



**Review of: Philippa M. Steele, *Writing and Society in Ancient Cyprus* (Cambridge Classical Studies),
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Anna Cannavò

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(i.e., who do systematic biographical research on members of the imperial or regional elites); those who pay attention to the survival of administrative structures into Early Islamic times; those who work in the field of historical geography; those who are able—thanks to the book's re-drawings of seal images—to express themselves in more detail than before on the traditional dress and headgear as well as other marks of dignity of the administrative elites of the empire; or those who concentrate on the Middle Persian vocabulary and on questions of etymology.

Writing and Society in Ancient Cyprus. By Philippa M. Steele. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xviii + 272. £75 (cloth).

REVIEWED BY ANNA CANNAVÒ, CNRS / UMR 5189 HiSoMA, Lyon

Cypriot writing and linguistic tradition during antiquity have been the object of many recent studies that have concentrated on the peculiar writing system (a syllabic script of Aegean inspiration) developed on the island since the Late Bronze Age.¹ Moreover, the research has focused on the system's adaptation of the Greek language (or more precisely, of a Cypriot dialect of it) during the first centuries of the first millennium BC,² and on its coexistence with other languages and scripts (especially Phoenician and the Greek alphabet) until the late Hellenistic period. Philippa M. Steele recently established herself as one of the leading and most prolific scholars on these subjects. After two books published in 2013, *Syllabic Writing on Cyprus and its Context* (a collected volume, of which she is the editor [Cambridge, 2013]) and her single-authored *A Linguistic History of Ancient Cyprus: The Non-Greek Languages and their Relations with Greek, c. 1600–300 BC* (Cambridge, 2013; the publication of her Ph.D. thesis), both for Cambridge Classical Studies, this third book published in the same series now concentrates on literacy and writing tradition in Cyprus as social phenomena. The new book is actually the publication of Steele's 2014 Evans-Pritchard Lectures delivered at All Souls College, Oxford; this is clear at some points, where the didactic character of the text has not been completely erased (e.g.,

Last but not least, we (remaining) historical generalists are extraordinarily grateful to the author for helping us (and contributing herself independently) to better understand the administrative structures of the Sasanid Empire on the whole. These include the dynasty's achievements and successes in foreign and domestic policy, but also its weaknesses and difficulties. With the help of comparative imperial studies, Gyselen has helped us to work out the basic features of this strong ancient empire.

p. 152, on Pseudo-Skylax). Since 2016, Steele has been the Principal Investigator of an ERC-funded project called CREWS: Contexts of and Relations between Early Writing Systems (2016–2021), based in the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge.³ Within this project, the study of ancient Cypriot writing systems plays a major role.

The book is composed of five chapters, following a more or less chronological development: from the advent of literacy in the Late Bronze Age to the introduction of the Greek alphabet in Cyprus and its progressive emergence as first the main, and later the exclusive writing system in Hellenistic times. A chronological table and a map of the island on pp. 2–3 provide the necessary landmarks. Two notes (p. 6 n. 3, on Late Bronze Age chronology, and p. 46 n. 3, on Cypro-Geometric periodization) add more precision to the chronology proposed in the table, which is now slightly outdated. The map is useful but not extremely accurate: a few important sites are missing, such as Soloi and Ledra, and others are approximately placed (Enkomi is in reality situated southwest of Salamis, which is closer to the coastline). Many figures (photographs and drawings) illustrate the most important inscriptions discussed. Even if the quality of some of them is surprisingly low for an otherwise well-edited book (for example, drawing 2.18 on p. 71 and photograph 3.7 on p. 127), the reader never misses this essential support for understanding and following the arguments.

¹ Jean-Pierre Olivier, *Édition holistique des textes chypro-minoens*, Biblioteca di Pasiphae 6 (Pisa, 2007); Silvia Ferrara, *Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions. Volume I: Analysis* (Oxford, 2012); Silvia Ferrara, *Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions. Volume II: The Corpus* (Oxford, 2013).

