Chapter 9

Between scripts and languages: Inscribed intricacies from geometric and archaic Greek contexts

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Writing again: the Greek alphabet

The transmission, adoption and adaptation of the Semitic alphabetic script by the Greeks, sometime in the late ninth–early eighth century BC, was perhaps the most significant outcome of contacts between the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean (Bourogiannis 2018). The recovery of the ability to write and therefore to document, centuries after this skill had fallen into oblivion in the Aegean with the final collapse of the Mycenaean palaces around 1200 BC, provided the most eloquent attestation for the cultural vitality of the Geometric period. In comparison to the laborious Linear B syllabic script that was in use between c. 1450 and 1200 BC, alphabetic writing was simpler and therefore easier to master. While Linear B was reserved for palace administration and managed exclusively by trained scribes, the simplicity and visual comprehensiveness of the alphabet encouraged a much higher proportion of the population to become acquainted with writing. This gradual ‘democratisation’ of writing, which is archaeologically visible from the eighth century BC onwards, is reflected in the casual form and private character of most early alphabetic inscriptions from the Aegean. These features suggest a rapid spread of literacy during the aforementioned period, although mass literacy, in the modern sense of the term, was never achieved in ancient Greece (Harris 1989, 45–64; Robb 1994; Thomas 2009; Oikonomaki 2017). Early textual evidence suggests that in the eighth and seventh centuries BC some people in many mostly coastal parts of the Greek world were literate – though it is

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not possible to designate neither the percentage nor the extent of their literacy – and that the rapid diffusion of writing in the Early Iron Age Aegean was not confined to any particular social class or specialists.

Evidently, there are still many questions surrounding early alphabetic writing in the Aegean that need further clarification, especially since there is no consensus among experts about where, why and how the adoption of the alphabet took place. The reason behind our difficulty to provide definite answers largely lies in the restricted and often disparate body of early alphabetic inscriptions from the Aegean, which also limits our access to the setting of the original introduction of alphabetic writing. This shortcoming is mitigated by the production of fresh textual evidence from Greek sites, as in the case of Methone in Macedonia (Janko 2015; Straus Clay et al. (eds) 2017). Admittedly, preserved textual material from eighth and early seventh century BC contexts only scarcely exists for many parts of Greece, a deficiency viewed as a distorting element when it comes to the linguistic verification of the ‘presumed’ Greek world (Johnston 2017, 376).

However, dearth of early textual evidence is not necessarily an indication for a limited use of writing but it may also be the result of writing being practised on perishable material such as wood or leather. Wooden tablets in particular, perhaps the most common writing medium in antiquity, rarely survive in the Aegean and even if they do, their dating is often disputable (Papasavvas 2003). Neither does it contradict the fact that the common language shared by Greek speakers contributed to the formation of a common identity. This was part of a complex process reflected in a number of phenomena, most of them traceable from the eighth century BC onwards (Sherratt 2003, 229–234, 237–238). This was exactly the time when a new writing system, the alphabet, became imperative, not only for facilitating economic interaction but also for providing a visual embodiment of the common language in use. The reintroduction of writing in the Aegean was therefore the result of long cultural and economic interaction between Greeks and Near Easterners both in the Aegean and in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as the outcome of social and political developments within Greece, traceable chiefly from the eighth century BC onwards, that shaped the right circumstances for the adoption of the alphabet (Kourou 2017, 21).

Steps towards writing

Let me start with two axioms: The Greek alphabet had a north Semitic/Phoenician derivation, securely traced in the names, forms and sequence of its letters, as well as in the retrograde direction of most early Greek alphabetic inscriptions. It was therefore created in relationship with a pre-existing known script of non-Greek origin and the process of its adoption was accompanied by one of adaptation, as frequently happens with scripts that pass from one group of people to another (Steele 2017a). The eastern origin of the alphabet was common knowledge among ancient Greeks, who usually contended themselves with calling the letters of their alphabet ‘Phoenician’, either because they were invented by the Phoenicians – a collective label for Easterners – or because they were brought to Greece from Phoenicia, the area that largely coincides with the Syro-Palestinian littoral. The details of this transmission were of lesser importance and were often blurred in diverse mythical narratives. Such was the case of the legendary King Cadmus, who brought with him to Greece the letters of the alphabet from Phoenicia (Herodotos, Histories 5.57–58). Although other ancient literary traditions regarding the origin of the Greek alphabet do exist, most of them agree on its eastern origin (Powell 1991, 5–6).

The second dictum is that Early Iron Age Greece was predominantly but not exclusively a Greek-speaking area. At least certain parts of Greece were regularly exposed also to other languages and in certain cases non-Greek languages were widely spoken. This is clearly reflected on the Homeric epics, primarily in the Odyssey, with frequent allusions to ἀλλοθρόους ἄνθρωπος or ἄνθραξ (men of strange speech) that is to people speaking other languages or producing confusing noises when they speak in an incomprehensible language. Interest in the concept of allotherism in the Odyssey is also used in connection with Greek-speakers, who were of course ‘men of strange speech’ to the rest of the world. Despite Homer’s dubious allusions to writing and literacy, we may assume that some of those ‘other’ languages were not simply heard in the Early Iron Age Aegean but also written. In other words, contact with the speakers of another language could also entail acquaintance with their cultural assets (Bryce 2008), as well as contact with the corresponding writing system. This was the case especially with literate Phoenicians, who systematically plied the Aegean during the Geometric and Archaic periods, as is archaeologically and textually manifested (Sommer, M. 2010; Kourou 2012b). Even though the Phoenician script was by its nature suitable for inter-linguistic conveyance, it was also the main, if not the only writing system to which the illiterate pre-alphabetic Aegean had easy access. Regular interaction between Greeks and Phoenicians facilitated the transmission of the alphabet. Although this occurred in an informal setting, it did necessitate a basic level of knowledge of each other’s language, to secure that communication between the two parts was intelligible. This casual movement between languages, which ultimately resulted also in a movement between scripts, was an integral part of the alphabetic transmission, although it left little trace on the textual material of Early Iron Age Greece.

A look at selected evidence

The need to address new questions in order to comprehend why and how the Greek alphabet appeared when it did is no longer a new notion (Sherratt 2003). The past...
few years have witnessed a remarkable progress in our comprehension of the early alphabets and recent studies confirm the progress in understanding the relations between Aegean writing systems of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (Steele 2017b). Following this tendency, the aim of this paper is to join the discussion of alphabetic writing by considering individual inscriptions that may yield information on relations between different scripts, languages and, ultimately, identities in geometric and archaic Greece. Questions about bilingualism and digraphia as part of the propagation of alphabetic writing will also be considered. Discussion is selective rather than exhaustive. It focuses primarily on non-Greek alphabetic evidence from Aegean contexts. Although the majority of such written attestations are ambiguous in their interpretation, they remain a valid source of information for the general linguistic setting of Early Iron Age Greece. The latter in the present context is a geographic term that encompasses most of the continental body of the Hellenic peninsula and the Aegean islands.

The principal sources of early textual evidence in Greece are either coastal locations or sites that are close and easily accessible from the coast. Even though a land route for the Greek adaptation of the alphabet remains a valid hypothesis (Brixhe 2007a), the geographic distribution of early writing from the Aegean confirms the paramount role of maritime connections in the transmission of the alphabetic script.

**Crete**

Given Phoenician contribution to the recovery of literacy in Greece, it seems appropriate that the earliest alphabetic attestation from the Aegean is actually in Phoenician language. The inscription, consisting of twelve signs, appears on a hemispherical bronze bowl from tomb J at Tekke, Knossos (Coldstream and Catling (eds) 1996, 30, no. 1, Heraklion inv. 4346). Its context is securely defined by Attic Late Protogeometric pottery and dates around 900 BC, to the transition from Late Protogeometric to the Early Geometric period. Although a Levantine origin has also been suggested (ibid., 563–564), the bowl is probably of Cypriot manufacture (Karageorghis et al. 2014, 165, no. 129) and belongs to a type that was common on Cyprus from the Late Bronze Age down to the Cypro-Archaic period (Matthaüs 1985, 71–108). The palaeographic designation of the inscription ranges in time between the eleventh (Cross 1980) and ninth centuries BC. The verification of the eleventh-century chronology is hampered by the extreme rarity at such an early date of Phoenician inscriptions on Cyprus, where the bowl was probably manufactured. The only exception is an obscure text on a steatite amphora of unknown provenance dated perhaps to the eleventh century and purchased by Luigi Palma di Cesnola at Nicosia (Steele 2013, 175–176, Ph1, and see the cover of this volume). The inscription is transcribed as ḥḥḥ.

