Writing and Society in Ancient Cyprus

From its first adoption of writing at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, ancient Cyprus was home to distinctive scripts and writing habits, often setting it apart from other areas of the Mediterranean and Near East. This well-illustrated volume is the first to explore the development and importance of Cypriot writing over a period of more than 1,500 years in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC. Five themed chapters deal with issues ranging from the acquisition of literacy and the adaptation of new writing systems to the visibility of writing and its role in the marking of identities. The agency of Cypriots in shaping the island's literate landscape is given prominence, and an extended consideration of the social context of writing leads to new insights on Cypriot scripts and their users. Cyprus provides a stimulating case to demonstrate the importance of contextualised approaches to the development of writing systems.

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PHILIPPA M. STEELE

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Abbreviations

AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Studies</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
CCEC	<i>Cahiers du Centre d'Études Chypriotes</i>
CHIC	Olivier, J.-P. and Godart, L. (1996) <i>Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae, Études Crétoises</i> 31, Paris
CIS	de Vogüé, M., <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> , multiple volumes, Paris (1889–)
GORILA	Godart, L. and Olivier, J.-P. <i>Recueil des Inscriptions en Linéaire A</i> , vols. 1–5, <i>Études Crétoises</i> 21.1–5, Paris (1976–85).
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JMA	<i>Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
RDAC	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SIMA	<i>Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology</i>

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Introduction

This book is the publication of the 2014 Evans-Pritchard Lectures at All Souls College, Oxford, delivered in May that year with the title *Society and Writing in Ancient Cyprus*. This annual lecture series is dedicated to the memory of Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, who was Professor of Social Anthropology and Fellow of All Souls from 1946 to 1970. The remit of the lectures is that they should fall within one of the disciplines (social anthropology, classical studies, archaeology, modern history, oriental studies) and the geographical areas (Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean) that most occupied him. Having trained as a classicist at Cambridge, and specialised during my doctorate and subsequently on epigraphic and linguistic research on the eastern Mediterranean and particularly the island of Cyprus, I chose to focus the lecture series on the place of writing in ancient Cypriot society over a broad period from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age through to the Hellenistic period. Working on the languages of ancient Cyprus,¹ what has often struck me is that there is quite a lot that could be said – but that can often be either implicitly assumed or simply overlooked in scholarship – about the social and political backdrop to the inscriptions, which in turn is relevant to our impression of how ancient Cypriots used writing.

As I prepared for the lectures, I found myself reading a number of Evans-Pritchard's works, many for the first time. I am not an anthropologist and had no intention of introducing an anthropological slant to my analysis of Cypriot writing; my approach was largely grounded in primary analysis of epigraphic material, studied alongside the broader archaeological and historical context of the inscribed objects. However, in reading Evans-Pritchard's work, I was struck by his careful accounts of the societies he studied and in particular his passionate descriptions of methodological approaches towards anthropological research. An awareness of the ways in which social context is relevant to understanding practices and customs seemed wholly appropriate to my subject matter, namely the position of

¹ Especially Steele (2013), which focuses on linguistic analysis of many of the inscriptions that reappear in the present work.

writing in ancient Cypriot society. As a token to Evans-Pritchard's influence and outstanding body of work, I have prefaced each of the ensuing chapters with a short quotation from one of his publications, in each case chosen because of some topical or methodological link with the material discussed. I hope the reader will indulge this small gesture in honour of the man who made the lecture series, and thereby this book, possible.

The outline of the original lectures is preserved throughout the book, although inevitably material has been added or changed to some extent since the original presentation. The reader will therefore find not a strictly chronological progression but a thematic one, from chapter to chapter, although with a tendency to treat the earliest material first where possible within the framework. The thematic focus was chosen because it allows, I hope, greater analytical potential. However, to aid the reader's path through Cypriot writing over time, cross-references to different chapters and sections have been added where possible, signalling discussion of related or similar material. It may also be helpful to have in mind the chronological table and Map 1.1, to make sense of references to different periods and sites. I hope that the overlapping central themes of the book, from developments in writing and literacy to the connections between writing and identity, will emerge as the reader progresses.

Chronological table: the Late Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period (absolute dates according to Dikaios (1969–71)).

Late Cypriot IA	1575–1525 BC
Late Cypriot IB	1525–1425 BC
Late Cypriot IIA	1425/1400–1375 BC
Late Cypriot IIB	1375–1300 BC
Late Cypriot IIC	300–1230 BC
Late Cypriot IIIA	1220/1210–1150 BC
Late Cypriot IIIB	1150–1050 BC
Cypro-Geometric I	1050–950 BC
Cypro-Geometric II	950–850 BC
Cypro-Geometric III	850–750 BC
Cypro-Archaic	750–480 BC
Cypro-Classical	480–310 BC
Ptolemaic/Hellenistic	310–30 BC

Map I.1 A selection of major Cypriot sites.

1 | The Advent of Literacy on Cyprus

So, whereas some custom of a people, when plotted on a distribution map, is of interest for the ethnologist as evidence of ethnic movement, of a cultural drift, or of past contact between peoples, it is of interest to the social anthropologist as part of the whole social life of the people at the present time. The mere probability that they may have borrowed it from some other people is not very significant for him since he cannot know for certain that they did borrow it and, even if they did, he does not know when, how, and why they borrowed it.¹

1.1 An Internal Approach

This chapter aims to consider the context in which ancient Cypriots developed the technology of writing. It should be emphasised, however, that when attempting to study the initial arrival of writing on Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age, we face some immediate problems because of significant unknown factors. Although the writing system that appears at this time, commonly labelled ‘Cypro-Minoan’, has evident affinities with the linear writing systems of the Late Bronze Age Aegean (in particular Linear A), a direct derivation from Linear A itself has been questioned. The numbers of surviving inscriptions are quite small, especially for the earliest period of writing on Cyprus, meaning that we have a limited pool of evidence for assessing script developments. It is also the case that Cypro-Minoan remains undeciphered, with only a small number of sign values identified with confidence and the linguistic content of its inscriptions unknown.

These problems make it very difficult to tell from whom ancient Cypriots borrowed the technology of writing, and indeed when and how – although broadly speaking this has not prevented epigraphists and archaeologists from making assumptions about how and why, and indeed when and where, the transmission might have taken place. This question was approached from the time of the very earliest scholarship from a predominantly comparative perspective, looking for the links with Linear A

and Crete to explain when and how Cyprus acquired writing: when the famous archaeologist Arthur Evans first named the Cypriot Late Bronze Age script ‘Cypro-Minoan’,² there was an explicit assumption of some relation to Linear A, the primary script of his Minoan period on Crete.

The quotation from Evans-Pritchard at the beginning of this chapter shows him commenting on a similarly comparative approach taken by ethnographers (or ethnologists as he referred to them), which for social anthropologists was not only unhelpful but to some extent misleading. While an ethnologist would principally be interested in how the custom was acquired, for the social anthropologist it is the place of the custom within the society that would be of interest. Evans-Pritchard was of course principally interested in societies in which the initial adoption of a particular custom was likely to be shrouded in the mists of time, precisely because of the late advent of literacy and literary traditions, and so the lack of evidence for early developments, in the societies he spent his life studying. Scholars of the ancient Mediterranean have better resources at their disposal when considering such questions, and so the outlook for studying the origins of Cypro-Minoan is not quite so gloomy. Nevertheless it is worth reconsidering the questions we usually ask about the transmission of writing to Cyprus. It is common to consider script developments in the ancient Mediterranean as results of, and therefore also as evidence of, contact between different peoples and cultures, and usually of people speaking different languages. The study of early Cypro-Minoan has been dominated by such a comparative approach, with the emphasis on contact leading to assumptions about when and how literacy was acquired. However, what if we were to shift the focus from the external to the internal? What if we were to begin by considering not the relations between ancient Cyprus and contemporary Mediterranean powers, but rather the internal factors that gave rise to the advent of literacy on the island?

This does not mean that we will abandon the comparative approach entirely. In fact, as we will see, considering from what source script Cypro-Minoan was developed (directly from Linear A, or not?) remains important if we wish to study the early stages of Cypriot writing. For example, if we can identify the source script, then we can also ask which of its features were preserved and which abandoned, and what were the practical reasons behind these choices. First, however, it is useful to consider what we know about ancient Cyprus and its inhabitants in the period when inscriptions begin to appear, which has the potential to tell us a lot more about the

² Evans (1909) 68–77.

reasons why Cyprus was ready to adopt literacy at this time. Privileging the internal approach in this way shifts the focus to the immediate context of writing and provides a new perspective that has not previously been studied systematically.

