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VISIBLE WRITING: QUESTIONS OF SCRIPT AND IDENTITY IN EARLY IRON AGE GREECE AND CYPRUS

Summary.   *A number of seemingly intractable problems still surround the introduction of the Greek alphabet some time around the middle of the eighth century BC, after more than four centuries of Greek illiteracy. The question of when this happened, though debated, seems still more or less a matter of consensus on the basis of the date of the earliest extant Greek alphabetic inscriptions, but the questions of where, how and why it did remain largely unresolved. Of these problems, perhaps one of the most intractable is that of why it happened when it did, given that the old idea of an isolated 'Dark Age' Greece, cut off from the literate east during the centuries before 800 BC, is no longer sustainable. On Cyprus, too, there is something of a literacy 'gap' between the early tenth and late eighth centuries, though there is every reason to suppose that an indigenous syllabic script continued in use on the island over this period, and the problem therefore is one of visibility rather than existence. This paper considers the contexts in which alphabetic literacy was introduced to Greece and in which syllabic literacy became visible once more on Cyprus at around the same time, in order to see if these are entirely coincidental or whether some link may be found between them. In particular, it raises some general questions concerning the relationships between script and language and between language and identity in different parts of the ancient world in the later second and early first millennia, and the implications these may have for the role of script in constructing and defining identities in eighth century Greece and Cyprus (both incidentally inhabited by Greek-speakers). It concludes that what we see are analogous, but quite separate, developments, both of them focused on Phoenician activity, but manifesting themselves in different circumstances through parallel but different phenomena.*

CYPRUS AND GREECE: THE NATURE OF THE LITERACY GAPS

The distinction of providing the earliest Iron Age Greek inscription belongs to the island of Cyprus. The Greek name Opheltas is neatly engraved in Cypriot syllabic script on a bronze spit from Tomb 49 at Palaepaphos-Skales, the contents of which date to Cypro-Geometric I (between the late eleventh and early tenth centuries BC) (Karageorghis 1983, 59–76 no. 16, pl. LXIII:16, fig. LXXXVIII:16; Masson and Masson 1983, fig. 2, pl. A:2). The five syllabic signs of which the inscription consists have been described by Emilia Masson as 'a perfect example

of a transitional phase' between the so-called Cypro-Minoan script of the Late Bronze Age and the Paphian script of the Cypro-Archaic period (Masson and Masson 1983, 411). Two other inscribed bronze spits were found in the same tomb: one with two syllabic signs on it (which, whatever they signify, do not say it in Greek), and another with a simple vertical stroke and a diagonal cross (Karageorghis 1983, 61 nos. 17–18, pl. LXIII:17–18, fig. LXXXVIII:17–18; Masson and Masson 1983, figs. 3–4, pl. A:3–4).

The importance of the Opheltas inscription is that it provides evidence not only of a Greek name but of the Greek language, since the name (read from left to right) is in the genitive and so provides evidence of Greek inflection. We thus have clear evidence of Greek being spoken in Cyprus at the time the spit was engraved. What is also clear is the use, in conjunction with the Greek language, of a distinctively Cypriot writing system, which was still used for writing a non-Greek language or languages in the eleventh to tenth centuries and indeed for many more centuries to come. There is nothing to suggest, at any rate, that Opheltas or any of his Greek-speaking friends or relations knew anything about writing in Linear B, the syllabic script used to write Greek in the Mycenaean palaces of the later second millennium – or, if they did, they do not appear to have had any interest in doing so. The other important thing is that writing is being used here in a manner which seems much more consonant with traditions of Cypriot and Near Eastern usage than anything that we see in Mycenaean Greece. In Greece, at least in the period when Linear B was in use (from around 1400 to 1200 BC), there is no history of inscribing metal objects or indeed anything much other than clay tablets, sealings and transport stirrup-jars with highly formulaic and abbreviated administrative or bureaucratic memoranda (Killen 2001; Snodgrass 1980, 79–81). There is also no history in Linear B usage (unlike probably Linear A) of marking personal ownership or merely proclaiming one's existence in permanent and visible form by writing one's name on objects such as weapons, tools, seals, rings, metal vessels, etc. – something for which there are good precedents in the Near East and probably also Cyprus, where inscriptions of a suitable length to represent personal names are found in the Late Bronze Age on objects such as gold rings, cylinder seals, bronze and silver bowls and bronze tools (Palaima 1989, 125, 154, 158, figs. 8, 20–1; cf. 1991, 455–7; see Tatton-Brown 1979, 53–4; Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, 172–3, nos. 1892–3; Karageorghis 1974, 44 no. 10, pl. LXVI:10). Moreover, the bronze spit on which the name of Opheltas appears is, at least in the eleventh century, a thoroughly Cypriot artefact, which is probably telling us something about the lifestyle of élite male groups on Cyprus at a period of some economic and political upheaval (Haarer 2000; Iacovou 1994, 1999a, 146–8). Whether Opheltas merely took delight in the ability to record his personal existence in visible and permanent form on an important symbol of his status and lifestyle, or whether he took the precaution of having the spit carefully inscribed before he departed for a spot of male bonding in the woods, here is a member of a Greek-speaking community whose culture generally is indistinguishable from that of other contemporary Cypriots, who is using a peculiarly Cypriot form of writing in a thoroughly Cypriot, or rather non-Greek, manner.

The discovery of the Opheltas inscription further complicated the question, which had long been apparent, of the literacy 'gap' between the so-called Cypro-Minoan script of the Late Bronze Age, last seen in the eleventh–tenth centuries, and the archaic syllabary, used to write both Greek and so-called Eteo-Cypriot, which first makes its appearance in the eighth century but begins to become common only from the seventh century (Karageorghis and Karageorghis 1956, 354–5; Masson 1983, 38–45). It should be emphasized that the two scripts – despite their different names – are essentially the same, and (as Masson's description quoted above makes

clear) one is effectively a continuation of the other. The Opheltas inscription certainly does not remove this gap; but what it does do is give us a clearer idea of the probable nature of the gap, not least by removing the possibility of a partial discontinuity in language on either side of it.