The eroded signs of the Phoenician inscription from Tekke resulted in different readings, although in essence most of them reproduce a similar syntax (Sznycer 1979; Cross 1980, 15–17; Puech 1983; Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 13–16; Lipiński 2004, 181–184). Two words are securely read: ʾḥḥ meaning vase or cup, and bn, meaning son. Both are presumably followed by two personal names, possibly Smʿ or Sʾḥ and Lʾmn respectively. Although none of them has secure parallels among Phoenician personal names, the structure ‘cup of x son of y’ is common in Phoenician and would identify the inscription from Tekke as a declaration of ownership. The main alternative to this reading was proposed by Lipiński (1983, 129–133). He associated a relative (ḥ) and a verbal form (ṣʿ) with the first personal name, which he read as [T]ābni. By so doing he rejected the interpretation of the letters bn as the word son and instead viewed them as the final two signs of the first personal name in the inscription. Moreover, he interpreted the sign l as a preposition (for, to) and not as part of the second personal name, which he read as mn (Amon). These modifications resulted in a dedicatory structure and therefore in a different meaning: cup/bowl which Tabni fashioned for Amon. Although the use of the Phoenician inscription from Tekke as a declaration of ownership seems more plausible, it does not fully resolve the interpretation problems of the inscribed object. The possible chronological anteriority of the inscription in relation to the rest of the burial offerings may suggest that the bowl reached Crete already inscribed through trade. This, however, remains an unprovable hypothesis. Moreover, the use of the inscription as evidence for an actual Phoenician presence at Knossos should be treated cautiously given the predominantly Cretan character of the burial context (Hoffman 1997, 120–124).

What the inscription on the Tekke bowl confirms is Phoenician script being present on Crete at least from c. 900 BC. Crete is one of the strongest candidates for the birth of the Greek alphabet due to the primitive form of its script that is the closest of all to the Semitic, the retrograde direction of the early Cretan inscriptions and her close connections with the eastern Mediterranean at the time when the alphabetic transmission occurred (Guaducci 1987, 18–19; Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 8–9; Kritzas 2010, 14–17; Okonomaki 2012; Janko 2015, 7–13). Despite Crete being one of the most likely places for the presence of Levantine migrants in the Aegean during the Geometric and Archaic periods, those migrants left barely any written mark of their presence on the island. Early alphabetic textual evidence from the island is limited (Johnston 2013, 429), also characterised by an astonishing dearth of Semitic inscriptions. The inscription from Tekke is actually the only securely identified Phoenician text known from Crete.

Kommos on the southern coast the island, a site where Greeks and Phoenicians lived in close proximity (Kourou 2000, 1068–1069), is no exception. It produced over 300 Phoenician pottery fragments, a number unmatched by any other site in the Aegean (Bikai 2000; Johnston 2005, nos 173–174). Most of them date to the ninth and

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4 This verbal form is not attested in Phoenician but it is known from Hebrew (ṣḥḥ) and Arabic (ṣāġa).
eighth centuries BC although the earliest pieces go back to the late tenth century. Kommos also produced a large number of alphabetic and non-alphabetic graffiti cut on amphorae and cups both before and after firing. Most of them are scrappy texts of the late eighth and seventh centuries BC (Csapo et al. 2000; Johnston 2005, 386–387, 2013 passim). The amphorae graffiti are often non-alphabetic symbols used as owner’s marks whereas most of the graffiti on cups are alphabetic and reflect commercial, proprietary, capacity, and possibly cultic or dedicatory uses (Csapo et al. 2000, 101–107). Although mostly minimal, Greek alphabetic inscriptions from Kommos are among the earliest found in Crete. The oldest known so far is a carelessly executed alpha on the handle of an eighth-century BC cup, perhaps the earliest Greek text from the site (Johnston 2005, 386, no. 289). This solitary letter is close in time to the earliest Cretan alphabetic inscription of some length in Greek language: a retrograde metrical text on a storage pithos from Phaistos, dated to the late eighth or beginning of the seventh century BC that reads ‘Erpetidamos, son of Paidophila’ (Bile 1988, 29; Jeffrey 1990, 468, 8a).

Despite the fragmentary state of the Kommos graffiti, alphabetic prowess must have been of some importance at the site, as indicated by a partly preserved post-firing abecedarium on a Cretan cup and probably of Cretan lettering (Csapo et al. 2000, 112–113, no. 9). Regarding the question of who was writing at Kommos, it seems that some scribes of the post-firing alphabetic graffiti were of non-Cretan origin (Csapo et al. 2000, 104–105; Johnston 2013, 430). This is reflected both on the letter forms and on structural details such as the form of the genitive case that point towards scribes from Attica, possibly Euboea or the Cyclades, and parts of central Greece such as Boeotia and Locris or Phocis. Although the appearance of the early graffiti at Kommos seems to favour the connection between early literacy and commerce with the eastern Mediterranean, not a single sign from the site is securely identified as Phoenician. The only possible exception is a post firing graffito on the handle of a Levantine storage jar found in a dump associated with Temple A (Csapo et al. 2000, 108–109, no. 1, 1 16 with discussion). The fragment is dated by context to c. 900–850 BC, slightly earlier than the peak of the Phoenician presence at the site. The only alphabetic symbol, to which it offers similarities, is Phoenician letter ḥêt. There are, however, issues with this identification: The sign has unusual proportions with awkwardly wide crossbars and it is rotated 90 degrees from the normal position of ḥêt, a problem that can be overcome by reading with the handle horizontal. Similar sideways forms of ḥêt normally occur in the Proto-Canaanite period – significantly earlier than the mark from Kommos – but they have the form of a box, that is without the extended vertical –

5 E.g Csapo et al. 2000, 114, no. 17: Νικαγόρο (μηλι).
6 E.g, Csapo et al. 2000, 112, no. 8: μιτρον ṣ[mi], in Cretan script. This is possibly a comment on the cup’s capacity although other possibilities are open.
7 E.g, Csapo et al. 2000, 118–119, no. 30: -αι θεατρόν | Να -; Johnston 2013, 430, fig. 3. The possible dative ending –αι, perhaps the name of a female deity, makes it possible that of the inscription is a dedication by Pau- or Fau- to a goddess.

in this case horizontal – crossbars. Moreover, the Kommos sign has two bars when ḥêt generally has three. The two-bar ḥêt is not normal to formal Phoenician at any period, although it is attested in some Semitic scripts of the late eleventh and tenth centuries BC (McCarter 1975, 129, pl. 1). Cyprus also provides some good parallels for the Kommos mark. Two very similar graffiti identified as Cypro-Minoan sign 68 (Steele 2013, 27, table 3A) appear on Canaanite storage jars from Kition Areas I-Floor IV and II-Floor II–III (Masson 1985, 284, I/671/2 and II/5069, pl. F). Their context dates between Late Cypro-IIC and IIB (Garageoghis and Demas 1985, 263–267). If comparison with the marks from Kition is correct, then the Kommos graffito could be a Late Bronze Age survivor of Cypro-Phoenician derivation (Csapo et al. 2000, 109).

To this limited list of Semitic inscriptions from Early Iron Age Crete, one more example may be added. Tholos tomb 1 at Gavalomouri Kissamou produced a large jar decorated with concentric circles, vertical strokes and horizontal bands in a style that is reminiscent of Rhodian Late Geometric pottery and dates to the last quarter of the eighth century BC (Stampolidis et al. (eds) 1998, no. 86). The vase, which remains unpublished, stands out thanks to a small pre-firing graffito cut on the exterior of the rim, identified as Phoenician letter šin. Since the sign was inscribed before the vessel was placed in the kiln, this unique mark possibly had a proprietary or commercial function related to the vase’s owner or manufacturer. The absence of a comprehensive publication hampers any further commenting. However, the possibility that the Gavalomouri jar originated in the Dodecanese, an area of close interaction between Greeks and Phoenicians (Kourou 2003; Bourogiannis 2013) is noteworthy. If it was from Crete that the alphabet reached Rhodes (Guaruddi 1987, 56), then this solitary mark from Gavalomouri offers perhaps a glimpse of the process.

Eteocretan bilingualism?