1.2 Ancient Cyprus in the Early Late Bronze Age: The Archaeological Picture

When and why did writing first appear on Cyprus? The inscription that has often been picked out as representing the earliest phase of Cypriot writing is a fragmentary clay tablet discovered at Enkomi (##001) and dated probably to the period Late Cypriot IB (LCIB, a ceramic phase). The correlation of ceramic phases to absolute dates is a difficult process and is still being reassessed by archaeologists today,³ but the LCIB phase is thought to correspond to the late 16th or the 15th century BC: see Table 1.1. However, there is some difficulty with dating the tablet precisely. It is possible that two other inscribed objects from Cyprus, both also found at Enkomi, may in fact be earlier than the tablet. One is a clay label, sometimes referred to as a 'weight', that is dated by context to LCIA-B (##095), and the other a cylinder seal dated stylistically to LCIA (##225). The latter would usually be assumed to belong to the 16th century BC, and the former may belong to the 16th or first part of the 15th. If we were to accept the revised radiocarbon dating scheme proposed by Manning,⁴ these objects could even date as early as the 17th century BC. The inscriptions themselves will be revisited later in much more detail (section 1.3).

Since the only direct evidence comes from the inscriptions themselves, our view of the chronology of early writing on Cyprus is constrained by chance survival: the surviving evidence points towards the technology having been developed in LCIA, but we have no way of knowing how many texts have been lost to us and whether some of them might have pre-dated this period. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that only inscriptions on durable materials (e.g. stone, baked clay, some metals) have any chance of surviving given that Cyprus is lacking in suitable environments

³ The scheme proposed by Schaeffer (1948) 403 was revised by Dikaios (1969–71), whose dating is still often followed today. Knapp (1994), (1997), (2008), (2013) has suggested a different categorisation of periods of the Bronze Age on Cyprus, and in his 2013 work includes an appendix by Manning (2013) giving a revised scheme of absolute dates based on radiocarbon analysis. See also Åström (1972) and Wiener (2003) for other discussions of the dating of Cypriot phases, and Vandenabeele (2007) and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 on the dating of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions.

⁴ Manning (2013).

Table 1.1 Absolute dates assigned to the Middle-Late Bronze Age transition on Cyprus.

Period categorisation according to Knapp 1994, 1997, 2008, 2013	Traditional periods	Absolute dates according to Dikaios 1969–71 (ceramic phases)	Absolute dates according to Manning 2013 (radiocarbon dates)
Protohistoric Bronze Age (ProBA)	Middle Cypriot III (MCIII)	1700–1575	1750/1700–1680/1650
	Late Cypriot IA (LCIA)	1575–1525	1680/1650–1450
	Late Cypriot IB (LCIB)	1525–1425	

for the preservation of more fragile materials (e.g. wood, papyrus, parchment). It cannot be ruled out that future discoveries could push the use of writing further back, even into the Middle Cypriot III period (MCIII), but since the surviving evidence suggests that the technology was developed in LCI, we will take that as our starting point for discussion. What factors might have led to Cyprus being ready to acquire the technology of writing at this time?

Significant changes that had begun in MCIII formed the foundation for a completely new social situation in Cyprus by the LCI period. This transitional period has sometimes been referred to as the start of the ‘Protohistoric Bronze Age’ (ProBA), as distinct from the preceding ‘Prehistoric Bronze Age’ (PreBA).⁵ Knapp summarises the new outlook as a development from an ‘egalitarian, isolated, cooperative and village-oriented’ society to one that was now ‘socially stratified ... international, competitive and town-centred’.⁶ Another way of looking at these transformations is as developments in the complexity of social structures working alongside changes in the extent and nature of contact with the world outside. The population grew, settlements became larger and were supported by more extensive exploitation of agricultural resources, previously sparsely inhabited areas of the island became home to new towns, the built landscape witnessed drastic changes and there is evidence for new ideologies and practices as well as an unprecedented level of visible signs of social stratification in the material record. Several related factors seem to have played a role in the transformation, some economic and some more strictly social. However, it is difficult to tell whether the economic developments triggered the social ones, or vice versa. Although the transformation, often

⁵ See Knapp (1994), (1997), (2008), (2013).

⁶ Knapp (2013) 348.

understood in terms of ‘urbanisation’ or ‘state formation’, came to Cyprus relatively late compared with other civilisations around the eastern Mediterranean, its impact was drastic and decisive.

At this time, there was a huge increase in the exploitation of the island’s natural copper resources, and with it arose a specialised metalworking industry producing significant quantities of copper that could then be used per se or form the basis (alongside tin) for the production of bronze.⁷ While some of the copper would have been used for local consumption, the metal was also in high demand around the Mediterranean and this gave Cyprus a chance to emerge as the whole region’s dominant provider of a very desirable resource. This began a trend that was so important to the island’s economy that Cyprus became synonymous with copper, manifest in the metal’s name. Because copper was so widely sought after, Cyprus became connected to wide-ranging Mediterranean trading networks,⁸ giving an opportunity not only to export to other societies around the Mediterranean (in Egypt, the Levant, Anatolia and the Aegean), but also to import goods from far and wide. As well as propelling Cyprus to international renown, this allowed the islanders access to new commodities and luxury goods that would not previously have been easily available.⁹

About the same time, the island witnessed substantial social reconfiguration that is clearly linked to the new economic developments. The growth in numbers and in size of archaeologically visible settlements from before and after the transition is a good starting point for observing the vast differences between the Middle Cypriot and Late Cypriot periods.¹⁰ Although the numbers and sizes of settlements had increased steadily during the Middle Bronze Age, it was in MCIII–LCI that the settlement pattern witnessed a major shift, as some parts of the island became much more densely populated and new sites appeared, particularly on the coast, and in the south and especially the east of the island. Most famous is one of the sites that emerged on the eastern coastline facing the Levant, namely Enkomi (*Ayios Iakovos*), which will feature heavily in our discussion of early literacy on Cyprus. Other important sites that arose at this time include Morphou (*Toumba tou Skourou*) in the north-west, Hala Sultan Tekke (*Vyzakia*) in the south-east, Episkopi/Kourion (*Bamboula*) in the south and Kouklia (*Palaepaphos*) in the south-west.¹¹ These larger

⁷ On the development of the copper industry, see Kassianidou (2008).

⁸ Mediterranean-wide developments at this time, and the place of Cyprus among them, are amply illustrated in Broodbank (2013) ch. 8.

⁹ On the economic developments of this period and their ramifications, see Peltenburg (1996).

¹⁰ See the maps in Steel (2004) 120, 149; also Knapp (2013) 278, 350.

¹¹ See especially Keswani (1996) on the new settlement pattern.

settlements are conspicuously positioned so as to be near to or on the coast but also sufficiently close to sites where copper was being refined that they could exploit internal resources as well as playing a role in the export of Cyprus' mineral wealth and the import of foreign luxury goods.¹²

It is not only the changes in the settlement pattern that indicate social upheaval at this time, but also numerous changes in the material record. The appearance of foreign luxury goods is one of those changes, and strongly indicates social stratification in which elites were consciously seeking to reinforce their status through the use and display of exotic and expensive objects.¹³ Elite behaviour also seems to be in evidence in the built landscape, for example in the series of forts constructed in different areas of the island. Most prominent of these is the 'fortress' at the northern entrance of Enkomi, a large monumental building with a central courtyard and numerous other rooms that is almost universally acknowledged to be administrative in nature and to reflect the presence of some sort of authority.¹⁴ It is easy to imagine that the elites in important Cypriot sites in the LCI period were both fuelling the economic expansion and benefiting from it in terms of personal wealth, social status and local administrative power.

It is difficult to get a sense of the overall distribution of power on the island in LCI, because the only site that has been excavated widely enough to give significant evidence for this period is Enkomi. While some archaeologists argue for the existence of multiple political powers on the island at this time (i.e. widespread, heterarchical power systems that might initially have been carried over from a similar distribution of local control in the Middle Cypriot), others have suggested that Enkomi was the only significant centre of power and had control over other parts of the island and most importantly over the production and movement of copper. The arguments are difficult to assess because it is possible that the archaeological record is skewed in favour of Enkomi (especially due to the relative extent of excavation at the site). Furthermore, the role of the series of forts that appeared across part of the island at this time remains disputed: were they built by locals as local defensive structures,¹⁵ for example, or were they part of Enkomi's 'hinterland strategy' for maintaining control over the island's copper resources?¹⁶ Later on, around the 14th century BC, Cyprus appears

¹² See Portugali and Knapp (1985) 50–61, Knapp (1998).

¹³ See Webb (2005).

¹⁴ See Dikaios (1969–71) 16–21 and 510–11 on the building.

¹⁵ E.g. Merrillees (1971).