The whole question of the gap on Cyprus is made more intriguing by the parallel, but rather longer, gap in Greece between the Linear B script which dies with the palaces at the end of the thirteenth century, and the first alphabetic writing attested in the eighth century (Jeffery 1990). Superficially, at least, it looks very much as though these two gaps are nothing more than coincidence. Few would now doubt that on Cyprus a syllabic script continued over the gap, though in what contexts and forms it continued are open to question. Manifestations of Cypriot syllabic script in general tend to preserve what might be called a kind of cuneiform appearance, by which I mean that the forms of the signs are not obviously lapidary in the way that early Greek alphabetic stone and even graffito inscriptions tend to be, nor do they ever display clear signs of cursiveness in the way that Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions often do even when inscribed on stone.[1] As a result, one might suggest that engraving with a stylus on clay or wax was an important medium (Karageorghis and Karageorghis 1956, 355).[2] Nevertheless, despite the apparent lack of obvious cursivity, writing with paint or ink (or both) on perishable materials, probably including papyrus,[3] almost certainly also had a part to play. Cypro-Minoan signs, painted after firing, are not at all uncommon on Late Bronze Age (particularly Mycenaean) pottery which passed through Cypriot hands (Stubbings 1951, 45–52; Hirschfeld 1999, 2000), and in much later times a Hesychian gloss implies that writing in the form of painting on leather was a normal Cypriot practice.[4] Certainly, among the earliest syllabic inscriptions to appear after the gap are the five signs painted before firing on a White Painted jug from the Paphos region, dated to around the middle of the eighth century (Karageorghis and Karageorghis 1956, 353 no. 4, pl. 119, fig. 4; Tatton-Brown 1979, 100–1 no. 314; Masson 1983, 187 no. 174).[5]

As to the context, some association both before and after the gap between inscriptions and sanctuaries (e.g. Masson 1985; Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, 172; cf. Masson 1986, 185–8), and, in the case of some Cypro-Archaic inscriptions that we can read and date with some confidence, an association between inscriptions and dedications (e.g. Masson 1983, 43–5 nos. 12, 15–15d, 15f, 188–9, 218–19, 307; cf. Tatton-Brown 1979, 100, 101 nos. 319–20), suggest that this is one type of context in which we might envisage the survival of writing even when we

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1   By 'cuneiform' I refer only to the generalized superficial appearance of the signs, whose shapes and formation (like those of true Cuneiform) seem in principle well suited to engraving by means of a rigid stylus on some softish material like clay or wax (Daniel 1941, 253). This has nothing to do with the old idea (first suggested by Brandis [1873, 649–53]) that all or some Cypriot syllabic writing derived directly from oriental Cuneiform scripts (cf. Palaima 1989, 155).

2   For what may be a bone stylus from thirteenth–twelfth century Enkomi, see Tatton-Brown 1979, 53 no. 146.

3   It seems more than likely that papyrus, which was certainly used in the Phoenician cities at the end of the second and beginning of the first millennia (see the Tale of Wen Amun: Pritchard 1958, 20; and cf. Aubet 1993, 24–5), was also quite readily available just across the water on Cyprus during this period when active commercial relations with the Levant are evident.

4   Hesychios, *Lexicon* s.v. διφθεραλοιφὸς (= schoolmaster, lit. 'leather-painter'). Cf. Masson 1983, no. 143, pl. XVIII:2 (an epitaph of Onasagoras, a schoolmaster [διφθεραλοιφὸς], written in syllabic script and dating to the fifth or fourth century). See also Karageorghis and Karageorghis 1956, 355 for various linguistic indications that ancient Cypriots thought of writing in terms of 'painting', as opposed to Greeks who thought of it in terms of 'engraving' or 'scratching' (γράφω).

5   For its region of origin, see Masson 1983, 408 no. 18c, 411 no. 174. It was originally published as from the Polis region. The inscription itself does not appear to be in the Greek language.

cannot see it. In general, however, it seems hard to escape the conclusion that literacy – or at least a generalized awareness of literate signs and their values (what might be called literacy-consciousness) – was probably quite widespread on Cyprus at the close of the Late Bronze Age, and probably continued to be so in subsequent centuries. Part of the reason for thinking so is the sheer diversity of objects on which 'Cypro-Minoan' inscriptions are found in the Late Bronze Age, even if their total quantity is not very great. There is little point in anyone inscribing his or her name, or the recipient of his or her dedication, on an object unless a reasonable number of people can read it, or at least recognize its significance. However, a more cogent reason for thinking so is the well-documented Cypriot Late Bronze Age practice of using individual syllabic signs to mark pottery (see generally Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, 172; Masson 1983, 35–7; Palaima 1989, 152–4; Hirschfeld 1999, 2002). We do not know the precise or even the contextual significance of these signs. However, the very fact that signs taken from a system of writing are quite widely used for this purpose implies the probability of phonetic values which mean something in terms of names or other vocabulary (perhaps as 'initials' or abbreviations), suggesting that, at the very least, sign recognition included a generalized recognition of signs which formed part of a writing system. This can be seen as a form of literacy-awareness, if not of semi- or full-literacy. This practice certainly continued into the eleventh to tenth centuries (Masson and Masson 1983, 413, figs. 7a–c, pl. B:3–5; Masson 1985, 283–4, pls. C–G). What is not yet clear is to what extent it may continue into the succeeding two centuries, and how much this ignorance can be put down to our sparse knowledge of settlement pottery in this period.

The problem with Cyprus, then, is not one of loss of literacy over the 'gap', but of loss of archaeological visibility of literacy for some reason or other. When we turn to Greece, however, we seem to have a quite different story. There the gap is real and complete. Literacy of the Linear B variety shows every sign of having been genuinely restricted, almost a closely guarded secret – a preserve of the palace systems with which it came and with which it disappeared. Even while the palaces flourished it was put to very limited applications. The very fact that there is no continuity between it and alphabetic writing – in other words, when writing reappears it is in the form of a completely different system adapted from the Phoenician alphabet – is a very strong (though not necessarily conclusive) argument for the complete loss of literacy in the interval, as is the argument that there is a total lack of congruence in the uses to which writing is put at either end of the gap.