Discussion so far has outlined a sort of Cretan paradox: the astonishing scarcity of Phoenician textual evidence on an island that was frequented by the Phoenicians and played a significant role in the birth of the Greek alphabet. Early Iron Age Crete, a place where many different languages were spoken, had additional linguistic substrata of pre-Hellenic origin (Brown 1985). The Odyssey’s (19.172–177) allusions to Cretan multilingualism are certainly not coincidental. The most famous among non-Greek speakers of Crete were the Eteocretans, presumably direct descendants of the island’s Minoan past. Their language, still undeciphered, is known through texts from east Cretan sites that date from C. 650 to the third century BC (Duhoux 1982). These inscriptions are written in a script that is almost identical to the Cretan alphabet and its signs presumably had similar phonetic values. The linguistic designation of the Eteocretan remains an unresolved problem whereas confident views suggesting its Semitic background (Gordon 1962, 1968, 1981) have been criticised for methodological discrepancies (Duhoux 1982, 223–224). Certain Eteocretan signs, however, seem to have a direct Semitic ancestry (Duhoux 1982, 180–181), leading to the hypothesis that
the Eteocretans played an important role in the invention of the Greek alphabet on Crete (Duhoux 1981).

The sanctuary of Apollo Delphinios at Dreros produced two possible manifestations of the Eteocretan and Greek bilingualism on Crete. The two inscriptions, today lost, dated to the second half of the seventh century BC and were cut on roughly rectangular stone slabs (Van Effenterre 1946a, 602–603, no. 5, 1946b; Duhoux 1982, 37–54; Cannavò 2016, 123). The Eteocretan texts were written in retrograde with occasional use of vertical lines to separate the words, as regularly occurs in Phoenician texts. The Greek parts of the inscriptions, written in boustrophedon and in Doric dialect, contain regulations regarding the use of the sanctuary. A similar interpretation for the Eteocretan texts was recently proposed based on laborious associations with Semitic grammar and vocabulary (Magnelli and Petrantoni 2013, 2016). Whether we are justified to view the Eteocretan texts from Crete as Greek transliterations of a northwest Semitic language is still debated. However, the display of bilingual inscriptions at a sanctuary of east Crete in the archaic period implies that part of the population was fluent in both Greek and Eteocretan even though this bilingualism was manifested in one script.

Euboea

Examination of the early alphabetic inscriptions in Greece inevitably passes from Euboea, the island that has long dominated our perceptions of the Early Iron Age Aegean. Euboea’s special role in the alphabetic narrative is related to its close contacts with the eastern Mediterranean. Lefkandi has produced the earliest Near Eastern find from the Aegean, a small Syro-Palestinian jug, from Early Protogeometric grave 46 at Skoubris cemetery (Popham et al. (eds) 1980, 126, no. 3). This is an isolated find that seems to indicate occasional rather than regular contacts between Euboea and the Near East. It is at the same site that the opening of regular contacts between the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean produced its first archaeological manifestation dated to the late tenth and early ninth centuries BC (Kourou 2012a). Regular interaction between Euboea and the Near East also resulted in Euboean acquaintance with the script used by the Phoenicians. Although this is not the place to ponder the birthplace of the Greek alphabet, the fact that a large part of the oldest Greek alphabetic inscriptions occur at areas with an archaeologically manifested Euboean presence, both in and outside the Aegean, cannot be fortuitous (Mazarakis Ainian 2000, 121–123; Tzifopoulos et al. 2017). Euboea was the chief instigator for the alphabetic diffusion also to the Italian peninsula, particularly through Pithekousai and Cumae. Furthermore, the Euboic script provided the impetus for the birth of the Etruscan alphabet (Guarducci 1987, 64; Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 235–239; Janko 2015, 13–16), although it seems to have somehow bypassed the Ionian islands, a necessary port of call for any ship sailing across the Ionian sea to Italy. Ithaca that has produced some of the most consistent early epigraphic evidence in the area has a script very similar to the Achaian alphabet, though not entirely deprived of Euboean elements for example the use of Euboic lambda, which does not recur in later Ithakesian inscriptions (Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 230–231; Morgan 2017, 574). Ithaca has also produced the earliest evidence for the Achaian epichoric alphabet in the form of a long metrical text in hexameter verse, painted from left to right on the neck of a fragmentary oenochoe from Aetos, dating around 700 BC (Powell 1991, 149–150; Morgan 2017).

With so much indication for alphabetic prowess it is hardly surprising that Euboea produced some of the earliest alphabetic attestations in the Aegean. Similar to Crete, such evidence reflects both Greek and non-Greek languages. I will leave aside for the moment the oldest alphabetic text from Euboea, an Aramaic inscription on a bronze piece of equine armour from the temple of Apollo Daphnehoros at Eretria, dated by Levantine chronologies to the last quarter of the ninth century BC (Kenzelmann Pfyffer et al. 2005, 80; Boffa 2013, 32–34), simply because it reached Eretria in the late eighth century as a Greek dedication, hence dissociated from its original linguistic context. This issue will be further explored in this paper.

A double portion for Κάπιλλος?

However, not every instance of Semitic writing from Euboea occurred via Greek mediation. Far more interesting in this respect is a Semitic retrograde graffito from Eretria, cut on the exterior of a locally-made Middle Geometric I cup sherd (Kenzelmann Pfyffer et al. 2005, 76, no. 66; Theurillat 2007, 334–335). The fragment was found in a context no later than Middle Geometric II, c. 800–750 BC, north of the apsidal building 17 in the sanctuary of Apollo Daphnehoros. The morphology of the letters also confirms a date between the ninth and early eighth century BC. The inscription consists of four signs. The last three are securely identified: a pē, followed by a lāmed and a sin. The first sign at the far right where the fragment is broken off is more dubious. A kaf is the most likely reading, although its long tail and two strokes are unusually tilted. Given the fragmentary state of the sherd it is possible that the inscription continued further to the left, although letter kaf on the right could hardly have been preceded by another letter. The graffito therefore reads KPLŠ and it is probably associated with the Semitic root kpl meaning double, in which case the inscription would refer to the vessel’s capacity. The closest comparandum is an Aramaic graffito on a Greek amphora from a Late Geometric I funerary context at Pithekousai that reads KPLN, combining the root kpl with the Aramaic suffix –n (Garbini 1978). What this interpretation leaves unexplained is the final letter sin in the inscription from Eretria. Although Greek final –ς is usually transliterated into Phoenician as –s (Schmitz 2009; Janko 2015, 12) the possibility that KPLS is the Semitic transliteration of a Greek personal name, e.g. Κάπιλλος, or of a Greek word, e.g. κάπηλος-merchant (Kenzelmann Pfyffer et al. et al. 2017). Euboea was the chief instigator for the alphabetic
Not all signs from Lefkandi are alphabetic. The non-alphabetic signs are mostly owner's marks and Karageorghis 1977, 131–134, D3, D5). If this was the case, could this presumed KāπIllustrations οι κάπηλος who inscribed the cup at Eretria sometime in the late ninth/beginning of the eighth century BC, indicate not just the formation process of the Greek alphabet but also a bilingual, or at least digraphic individual? In the absence of enough evidence I am not going to push the argument any further.

Despite its dubious verification, the presumed association of KPLS with a Greek word has been viewed as an adaptation of Phoenician script to the Greek language during the early stages of alphabetic transmission, or as a phase of experimentation when the semantic value of alphabetic signs was not yet fully established (Boffa 2013, 39–40). An alternative explanation saw in KPLS the transcription of an Anatolian, perhaps Cilician name, implying that a Cilician visited Euboea and wrote his name on a locally made cup by using the Semitic script (Theurillat 2007, 334). This would in turn support the hypothesis that the transmission of the alphabet occurred as much by sea as it did by land through Asia Minor (Brixhe 2007a).

Although the Semitic inscription from Eretria is actually unintelligible, the presence of Semitic writing on a locally-made Middle Geometric I vessel adds to the usual corpus of Semitic script from Early Iron Age Greece. Unlike the Aramaic inscription on the imported horse blinker that ended up in Eretria detached from its original linguistic context, the short Semitic graffito was inscribed in situ on an unassuming Euboean pottery fragment. It is therefore indicative of the presence and circulation of foreign people, of their script and consequently of their language – albeit the latter is not always identifiable – in Greece well before the Late Geometric period. Moreover, it indicates that the rapid development of Greek literacy in the eighth century BC was associated also to the presence and mobility of people from the Near East in the Aegean (Kourou 2017, 24).