¹⁶ Peltenburg (1996) 33.

to have played a role in international diplomacy, as attested in cuneiform documents from sites such as Tell el-Amarna (Akhetaten), Bogazkoy (Hattusha) and Ras Shamra (Ugarit), in which the king of ‘Alashiya’ (a place name widely accepted to correspond to Cyprus) exchanged letters with other eastern Mediterranean powers (see further section 1.6.2 below). These external sources may hint that Cyprus was politically unified in the 14th century but they cannot be relied on as positive evidence for the earlier LCI period, and we may even doubt their value as evidence for the LCII period given that the documents reflect long-range diplomatic relationships and are often formulaic.¹⁷

We cannot easily settle the question as to whether Enkomi held political control over the whole or large parts of Cyprus in LCI,¹⁸ but there can be no doubt that Enkomi was in a fortunate position in this period. Its material and mortuary record show clear evidence of imported luxury and prestige goods originating from the Levant and Egypt.¹⁹ The monumental ‘fortress’ building is almost certainly to be linked with administration as well as status display, and although the evidence for a link between this building and copper working for the LCI period is not as well attested as for later periods, there can be little doubt that Enkomi’s wealth was linked to copper production from the start.²⁰ A further element that suggests administrative development is the high concentration of glyptic production at the site: cylinder seals and other glyptic devices are often assumed to have been used as tools for authenticating transactions and exchanges important to the economy, practices well attested in and perhaps borrowed from the Near East.²¹ Unfortunately, however, very little evidence of sealings (i.e. the impressions made by the seals in the context in which they were used) survives, making it difficult to reconstruct the items’ potential administrative uses.²² Another common assumption is that seals acted as personal indicators of status (with images representing the individual in a similar way to heraldic coats of arms), which could imply a link with the emergence of elites at Enkomi attempting to control economic practices, although this is very difficult to substantiate without more evidence for seal usage. Leaving aside the question mark over the extent of Enkomi’s control outside

¹⁷ See e.g. Moran (1992) 104–13 and 188–90 on the relevant Amarna letters mentioning Alashiya (which date to the early 14th century, i.e. early LCII).

¹⁸ For overviews of the different arguments, see Knapp (2008) 336–7 and (2013) 432–5.

¹⁹ See Keswani (1989), Knapp (1998).

²⁰ See Kassianidou (2012); also Courtois (1982) on the development of the copper industry at Enkomi throughout the LBA.

²¹ See Smith (1994), Webb (2002).

²² See Webb (2005).

of its local area, it is clear that the city became an important centre at an early stage – and, as we will see, it is perhaps unsurprising that the earliest attestations of writing on Cyprus are also associated with this site.²³

It is against the background of a burgeoning economy based on the island's natural resources and the significant external demand for them, alongside the rise of elite individuals or groups operating within a hierarchical system and taking part in status display, that the appearance of writing in LCI Cyprus must be measured. There can be no doubt that the advent of literacy must be related to the vast economic and social changes of this period, but nonetheless its exact context remains poorly understood. In order to understand the significance of literacy to LCI Cypriot society, we will begin by examining the earliest attestations of writing and the type and context of the objects on which the inscriptions appear. This will also lead us to consider related epigraphic problems, such as the apparent difference in epigraphic repertoire employed in some of the earliest inscriptions.

1.3 The Earliest Examples of Cypriot Writing

The three inscriptions mentioned at the beginning of the last section (1.2) can all be dated to the LCI period, and constitute the earliest surviving evidence for writing on Cyprus: a clay tablet ##001, a clay 'weight' or 'label' ##095 and a steatite cylinder seal ##225, all originating from Enkomi.²⁴ We will begin by considering the context and object type of each of the inscriptions before analysing their epigraphic features.

The tablet ##001 is made of clay and is unusually thick by comparison with clay tablets from the Aegean or Near East, with no exact existing parallels known for the object type. It is broken at the bottom and preserves three lines of text on one side, written when the clay was still wet (21 signs), with a further two signs appearing on its right-hand edge, at about the height of the first line of text, written when the clay had begun to dry: see Figure 1.1. The clay used in the tablet looks very similar in type to that of some other Cypro-Minoan documents, and petrographic analysis suggests

²³ On possible links between the introduction of writing and stimulation of glyptic production, see also Smith (2003).

²⁴ The numbers prefixed with ## originate from Olivier (2007) (with further numbers added in Ferrara (2012/13) and Valério (2014) and are used to refer to Cypro-Minoan inscriptions in most recent publications. Ferrara also identified the three objects under discussion here (##001, ##095 and ##225) as the three inscriptions that give evidence for the earliest phase of writing on Cyprus and at Enkomi, though without discussing their epigraphic features in detail (Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 53).

Figure 1.1 Enkomi clay tablet #001.

a possible local clay source in the Pedheios river channel near Enkomi itself.²⁵

The tablet was found in the ‘fortress’ building at Enkomi (in Area III, Quartier 1 W, room 103), and notably very close to evidence for copper smelting. Strictly speaking we can only give the object a date of ‘LCIIB *ante quem*’,²⁶ because it was found in the filling between floors viii and ix and so not in its original context, but it is likely that it was associated with the activities represented by floors viii and ix, dated to LCIB.²⁷ The association with copper smelting is important, as is its discovery in the Enkomi ‘fortress’ building, especially in light of the close link between economic factors and social developments highlighted in the previous section (1.2) that characterise the period in which writing first appears. Although the content of the inscription remains mysterious (see section 1.4), the proximity of industrial activity to its find spot has sometimes been taken to suggest an

²⁵ See Goren et al. (2003) 236–7.

²⁶ See Dikaios (1963).

²⁷ On its context see Dikaios (1963); see also Baurain (1980) and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 53–5.

administrative context.²⁸ It furthermore seems quite likely that the two signs on its edge (which repeat the first two signs of line 1 of the inscription provided that we read that line from right to left²⁹) are intended as a reference to the content of the tablet, thus raising the possibility that it once belonged to ‘a larger, organized, deposit system’.³⁰ The use of inscriptions on the edge of documents as a colophon or external reference is a practice known in the Near East, but it also seems to appear in a few later Cypro-Minoan documents: one of the clay cylinders from Kalavassos (##102), a ‘CM2’ tablet from Enkomi (##209), one of the tablets from Ugarit (##212) and one of the new tablets discovered at Pyla-Kokkinokremos.³¹

The second object, ##095, comprises a flat, pointed piece of clay, pierced at its narrower end and bearing a single-line inscription of seven signs (probably to be categorised as a group of three syllabic signs, then a word divider followed by three more syllabic signs): see Figure 1.2. The inscription

Figure 1.2 Enkomi clay label ##095.

²⁸ Already by the excavator, Dikaios (1969–71) 883.

²⁹ On the theory that the text is boustrophedon (first line sinistrovers, second line dextrovers, third line sinistrovers), see Janko (1987).

³⁰ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 63.

³¹ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 136–9 and 204–6. The tablet from Pyla-Kokkinokremos is to be published by Athanasia Kanta and Massimo Perna.

was incised before firing. Although it has traditionally been classified as a ‘weight’, Ferrara has pointed out that it is better understood in the context of similar objects from Crete that function not as weights but as labels: these are small pieces of clay of varying shapes (often quite rounded and almost circular, or sometimes long and practically rectangular but rounded at the end), usually pierced with a hole, and bearing an inscription in Cretan Hieroglyphic (multiple examples, especially from the archives at Knossos and Mallia) or Linear A (one example, PH 9 from Phaistos).³² Furthermore, if #095 were to be hung from its pierced hole in the manner of a weight, its inscription would be upside-down, suggesting that the interpretation as a label is more plausible. One could envisage that the user would tie the label to an object with string passed through the hole at the base, and would hold it up in order to read the inscription.

The label was excavated by Schaeffer in Enkomi’s Quartier 5E, to the east of a tholos tomb, but its exact context has never been very well described or published and so again some imprecision in its dating is inevitable: it is said by the excavators to belong to LCIA but this is difficult to verify.³³ The pinkish clay used in the label is quite different in appearance from that used to make the tablet #001, although it may still be from a Cypriot clay source. Because we know so little about the label’s exact find spot, its context remains difficult to assess. Nevertheless, if it functions as some sort of label, then we might make a tacit assumption that its context was administrative, particularly going by Aegean parallels that were discovered in archival deposits.

The third object, #225, is a cylinder seal made of steatite that bears a sequence of what seem to be four signs between various pictorial motifs including a human figure: see Figure 1.3. Although it was not found in its original context, it originates from Gjerstad’s excavation of Enkomi tomb 2 and was dated by him on stylistic grounds to LCIA,³⁴ making this potentially the earliest example of Cypriot writing. Tomb 2 was in use from LCIB to at least LCIIA and contained remains from 11 individuals, with evidence for secondary treatment and collective reburial.³⁵ One other cylinder seal was found in the same tomb but does not bear Cypro-Minoan signs.

³² See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 53–6.

³³ Schaeffer, Courtois and Lagarde (1968) 266 (fig. 3); see further Courtois (1984) 68 and 238 on the context (with a photograph, pl. 23) and Baurain (1980) on the dating.

³⁴ Gjerstad et al. (1934) 474–5 (pl. 76 no. 68). The object is not included by Olivier (2007); see Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 no. 225 (also vol. 1 53).

³⁵ See Keswani (2004) 158.

Figure 1.3 Enkomi cylinder seal #225.