² Markus Egetmeyer, *Le dialecte grec ancien de Chypre* (Berlin, 2010).

³ For more information on CREWS, see: <https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/context-of-and-relations-between-early-writing-systems-crews> (accessed June, 2019).

In Chapter 1 (“The Advent of Literacy on Cyprus,” pp. 4–44), the author concentrates on the historical and social circumstances of the introduction of literacy in Cyprus, as well as its emergence and evolution, from the perspective of identity. The development of a socially stratified society, with the copper industry playing a leading economic role and the site of Enkomi as the main political center, constitutes the historical context within which literacy appeared during the sixteenth century bc for possibly administrative and/or elite display purposes. A detailed epigraphic and paleographic analysis of the three earliest known Cypro-Minoan inscriptions (##001, ##095, and ##225)⁴ introduces the issue of the existence of four Cypro-Minoan signaries, labelled CM0, CM1, CM2, and CM3 (rather inconsistently placed within brackets by the author) in the scientific literature. The discussion of Linear A rather than the Near Eastern cuneiform tradition as the model for Cypro-Minoan underlines the originality of Cypriot literacy tradition: an Aegean-derivate script is used on Near Eastern inspired objects (seals), as well as on original Cypriot creations (clay balls, further discussed in Chapter 3).

The second chapter (“Scripts and Languages in Geometric Cyprus,” pp. 45–94) deals with fewer than twenty Cypro-Geometric inscriptions used to understand the transmission of literacy and its evolution from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age. The correct preliminary assumption is that the epigraphic gap observed during the Cypro-Geometric period is a gap in the available evidence, and not in the practice of writing. The changing historical and social context, with the emergence of a new settlement pattern in the eleventh century bc, and the development of regional diversity and progressively independent political entities (of which the inscription from the Medinet Habu temple of Rameses III is in my opinion erroneously considered to provide a list on p. 55),⁵ underpins important breaks in lin-

guistic and epigraphic practice. Such breaks include the introduction of Greek (since the eleventh century bc) and Phoenician (since the ninth century bc), and the script reform from Cypro-Minoan to Cypro-Syllabic. Nevertheless, these breaks are accompanied by remarkable continuity, observable in the unchanged syllabic character of the script and in the continuous attestation of a distinctive Cypriot typology of inscriptions (the so-called “1+1” type, consisting of two syllabic signs separated by a divider) already known in the Late Bronze Age.

The importance of the site of Palaepaphos during this transitional phase is made clear by the evidence of tomb 49 in the Skales necropolis, with its three inscribed skewers, including the well-known Opheltes *obelos* (the most ancient Cypriot inscription in Greek). The conclusion that arises from the thorough discussion of Cypro-Geometric inscriptions is that the question of their belonging to the Late Bronze Age (Cypro-Minoan) or the Iron Age (Cypro-Syllabic) tradition is not worth asking due to the continuity in literacy and epigraphic practice. Cypro-Syllabic did not emerge after a script reform promoted by a political or administrative authority, but instead from Cypro-Minoan through several steps and throughout the Cypro-Geometric period. The crystallization of the differentiation between the Common and Paphian syllabaries, two variants of the Cypro-Syllabic script, is interestingly discussed in relation to the use of writing in official or sacred display contexts, starting towards the end of the Cypro-Geometric period. The centrality of Palaepaphos in Geometric literacy practice may not be unrelated to the successive development of a distinctive Paphian signary, but this correlation, as well as the reason for the emergence of two different signaries, remains unexplored.