Euboean engagement in the diffusion and perhaps even in the creation of the Greek alphabet (Janko 2015, 12) is implied also by the origin of some of the earliest Greek alphabetic inscriptions known so far. Lefkandi, the predecessor of Eretria, produced a small group of graffiti (Popham et al. (eds) 1980, 89–93) dated between local Sub-Proto-Geometric I–II (Early Geometric I–II) and the Late Geometric period. The earliest alphabetic graffito from Lefkandi9 is marked on a seemingly non-local vase from a pit at Xeropolis. Its context is presumably Sub-Proto-Geometric III/Middle Geometric II (775–750 BC) but the dating is uncertain (Popham et al. (eds) 1980, 90, no. 102, 93, pl. 69d; Powell 1991, 15, note 34, 124). The graffito comprises of only two letters. The first letter is an alpha. The second sign is a long sigma tilted out of vertical or a five-stroked mu sloping upwards. Depending on the direction of writing, the graffito reads [...]α, if retrograde, or ‘Αμ[...], if written from left to right. The first reading is more likely given that the graffito was almost certainly written in retrograde. The upright position of the alpha confirms that the script is not Phoenician (Janko 2015, 12, note 90), as is probably the case with a graffito from a Late Geometric funerary context at Pithekoussai the reading of which fluctuates between Greek ]θα and the Phoenician definite article ’l, depending on which way up the pottery sherd is kept (Powell 1991, 125).

The sanctuary of Apollo Daphnephoros has its own share in alphabetic attestations predating the Late Geometric period. Particularly important is the oldest Greek inscription from Eretria and the earliest securely dated Greek inscription on a pot in the Aegean as a whole (Kourou 2017, 22–23). It comes from a Middle Geometric II (first half of the eighth century BC) context and it is written on the interior of an amphora fragment (Kenzelmann Pfyffer et al. 2005, 75, no. 64; Theurillat 2007, 335). The position of the graffito confirms that the writing occurred after the breakage of the vase. The lettering is rough and inept. It comprises of three signs in retrograde and its meaning remains uncertain. The most common reading is [β][θ][θ], an abbreviated version of θεῶι with the omission of vowel epsilon (Wachter 1991, 58), which would suggest the votive use of the inscription. However, the position of the graffito hampers the verification of this hypothesis. An equally problematic alternative is to read the first sign to the right as a window-like samek instead of a theta, which would suggest an abecedarian use of the graffito. Although such an interpretation would explain the unskilled writing, it overlooks the circular outline of the sign that points directly to atheta, unlike the normally square outline of the window-shaped samek.

Nevertheless, Eretria is the only site in Greece where samek in the form of a little square with a cross (Dubois 2014), is securely attested. Inherited directly from the equivalent Semitic sibilant, from which Greek letter ksi (κ) derived, squared samek appears on a pre-firing graffito on the rim of a monochrome cup from the sanctuary of Apollo (Kenzelmann Pfyffer 2005, 60, no. 3; Theurillat 2007, 337). The graffito has three letters written in retrograde: κσι/samek, omicron and a faint pi. Their sequence confirms the abecedarian use of the inscription. Window-shaped samek occupying the position of letter ksi in the abecedary was never really used in the Euboic script to transcribe the sound ks. The latter was represented by the X letter-form, either on its own (X) or in combination with an added sigma (XS). Although the abecedary from Eretria was found in a disturbed layer, it cannot be dated later than the second half of the eighth century BC, since the appearance of the squared samek in the position of ksi attests to its archaic character (see also Boffa 2013, 36). Noticeably, the earliest attestation of letter X as ks, found on the foot of an Euboic crater from Pithekoussai, dates to c. 720 BC. The vessel was found in grave 168, the same funerary context that
produced the famous cup of Nestor and bears the pre-firing retrograde inscription EXΩEO (Bartoněk and Buchner 1995, 177–178, no. 44; Janko 2015, 21). The attestation of window-shaped samek/ksi at Eretria offers a sound connection with the seventh-century BC abecedaries from Etruria, where squared samek also occupies the position of ksi (Pandolfini and Prosdocimi 1990, 195–203; Wachter 2005). The earliest and best known example is a wax-covered writing tablet from Marsilianna d’Albegna dated to the second half of the seventh century BC (Powell 1991, 155–156; Boffa 2013, 34–35; Rix et al. 2014, AV 9.1). Given that the Etruscans adopted the Euboic script, it seems that the Eubeans had carried with them to Italy also this ‘dead’ Semitic sign that was nonetheless present in their abecedaries although its semantic value was not yet precisely designated (Wachter 2005, 84–85; Theurillat 2007, 337; Boffa 2013, 36). A similar function for samek is attested also in the intriguing Greek abecedaries from Fayoum in Egypt, with a suggested date around 800 BC (Brixhe 2007b). However, the chronology and features of the Fayoum abecedaries are still debated.

The early graffiti from Eretria are significant also because they provide characteristic examples of the kind of inscriptions that have been found in Geometric Greece: abecedaries, ownership declarations and votive inscriptions (Kenzelmann Pfyffer et al. 2005, 54–55; Theurillat 2007, 337–338). To these one should include non-alphabetic pre-firing potters’ marks mainly on cups (Johnston 2017, 377, fig. 32.3), a practice attested in the Aegean throughout the Early Iron Age (Papadopoulo 1994, 2017, 39–83; Morgan 2017, 573). Given that the early texts from Eretria are minimal, the absence of metrical inscriptions, one of the chief expressions of early Greek alphabetic writing, is adequately explained. This gap gets compensated by finds from other areas of Euboan presence, such as Pithekoussai and, more recently, Methone. The latter produced 191 graffiti, inscriptions and trademarks, 157 of which date between 730 and 690 BC (Tzifopoulos et al. 2017 with previous bibliography). Only 25 of them are alphabetic, though the texts are minimal. However, seven vessels, from the lower layers of the Ypoigeio shaft at Methone, dated around 730–720 BC, bear long enough alphabetic inscriptions (Tzifopoulos et al. 2017, 371–373). All seven are ownership statements in the formula of the speaking object. The use of the first person in ownership declarations, which transforms vessels into ‘speaking objects’, is a common practice in Greece during the late eighth and seventh centuries BC and has been viewed as a manifestation of Greek appropriation of writing (Carraro 2007).

One of them, however, stands out. The so-called Hakesandros cup has a retrograde post-firing graffito cut on its outer face (Tzifopoulos et al. 2017, 373–374). The script and the vessel itself are most probably Eretrian, as is probably also the dialect in which the inscription is written (Janko 2015, 3). The structure of the Hakesandros inscription is special as it combines an ownership statement in prose with a metrical part in iambic diameter or trimeter, the oldest one attested. Although the inscription is too incomplete to securely guess the missing parts, it seems that whoever drinks from the cup of Hakesandros will be deprived of his eyes, ὀμοιότατον or his money, χρηματῷ depending on the reconstruction of the missing part. Such witty literary games occurred at symposia. The threat on the Hakesandros cup is a forerunner of another playful combination of a proprietary formula with a curse on the inscription of Tataie, a roughly dactylic graffito cut in a continuous spiral on an aryballos from Cumae dated to c. 675–650 BC (Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 240, no. 3; Powell 1991, 166–167). Tataie, a native or Italic girl integrated in the Greek colony at Cumae (D’Acunto 2017, 316), threatens whoever steals her pot to lose his eyesight.

Rhodes

Rhodes dominates the southeast entrance to the Aegean, providing anchorages to vessels sailing from the east Mediterranean. This strategic location did not pass unnoticed by the Phoenicians who visited and perhaps also settled on Rhodes in the Early Iron Age (Coldstream 1969). Their presence, particularly during the eighth and seventh centuries BC, is traceable in the archaeological record and reflected on the ancient literary sources (Kourou 2003; Lipiński 2004, 145–148; Bourogiannis 2013). Rhodes retains a special position in the discussion of alphabetic transmission, reflected also on the mythical narrative. On his way to Thebes king Cadmus stopped at Rhodes and dedicated a bronze cauldron inscribed with Phoenician letters to the sanctuary of Athena at Lindos (Diodorus 5.58). This prestigious votive offering is also listed in the Chronicle of Lindos (Higbie 2003, 22, III) attesting to the significance ‘Phoenician letters’ had for the Rhodians.