Given that it was found in a tomb, the seal #225 can potentially be understood as a personal item belonging to a buried individual. However, it must also be viewed in the wider context of the usage of seals in Bronze Age Cyprus and alongside the earliest appearances of similar objects at Enkomi, which seems to have been the first significant producer of glyptic devices in Cyprus. Steatite, as a relatively soft but quite long-lasting stone, was a common choice for cylinder seals in both the Near East and Cyprus, and in Cyprus it has traditionally been associated with the simpler designs grouped by Porada under the 'Common Style'; harder stones such as haematite or more valuable ones such as the highly prized lapis lazuli were associated with more intricate designs in Porada's classification.³⁶ Cylinder seals were undoubtedly an object type borrowed from the Near East, where they first appeared as early as the 4th millennium BC, but that does not mean that Cypriots necessarily used them for the same purposes. Indeed, some innovation is obvious in the decoration of these objects, with images and motifs that often recall the contemporary Aegean rather than the Near East: seal #225 is in fact a good example of this, with symbols such as bucrania, horns of consecration and X-marks that would look quite at home in an

³⁶ Porada (1948).

Aegean setting.³⁷ A lack of evidence for seal impressions and sealing practices in Late Bronze Age Cyprus prevents us from understanding the context of their usage. However, Webb has argued strongly for glyptic imagery as playing a significant role in power structures, with elites employing cylinder seals as markers of authority and practical tools in both ideological and economic control.³⁸

A theme emerges from this investigation into the three earliest surviving Cypriot inscriptions (##001, 095, 225), which are the only ones dated with certainty to the LCI period:³⁹ all three can be argued to have some relation to elite behaviour and/or administrative processes, at least one (or perhaps all?) of them potentially in connection with the copper industry. The clay tablet ##001 was found in proximity to evidence for copper working and could perhaps once have been part of some sort of filing system (otherwise, why the need to put an abbreviated reference to its content on its edge?). The clay label ##095 was found in a location that has not been well documented, but the object itself could be administrative in nature if we are to understand it as a label that would presumably have been used in contexts similar to those of its Aegean counterparts. Similarly, although the cylinder seal ##225 originates from a mortuary context, the object type itself potentially associates it with administrative control by elites and so with related administrative processes.

A link between the advent of writing on Cyprus and the vast economic and social changes that underpin the MCIII–LCI period would not be at all surprising. In fact, this is exactly what we might expect. Links between the inception of literacy and economic administration are well attested in the history of writing, as for example in the earliest appearance of cuneiform in Mesopotamia, developing from the ‘proto-writing’ of simple accounting

³⁷ On Aegean influences on particular stylistic features in Cypriot seals, see Pini (1979) and (1980), Weingarten (1996). On the ‘hybridisation’ of Aegean and Levantine imagery in cylinder seal decoration, see Knapp (2008) 274–7. On the differences of usage and development between seals in Crete and Cyprus, see Webb and Weingarten (2012).

³⁸ Webb (2005).

³⁹ Three other inscriptions that could in theory be as early as the ones described above have been excluded from this discussion. These are three objects that are included in Ferrara’s corpus (2012/13 vol. 2) but were not included by Olivier (2007), and all three are dated quite imprecisely. One is a pottery handle found at Dhenia belonging to the broad period LCI–II, ##221, which Ferrara lists as having two signs followed by a word divider and then another sign; however the signs are all ‘plus’-shaped (+), which could be reminiscent of Cypro-Minoan sign 005 but is perhaps more likely to belong to the longstanding (and probably illiterate or para-literate) tradition of potmarking, whereby pots and especially their handles were marked with series of lines and crosses (on potmarks generally see Hirschfeld (2008)). The other two are also on ceramic objects: the bottom of a bowl found at Klavdia (##231), marked with two signs and dated via the known use of the type of ware to LCIA or LCII–IIIA (so in all probability a much later artefact), and a pottery handle from Kalopsidha (##235) with a short but damaged inscription, a surface find discovered out of context and consequently dated broadly to LCI–II(?).

documents. As the copper-based economy of MCIII–LCI Cyprus grew, the processes of copper production would have intensified and required closer supervision by those overseeing the industry. Since they were benefiting directly from the production and export of the commodity, the elites themselves (i.e. the individuals or groups who came out on top in what appears to be an increasingly hierarchical society) would have had a keen interest in monitoring the industry and so the source of their own wealth and power. Thus writing could have been adopted primarily as a practical tool for overseeing copper production by allowing, for example, amounts or allocations to be recorded. The transition from a practical tool to a symbolic one could also have been straightforward, since elite individuals or groups (whether their power was derived from direct administrative control or more abstract ideological control, or a combination of both) would have needed to protect and control the industry that provided the key to their place at the top of the local hierarchy.⁴⁰

The fact that few numerals have been found in Cypro-Minoan inscriptions overall and none in the earliest inscriptions has sometimes been taken to militate against administrative use (also for the clay tablet #001 in particular⁴¹). If we were dealing with an exact parallel to the administrative documents of Late Bronze Age Crete and mainland Greece then such an observation might have some value, as Linear A and Linear B records ubiquitously use numerals (alongside ideograms) to designate amounts, even in situations where this might not necessarily be seen as a requirement (e.g. lists of individual items or people, where each will be listed with a numeral ‘1’). Cyprus, however, never seems to have adopted anything like the systematic notation of commodities and quantities witnessed in the Aegean. This need not be seen as an anomalous situation: compare, for instance, the lack of numerals in Greek alphabetic inscriptions until a system of notation was developed in the late 6th century BC. Even if Late Bronze Age Cypriots were working without a well-developed system of numerical notation in the Aegean style, it is still entirely possible that their clay tablets and other objects could have functioned successfully as administrative documents. It is also important to remember how few documents we are dealing with (just three for this period, and only some 250 for the whole period from LCI to CGII, i.e. the 17th to 10th centuries BC; see further Chapter 3), which makes it difficult to make assumptions about the employment of features such as numerical notation. This does not detract

⁴⁰ See also Knox (2008) on the suggestion that Cypro-Minoan emerged as part of a ‘package of elite self-definition’ based on an Aegean model (quote p. 10).

⁴¹ Godart and Sacconi (1979) 132.

from the wider impression that the beginning of writing in Cyprus seems to have coincided closely with the development and control of industry.⁴²

The derivation of the document types themselves, variously based on Aegean and/or Near Eastern models, could also be seen to fit in with the picture outlined above. Clay tablets with cuneiform inscriptions were in use in the Near East from the 4th millennium BC onwards, while in the Aegean clay tablets inscribed in Cretan Hieroglyphic and Linear A were first used in the first half of the 2nd millennium. Although it has unusual dimensions, the Cypriot tablet ##001 looks more in keeping with Aegean tablet types in its flat surface and method of incision. This could suggest some parallels in usage too: Aegean tablets were apparently restricted to administrative contexts while in Mesopotamia cuneiform-inscribed tablets had a much wider range of usage (including letters and belletristic texts as well as administrative ones). If the tablet ##001 was based on an Aegean model, might we assume that its use was in some way similar and so likely to be linked to the economy? Remember also that the use of an abbreviation on the tablet's edge, which conversely is a practice better attested in the Near East, further suggests the archival storage of information. The clay label ##095 again appears to be inspired by Aegean object types used for administrative purposes (confirmed in the Aegean cases sometimes by the use of ideograms and numerals), and in this case there is a lack of typological parallels within Near Eastern literate contexts. However, even if it is Aegean document types that seem to provide the model here, it is evident that there was no wholesale borrowing of Aegean administrative methods.

The cylinder seal ##225, on the other hand, has its only parallels in the Near East, and belongs to a relatively recently adopted tradition first attested in Cyprus at around the time of the MCIII–LCI transition. In contrast to the other two early inscriptions, here we have an object whose main purpose was *not* to carry writing. Seals were at first imported, but before long were produced in Cyprus itself, sometimes of local materials like steatite, calcite and haematite and sometimes of imported luxury materials like lapis lazuli, amethyst and carnelian. Most surviving Cypriot cylinder seals do not feature writing at all and contain only decorative motifs, but 22 have been found that bear Cypro-Minoan signs, of which ##225 is the earliest.⁴³ As has

⁴² See also Duhoux (2009a) 13–14.

⁴³ The others are ##193 (original object lost), 194 (reused Babylonian seal of lapis lazuli with a cuneiform inscription as well as a Cypro-Minoan one), 195 (haematite), 196 (original object lost), 197 (haematite), 198 (haematite), 199 (lapis lazuli, probably reused Babylonian), 200 (haematite), 201 (haematite), 202 (haematite), 203 (steatite), 204 (haematite), 205 (haematite), 217 (haematite), 218 (haematite), 220 (steatite), 226 (blue faience), 227 ('black stone'), 232 (buff faience), 252 (haematite), 253 (basalt).

been pointed out above, we do not have direct evidence to tell us how or for what Cypriots were using cylinder seals but the existence of intricately carved examples made of expensive imported materials strongly suggests a link with status or prestige. What that meant in terms of day-to-day usage is far more difficult to reconstruct, and it is impossible to verify the common assumption that seals would have been used to authenticate economic transactions in some way, as we know they were used in the Near East.