The question of the length of the gap has been debated over the last 30 years.[6] The earliest Phoenician inscription so far found in the Aegean is the inscribed bowl from Teke Tomb

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6   For relatively recent discussions of this debate, see for example Isserlin 1991; Amadasi Guzzo 1991. In general, however, consensus remains with the eighth century (particularly from around the middle of the century onwards), before which there is no physical evidence for Greek alphabetic inscriptions (Jeffery 1990, 16–17, 426–7; cf. Amadasi Guzzo 1991, 298; Whitley 2001, 130–1). The earliest allegedly Greek inscription found so far is a curious graffito consisting of four or five signs on a local flask from Osteria dell'Osa in Latium, dated by its archaeological context to before 770 BC (Bietti Sestieri 1992, 184–5, fig. 8.9; Bietti Sestieri, De Santis and La Regina 1989–90, 83–8). However, even if one takes its necessarily very approximate date seriously, and despite the fact that the signs appear to be dextroverse, it does not seem to make any sense in Greek or as a Greek name, and it is far from certain that we are looking at a specimen of the Greek alphabet. Given the presence of very visible Phoenician inscriptions in the central Mediterranean already in the ninth century (Aubet 1993, 179–81), the scope for early local experimentation with sign reproduction is considerable (something comparable is possibly seen in the pseudo-'Phoenician' inscription from Palaepaphos mentioned below, in note 16). What it does do, however, is add some weight to the suggestion that the Greek alphabet itself was first developed in the Tyrrhenian area (see below, note 15).

J at Knossos on Crete (Coldstream 1982, 271–2, pl. 27:c–d; Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 13–16).[7] Depending on whether it is dated by the ceramic context of its deposition or by assessments of its palaeography (the two need not be incompatible), it belongs either to the early ninth century or around a century earlier (Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 13–16 with references). For some, this bowl has been seen as adding support to the argument (originally put forward on somewhat narrowly conceived palaeographic grounds) that alphabetic writing must have begun to develop in Greece significantly before the mid-eighth century, despite the absence of any earlier Greek alphabetic inscriptions (Naveh 1973, 1987, 175–86; Cross 1980; cf. Isserlin 1991; Amadasi Guzzo 1991; see also Bernal 1987, 427–33; Morris 1992a, 106, 115, 159–60). However, it seems to me that this is based on a misapprehension of what literacy – or at least early Greek literacy – is all about. Writing is in some respects analogous to the potter's wheel and other manifestations of what we assume to be technological 'progress'. It is not something that people automatically embrace just because they have become aware of the possibility and have encountered the technology. The conditions also have to be right. In other words, an appropriate cultural context is needed in which writing can be put to some perceptibly useful purpose.

THE CONTEXT OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GREEK ALPHABET:
HOMER, LANGUAGE AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Before considering this question of context, it seems worth raising a further question concerning the introduction of the Greek alphabet in general. Particularly in the context of the picture with which we are often presented in relation to the Early Iron Age site of Lefkandi on Euboea, of enterprising Euboean warrior-traders and pot-salesmen more or less constantly voyaging to Cyprus and the East Mediterranean from at least the beginning of the tenth century onwards (Popham 1994; Popham and Lemos 1995; Boardman 2002), why was writing not re-introduced to Greece in the form of a Cypriot syllabary already used in this period for writing Greek? That it clearly was not might conceivably give us one more reason to look sympathetically on the claims of John Papadopoulos (1997; cf. Morris 1992b, xiv) that reports of Euboean enterprise in the East Mediterranean – and even around the shores of the Aegean – may have been greatly exaggerated, and to conclude that in fact very few, if any, Euboeans regularly made the journey to and from the East Mediterranean in the period preceding the appearance of the Greek alphabet. Instead, the chronological and spatial distribution of Greek Early Iron Age pottery in the East Mediterranean, which is found consistently earliest and in greatest quantities at Tyre and also in Tyrian-dominated localities in the southern Levant (Coldstream 1989, fig. 1a; Coldstream 1998; cf. Aubet 2000, 81–6), suggests that its carriage

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7   For other early Semitic inscriptions from the Aegean of late ninth to eighth century date, see Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 16–21; Röllig 1988. Like the Teke bowl, most of these either mark ownership or are statements of dedication, and three of them come from sanctuary contexts. For eighth century Semitic inscriptions in Greek-frequented regions of the central Mediterranean, including Pithecusae, see Buchner 1982, 290–6; Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 21–7. The question of whether the letter forms of some individual inscriptions found in the Aegean or central Mediterranean can be identified as specifically Phoenician or Aramaic seems to me largely irrelevant to the general issues considered here. As it is, before the early eighth century there is no clear way of distinguishing between them (Amadasi Guzzo 1991, 296; Bisi 1991, 278), and even in the eighth century such a distinction is not always undisputed (Ridgway 1992, 153; cf. e.g. Teixidor 1979, 387 no. 137). In any case, it does not affect the general consensus (including that of the ancient Greeks themselves) that the parentage of the Greek alphabet lay with those whom the Greeks *called* Phoenicians.

was almost entirely in the hands of eastern (especially Tyrian) carriers.[8] In other words, there is no evidence that the inhabitants of Euboea, or for that matter other Greek-speaking inhabitants of the Aegean, frequently if ever found themselves in the position between the eleventh and eighth centuries of seeing full-blown Cypriot literacy in operation in its own context. Since in this period at least it does not seem to have travelled outside the island, it seems very likely that they did not even know of its existence.[9]

I should like to turn now to the main questions concerning the contexts in which Cypriot literacy begins to become visible once more around 700, and in which literacy is reintroduced to Greece (and becomes immediately visible) from around the mid-eighth century, and to consider whether these developments really are coincidental or whether it is possible to find some connection between them. To take Greece first, I have suggested above that, when the time was right, the Greeks (ironically as it turns out) adopted and adapted the Phoenician alphabet, partly perhaps because by its nature it lent itself well to inter-linguistic transference, but mainly because it was the only form of writing of which they were aware. The question is, what made the time right?