The earliest alphabetic attestation from Rhodes dates to the late eighth century BC. It is a retrograde graffito on a monochrome cup purchased on Rhodes in 1942, although the precise find spot is unknown (Copenhagen 10151: Guarducci 1987, 75–76; Powell 1991, 137–138). The inscription reads Θρημωμεν ημι φιλοραξείς (I am the kyllix of Korax) hence it is a declaration of ownership in the form of the speaking object.

Archaic Rhodes also produced non-Greek textual evidence. Three sherds from a monochrome cup found in tomb 37 (344) of the Koukkia cemetery at Ialysos and dated to the third quarter of the seventh century BC preserve short graffiti in Greek and Phoenician (Jacopi 1929, 195–203; Wachter 2005). The earliest alphabetic graffiti from Rhodes dates to the late eighth century BC. It is a retrograde graffito on a monochrome cup purchased on Rhodes in 1942, although the precise find spot is unknown (Copenhagen 10151: Guarducci 1987, 75–76; Powell 1991, 137–138). The inscription reads Θρημωμεν ημι φιλοραξείς (I am the kyllix of Korax) hence it is a declaration of ownership in the form of the speaking object.

10 Rhodes, inv. 11459. Note that one of graffiti is published upside down by Jacopi whereas the reading of the Greek graffito is erroneous in Coulié and Filimonos-Tsopotou 2014. For the Greek graffito see also Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 356, no. 2. The solitary sign on one of the sherds has no secure identification although a Semitic nature cannot be ruled out.
on a sherd from a burial context at Salamis that dates to c. 600 BC (Masson 1961, 317, no. 318). The Cypriot inscription suggests that the word κάδος reached the Aegean from the Phoenician-speaking population of Cyprus rather than from mainland Phoenicia (Amadasi Guzzo 1990, 17–20; Cannavò 2016, 119–120). Although the surviving parts of the Greek and Phoenician graffiti from Ialysos are by no means translations of each other, they may outline similar functions as declarations of ownership. If the three sherds really come from the same vessel, as their fabric indicates, then Rhodes produced the earliest bilingual and digraphic attestation in the Aegean. Bilingualism on the island is securely attested much later, in the third and early second centuries BC, through three inscriptions in Greek and Phoenician (Fraser 1970). The personal names on them have precise parallels among Phoenician names attested in Cyprus, particularly from Idalion, Tamassos and Kition (Amadasi Guzzo 2013, 149–153), the latter also being the ethnic in one of the late inscriptions on Rhodes (Fraser 1970, no 1).

The possibly Cypriot dimension of the Phoenician presence on archaic Rhodes is hinted also by a limestone votive sphinx from Vroulia, today at Copenhagen, inv. 11328 (Fig. 9.1) (Kourou 2003, 256–257, 2015, 252; Bourgoiannis 2015, 163–164). The statuette dates to the final seventh century BC and its Cypriot origin was proved scientifically (Kourou et al. 2002, 55, VR2). The sphinx stands out thanks to an eroded Phoenician inscription cut on its right wing and reading т (or š) с m z (or q) . q (or n) h (or t) k š (Riis et al. 1987, 51–52, no. 34). Despite the poor condition of the signs, the lettering is considered Phoenician and the inscription was most probably of a dedicatory nature. The presence of Phoenician votive inscriptions in the archaic Aegean is confirmed at the Chalcidice peninsula. A short Phoenician graffito cut in two lines on the back side of a sixth century BC terracotta figurine of an eastern deity wearing a polos, was found at the archaic sanctuary of Stageira. The graffito reads з mṭn’ [...], šт [...], this (is) the offering (of) [...], šт [...], (Vaistub 2014). The Phoenician root тн that expresses the act of dedicating or offering, was never used in secular contexts and has an exclusively votive meaning. In the example from Stageira тн’ appears in the substantive form (mтn’), meaning the offering or dedicated object and is preceded by the demonstrative pronoun з. The graffito reflects the donation of a Phoenician voyager paying tribute to the sanctuary of the coastal Macedonian city. Coming back to the inscribed sphinx from Vroulia, the presence at a Rhodian sanctuary of a Cypriot statuette with a Phoenician inscription indicates a Phoenician-speaking dedicator who possibly reached the southernmost tip of Rhodes from Cyprus. Phoenician script was therefore present at this remote part of Rhodes and Phoenician language was heard each time Phoenician sailors stopped at Vroulia also to seek divine protection for their dangerous maritime journey.

Economic interaction and cult made a favourable combination for multilingual and multigraphic expressions. A minimal inscription possibly written in the Cypriot

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syllabary is attested on a limestone statuette in the popular type of the seated lion and dates to the late seventh/early sixth century BC (Fig. 9.2) (Riis et al. 1989, 46, no. 29, Copenhagen, inv. 7676).

The statuette presumably comes from a Rhodian votive context and was acquired in 1921 from the Kinch collection. Lindos is its most likely place of origin given the large number of typologically similar statuettes there (Blinkenberg 1931, pls. 77–78). It has two eroded signs on the right side of the neck, representing the syllable ti or ri and a dividing line (Fig. 9.3).

The inscription is minimal and therefore its linguistic designation is uncertain. If indeed in the Cypriot syllabary, it possibly reflects a Cypriot visiting one of the major sanctuaries at Rhodes and inscribing his offering using the script he was acquainted with. The opposite end of this Cypro-Rhodian thread may be found in the digraphic text on a late seventh–early sixth century BC funerary stele from Golgoi (Steele 2018, 221–222). At the left-hand end of the stele the alphabetic text reads Καρυξ εμι (I am Karyx), whereas on the right-hand end is the exact reproduction of the alphabetic text though this time in syllabic script reading ka-ru-xe-e-mi. What is noteworthy, apart from the digraphic character of the inscription is that the alphabetic signs are also in-keeping with a sixth-century date and look similar to letter forms found in Rhodes of a similar period (Masson 1961, 281, no. 260). The inscribed limestone statuette from Rhodes adds to the small corpus of foreign objects bearing a foreign inscription and dedicated to Greek sanctuaries in the archaic period (Kourou 2004). Cypriot limestone statuettes in particular are usually inscribed in Greek and their inscriptions follow a consistent pattern that documents the name of the donor and, occasionally, the reason for the dedication.

This shift between scripts and languages formed an intriguing aspect of contacts between Rhodes and the eastern Mediterranean in the archaic period. An expression of the same interplay is provided by a recently presented Syro-Palestinian alabastron of the seventh century BC from Kamiros, today at the Louvre A342 (Coulié and Filimonos 2021, 337–338)
foreign personal names, especially of Phoenician origin, is better documented in Greece during the late classical period (Amadasi Guzzo and Bonnet 1991; Masson 1994). Smyrdes’ special taste for Egyptian statuettes suggests his role as a mercenary in the court of Psammetichus I or of his successor, Psammetichus II. In order to propel their political power both Pharaohs made extensive use of east Greek mercenaries, including Rhodians (Bettalli 2013, 203–220). The latter is epigraphically attested also by the names of two Ialysians, Telephos and Anaxanor, engraved on the legs of a colossal statue at Abu Simbel in Egypt, who served in Psammetichus II’s expedition against the Ethiopians in 591 BC (Guarducci 1987, 76–77; Boardman 1999, 115–117; Kourou 2004, 20–21).

Cos

Very little is known of the archaic alphabet of Cos, opposite the Halicarnassus peninsula. Although our knowledge of the island in the early archaic period remains elusive, some Phoenician elements can be traced in the Coan archaeological record of the eighth and early seventh centuries BC (Bourogiannis 2013, 148–152). Cos has so far produced no early attestation of alphabetic writing whereas textual evidence of Coan interaction with the eastern Mediterranean is practically non-existent. Greek and Phoenician bilingualism on Cos is securely attested only in the late fourth century BC, through a dedicatory inscription by Diotimos, son of king Abdalonymus of Sidon to Aphrodite/Astarte (Kantzia and Sznycer 1980; Lipiński 2004, 149–155; Amadasi Guzzo 2013, 153–158; Cannavò 2016, 120–121).