Chapter 3 (“‘Understanding’ Undeciphered Scripts and Unidentified Languages,” pp. 95–146) proposes a “reading” of undeciphered inscriptions through the study of their context and materiality. This concerns the totality of the Cypro-Minoan corpus and a part of the Cypro-Syllabic corpus, including mostly Eteocypriot and a few other non-Greek inscriptions. Cypro-Minoan remains not only undeciphered, but also unreadable: the phonetic value of the signs is still unknown, with few exceptions. After dealing with the different possible Cypro-Minoan signaries (as proposed by E. Masson, Jean-Pierre Olivier, Silvia Ferrara, and M. Valério)⁶ and the reasons

⁴ Cypro-Minoan inscriptions are numbered following Olivier, *Édition holistique des textes chypro-minoens*, where inscription numbers are prefixed with ## to clearly distinguish inscriptions from Cypro-Minoan signs, which are also indicated by three-digits numbers.

⁵ See Jean Leclant, “Le nom de Chypre dans les textes hiéroglyphiques,” in *Salamine de Chypre, histoire et archéologie. État des recherches*, ed. Marguerite Yon (Paris, 1980), 135 n. 60 (“une série d’assimilations hâtives recueillies de-ci de-là à partir des toponymes de Ramsès III à Medinet Habou”). The authority of Anthony Snodgrass, who accepts this evidence (e.g., “Gains, Losses and Survivals: What We can Infer for the Eleventh Century B.C.,” in *Proceedings of the International Symposium “Cyprus in the 11th century B.C.”*, ed. Vassos Karageorghis [Nicosia 1994], 169) explains its wide acceptance within the scholarly community working on Cyprus.

⁶ Émilie Masson, *Cyprominoica*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 31/2 (Göteborg, 1974); Olivier, *Édition holistique des textes*

for the unlikelihood of a decipherment in the near future, a study of the types of objects bearing Cypro-Minoan inscriptions underlines the very interesting case of the clay balls, distinctive Cypriot Late Bronze Age objects with no parallels outside the island, which did not survive the transition to the Iron Age. Another interesting remark (pp. 121–22) is that, despite the abundance of cylinder seals found in Cyprus which are mostly interpreted as prestige objects, there are almost no inscribed sealings in the Cypro-Minoan corpus. Even if this situation results from an accident of recovery, it enhances (in accordance with the overall picture) the perception of Late Bronze Age Cypriot literacy as related to, but largely independent from, administrative practices. The study of Cypro-Syllabic non-Greek inscriptions (mostly Eteocypriot) is largely based on the author's 2013 *Linguistic History of Ancient Cyprus*, with no noteworthy developments. Among the few identifiable linguistic features, the reading of the patronymic “formula” *-okoo-* (mentioned on pp. 132–33) has now been improved by Massimo Perna as *-oweo-*.⁷ The specificity of Amathus is correctly emphasized but remains unexplained, as does the enigmatic case of Golgoi and its handle of fourth-century incomprehensible syllabic inscriptions.

In Chapter 4 (“Visible Languages and Cypriot Identities,” pp. 147–96), the author stresses the inconsistency of ethnic-centered analysis and correctly highlights the importance of the city-based dimension in the distribution pattern of languages and scripts in Cyprus. She therefore proceeds to a case-by-case analysis of Cypriot sites where two or more languages are attested (Amathus, Golgoi, Idalion, Kition, Lapethos, Marion, Paphos), with the aim of elucidating the distribution of languages in relation to their public/official or private use. The same is done with the bilingual inscriptions, although among these, the digraphic inscriptions (i.e., written in Cypro-Syllabic and alphabetic Greek) are unfortunately not taken into consideration, even though they also represent a form of bilingualism (as Cypro-Syllabic is reserved to the Cypriot dialect and the Greek alphabet to the koine). The

case-by-case analysis of the sites usefully collects scattered data and information, leading to the general conclusion of a conscious use of different languages and scripts by individuals with mainly political or identity-related purposes. However, some important references are lacking. For example, the most accurate and recent publication by Anna Georgiadou of the Idalion tablet is not cited,⁸ no mention is made of the ongoing study by Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo and José Ángel Zamora of the Idalion archives,⁹ the essential but largely unknown papers by Carlo Consani on bilingualism and digraphism are not included,¹⁰ and the study by Amadasi Guzzo and Corinne Bonnet on Phoenician onomastics is not featured.¹¹