Various suggestions have been proposed in the past about the purposes for which the Greeks adopted alphabetic writing, none of them entirely satisfactory for a variety of different reasons. The requirements of trade (once thought to begin again only in the eighth century, at the end of a 'Dark Age') seem particularly unconvincing in view of the wholly non-commercial and non-notarial nature of early Greek inscriptions.[10] In any case, people all over the world and throughout history have traded successfully with varying degrees of complexity and sophistication without the need for writing. More importantly, however, especially in view of the growing evidence for trading contacts between Greece and other regions of the Mediterranean in the first two centuries of the first millennium, such an answer does nothing to explain why the advent of Greek literacy was postponed until the eighth century.

Much the same may be said of another suggestion, that writing was adopted as a symbol of élite status and self-definition (Stoddart and Whitley 1988; cf. Schnapp-Gourbeillon 2002, 311–14). While this makes some sense in terms of the highly personal nature of many of the earliest Greek inscriptions, it does nothing to explain the question of timing. Eilites are always looking for new ways of differentiating themselves and, if that was the reason, why should they have waited until the eighth century was quite well advanced to do so, given that the earliest extant Phoenician inscriptions appear in the Aegean well before the earliest Greek ones? So far, the only suggestion which explicitly addresses the reasons for the timing of the appearance of Greek literacy is that of Barry Powell (1991), to which I shall return below.

It seems to me that the answer may lie elsewhere, in one of the central pillars of ancient Greek identity – the Greek language. The extraordinary thing about historical Greece is the political hardness of its linguistic boundaries, at least before the Hellenistic period. Language

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8   To this we can add the sign inscribed after firing on an amphora of probable north Aegean manufacture found at Lefkandi in the tenth century (Catling 1996). The mark may derive from the Phoenician alphabet, and provides some support for the idea that pottery traded around the Aegean in this period may well have travelled in the hands of East Mediterranean carriers.

9   For a tiny handful of Cypriot syllabic inscriptions from the Aegean and southern Italy, none of them earlier than the seventh century, see Masson 1983, 422 nos. 369–369c.

10 For recent advocacy of the adoption of the alphabet as a primarily economic tool, see e.g. Ruijgh 1995, 37. For a critical discussion and further references, Schnapp-Gourbeillon 2002, 274–9.

was the main symbol of demarcation not only of the boundaries of the Greek-speaking world itself, but also of the internal dialectal boundaries which at least in Classical times, as known to us from inscriptional and literary evidence, formed some surprisingly hard territorial and political edges, despite the fact that the purely linguistic distinctions between the dialects seem barely noticeable in comparison with, for example, the differences between some British–English regional dialects. What this means is that historical Greek identity as a whole, and the identities of individual Greek cities, were both closely bound up with language. While this might seem both self-evident and natural within what might be termed a traditional cultural-historical perspective (or indeed to anyone steeped in the ideologies of Classical literature), anthropology and history teach us otherwise. What we commonly think of as ethnic identity is not *automatically* focused on language (though it often may be). We need only think of the former Yugoslavia, for instance, to remind us of this. In the second millennium Near East, there is little reason to suppose that language formed a particularly important focus of identity in any symbolic or self-conscious way (Schwartz 1995), and the same is probably true of the second millennium Aegean. People spoke the languages of their own everyday communities, and when the need and/or opportunity arose they also used other people's languages or an international language such as Akkadian, without making much fuss or investing any great emotion in it. Language was generally not an enormous symbolic issue (Schwartz 1995).

The Greeks, who gave us the concepts of βάρβαρος (which we translate as 'barbarian') and barbarophonism (from βαρβαρόφωνος -that is, 'speaking barbarian [non-Greek] languages'), seem to have been among the first that we know of historically to elevate language into a major focus of ethnic (and here one might actually use the term national) identity. If the traditional explanation of the etymology of βάρβαρος as onomatopoeic has any merit (that is, the idea of making unintelligible noises [Strabo 14.2.28]), it implies a Greek reluctance even to understand languages other than their own, or at least a reluctance to admit that they do.[11] The concept of barbarophonism already appears once in the *Iliad*, in connection with the Carians of Miletus (*Iliad* ii.867), though it seems likely that the more general concept of 'barbarian' develops a little later than the period in which the Homeric epics emerged somewhere around 700 BC (Hall 1989). However, there is another more firmly entrenched Homeric concept which is to all intents and purposes identical with barbarophonism. This concept is 'allothroism' (from ἀλλόθροος, the speaking of *other* languages, or more strictly speaking the confused noises which others make), which carries with it not only the recognition of the existence of other, non-Greek languages as a condition worth pointing out, but also much the same value-laden opposition between Greek and other languages as is implied by barbarophonism. The concept of allothroism is used explicitly in the *Odyssey* in connection with Egyptians (*Odyssey* iii.802), with generalized foreigners (*Odyssey* xiv.43), and with the inhabitants of a place called Temese (*Odyssey* i.183–4) who may most plausibly be thought of as Phoenicians in charge of the mines at Tamassos on Cyprus, for which there is at least circumstantial evidence in the Phoenician inscription on a late ninth century bowl from Kition recording a dedication to Astarte by a citizen of Tamassos (Karageorghis 1976, 106, pl. 83; Amadasi Guzzo and Karageorghis 1977, 149–60 no. D21, pl. XVII:1–2, fig. 23; Karageorghis 1982, 124).[12] The word ἀλλόθροος

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11 An idea no doubt wholly in tune with the norms of English school education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which combined great emphasis on facility in dead foreign languages with a blithe disdain for the desirability of being able to speak modern ones.