Making sense of nonsense

Until recently, this was the earliest occurrence of Semitic script from the island. This picture was revised a few years ago, with the publication of a handle sherd from a cup, found alongside a small cluster of vases of the first half of the sixth century BC. The handle bears two short pre-firing painted inscriptions, one on its upper and one on its inner face (Bourogiannis and Ioannou 2012). The lettering is not Greek but bears a close resemblance to the Semitic alphabet. The dipinto on the outer face comprises of two letters, a waw and a yod, whereas the longest dipinto on the inner face of the handle reads three waws separated by verticals. The first waw is preceded by two signs, the first one of which is perhaps a gimmel although the second sign is non-identifiable (g? w w w). This repetitive use of the same letters is hitherto unique among the scarce evidence of Semitic script in the Aegean. Although the Semitic character of the signs seems convincing the inscription raises numerous questions regarding its function and meaning (Cannavò 2016, 120). The combination of signs is nonsensical and even though each letterform is legible their combination makes no semantic sense. The possibility that the two dipinti represent a conscious attempt to simulate Semitic signs, perhaps in a disguising manner by someone who had difficulty writing properly cannot be ruled out. Even when viewed as mimetic icons of (Semitic)
writing, the precise linguistic content and context of the Coan dipinti remains unresolved.

The dipinto from Cos may be viewed alongside nonsense inscriptions of the sixth century Aegean. Examples are known from Boeotia, Corinth, Lakonia and the Greek islands (Wachter 2001, 282–284, §403) although the greatest number appears on Attic cups (Immerwahr 2006; Heesen 2016; Chiarini 2018). The features of the Attic examples are quite varied. Certain nonsense inscriptions repeat the same letter, or combination of usually two or three letters, on different sides of the vase (Heesen 2016, 96–100; Chiarini 2018, 63–85). This practice is reminiscent of the repetitive use of the sign waw on the Coan handle. Others display similar letters on two different sides of the vessel, although their sequence may differ on either side (Heesen 2016, 103–107). Particularly interesting are nonsense inscriptions inspired by meaningful counterparts on the same vessel such as signature and drinking inscriptions (Immerwahr 2006, 139–140; Heesen 2016, 94–96). This coexistence of sense and nonsense demonstrates that the same person was capable of producing both meaningful and meaningless letter combinations and therefore nonsense does not necessarily equal illiteracy (Chiarini 2018, 218–224). The fragmentary state of the inscribed Coan handle hampers any secure definition of both the linguistic background and the level of literacy of the person who wrote the inscription. However, it confirms the importance of writing in archaic Cos. Like Immerwahr (2006, 140) aptly put it ‘writing nonsense was respectable because writing letters had prestige in itself’ and the existence of miswritten abecedaria confirms that this was probably the case (for example Wachter 2001, 25, BOI 30, sixth century BC). Alphabetic signs on vases, even in linguistically void combinations, may also had aesthetic rather than purely semantic weight, although their value was closely linked to their social and political contexts (Pappas 2012, 2017). The decorative use of nonsense or badly miswritten inscriptions may have been an important aspect in the use of writing already at the dawn of Greek alphabetic texts, as in the case of the famous Dipylon oenochoe (Binek 2017). However, the awkward position of the Coan dipinto makes its decorative use unlikely.

Kalymnos

Rocky and barren Kalymnos has produced a considerable number of early inscriptions marked on sherds from the rich temple deposits of the precinct of Apollo Pythios (Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 154, 353–354). Particularly interesting is a large pottery fragment with post-firing graffiti on both sides, today on display at the archaeological museum of the island (Jeffery and Johnston 1990; Powell 1991, 154–155). The sherd looks Late Geometric in style with a possible date around the end of the eighth century BC. The graffiti inscribed on both sides of the fragment are careless and their interpretation remains dubious. They may represent Greek letters written for practice, perhaps pieces of an abortive abecedarian series, although some of the signs are probably doodles. The possibility that the signs are Carian has also been suggested (Powell 1991, 155) but the absence of any securely Carian sequence of letters and the possible presence of two instances of pi, a letter alien to the Carian inventory, rule out such a possibility.13 The presumed Carian interpretation of the graffiti from Kalymnos was also due to the island’s proximity to Asia Minor, with its rich albeit largely later record of Carian inscriptions (Adiego 2007d, 128–163). Connections with Carians were certainly strong for some Ionian cities situated not far from Kalymnos, chiefly for Miletus, where Carian names and language are attested, although such textual evidence dates primarily from the early fifth century BC onwards (Herda and Sauter 2009; Mac Sweeney 2013, 65, 2017, 396). Carian inscriptions from mainland Greece remain scanty. One of the most interesting examples is the bilingual funerary inscription of a Carian buried in Athens, dating to c. 525 BC and mentioning the name of the deceased, his patronymic - only in the Greek text – as well as the name of the artist who made the stele. (Adiego 2007d, 164, G1, Athens D16). The area of Thasos and Chios is another important source of Carian inscriptions dated to the late sixth and fifth centuries (Tzanavari and Christidis 1995; Adiego et al. 2012). Carian presence in northern Greece may relate to Persian military action or to trade. The latter is suggested by the numerical symbols on two Carian inscriptions of the late sixth–early fifth century from Thessaloniki (Adiego et al. 2012, 196–201), an area that Carians may have reached through east Greece and Ionia. Carians and east Greeks had a long acquaintance not only due to their geographic proximity but also from their engagement in the support of powerful states of the eastern Mediterranean, as in the case of Pharaoh Psammetichus II in his Nubian expedition of 591 BC (Unwin 2017, 34–36). Among the most eloquent textual attestations of their activity as mercenaries are the Greek and Carian graffiti from Abu Simbel in Egypt written by mercenary contingents and dated to c. 592/591 BC (Vittmann 2003, 163–164, 200–201; Iancu 2016). The Greek graffiti mention places such as lalysos in Rhodes, Teos and Colophon on the coast of Ionia, whereas Phoenician mercenaries were also involved in such recruiting mechanisms (Schmitz 2010).

Aramaic inscriptions

Aramaic is the second Semitic language, after Phoenician, that is securely attested in the Early Iron Age Aegean. The volume of Aramaic textual evidence from Greece is rather minimal and comes exclusively from votive contexts. Particularly interesting are two inscriptions that allude to the same historical incident. They are inscribed on two bronze pieces of equine armour of north Syrian manufacture and mention King Hazael of Damascus, who reigned between 843 and 796 BC (Kourou 2004, 17; Lane Fox 2008, 115–118; Janko 2015, 12). The first one comes from the Heraion of Samos and is inscribed on a trapezoid bronze plaque that would be placed a horse’s forehead.

12 In the case of the Attic cups, the vase painter.

13 I am grateful to Professor Ignasi Xavier Adiego for sharing his expertise with me.
The inscribed bowl
What seems clear is that the two Aramaic inscriptions were dedicated by
14 It is likely that some Greeks, perhaps from Al-Mina, were involved in that looting.

15 The inscribed blinder was found by K. Kourouniotis in the early twentieth century BC at the
temple of Apollo at Eretria today stored in Athens (Charbonnet 1986, Athens 15070).

16 Athens, 7941.

172 Giorgos Bourogiannis

9. Between scripts and languages

Olympia has also produced an Aramaic inscription marked below the rim, on the
outside of a Phoenician bronze bowl with engraved decoration and of Phoenician
manufacture (Markoe 1985, 204–205; Amadasi Guzzo 1987, 20–21). The inscribed bowl
dates to the second half of the eighth century (Markoe 1985, 150, 153–154) and has
the usual structure of ownership statements, including the owner's name followed by
the patronymic (of Ngd/r, son of Myp'). Its precise archaeological context is unknown
since it was found at the start of the Olympia excavations in the late nineteenth
century near the village Makryisia. Its use was almost certainly votive, although it
is hard to know if it was offered by an Aramean or by a Greek dedicatar. Finally,
is fragmentary and was scratched in retrograde on the shoulder of the vessel after firing. It reads Ἰλασι-τεμί | σε or Ἰλασι-τεμί | σε depending on the presence or not of a word divider between the second and third sign of the inscription.\(^{17}\) Although its fragmentary state hampers a secure identification, the inscription probably incudes an abbreviated personal name beginning with Ἐρμαί- (τεμί). The content of the graffito from Mende resembles an inscription from Policoro in southern Italy dated to the first half of the seventh century BC that reads Ἰ-τεμί-[\(\square\)] but its sequence is also difficult to reconstruct (Pugliese Carratelli 1971; Egetmeyer 2010b, 840). The graffito from Mende seems to reflect a Greek-speaking Cypriot trader visiting the area of the Thermaic gulf and marking the amphora by using the only script to which he was accustomed, the Cypriot syllabary. Whether the amphora was inscribed in situ or in Cyprus is hard to assess with any certainty, although the first case seems more likely. Viewed alongside previously discussed written attestations of Phoenician and Carian, the occurrence of an inscription in the Cypriot syllabary make Chalcidice and the area of the Thermaic gulf one of the most prolific and diverse sources of textual evidence in the Late Geometric and Archaic Aegean.