In the last chapter (“Cypriot Writing at Home and Abroad,” pp. 197–244), the identity-based dimension of language use is thoroughly analyzed with the study of Cypro-Minoan and Cypro-Syllabic inscriptions outside of Cyprus, which include the abundant corpus of mercenaries' graffiti in Egypt (at Abydos and Karnak). The introduction of the Greek alphabet in Cyprus, starting from occasional and private use in funerary contexts in the late Archaic period, is mainly related during the late fifth and fourth centuries BC to political and mostly royal choices, particularly on coins and later on official inscriptions. The balance between the Greek alphabet and the Cypro-Syllabic script shifted in the Hellenistic period, with the Greek alphabet becoming progressively predominant and almost exclusive, and Cypro-Syllabic being restricted to religious use (Kafizin). Despite the author's arguments, the sealings from Nea Paphos, bearing occasional syllabic signs (isolated or in two-sign

⁸ Anna Georgiadou, “La tablette d’Idalion réexaminée,” *Cahiers du Centre d’Études Chypriotes* 40 (2010): 141–203.

⁹ Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo, “The Idalion Archive 2. The Phoenician Inscriptions,” in *Αρχαία Κύπρος. Πρόσφατες εξελίξεις στην αρχαιολογία της ανατολικής Μεσογείου*, ed. Nikolas Papadimitriou and Maria Toli (Athens, 2017), 275–84; Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo and José Ángel Zamora, “The Phoenician Name of Cyprus: New Evidence from Early Hellenistic Times,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 63 (2018): 77–97.

¹⁰ Carlo Consani, “Bilinguismo, diglossia e digrafia nella Grecia antica. I: Considerazioni sulle iscrizioni bilingui di Cipro,” in *Bilinguismo e biculturalismo nel mondo antico. Atti del Colloquio interdisciplinare tenuto a Pisa il 28 e 29 settembre 1987*, ed. Enrico Campanile, Giorgio Raimondo Cardona, Romano Lazzaroni (Pisa, 1988), 35–60; Carlo Consani, “Bilinguismo, diglossia e digrafia nella Grecia antica. III: Le iscrizioni digrafe cipriote,” in *Studi in memoria di Ernesto Giammarco*, ed. T. Bolelli (Pisa, 1990), 63–79.

¹¹ Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo and Corinne Bonnet, “Anthroponymes phéniciens et anthroponymes grecs: remarques sur leurs correspondances,” *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* 8 (1991): 1–21.

chyprominoens, Ferrara, *Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions*, Miguel Valério, “Investigating the Signs and Sounds of Cypro-Minoan” (Ph.D. diss., Universitat de Barcelona, 2016).

⁷ Massimo Perna, “La grande inscription d’Amathonte (ICS 194 + 195): une nouvelle étude épigraphique. Rapport préliminaire,” in *Les royaumes de Chypre à l’épreuve de l’histoire: transitions et ruptures de la fin de l’âge du Bronze au début de l’époque hellénistique*, ed. Anna Cannavò and Ludovic Thély, *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique Supplément* 60 (Athens, 2018), 213–20.

sequences) as late as the second and first centuries BC, are still better considered as only remnants of the past, and are unconvincing proof of a survival of Cypro-Syllabic literacy at this late time.

A bibliography and an index complete the volume. As noted, the bibliography lacks a few important references, and the scientific literature in English is largely privileged, a case which is quite frequent in books of native English speakers. As it appears from the author's previous works, she is more comfortable with second-millennium scripts and languages, about which she proposes inter-

esting and new remarks. This does not mean that her discussion of Iron Age languages and scripts is not worth reading and discussing, however: after collecting scattered and little-known information, she underlines the importance of the materiality of writing practices and the role of scripts as markers of political identity. This is something Cyprus shares with many other areas of the ancient (and contemporary) Mediterranean, and Philippa Steele's effort to situate the Cypriot case in a wider context through her ERC-funded project is particularly welcome.