The three earliest inscriptions seem to fit in well with the model presented in section 1.2 concerning the context of the adoption of writing on Cyprus: a tablet and a label that could be linked with administration and perhaps even the practical administration of the copper industry, and a cylinder seal that could be linked with elite ideology and/or control. This is where we must turn from the analysis of the inscriptions as objects to their analysis as pieces of writing, because an epigraphic study of these texts has something to add to our impression of the initial adoption of and early developments in Cypriot writing.

1.4 The Epigraphy of Early Cypriot Inscriptions

On closer inspection, and from an epigraphic rather than a contextual point of view, the three earliest Cypriot inscriptions present us with something of a mystery. Let us begin with the clay tablet, ##001, which has long been acknowledged to diverge substantially in epigraphic terms (i.e. its sign repertoire) from the rest of the corpus of Bronze Age Cypriot inscriptions. The tablet was already isolated by É. Masson as one of her ‘archaic repertoire’, partly on the basis of the extent to which its signs differ from the standard repertoire known for other Cypro-Minoan texts.⁴⁴ Olivier, however, isolated ##001 alone as possibly representing a ‘rameau mort de l’évolution de l’écriture syllabique’, i.e. a stage of writing that is not closely related to the development of other known forms of Cypro-Minoan, and labelled it as ‘CM0’.⁴⁵ More recently, Ferrara has stressed the importance of studying the whole body of inscriptions and seeing divergences as largely palaeographic rather than epigraphic, and consequently not only did not mark out the tablet for special treatment but also suggested that it does belong to the same tradition of writing as the later inscriptions.⁴⁶ More recently still, Valério has sought to establish more closely, through

⁴⁴ See É. Masson (1987).

⁴⁵ Olivier (2007) 21. The label ‘CM0’ is in line with the numbered classifications for other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions devised by É. Masson: see below.

⁴⁶ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 220.

palaeographic study, the links between Linear A and Cypro-Minoan signs, and has argued specifically for the tablet #001 that its script can be seen as an early stage in the development of Cypro-Minoan from Linear A.⁴⁷ A re-examination of the epigraphic features of this inscription will demonstrate the central problem and the issues underpinning these different points of view.

First it is worth considering how we might go about evaluating epigraphic divergence from known Cypro-Minoan. There are only about 250 attested Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, most of which are very short and/or fragmentary. Thus our knowledge of Cypro-Minoan is based on an extremely limited amount of evidence, so much so that not only is it undeciphered, but also it is considered undecipherable in its current state.⁴⁸ The inscriptions that have survived are furthermore characterised by a great level of diversity in terms of date (16th–10th centuries BC, i.e. over 500 years or more), origin (texts found all over the island and also at Ugarit and Tiryns), object type (tablets, cylinders, balls, jewellery items, pottery, seals, statuettes, etc.), material (objects made of clay, bronze, gold, ivory, glass, etc.) and method of inscription (signs incised, impressed, painted, etc.).⁴⁹ Some smaller groups within the corpus have furthermore been categorised as epigraphically or geographically divergent: É. Masson in the 1970s devised the labels of ‘CM2’ to refer to three long clay tablets from Enkomi that have a different repertoire of signs, ‘CM3’ to refer to the inscriptions found outside of Cyprus at Ugarit in the northern Levant, and ‘CM1’ to refer to everything else.⁵⁰ The efficacy of her categorisations is not the central issue here, and they have been discussed and critiqued at length elsewhere.⁵¹ However, it is important to remember that the body of inscriptions that we refer to as ‘Cypro-Minoan’ is far from being a single and discrete entity.

The diversity of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions raises the question: how do we make a useful comparison between the Enkomi tablet #001 and the rest of the corpus, when that corpus is so diverse? It is important to proceed with caution.

The tablet #001 contains 20 different signs, with very few repetitions. Of these signs, some are known in other Bronze Age Cypriot inscriptions but others are not. Some of the signs (both ones that do and ones that do not otherwise correspond to known Cypro-Minoan signs) also have obvious

⁴⁷ Valério (2017). See also Valério (2016).

⁴⁸ See Duhoux (2013).

⁴⁹ Chapter 3 looks at the Cypro-Minoan corpus in more detail, and see also Steele (2012).

⁵⁰ The groups are presented most fully in É. Masson (1972) and (1974).

⁵¹ E.g. Steele (2013) ch. 1, and especially 30–5 (section I.1.D.ii), and (2014a), and Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 and (2013). See also Chapter 3 of this volume, section 3.2.2.

parallels in Linear A (which may be the script from which Cypro-Minoan is directly descended; see section 1.6 below). Table 1.2 sets out a tentative set of correspondences for each of the signs appearing in the tablet.

Table 1.2 Sign correspondences of Enkomi tablet #001.^a

Signs of tablet #001 (CM0 numeration – see Olivier (2007) 60–1)	Correspondences with other known Cypro- Minoan signs	Correspondences with Linear A signs
01	087	-
02	102	AB 08
03	082	AB 31
04	008	AB 05
05	-	-
06	-	AB 54
07	005	AB 02
08	069	-
09	-	AB 77
10/11	-	-
12	-	AB 55
13	007	AB 04
14	044	AB 09
15	023	AB 37
16	-	AB 30
17	-	-
18	-	-
19	-	-
20	-	-
21	104	AB 28

^a The signs are drawn after the sign tables in Olivier (2007) 412, 413, and the palaeographic charts in *GORILA* vol. 5.

Again a note of caution is necessary, because the correspondences shown in Table 1.2 are based almost exclusively on the superficial, visual similarity of signs in the scripts under consideration and it is difficult to check them by any other means. Both Cypro-Minoan and Linear A remain undeciphered to different extents, which means that we cannot easily confirm the correspondences by comparing the phonetic value of the signs. However, by taking a broader view and with some detective work we can in some cases use signs in related scripts to support our assumptions. For example, CM0 sign 21 looks superficially close to CM sign 104 , but the parallel in Linear A usually has only one vertical stroke at the bottom of the sign rather than two (AB 28) , as does its known Linear B counterpart (*i*).⁵² If we also compare the later Cypriot Syllabic sign for *i* , we can see that it shares both a superficial similarity with CM 104 (though simplified via a phenomenon sometimes known as ‘H > X reduction’) and a phonetic value with Linear B *i* , which in turn suggests that we have a full and close correspondence between the signs in the four scripts (Linear A 28 , Linear B *i* , Cypro-Minoan 104 and Cypriot Syllabic *i*). We may add that a study of the appearances of Cypro-Minoan sign 104 reveals that it occurs far more often at the beginning of Cypro-Minoan words than in any other position, which makes it very likely that this is a vowel-only syllabic sign (e.g. *a*, *e*, *i*, etc., rather than representing a combination of consonant + vowel, e.g. *ta*, *pe*, *ki*).⁵³ The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit together to suggest that the signs in the four scripts shared the same basic phonetic value, as well as all being related to each other. We may conclude that we are right in putting not only Cypro-Minoan sign 104 but also Linear A sign AB 28 down in our table as correspondences for CM0 sign 21 even though the Linear A correspondence diverges in the number of strokes in the bottom part of the sign.

Some of the correspondences in Table 1.2 are more certain than others:⁵⁴ for example, as shown in the previous paragraph, we have sufficient information via a comparative approach to link sign 21 with counterparts in both Linear A and Cypro-Minoan (the same approach confirms the correspondences for 04 , 07 , 14 and 15) , but, at the other end of the spectrum, can we be certain that 13 corresponds to Cypro-Minoan sign 007 and Linear A sign AB 04 ? Furthermore, have we correctly

⁵² On the relationship between Linear A and Linear B sign values, which in many cases should be considered to be very close to one another, see Steele and Meißner (2017).

⁵³ See Steele (2013) 53–5.

⁵⁴ See also Duhoux (2009a) 20–2 for a slightly different approach.

identified 03 as being related to Cypro-Minoan sign 082 and Linear A sign AB 31 rather than, perhaps, Cypro-Minoan sign 004 and Linear A sign AB 01 ?⁵⁵ And is 02 better understood as being related to Cypro-Minoan sign 102 and Linear A sign 08 rather than to Cypro-Minoan sign 103 (with no certain Linear A correspondence)?

Because the Enkomi tablet ##001 is epigraphically isolated and has no known parallels, we can only draw tentative conclusions about how its signs are related to other known scripts. However, if we assume that the correspondences given in Table 1.2 are correct, then we may observe that:

- eight of its signs have correspondences in both Cypro-Minoan and Linear A
- two of its signs have correspondences only in Cypro-Minoan
- four of its signs have correspondences only in Linear A
- six of its signs do not have correspondences in either Cypro-Minoan or Linear A.

What are we to make of such a distribution? The answer necessarily relies on assumptions that we make about the other scripts as well. If we assume that we have reasonably complete knowledge of the sign repertoires of Linear A and Cypro-Minoan, then this single inscription appears to diverge sufficiently from both of them to state that it is neither Linear A nor Cypro-Minoan, although it is probably related to both.