Particularly interesting is the inscription on the lion-shaped foot of a bronze tripod stand from Delphi, inv. 1717 (Egetmeyer 2010b, 841; Karnava 2013, 163–165; Steele 2018, 68, 210). The bronze fragment was found at the entrance to the temenos and its date fluctuates between the end of the eighth and the early seventh century BC. The inscription consists of four signs written in sinistroverse. They were followed by a fifth sign which cannot be securely restored since it was written right on the fracture of the fragment. The inscription reads ε-ρε-μαί-[\(\square\)] giving the name Ερμαί[ου], possibly in the genitive case to mark the name of the tripod’s owner/dedicator. Although the context of the inscription supports its votive character, an interesting alternative sees in ε-ρε-μαί-[(\(\square\))] the signature of the tripod’s manufacturer. In this case, the name written on the tripod is not related to the tripod’s votive context at Delphi but to its original manufacture in Cyprus (Karnava 2013, 167). The interpretation of ε-ρε-μαί-[(\(\square\))] as an artisan’s signature rather than as part of a votive inscription is implied also by the position of the text, situated between decorative line bands and thus incorporated into the decorative syntax of the tripod stand (Steele 2018, 210). This must have been a deliberate decision on behalf of the Cypriot inscriber and can be related to other similar instances of ‘decorative’ Cypriot syllabic inscriptions. Regardless of the different possibilities, the presence of the inscribed bronze tripod at Delphi is fully integrated in the religious practices of the late eighth and seventh centuries BC and it may suggest a Cypriot dedicar. Cypriots were engaged in religious practices in the Aegean during the aforementioned period and their presence at Delphi in particular is reflected on the archaeological evidence (Partida 2006, 802–803).

**Lemnos**

Lemnos was traditionally associated with the Pelasgians, a term used rather vaguely by ancient authors to denote people who had inhabited parts of the Aegean before the Greeks and who spoke a non-Greek language (Colvin 2014, 21–22). Homer’s allusion to the ἄγριοφώνους (of savage speech) inhabitants of Lemnos (Odyssey 8.293–294), a term implying that they were also barbarophoi is noteworthy. The use of a non-Greek language akin to the Etruscan at Lemnos is confirmed epigraphically. Interestingly, the Greeks associated Etruria with the Pelasgians, implying that in the ancient world there was some awareness of linguistic and ethnic connections between the two areas (Colvin 2014, 23). In 1884 Kaminia on Lemnos produced a sixth-century BC funerary inscription in a script and language that bear a close resemblance to Etruscan. The typology of the stele, with the figure of a warrior in profile, resembles similar funerary stele from north Etruscan sites, though the text on them is inscribed at the sides (Bonfante and Bonfante 2002, 141–143, nos 14–17, figs 18–21). The Tyrrhenian inscription, today at the National Museum of Athens, is cut in boustrophedon (De Simone and Chial 2001; Bonfante and Bonfante 2002, 60–62; Wallace 2008, 218–221). It presents some striking similarities with Etruscan inscriptions in language and vocabulary, standard, expressions, grammatical endings as well as in the separation of words by two dots. The script, however, is also divergent from standard Etruscan, suggesting its language is probably related but not necessarily identical to Etruscan, possibly written by people who had been cut off from their homeland for a long time. That Etruscans had settled on Lemnos is recorded in ancient literary sources (Janko 2015, 8, note 54) but when and in what circumstances this occurred is far from clear. Noticeably, the script on the inscription from Kaminia has been compared also to the Phrygian based on the form of certain signs (Jeffery and Johnston 1990, 299; Janko 2015, 18–19) but the documentation of this relation appears more laborious.

**Bilingualism and digraphia in Geometric and Archaic Greece: some thoughts**

Previous analysis explored the range of scripts and languages attested in Greece during the geometric and archaic period. Discussion was based on the selective treatment of early textual evidence primarily from eighth-, seventh- and sixth-century BC contexts from Crete, Euboia, Lemnos, the Dodecanese and the Greek mainland although in certain cases later textual material was considered. With regard to the scripts being used, evidence falls into two groups and comprises both alphabetic and non-alphabetic inscriptions. Texts written in alphabetic scripts correspond to a greater number of languages including Greek, Eteocretan, Phoenician, Aramaic, Carian and the awkward Lemnian version of ‘Etruscan’. The occurrence of non-alphabetic scripts is limited

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\(^{17}\) Alternatively Ἰλασι-τεμί | σε. After examining the fragment Karnava (2013, 162) believes that the presumed word divider between the second and third sign of the inscription is actually coincidental because the surface of the vessel has flaked off at that point.
to the Cypriot syllabary in Greek language and to a unique occurrence of the neo-Hittite syllabic script. Although restricted and inconsistent, early textual evidence confirms the occurrence in geometric and archaic Greece of multiple languages and of multiple scripts. It fails, however, to provide straightforward answers about the extent of their use and the possible associations between them. Leaving Greek apart as the dominant language in the Greek area, early inscriptions indicate that not all languages represented in a written format were also spoken. This is the case particularly with the eighth-century BC Aramaic and Neo-Hittite inscriptions from Samos, Eretria, possibly Olympia and east Locris. These inscriptions were found in Greece but not written in Greece and therefore reached the Aegean detached from the linguistic setting that produced them. This oxymoron does not preclude that for example Aramaic was never heard in the Aegean but there is no secure attestation for this in the Early Iron Age written record.

Studies on ancient bilingualism and multilingualism, two terms often used interchangeably with a quantitative rather than qualitative difference (Mullen 2013, 54), are not a new notion (Consani 1990). Interest in these issues reinvigorated in the past two decades (Adams et al. eds) 2002; Biville et al. (eds) 2008; Briquel Chatonnet 2012; Mullen and James (eds) 2012; Mullen 2013). Most recent studies focus on the late classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods (fourth century BC–fourth century AD), for which evidence throughout the Mediterranean is more abundant, making the identification of bi- or multilingual phenomena easier and more secure. On the contrary, evidence of bilingualism is less common and harder to assess in the period with which we are primarily concerned here. Perhaps the best examples among the rare, securely bilingual texts of the eighth and early seventh centuries BC come from Anatolia. Çineköy and Karatepe in Cilicia produced two bilingual and digraphic inscriptions in Luwian and Phoenician, dated to the late eighth century BC (Payne 2007, 125–131; Steele 2013, 161). Their texts, written in the autochthonous hieroglyphic script for the Luwian language, and in alphabetic script for the Phoenician, are of cultic character. Although the clauses in the two languages are not precise translations of each other and may diverge in details, the inscriptions offer a sound attestation of bilingualism and support the use of Phoenician as a sort of lingua franca in the eighth century BC. Equally interesting are the Assyrian lion-shaped weights with bilingual and digraphic inscriptions in Akkadian cuneiform and Aramaic alphabetic script (Fales 1995). Considerably later but important for the acknowledgement of similar phenomena in the western Mediterranean are three bilingual gold tablets from Pyrgi in Etruria, dated to the late sixth century BC, with inscriptions written in Etruscan and Phoenician (Bonfante and Bonfante 2002, 65–68).

When focusing on Greece, bilingual textual evidence also consists a late classical, Hellenistic and Roman phenomenon evidenced primarily at sites of commercial and religious importance such as Delos, Piraeus, Rhodes and Delphi (Vattioni 1987–1988; Adams 2002; Bauson 2008; Hasenohr 2008; Cannavò 2016). Direct allusions to bilingualism by ancient Greek authors are not that common either. One of the most eloquent examples is by Thucydides (4.109) who describes the inhabitants of the Athos peninsula as ‘bilingual barbarians of mixed ethnicity’ (ξυμμείκτοις ἐθνοις βαρβάρων διγλώσσων) adding that they were ‘mostly Pelasgian descended from the Etruscans who formerly inhabited Lemnos and Athens’. An additional outcome of cultural interaction in the Aegean during the late archaic and classical periods features linguistic influences between Greek and non-Greek languages of Asia Minor, especially Lydian, Phrygian, Carian, and Lycian (Adiego 2007a–c; Tzitzilis 2007; Mac Sweeney 2017, 396–401; Unwin 2017, 42–51). This phenomenon, traceable already in the Late Bronze Age (Yakubovich 2008b, 127–129), is attested through linguistic affinities, loanwords and morphological or phonetic associations. Our often problematic access to such linguistic complexities is notably reflected on a recently published inscribed golden sheet from the sanctuary of Aphrodite on Zeytintephe in Miletus (Brize 2017). The sheet that is of Greek workmanship dates to the third quarter of the seventh century BC and its inscription provides one of the oldest specimens of writing from southwest Asia Minor. Although the writing displays features that may be associated with Lydian, Carian and Greek, it has not been possible to ascribe it convincingly to any of the languages spoken in the region.