12 For the identification of Homeric Temese with Tamassos, see Winter 1995, 268 n.43.

is also, interestingly, used by a Phoenician woman (Eumaios's Phoenician nurse) to apply (at least by indirect implication) to Greek-speakers on Ithaca (*Odyssey* xv.453, cf. 482–3): another suggestive straw in the wind which may indicate something of the main oppositions on which this early linguistic consciousness was focused. The concept is also implicit in the *Iliad* in relation to the Trojan army, whose mixture of languages is presented as an explicit disadvantage to it in contrast with the linguistic homogeneity of its Achaean opponents (*Iliad* iv.437–8). Virtually the same wording is used in the *Odyssey* of Crete (*Odyssey* xix.175), the part of the Achaean world most regularly frequented by Phoenicians and the only one in which linguistic diversity is an explicit issue (Sherratt 1996, 90).

How does writing come into this? The mention of Homer brings me immediately to Barry Powell's renewal of the argument, first proposed by H.T. Wade-Gery (1952) and subsequently by Anthony Snodgrass (1980, 82–3), that alphabetic writing was introduced to Greece specifically in order to write down the Homeric epics (Powell 1991; cf. the varied criticisms in Powell *et al.* 1992). While I, like many of Powell's critics, am unwilling to concede any likelihood of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* having been committed to writing in their entirety at this early date, or even that there was any need for them to be written down (Sherratt 1990, 821; cf. Kirk 1962, 319–20; Hainsworth in Powell *et al.* 1992, 122–4), I am convinced that Powell is right to emphasize a connection of some sort between epic and alphabetic writing, which is visible not least in those striking instances of hexameter graffiti which form some of the earliest alphabetic inscriptions (Powell 1991, 119–86). Among these is the well-known 'Nestor' cup from Pithecusae on Ischia (Jeffery 1990, 239 no. 1, pl. 47:1; Ridgway 1992, 55–7; cf. Schnapp-Gourbeillon 2002, 305–10) which carries a clear allusion to one of the characters of contemporary epic (whether specifically Homeric or not), and, indeed, to one of his more famous attributes in the form of his hero-sized drinking cup (cf. *Iliad* xi.632–7). However, despite this, it seems to me more likely that the connection between epic and early alphabetic writing of this sort lies, not in the subservience of one to the other (in other words, in the use of writing as a subsidiary tool to record epic), but in the fact that both Homeric epic *and* writing are separate but parallel manifestations of the same thing. Both are concerned with a specifically pan-hellenic ethnogenesis, and both depend on language as a powerful focus of that ethnogenesis.[13]

Those who are fully literate (particularly in more than one language) rarely make the mistake of confusing language with script. The two represent quite different and essentially independent and separable types of systems. Certainly, no such confusion seems to have arisen among the literate sectors of society in the ancient Near East, where in the second and early first millennia a variety of different scripts may be used for one language, and a variety of different languages written in one script. What does seem likely, however, is that particularly in illiterate contexts or contexts where literacy is very limited, language and script do have the potential to become more closely identified, with the signs in a real sense becoming the visible symbol of the language, even (or perhaps particularly) if the viewer cannot actually read them. Unlike other more ideographic forms of writing, both alphabetic and syllabic scripts have a

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13 By ethnogenesis, I mean ethnogenesis as a conscious construction, not as some sort of birth of an essentialist phenomenon. I also use the phrase 'depend on language' in relation to the pan-hellenic impetus of Homeric epic quite deliberately. Here, I am not just thinking of the relatively few (but significant) contrasts between Greek-speakers and ἀλλόθροοι discussed above, but of the extraordinary artificial (and to my mind quite conscious) blending of different dialectal forms which characterizes the language of the epics. This can hardly have been lost on epic audiences, and can best be explained as the deliberate and obvious integration of several different traditions of epic inheritance.

direct and obvious relationship to spoken language, and require translation into sound before they can be read. This identification of script with language, I think, could be the key to the reintroduction of writing into Greece some time in the second half of the eighth century. It was not designed for what we would regard as any sort of purely practical use, or even just as a distinguishing élite accomplishment, but as a visible expression of the language which was fast becoming a focal pivot of collective Greek identity.[14] In this case, *how* it was used becomes less important. Anyone could use it for any purpose they liked, and the more they used it, the more 'Greek' their world not only sounded but looked. Like most novelties, it probably was mainly a toy of élites, but it was more than just another accomplishment which defined their élite status. It also helped to define their collective identity as Greeks, by giving visual embodiment to the central focus of that identity – their shared language. That is why, once introduced, the alphabet spread remarkably widely and quickly, and why – despite detailed and often minor differences in the development of a few letter forms – it was right from the start extraordinarily uniform by any objective standards (Coldstream 1982, 270; Röllig ibid., 273). This whole movement of collective Greek ethnogenesis, with its strong linguistic focus, was triggered by Phoenician activity, both in the Aegean and particularly in the central Mediterranean, where the tension arising from increasingly explicit competition became progressively more acute as each embarked on the process of founding overtly political colonies (ἀποικίαι) during the later part of the eighth century – a process which the later Classical world itself believed was actually spearheaded by the Phoenicians (Sherratt 1994, 81–3, 1996; Sherratt and Sherratt 1998, 333–6; Aubet 1993, 135–7). It is thus a supreme irony that, when the Greeks came to develop a writing system of their own to express this linguistic rallying point of their collective identity (perhaps at some supra-regional sanctuary on one of the main maritime sea-routes, or perhaps indeed somewhere like Pithecusae in the central Mediterranean itself),[15] they were thrown back on the

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14 With regard to the peculiarly Greek adaptation of certain signs to represent vowels, which is often understood as a reflection either of the prominence of variable vowel qualities in the Greek language generally and in Greek inflexion in particular (Osborne 1996, 109), or of the importance of vowel notation for recording dactylic hexameter (Snodgrass 1980, 82–3; Powell 1991), it is worth noting Whitley's remark (2001, 128) that these had the effect of bringing writing and speech much closer together. Though Whitley intended this as a comment primarily on the flexibility and user-friendly nature of the Greek alphabet, it seems to me a point that also has wider implications for the perception of the immediate relationship between language and script entertained by early Greeks. At the same time, I wonder if it was not also at least as much the result of a desire rapidly to differentiate the new Greek alphabet from its eastern parent. The same might be said for the rejection of the Semitic practice of writing consistently from right to left in favour of boustrophedon, a change which also seems to have accompanied the initial adaptation (Jeffery 1990, 43–50).

