towards understanding authorized, top-down urban narratives of course predominate in our twenty-first “century of cities,” when just over half of the world’s population resides in urbanized places and when globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and transnationalism among developed and developing countries have pushed rural
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matters, and their associated environmental changes, to the background. Yet non-urban communities and social groups, many of them indigenous, are increasingly proximate to and impacted, oppressed, or challenged in diverse ways by ecological and climatic disturbances related to industrial development, resource extraction, pollution, and sea level rise, among myriad others (Nixon 2011).

When people living along Pigeon Creek, West Virginia (USA) woke up to disastrous flooding in their homes one day in May 2009, for example, they knew that the material destruction was somehow related to the strip-mining of coal in the surrounding hills of Appalachia, not just the bad luck of sudden storms. Lawsuits pitting these rural communities against coal mining companies such as Alpha Natural Resources, as well as associated research into the causes of the flooding, would point not only to the complex hydrology of the larger Ohio River watershed and the Appalachian mountain range, but equally to the effects that the slow destruction of mountaintop removal coal mining can have on stormwaters, which are increasing in frequency and severity with global climatic changes (e.g. Pericak et al. 2018). Thunderstorms had dumped several inches of rain that swelled creeks, caused flash floods, and released inundations polluted by acid mine drainage. The waters seeping into the households and communal built environments of rural settlements along Pigeon Creek were thus intertwined in varying ways with residential histories, local, state, and federal economic policies of resource use, the profit maximization and deregulatory practices of mining companies, and the actions of soils, chemicals, and storms. They were also grounded in the pasts and futures of the interaction between villagers, workers, and coal in these valleys. The material legacies of coal mining will indeed impact these places long after the industrial companies shut down operation. The stories like these playing out today in forms of land tenure and environmental policy, resource sustainability, and industrial production among smaller-scale rural communities offer important insights, and counter-narratives, to the dominant lens of urban socio-environmental dynamics.

These narratives reveal the interacting ways that power, difference, and social complexity materialize and historicize rural spaces and landscapes in ecological flux, in an era of seemingly fast-moving and anxiety-inducing climatic shifts. They also highlight how we experience, perceive, and imagine environments in highly contingent ways, relative to scales of personhood, family, community, and broader political belonging. Where stormwaters could mean huge loss for some families along Pigeon Creek, devastation to the plant, animal, and biotic life along the waterways, and justification...