Despite difficulties of this sort, it seems reasonable to suggest that interaction between speakers of different languages also generated bilingualism, as evidenced through Greco-Lycian, Greco-Lydian and Greco-Carian inscriptions of the late sixth and fifth centuries BC, mostly of funerary character (Adiego 2007a, 761–762; Payne 2007, 131–137; Payne and Wintjes 2016, 82, LW20; Rutherford 2002). Though not from the Aegean, noteworthy are also the fourth-century BC bilingual and digraphic dedicatory inscriptions in Greek and Eteocypriot from Amathus that demonstrate the simultaneous official use of Eteocypriot and Greek and of their respective scripts (Steele 2013, 105–107, 113–115).

Languages are of course cultural artefacts hence any exploration of bilingual phenomena in antiquity needs to consider a number of theoretical questions (Mullen and James (eds) 2013, 1–35), particularly since our access to ancient multilingualism deals with written evidence only. Although there are multiple ways of interrogating such data, context is of paramount importance in identifying possible bilingual phenomena in antiquity. Early textual evidence from Greece clearly manifests the importance of contextualisation since funerary and votive contexts are the primary source for early alphabetic writing. Although this fact relates also to the dearth of domestic data in the Early Iron Age Aegean, it must also reflect what kinds of contexts were considered appropriate for practicing or displaying the skill or writing. In this respect, no contextual difference between Greek and non-Greek textual evidence is noticed, suggesting that the same settings were used for writing regardless of the language or script being applied. Nearly identical are also the practical purposes of writing in Greek and non-Greek early inscriptions. This is true also for inscriptions in the Cypriot syllabary used to denote the Greek dialect of Cyprus. Leaving aside single letters (a ḥēt from Kommos and a šin from Gavalomouri), the majority of non-Greek
early inscriptions from the Aegean are either declarations of ownership or short votive texts, although the use of these two categories is often intermixed. This comparison also helps to detect uses of writing that stand out as exclusively Greek. The relatively high occurrence of hexameter verses in particular only characterises Greek inscriptions. It suggests a special link between poetic narrative and early Greek alphabetic writing, both of which must have served as important components in the gradual formation of a common identity among Greek speakers of the eighth and early seventh century BC.

Another area for consideration relates to the extent and nature of ancient bilingualism, as well as to whether or not bilingualism entailed biliteracy. Although early textual record from Greece is too restricted to permit a consistent treatment of this matter – let alone to provide sound written confirmations for bilingualism and biliteracy in the geometric and archaic period – the occurrence of unintelligible or nonsensical alphabetic graffiti that presumably mirror non-Greek languages, as in the case of the archaic handle from Cos and the presumably ‘Carian’ graffito from Kalymnos, is noteworthy. Such evidence may suggest that occasional attempts to reproduce or imitate the script of another language did not necessarily entail proficient knowledge of the language itself. Truth is of course that we are dealing with a period of imperfect literacy in Greece, as is demonstrated by the presence of incomplete or abortive abecedaries and of nonsensical writing (Jeffery and Johnston 1990 passim; Powell 1991, 152–155). Evidence for the dissociation of biliteracy from bilingualism becomes clearer in later periods. The scribes of lapidary inscriptions for example could have been commissioned to produce texts in languages they did not necessarily comprehend. This was for example the case with a second-century BC Greco-Phoenician bilingual inscription from the sanctuary of Apollo at Delos, produced by a scribe who did not speak Phoenician (Basleiz and Briquel-Chatonnret 1990).

Writing was not the most popular medium for communication in the predominantly non-scribal Geometric and archaic Aegean. However it must reveal something about the referents’ sense of identity, for which language is a primary index. In certain cases, for example in the Aramaic inscriptions from Eretria, Samos, the Phoenician inscriptions from Tekke, Vroulia and Stageira and the Eteocretan inscriptions from east Crete, equations between script and language are quite straightforward. Although some of these texts, especially the Aramaic ones, probably ended up in Greece through Greek intermediaries, they still portray the linguistic identity that produced them. Other written instances are more doubtful: If the early eighth-century graffito from Eretria that reads KPLS is indeed a transliteration in Semitic script of a Greek name (Κάπιλλος), and if the word Mitlu on a seventh-century vase from Rhodes is the Greek transliteration of a non-Greek name, then these two graffiti are possible ploys to underline duality of identity. In these two examples it is not the dubious names that evidence such duality – personal names are not the most secure markers of identity after all (Mullen and James (eds) 2012, 8; Payne 2007, 137) – but the curious and perhaps purposeful choice of scripts that bear no straightforward connection to their corresponding language.

So what is the evolving picture from Greece based on early inscriptions? Starting from acknowledging that conclusions are drawn from disparate evidence, early Greece has yielded inscriptions that correspond to more than one language. Leaving aside the Eteocretan inscriptions that mirror the special linguistic and cultural environment of east Crete, evidence for bilingualism in geometric and early archaic Greece is occasional and casual. Semitic is the only non-Greek alphabetic script that recurs with some consistency in both funerary and votive contexts. Some of its occurrences are unintelligible, either because the condition of the inscription is very poor, for example on the sphinx from Vroulia, or because the sequence of the signs is nonsensical. In all other cases when reading is more secure, there is a marked difference between Aramaic inscriptions that appear dissociate from their original linguistic context – at least those that are better published – and Phoenician inscriptions. The latter appear as more casual expressions of literacy and most of them seem to have been written in the Aegean, suggesting the actual presence of Phoenician speakers. There is no way of knowing if those Phoenicians originated in Cyprus, Phoenicia proper or both. However, it seems safe to assume that some of them belonged to the Phoenician-speaking stock of Cyprus, since Cypriot interaction with the Aegean in the eighth and seventh centuries BC is confirmed also by the few occurrences of the Cypriot syllabary to denote the Greek but not yet the Eteocypriot language.

A comparative consideration of the archaeological data from the Aegean suggests that it is mainly from the early seventh century BC that Phoenician presence becomes more visible in the textual and material record. This is also the most likely period for the presence of small Phoenician communities in the Aegean, for example on Rhodes, some members of which were probably to some extent bilingual. This is hinted by the fragmentary cup from Ialysos tomb 37 that preserves parts of post-firing graffiti in Greek and Phoenician. Sanctuaries were popular destinations for foreign speakers who reached the Aegean in the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries, being places where profitable activities could be practised and where divine protection could be sought. Often situated along major trading routes, they provided the ideal ground for the coexistence of different dialects, scripts, and languages, as well as for the casual display of literacy, usually written on cheap and portable objects.

In these contexts, the origin of the inscribed media rarely coincides with the origin of the script being used, as evidenced by the Semitic inscriptions on cups from Euboia and Rhodes or on Greek terracotta and Cypriot limestone statuettes, Greek inscriptions on statuettes from Egypt or Cyprus, Cypriot-syllabic inscription on Attic pottery, Eretrian script on Lesbian mugs from Methone and so on (see also Janko 2015, 3–4; Tzifopoulos et al. 2017, 373). In such complex patterns of cultural interaction, some people may also have been digraphic. This is suggested by the possible transliteration of personal names or terms belonging to one language in the script of another language, as was perhaps the case with the Eretrian KPLS and
the Rhodian Mitlu graffiti, but also through the ability to write in different epichoric alphabets, as in the case of a sherd from Cumae written in one hand in Corinthian and Euboean script (Johnson 2013, 436).

This varied use of writing in different languages and scripts in Late Geometric and Archaic Greece, indicates a casual and self-assertive rather than administrative form of literacy, and an equally free and easily accessible use of writing that was not limited to Greek-speakers alone. Acquaintance not only with different languages but also with different writing systems was one of the most fascinating, albeit not yet fully understood manifestations of the recently designated ‘art of contact’ in the geometric and archaic Aegean (Martin 2017). Hopefully, more textual evidence will be published in the near future.