The above line of reasoning constitutes quite a cautious approach to the problem of the script used in clay tablet ##001. While this is preferred by the present author, it is important to note that some other studies have attempted to push the boundaries of our understanding further. In particular, Valério has suggested a much more complete set of correspondences for the tablet's signs, identifying Cypro-Minoan and Linear A cognates for most signs based on a palaeographic study.⁵⁶ That is to say that by looking at the degree of variation in attestations of each sign in each script, he has been able to find variants of particular Cypro-Minoan and Linear A signs that look close to the signs found in the tablet in all but two instances; sometimes he finds close parallels in both scripts, while in other cases he presents an argument that the sign as found in ##001 is 'intermediate' between one in Linear A and one in Cypro-Minoan. One example of the latter is sign 09 in the tablet, whose gap at the bottom of

⁵⁵ Although CM0 sign 03 seems to 'point' in the wrong direction (as does sign 01 compared with its suggested counterpart), this would not be unexpected if Janko (1987) is correct that the inscription is boustrophedon and the first line reads from right to left.

⁵⁶ Valério (2017) and (2016) 179–94.

the circle he sees as part of ‘an increasing propensity to open the sign at its lower edge’ in comparison to a Linear A sign, AB 77 , that is often circular (like its Linear B counterpart, which is fully circular more often than not) but sometimes also has a small gap at the bottom. The eventual outcome of this sign, in Valério’s view, is Cypro-Minoan sign 025 , which is more pointed at the apex and never appears as a complete circle.⁵⁷ A final step in the argument is that the sign *ka* in the later Cypriot Syllabary could potentially be seen as a further development from Cypro-Minoan 025, while preserving the same value as the Linear B sign *ka* related to Linear A sign AB 77. Following Valério’s reasoning, one could even use his Linear A and Cypro-Minoan correspondences (since they are closely related to the deciphered scripts Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary respectively) to suggest a tentative reading of the tablet: something like (reading from the signs on the edge and then in boustrophedon from the top right corner) *ja-ro // ja-ro-wa-?-to-sa-a-ra-//-ka-ru-re-nu-te-ti-i-ne-e-ta-zu?-ni* (*inf. mut.*).

There are however some criticisms that could be made of such a positivist approach. Attention to palaeographic variation is of great importance in studying writing systems that are attested in only small numbers of inscriptions, but at the same time the small number of attestations makes it difficult to understand the degree of variation. Palaeographic variation only makes sense in context: a particular written sign has certain properties of which some will remain stable while others will vary to different degrees, and the underlying reason behind each variation may differ. The ‘ductus’ of a sign is affected by the technique used to write it (e.g. incising, impressing, painting), the material on which it is written (stone, metal, hard or soft clay, etc.), the type or register of the text (formal, informal, decorative), the level of experience (professional, amateur) and personal traits (neatness, flourishes, etc.) of the author and so on. For Linear A we have at least some indication that particular inscriptions belong to administrative archival practice (e.g. clay tablets) while others seem to fall outside of this sphere of use (e.g. inscriptions on jewellery or libation tables), and so can say a bit more about the context in which they are written and how that might affect palaeographic variation.⁵⁸ For Cypro-Minoan we have far fewer certain administrative texts (e.g. only a handful of clay tablets) alongside many

⁵⁷ Valério (2017) with fig. 8.17. Note however that AB 77 often is not closed at the bottom, and so sign 09 in the tablet cannot easily be seen as a progressive form in comparison with the Linear A: it is in fact very close in shape to most variants of AB 77.

⁵⁸ On palaeographic variation and administrative and non-administrative contexts, see Steele (2017).

whose function we often do not understand (e.g. see Chapter 3 section 3.2.3 on the clay balls). With small numbers of texts and attested individual signs, palaeographic variation can be observed but is difficult to analyse. So even if attention to palaeographic variation can begin to give us some answers (e.g. that a particular variant exists in one script and may be related to something similar-looking in another), it also presents some problems of its own.

Even the identification of individual signs is not without difficulty. Unfortunately, our understanding of the sign repertoire of Cypro-Minoan is not necessarily as complete as is often assumed. If we consult Olivier's sign table (see Table 1.3), we have the impression that 'CM1' (the version of the script in which the majority of inscriptions are assumed to be written) is composed of 72 syllabograms, compared with 61 in CM2 and 50 in CM3.⁵⁹ The CM2 documents, which comprise three long tablets of the same type, location and date, containing more than 1,300 syllabograms in total, can be assumed to attest the whole or nearly the whole repertoire of the script in which they are written (which is why it is often thought to be a different script from 'CM1').⁶⁰ However, even though 'CM1' has produced a comparable total number of signs, its attestations are spread over more than 200 inscriptions, most of which are very short and/or fragmentary, covering a chronological span of probably more than 500 years. The longest 'CM1' inscription is a clay cylinder from Enkomi dated to LCIIA–B and contains only 203 syllabograms in total over 27 lines of text, with only 39 different signs (+ 1 uncertain) represented. This text is too short to assume that it represents the whole sign repertoire of the script in which it is written, but equally it is very difficult to be certain how much of that whole sign repertoire is missing from the inscription. It is also difficult to compare any one 'CM1' inscription with another, because most of them are so short (typically fewer than ten signs in total), and because in absolute terms it is impossible to prove that, say, one inscription dating from LCIIA and bearing five signs is written in the same script as an inscription from LCIIIC and bearing five different signs.

Overall there are too many uncertainties, too much diversity and too few inscriptions to give a coherent picture of the 'CM1' signary. We might even question whether 'CM1' is a valid concept outside its usefulness as a catch-all term to refer to inscriptions that are neither written in the CM2 signary (assuming this is a distinct script at all) nor from Ugarit (i.e. CM3, for

⁵⁹ Olivier (2007) 414–16.

⁶⁰ See Olivier (2008) 607.

Table 1.3 Cyprio-Minoan sign grid, after Olivier (2013) 10.

	A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC	A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC	A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC	A	CM 1	CM 2	CM 3	CC
001	I	I	I	I	工	040					079									
002	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	041	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	080	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀	𐀀
004	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	044	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	081	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁	𐀁
005	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	046	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	082	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂	𐀂
006	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	047	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	083	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃	𐀃
007	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	049	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	084	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄	𐀄
008	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	050	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	085	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅	𐀅
009	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	051	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	086	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆	𐀆
010	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	052	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	087	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇	𐀇
011	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	053	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	088	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈	𐀈
012	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	054	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	089	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉	𐀉
012b	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	055	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	090	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊	𐀊
013	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	056	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	091	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋	𐀋
015	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	058	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	092	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌	𐀌
017	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	059	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	094	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍	𐀍
019	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	060	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	095	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎	𐀎
021	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	061	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	096	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏	𐀏
023	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	062	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	097	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐	𐀐
024	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	063	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	098	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑	𐀑
025	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	064	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	099	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒	𐀒
026	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	066	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	100	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓	𐀓
027	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	067	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	101	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔	𐀔
028	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	068	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	102	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕	𐀕
029	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	069	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	103	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖	𐀖
030	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	070	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	104	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗	𐀗
033	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	071	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	105	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘	𐀘
034	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	072	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	107	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙	𐀙
035	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	073	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	108	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚	𐀚
036	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	074	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	109	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛	𐀛
037	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	075	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	110	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜	𐀜
038	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	076	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	112	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝	𐀝
039	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	078	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	114	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞	𐀞

which the statistics are even gloomier than for ‘CM1’ because of the very small number of inscriptions, relatively long by ‘CM1’ standards but very short by CM2 standards: only eight inscriptions and some 250 signs in total between them).⁶¹ Even if we abandon a variegated view of Cypro-Minoan writing altogether and see all the ‘CM1’, CM2 and CM3 inscriptions as being written in a single script, it does not solve the problem of the heterogeneity of the inscriptions and the degree of palaeographic variation of individual signs.

The uncertainties related to the overall Cypro-Minoan repertoire of signs (especially for ‘CM1’) make it very difficult to judge the CM0 Enkomi tablet #001. Considering the small number of surviving Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, some relevant signs or sign variants could very well be missing by chance, although we may hope that future finds help to shed further light on the problem. Even the better-attested script Linear A, with some 1,500 documents surviving compared to some 250 in Cypro-Minoan, only relatively recently produced an example of a sign related to Linear B *nwa* (AB 48), which had been missing only by chance from all other known inscriptions.⁶² On the other hand, it seems significant that an inscription containing only 23 signs in total (20 different signs) has so few signs that share obviously comparable shapes with signs attested in other Cypriot inscriptions (only 10 according to the cautious analysis offered in Table 1.2). If these are signs that do not feature in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, then it could point towards ‘CM0’ being a separate writing system,⁶³ while if these 10 are related to other known Cypro-Minoan signs but look quite different from attested examples of them then there is still a gap, even if it is only a palaeographic one and not a systemic one.

We can consider this problem from another viewpoint by asking: how can we tell whether #001 is the only example of the script in which it is written? For example, can we tell whether the other inscriptions of comparable date, #095 and #225, are written in the same script or not? The clay label, #095, contains six syllabograms. As with the tablet #001 above, we can show its sign correspondences in tabular form (Table 1.4).