15 Pithecusae (or the central Mediterranean generally) begins to become increasingly attractive as a location for the adoption of the Greek alphabet, not only because of the conjunction there of Phoenician and other Semitic inscriptions with some of the earliest Greek inscriptions and with evidence (in the form of the 'Nestor' cup) of a preoccupation with contemporary Greek epic, but also because of the competitive foundation of formal Greek colonies which sprang up rapidly on either side of the Sicilian straits from the 730s onwards to secure the sea route to the Tyrrhenian area, at the same time as the Phoenicians, by similar methods, were securing the routes via Carthage and western Sicily to Sardinia and their already-existing settlements in southern Spain. The element of pan-hellenic versus Phoenician rivalry behind this movement of formal colonization (superimposed, in typical Archaic Greek fashion, on competition between individual Greek cities) is further hinted at by the frequency with which the Delphic oracle is involved in a number of traditional Greek colonial foundation legends (Malkin 1987; Morgan 1990, 172–8).

    Evidence for the international maritime clientele of several of the Greek 'supra-regional' sanctuaries in the ninth–seventh centuries is provided by their wealth of foreign objects whose origins range from the Near East in one direction to the central Mediterranean and the head of the Adriatic in the other (Kilian-Dirlmeier

only writing system with which they were familiar and to which they had quite easy access when the desire to represent their language in visual form arose: the writing system of the Phoenicians, in opposition to whom they were actively engaged in defining their own identity (Sherratt 1994; Winter 1995).

CYPRUS: SCRIPT AND IDENTITY WITHOUT HOMER

When we turn to Cyprus, the first thing we notice is that indigenous literacy (though undoubtedly still practised on transient, and to that extent inherently more private, materials) does not become visible again in more permanent media until some time after the foundation of a formal Tyrian colony at Kition in the ninth century. The next thing we notice, when it does become visible, is what looks like a fairly close isomorphic division between language on the one hand and script on the other. Syllabic script is used for Greek, and for so-called Eteo-Cypriot insofar as we can recognize it (cf. Reyes 1994, 15). There is no clear instance of it being used for Semitic, and likewise there is no evidence of Greek being written in the Phoenician script. Both of these observations should alert us to the possibility that something similar may be at work in the heightened visibility of indigenous Cypriot writing around the end of the eighth century to that which triggered the initiation of the Greek alphabet a few decades earlier.

Cyprus had been used to tolerating and using a diversity of languages for a long time, almost certainly from at least the later part of the Late Bronze Age, when a miscellany of various forms of Semitic, Anatolian, and possibly also Greek and Egyptian were probably quite regularly heard at least in the ports and merchant quarters of the large coastal urban centres. From the later eleventh century onwards, parts at least of the island must have been used to the sound of Phoenician voices and almost certainly to conversing with Phoenicians in their own language. It seems probable, too, that they were familiar with Phoenician writing in a variety of, possibly mainly impermanent, media. As for Phoenician inscriptions of this date on less perishable materials, we may well have one on the base of a small stone unguent jar from the Cesnola Collection (unfortunately without any provenance or context), which has been dated on stylistic and palaeographic grounds to around the eleventh century (Masson and Sznycer 1972, 128–30 no. 15, pls. XIX, XXII; Amadasi Guzzo and Karageorghis 1977, 185–6 no. F33, pl. XVI:2).

The earliest securely provenanced Phoenician inscription we have from Cyprus so far is one painted after firing on a White Painted II bowl from Salamis, dating to the late tenth or early ninth century (Sznycer 1980, 126–7; Yon 1999, 19, fig. 6b). It was found close to a Phoenician jar containing a child burial, and preserves the last four letters (reading from right

1985; Sherratt and Sherratt 1993; de Polignac 1992). Their frequentation by 'foreign' (above all eastern) mariners rendered them fertile seedbeds for the growth of a sense of Greek identity and the formation of the sort of pan-hellenic consciousness embodied in the symbolism of the Olympic games (first instituted, according to later tradition, in 776 BC) (Sherratt 1996, 91 with n.15); and it seems more than likely that large-scale festivals at one of these (perhaps Delos) provided the setting in which the Homeric epics were initially elaborated and performed (Taplin 1992, 1–45). Moreover, a significant proportion of the early Phoenician or other Semitic inscriptions in the Aegean are associated with such sanctuaries at Samos, Eretria and Olympia (Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 17–20; Röllig 1988). However, although there is a strong *a priori* possibility that the Greek alphabet, like the Homeric epics, was first developed at one of these sanctuaries, and while this would perhaps explain its widespread and rapid dissemination throughout Greece more convincingly than a development in the central Mediterranean, so far the distribution of findspots of the earliest Greek inscriptions cannot be used to demonstrate unequivocally that this was indeed the case.

to left) of what is probably a personal name. However, in addition to this and the late ninth and eighth century inscriptions known from Kition and elsewhere (Amadasi Guzzo and Karageorghis 1977, 134–5 no. D6, 149–60 no. D21, 166–7 no. D33; Masson and Sznycer 1972, 102–4 no. 8 ter, 114–15 no. 12A; and cf. above),[16] another particularly interesting Phoenician inscription is a tomb-curse of unknown provenance (but certainly from Cyprus) in the Cyprus Museum, which A.M. Honeyman dated long ago on grounds of the letter forms to the early ninth century (Honeyman 1939, 106–8 no. 8, fig. 3), a date which has since been supported by M. Sznycer (Masson and Sznycer 1972, 13–20; Sznycer 1980, 124). The red sandstone on which it is inscribed is particularly characteristic of south-east Cyprus, and suggests that the inscription may well have come from Kition itself (Honeyman 1939, 106). If so, it probably dates from around the time of the formal foundation of the Tyrian colony (Karageorghis 1982, 123–6; Sznycer 1980, 124). What is particularly interesting is that it is the earliest substantial stone inscription from the island. It was probably built into the door of a tomb, and to that extent combines permanence with both a degree of public visibility and at least a hint of monumentality. It warns of the terrible things that will happen to anyone who disturbs the owner of the tomb; and although its terms of reference are explicitly personal rather than political, the overall effect of a publicly visible inscription like this, together perhaps with its mention of Baal and the assembly of the gods (who are invoked as protectors of the peace of the tomb-owner), can perhaps be compared with that of the roughly contemporary stone inscriptions from Nora and Bosa in Sardinia, which proclaim a Tyrian presence by means of the foundation of a temple to the god Pumay (Amadasi Guzzo 1967, 83–8; Gehrig and Niemeyer 1990, 90–2, fig. 72; Aubet 1993, 179–81; Sznycer 1980, 124). These, in effect, may be seen as territorial markers of the 'we are here' variety. Such permanent, effectively public inscriptions, whether or not they had any explicit political content, served the purpose (or at least had the effect) of a kind of political statement, if only through their intentional and relatively high-profile visibility.[17]