Judging the label’s signs by superficial similarity, we can note that all of them have reasonably good parallels with ones found in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, which has led Olivier to group it with ‘CM1’, rejecting

⁶¹ See further Steele (2013) 30–5; also Steele (2012) on the diversity of ‘CM1’.

⁶² See Olivier (2013) 8–9.

⁶³ Compare the approach taken in Steele (2014a).

Table 1.4 Sign correspondences of Enkomi label ##095.

Signs of label ##095	Correspondences with the signs of tablet ##001	Correspondences with other known Cypro-Minoan signs	Correspondences with Linear A signs
1	-	097	-
2	03	082	AB 31
3	-	011	-
4	07	005	AB 02
5	-	108	-
6	-	064	-

its inclusion in É. Masson's 'archaic repertoire'.⁶⁴ The only significant differences are found in the fifth and sixth signs, which look quite different from other attested examples of signs 108 (though the label's fifth sign could be explained as a development via 'H > X reduction') and 064 (which does not usually have a central vertical line as in the label's sixth sign⁶⁵). Comparing the label with the tablet #001 alone is less helpful because of the short length of both inscriptions. Two signs look palaeographically very close to ones appearing in the tablet (the second and fourth signs in the label: see Table 1.4) while the other four do not appear in the tablet at all. Considering that the surviving fragment of #001 contains only 20 signs out of a repertoire that must have been considerably larger than the number of signs attested in these inscriptions (related syllabaries of this type typically containing between 50 and 100 signs in total), it is impossible to state with certainty that ##095 was or was not composed in the same script as ##001 – although equally it remains impossible to state the opposite. The length of the inscriptions is simply too short to allow a definitive statement to be made.

Similarly, an examination of the stone cylinder seal ##225 reveals some correspondence with the signs found in the tablet ##001 (Table 1.5).

In this case again two signs may be shared with the tablet, although in the tablet the palaeographic variant of its sign 13 is very different (if it is the same sign at all), while in the cylinder seal it is much closer to what we see in other Cypro-Minoan inscriptions (007). The first two signs of the inscription have no obvious parallel in either Linear A or Cypro-Minoan,

⁶⁴ In Olivier (2007).

⁶⁵ Valério (2017) considers this a variant of sign 037 .

Table 1.5 Sign correspondences of Enkomi seal ##225.

Signs of cylinder seal ##095	Correspondences with the signs of tablet ##001	Correspondences with other known Cypro-Minoan signs	Correspondences with Linear A signs
1	-	-	-
2	-	-	-
3	15	023	AB 37
4	13	007	AB 04

although the second sign does resemble an otherwise unidentified sign found on a pottery fragment of unknown date from Enkomi ascribed to ‘CM1’, ##109: . Ferrara labels the first sign as an example of Cypro-Minoan sign 082 ,⁶⁶ but this looks unlikely because 082 is a frequent sign that never features an extra horizontal stroke at the bottom. However, a much more likely explanation is that the first two ‘signs’ are not signs at all but rather are decorative motifs, very similar to the other motifs that appear next to the human figure on the seal. The first ‘sign’ is quite similar to the two bucrania that appear in the upper half of the seal, one above the horns of consecration and the other to the right of the ingot symbol, and both the bucranium and the X-shaped mark ( ) find numerous comparanda among the decorative repertoire of Late Bronze Age Cypriot seals.⁶⁷ Figure 1.5 shows similar decorative images in a cylinder seal also found at Enkomi but dated later (probably LCII–III). Furthermore, the and of ##225 are slightly larger than the and , and the extends upwards into the field of the other decorative images in the top half. We should almost certainly see this as a two-sign inscription ( ) , with both signs finding good parallels with later Cypro-Minoan signs 023 and 007 (both signs also finding parallels in Linear A and possibly both in the clay tablet ##001). It is again impossible to state with certainty that this very short inscription is not written in the same script as the tablet ##001, but it is important to remember that its context is very different: the two syllabograms are

⁶⁶ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 no. 225.

⁶⁷ For example, see the Common Style cylinder seals illustrated in Webb (2002) 125. An ‘X’-shaped symbol also features commonly in Cretan Hieroglyphic seal inscriptions where it is often interpreted as an indicator of reading direction, a form of punctuation or simply a marker of the presence of writing more generally (though, with the possible exception of *CHIC* #201 and #294, it is almost always smaller in size than accompanying sign sequences); I am indebted to Roeland Decorte for this observation.

integrated into the broader image on the seal, and while they are likely to represent a word (perhaps the name of the seal's owner?), they also in such a context have value as part of the seal's decoration. We do not have to assume that the seal's owner was literate, but it appears that he was intentionally making reference to the technology of writing in his seal, which probably also has ideological significance since writing and literacy at this stage would almost certainly have been somewhat restricted.

An examination of the three earliest inscriptions from Cyprus reveals that they are very difficult to classify epigraphically. Although the basis on which É. Masson assumed that there was a separate 'archaic repertoire' was unreliable, it is impossible to be certain that these three inscriptions are not all written in the same script: we simply have too little evidence to prove the

Figure 1.4 Enkomi cylinder seal ##225 (cut down version of Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.5 Impression of a cylinder seal from Enkomi, LCII–III.

case one way or the other. Nevertheless, we can at least say that the clay tablet #001 is written in a script with a repertoire that looks in some sense different from that of other later Cypro-Minoan inscriptions. This is not because the tablet contains so few of the signs known in other inscriptions, but rather because it contains so many signs (10 out of 20 in total, or 50%) that are not known, or that look very different, in other inscriptions. In such a short inscription, this is remarkable. The other two early inscriptions, #095 and #225, however, are impossible to classify conclusively because of their short length, but their signs appear to conform well to signs known in the later Cypro-Minoan repertoire.

1.5 The Context of the Earliest Cypriot Writing

The previous section (1.4) has demonstrated some of the problems with analysing the writing system used in the earliest phase of writing on Cyprus. The clay tablet #001 is visibly different from other surviving Cypriot inscriptions, but whether that is a difference of script repertoire or a reflection of significant palaeographic variation is just one of the questions surrounding early Cypriot literacy. Do the tablet's peculiar features stem from the earliest process of script adaptation on the island? Are the label #095 and cylinder seal #225 written in exactly the same script as the tablet or not? And if not, does this point towards multiple adaptations of writing in the LCI period? Bringing epigraphic and contextual studies together can help us to think about how to resolve such problems.

As we saw in section 1.3, it is important to consider not only epigraphic features of the three earliest inscriptions but also their object type. Most importantly, the clay tablet #001 gives every appearance of having some relation to written administrative procedures: administration is the primary use of clay tablets in the Late Bronze Age Near East and Aegean, the two repeated signs on the edge of the tablet look like a means of referring to the content without having to read the rest of the inscription (a 'filing system?'), the object was found near evidence of copper smelting (i.e. a potential link with areas used for industry) and the text is ruled in neat lines, a common feature of some Aegean counterparts. Considering that it is broken at the bottom, it is furthermore impossible to be certain that it did not once contain numerals or other features associated with accounting-type documents.

If the tablet does not look exactly like a Linear A or B or cuneiform accounting document, this need not surprise us. LCI Cyprus, for all that it may have been dominated by a single pre-eminent power in this period (or

not, depending on one's interpretation of the archaeological evidence, for which see section 1.2 above), shows no direct signs of centralised economy types based around building complexes, as are well attested in 3rd- and 2nd-millennium BC Mesopotamia, and in Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece during the 2nd millennium. What have survived may well represent smaller-scale accounting, perhaps relating primarily to some overseeing of the copper and metalworking industry in particular centres, especially Enkomi. Otherwise we might expect more extensive signs of archives, as we have for example at Minoan sites such as Hagia Triada and Phaistos; absence of evidence cannot be taken directly as evidence of absence, but the few clay tablets that have survived the Cypriot Late Bronze Age have not come from obvious archival contexts.⁶⁸ Without more evidence, the broader socio-political background of administrative uses of writing is difficult to pin down.

However we understand the broader context of attested writing in LCI, the document types themselves give every reason to assume that literacy at this stage stood in a close relationship with some sort of administrative or economic practice, as argued above (section 1.3). The tablet #001 is particularly liable to be interpreted in this way, especially by Aegean parallels for clay tablet use. Indeed it has even been suggested that when writing was first adopted in Cyprus it was part of an administrative 'package' borrowed from the Aegean in conjunction with ideas such as the use of clay tablets for documentation purposes.⁶⁹ It seems quite unlikely from surviving evidence that a single, lasting archival tradition was ever established in Cyprus, given the great degree of variation in writing practice (e.g. methods of and implements used for incision) throughout the Late Bronze Age.⁷⁰ Instead we should perhaps think in terms of different smaller-scale contexts, probably changing significantly over time and not necessarily with any great degree of continuity, in which documents such as clay tablets may have been used to record administrative or economic information. The clay tablet #001 may constitute one of the earliest pieces of evidence for such a situation.