At this point, it seems relevant to consider the effects of the ninth century establishment of a formal, overtly political Tyrian colony at Kition on the institutional development of other polities on Cyprus, a question which has recently been addressed by Andrea Swinton (1996, 105–13). Whatever the reason for the colony's foundation after at least two centuries of continuous close economic and cultural links between Cyprus and the Phoenician coast (and I am sure she is right in suggesting that this had most to do with economic and political rivalries *between* the individual Phoenician cities), the effect, as Swinton has argued, will have been to tip the balance in favour of Kition by giving it strengthened political, cultural and above all privileged commercial links with Tyre, and thus to upset the balance of the existing political status quo on Cyprus (Swinton 1996, 112–13). A knock-on effect of this distortion will not only have been an increased degree of inter-urban competition between existing Cypriot polities, as Swinton points out, but probably also the creation of a certain degree of united resentment at Kition's privileges, and perhaps even, to some extent, a degree of unity in competition with a Tyrian-controlled Kition which was bent on extending its influence further into the Cypriot hinterland.

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16 One might also add what appears to be a 'Phoenicianizing' pseudo-inscription of tenth–eighth century date incised on a jug from Tomb 69 at Palaepaphos-Skales (Sznycer 1983). Most of the signs appear to be based on Phoenician letters, though some more faithfully than others. It seems likely that this is an example of visible 'writing' for its own sake, rather than a means of conveying any meaning or information.

17 The thousands of inscribed votive stelae from tophets throughout the Phoenico-Punc west (Amadasi Guzzo 1967; Aubet 1993, 207–8, 212–15) served much the same purpose.

As a result of this, there seems to be some argument for suggesting that, by the later eighth century, Cyprus (like Greece) had begun to see a parallel, but quite separate, development of definition in relation to an increasingly obtrusive Phoenician 'other', which likewise may have at least partly manifested itself symbolically in the hardening up of explicitly non-Phoenician language expressed in this case through some deliberate increase in the visibility of an indigenous syllabic script which had hitherto been largely taken for granted and used in a matter-of-fact, essentially non-symbolic manner (cf. Iacovou 1999b, 13). This development was triggered in general by the overtly political Tyrian colonial foundation at Kition and by the extension and consolidation of more Phoenician control and influence outwards from there, and perhaps in particular by the provocation of more permanently and publicly visible forms of Phoenician inscriptions. That, as a development, it was at least partly dependent on the existence of Phoenician inscriptions in what might almost be called a dialectical relationship is strongly suggested by two things: the direction of syllabic writing, which unlike the Opheltas inscription and (to the extent that we can tell) also unlike the syllabic inscriptions of the Late Bronze Age, from now on ran from right to left in the majority of cases, in the manner of Phoenician inscriptions (Masson 1983, 78); and in a strong continuing parallelism in the uses to which both Phoenician and syllabic inscriptions were put by the inhabitants of Archaic Cyprus. Like many political gestures manifested purely through manipulation of aspects of material culture, it was a statement of identity which operated primarily at a symbolic level. We have no reason to assume that it reflects any serious jeopardization of the peaceful and profitable co-existence, and indeed interpenetration, of different linguistic communities on Cyprus which continued for many centuries to come, and which almost certainly included a considerable degree of effective and everyday bilingualism (Sznycer 1980, 127–9; Maier 1985; Snodgrass 1988, 19–20).

Finally, what has been proposed so far has some implications for the relationship between Greece and Greek-speaking Cypriots in the period around 700 BC. I have suggested that the Greek alphabet itself was closely bound up with the definition and dissemination of a specifically pan-hellenic identity focused above all on language. I have also argued (as have numerous others), that the Homeric epics were closely implicated in this process,[18] and that the two to a large extent go hand in hand as parallel expressions of the same phenomenon. However, I would also argue that what we see in Cyprus as far as writing is concerned is in some sense an analogous, but quite separate, development, in which identity was couched in terms of an indigenous Cypriot (including Greek-speaking Cypriot) *versus* Phoenician identity rather than of a more specific Greek–Phoenician opposition. This brings us up against an old chestnut whose implications have long seemed to run counter to what we know of Archaic Cypriot history, in which any intermittent sense of identification with Hellenic Greece or any part of it on the part of individual rulers of Cypriot city states appears as essentially shallow-rooted, evanescent and entirely opportunistic (Reyes 1994). By this I mean the question of so-called Homeric features in the Royal Tombs at Salamis at the end of the eighth century and beginning of the seventh century. Features such as horse and chariot or cart burials in some of these tombs, the inclusion of an ivory throne in one of them, a sword with silver rivets in another, and the very occasional evidence of human sacrifice or of the use of cremation have been hailed by some as deliberate reflections of Homeric epic (Coldstream 1977, 349–50; Karageorghis 1982, 131–5), and it has been suggested that, as such, these may be linked with a wider sense of pan-hellenic

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18 For the epics as pan-hellenic, see e.g. Nagy 1979, 1–11 and *passim*; Osborne 1996, 157; see also Winter 1995; Sherratt 1994, 78–83, 1996.

consciousness disseminated as far as Cyprus through the medium of the Homeric epics at this time (cf. also Rupp 1988, 133). However, as a former proponent of 'Homeric' features in the Salamis Royal Tombs has recently observed, the fascination of the wonderful world of Homer may have prejudiced attempts to interpret these princely burials (Karageorghis 1995, 10), and when one looks closely at both the tombs and their heterogeneous assemblage of contents[19] one cannot fail to agree with him. It is difficult, except with the determined eye of 'Homeric' faith, to see any convincing resemblance between these built tombs with their predominantly inhumation burials, lavishly endowed with a rich variety of contents from various areas of the Near East and the Mediterranean, and the standard Homeric hero burial.[20] For all that Cyprus may well have had its own epic traditions, some of them possibly originally imported by Greeks at various stages of the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age (Richardson 1989), it is difficult to see any evidence that it formed part of the new, self-consciously pan-hellenic Greece which sprang into being in the years around 700 BC (Iacovou 1999b, 17). If it had, then, for example, the coins issued by Euelthon, the Greek-speaking king of Salamis in the second half of the sixth century, and by his successors right down to the early fourth century should logically have been inscribed in the Phoenician-derived Greek alphabet.[21] The fact that the Greek alphabet did not begin to establish a toehold on Cyprus until the Hellenistic period in the second half of the fourth century (Masson 1983, 78–80; Palaima 1991), seems to back up what we know from other sources of political, cultural and ideological relations between Greece and Cyprus in the Archaic and Classical periods in suggesting that this sort of close or deep-rooted identification between Greeks and Greek-speaking Cypriots was still a very long way off.

CONCLUSION

In order to comprehend why the Greek alphabet might have appeared when it did – that is, when we first see it – we have to look at the context in which it appears: not just the micro-contexts of individual inscriptions, but the macro-environment which formed the context for their appearance as a whole. Alphabetic writing is only one of a number of phenomena associated with the eighth century, particularly its later half. Others include the Homeric epics, western colonization (in the political ἀποικία sense),[22] activity in and around Mycenaean chamber tombs, a growing interest in the depiction of specific narrative, the formation of citizen (hoplite) armies, formal temple-building, the growth of supra-regional sanctuaries, and the possible foundation of hero cults. These are often lumped together in terms of an eighth century

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19 These, incidentally, include a Phoenician inscription painted on the upper part of a Plain White amphora, probably of local manufacture, from Tomb 79, one of the most allegedly 'Homeric' of all the tombs (Karageorghis 1973, pl. XLVII:812; cf. Sznycer 1980, 127–8).

20 Indeed, in general there is a greater resemblance between the general 'style' of these tombs and the Royal Graves at Ur, the Phrygian royal graves at Gordion, and even the Mycenae Shaft Graves – possibly, as Rupp (1988, 132) has pointed out, for similar reasons to do with the enhancement of local political power structures.

21 For coins issued by Euelthon and his successors, all of them with syllabic inscriptions, see Masson 1983, 318–23. For the very few alphabetic Greek inscriptions known from Cyprus before the Hellenistic period (most of them digraphs), Masson 1983, 78–9.

22 The Greeks themselves took the distinction between ἀποικία (literally 'a setting-up house away from home') and ἐμπόριον (an emporium) seriously, and so should we. The first implies a considered political act (also evident in many of the traditional foundation legends, which involve both the sons of noble families and a strong element of institutional religion), which is quite absent from the second.

'renaissance', a catch-all phrase traditionally used to describe a large number of different phenomena and, in some ways, a *cul-de-sac* which has encouraged us to think that it constitutes some sort of an explanation in itself which raises no further questions. But it can be argued that most, if not all, of these phenomena have a direct bearing on collective identity at one level or another, either the local and regional identities of individual cities or a more over-arching identity,[23] in both of which the creation of a shared past was an important factor. Above all, in the emergence of the Homeric epics, the growth of supra-regional sanctuaries out of internationally frequented ones on major Mediterranean maritime and isthmus route-systems, and the process of establishing formal colonies in the west, the sense of a nascent ideal of collective Greekness can be glimpsed (in some cases unmistakably), shaping the *Zeitgeist* which not only informs and links these but also explains their timing; while the 'others' in relation to whom this collective identity was gradually defined were almost certainly easterners, particularly those whom the Greeks themselves labelled Phoenicians and for whom they constructed a territorial homeland called 'Phoenicia' as a counterpart to a newly invented Hellas (*Odyssey* iv.83; xiv.291; cf. Sherratt 1994, 82 n.34). The introduction of the alphabet can be seen as both instrument and result of this emergent sense of collective identity, intimately linked with the language which formed the rallying point of collective ideology and extending the conscious perception of this language from the aural to the visual field.

On Cyprus, the renewed archaeological visibility of syllabic writing, displayed in permanent form on unperishable materials from the end of the eighth century onwards, also appears to have something to do with language, in the sense that there are clear isomorphic boundaries between both it and the languages it was used to write on the one hand, and Semitic script and language on the other. The syllabic script was a long-established element of shared Cypriot culture (for speakers of Greek and other Cypriot language or languages alike), but there is no reason to suppose that it was a conscious symbol of Cypriot identity until something triggered the need for such a symbol. That trigger seems likely to have been the overtly political foundation of a Tyrian colony at Kition in the ninth century, accompanied perhaps, in typical Phoenician fashion, by some publicly visible permanent inscriptions which had the effect of proclaiming their political presence. Despite the parallelism of timing, triggers and symbols, however, this development on Cyprus, though analogous, was both separate and different from the development of visible Greek alphabetic writing in Greece.

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23   There was, throughout the Archaic period, no contradiction or incompatibility between the various levels of Greek identity. Corinth and Chalcis could compete with each other for the control of strategic colonies (or safe way-stations) along the routes to the Tyrrhenian area, and at the same time both could ensure that similar Phoenician control posts were kept out. The citizens of different centres could compete with each other in contests at Olympia, but in the context of a collective coming-together at a single festival. They could build their own temples and treasuries at Delphi using the same basic architectural styles and designs, yet adorn them in ways which clearly differentiated them.

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