⁶⁸ The tablet #001 and the CM2 tablets #207–9 were each found in isolated contexts, and although the latter give every appearance of belonging to the same writing tradition, there is no direct evidence for how they were stored. The CM3 tablets #212–15 from Ugarit belong to an archival tradition, but an Ugaritic (and predominantly cuneiform) one that does not reflect Cypriot practice. The best potential evidence for an archival use of Cypro-Minoan clay tablets comes from the new finds (two tablets) from Pyla-Kokkinokremos dated to the 13th century BC (see Karageorghis and Kanta (2012) 110–11; the tablets are to be published by Athanasia Kanta and Massimo Perna).

⁶⁹ Knox (2008).

⁷⁰ Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 211–13.

One significant feature of the tablet is that it has two signs on its right edge. The direction of writing of the first line has been interpreted convincingly as sinistaverse (i.e. right to left, after which the tablet continues boustrophedon, with alternating direction of reading),⁷¹ and so the two signs on the edge repeat the first two signs of the inscription, making them in all likelihood an abbreviated reference to its content as noted above. Furthermore, these two repeated signs on the right edge have somewhat more shallow incisions and so appear to have been written when the clay was drier some time after the inscription was made on the tablet's face, quite possibly by a different writer considering the small but distinct palaeographic differences in the shapes of each sign (on the tablet's face but on the right edge).⁷² This suggests a filing system of some kind. But if the tablet belongs to some sort of 'organized, deposit system', then in what sense can it also represent a 'period of experimentation' with writing, as has been suggested based on its epigraphic peculiarities?⁷³ Indeed, if this object belongs to any formal administrative system, we might assume that it is written in a script that is already well established for this purpose: there is no point in having a filing system unless multiple documents are being produced, perhaps by multiple individuals and to be read by multiple individuals. The possible involvement of a second author in tablet #001 lends some weight to this hypothesis. This strongly implies that the script used in the tablet was sufficiently standardised to be useful in such a tradition, and so we must envisage a situation in which a single writing system was deliberately being promulgated for a specific administrative purpose – however limited and short-lived that situation might have been.

As we saw above (section 1.4), from an epigraphic point of view it is difficult to be certain that the clay label #095 is, or is not, written in the same script as the tablet #001, although it bears close similarities with later Cypro-Minoan. From a contextual point of view, we might suggest that, since it is also an administrative document-type going by Aegean parallels, and given that it originates from the same site in the LCI period, it could belong to the same administrative situation. On the other hand, given that neither object has been dated very precisely, there could be something of a chronological gap between the two, which would give room for changing practices. What is odd is that, in as far as we can assign a date to either item given their difficult excavation histories, the label is likely to be an earlier

⁷¹ Janko (1985).

⁷² See also Duhoux (2009a) 13–14.

⁷³ Quotations from Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 63 and 61 respectively.

item than the tablet. Whether or not we can make a good case for both inscriptions being written in the same script (i.e. a system of writing with a single repertoire of signs), the fact that they look palaeographically quite different cannot be ignored. Do they belong to two different traditions of writing, or do they simply belong to a period or situation in which writing existed but had not yet been subject to processes that would create more standardised palaeographic features (such as scribal training, or the need for one person's 'handwriting' to be easily read by a number of other individuals)? This is not easy to answer.

The steatite cylinder seal ##225 is less problematic because of the object type itself. It may or may not have been used for administrative purposes (remembering that we have very little evidence for what cylinder seals were used for in Late Bronze Age Cyprus), but the object itself is very clearly inspired by the existence of cylinder seals in Near Eastern literate societies. Whether or not we make a case for a specific economic or administrative role in parallel with Near Eastern uses (e.g. the authentication of economic transactions), the inscription itself originates from the context not of the seal's use but of its creation: typologically it would be likely that the inscription refers to the individual to whom the object belongs, and in this sense it could be seen as a personal item, an impression reinforced by the discovery of ##225 in a tomb. Even more importantly, we saw in section 1.4 that it is not very easy to tell the difference, at first sight, between script signs and pictorial symbols in the seal's carved decoration. While it may communicate information (i.e. the seal owner's name, if that is what the written signs reflect), this is not an inscription that exists solely to convey information, and in this regard it can be seen at least in part as a decorative and/or ideological statement on the part of the presumably elite individual to whom it belonged.

We may conclude that the tablet ##001 at least must signify the existence of a well-established (if perhaps restricted) script, used for administrative purposes at LCI Enkomi, while the label ##095 and cylinder seal ##225 are difficult to reconcile with it from an epigraphic point of view. Variations in palaeographic realisations of signs and perhaps even in script repertoire could suggest that writing was being used for ad hoc purposes outside of a centrally standardised context, as pointed out above. However, 'standardised' is simply a retrospective label applied to a tradition that looks in hindsight fairly homogeneous. The tablet ##001 very probably belonged to a context in which writing practices were locally standardised to the extent that some sort of filing system was in place for clay documents, but no further evidence has survived to confirm this. Whether or not the label ##095 and seal ##225

were associated with similar social or administrative contexts is equally impossible to verify.

While the epigraphic/palaeographic variation in evidence in the three surviving LCI documents makes it difficult to assess the nature of script in this period, it does not have to be problematic in terms of assessing the relationship between LCI writing and later Cypro-Minoan literacy. Indeed we might expect social, political and other changes over time to impact on the nature of literacy and the appearance of writing. For example, the partial destruction of the Enkomi Fortress building and the new outlook of the LCII period may represent change in the upper strata of Cypriot society and in the organisation of hierarchical control, which might explain why writing attested in later inscriptions from LCII onwards is strikingly different in appearance from that used in the LCI clay tablet #001.⁷⁴ If we see the script used in that tablet as formally distinct from the later writing system(s) (i.e. composed of a different repertoire of signs), we could even hypothesise that a decisive script reform at some point took place, which could have arisen from political or administrative change impacting on the use of writing.

1.6 External Influences on Cypriot Writing

Now that we have considered the context of the earliest appearances of writing on Cyprus from an internal point of view, we are in a better position to understand when the technology of writing was adopted, by whom and why. This allows us to return more confidently to the question of external stimulus, which, as was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, has been a major preoccupation in the minds of scholars trying to understand Cypro-Minoan for more than 100 years. From where did Cypriots draw their inspiration when they first adopted the technology of writing and made it their own?

1.6.1 Linear A and Cypro-Minoan Writing Systems

One way of trying to answer this question is to look at the nature of the writing system and to assess its affinities with other known writing systems. As we have already seen, the inscriptions from the LCI period cannot provide any definitive answer because they are too short for the necessary extensive epigraphic analysis. The tablet #001 is the longest of the early

⁷⁴ See Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 64–72 on the context of inscriptions from the early LCII period.

inscriptions, but with only 20 different signs we probably have considerably less than half of its script's repertoire attested. At face value it features some signs with shapes superficially very close to Linear A signs that otherwise do not seem to have been adopted on Cyprus (4 out of 20, or 20%; see Table 1.2 above), and more than half of its signs have good Linear A parallels (at least 12 out of 20). The eight signs that do not have obvious Linear A parallels could lead us to assume that it is not a Linear A inscription, but nevertheless a close affiliation with Linear A is evident.

In evaluating Linear A as a source script for writing on Cyprus, another factor we can consider is how many signs are shared by Linear A and the repertoire of Cypro-Minoan as known from later inscriptions. We know already that it is no coincidence that some Cypro-Minoan signs superficially resemble Linear A signs, because by studying related deciphered scripts (Linear B, a direct descendant of Linear A, and the Cypriot Syllabary, a direct descendant of some form of Cypro-Minoan, both used to write Greek) we can observe that some of the shared signs had the same or very similar values. This fact was useful in our discussion of epigraphic features in section 1.4 above (where the sign for *i* is discussed in detail), because it allowed more certainty in identifying related signs in Cypro-Minoan and Linear A. Some other signs may appear superficially close, but it is the ones where we can also match up related phonetic values on the Cretan and the Cypriot sides where we can allow more certainty.

A survey of the Cypro-Minoan signs that have **both** superficially similar correspondences in Linear A **and** matching corresponding values in Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary, however, reveals only a very small number of signs that we can prove are related beyond doubt (see Table 1.6).

Most of the signs shown in the table are unproblematic and share very close correspondences in sign shape as well as value. For some we can observe some small changes in their shape between the different writing systems, for example the 'H > X reduction' resulting in the forms of *a* and *i* in the Cypriot Syllabary, and the more strongly asserted central stroke of the *ti* sign in all scripts after Linear A. For some signs the correspondence in value leaves some uncertainties over the precise nature of the script developments, particularly in the case of the *da* or *ta* sign , and the *ro* or *lo* sign (see below). One of the signs, the *po* sign , also is not attested beyond doubt in Cypro-Minoan itself, but we can deduce from the signs of closely corresponding shape and value in Linear A, Linear B and the Cypriot Syllabary that this sign must be missing only by chance from

Table 1.6 Signs with corresponding shape and value in the Aegean linear scripts.

Linear A	Linear B	Cypro-Minoan	Cypriot Syllabary
AB 01	<i>da</i>	004	<i>ta</i>
AB 02	<i>ro/lo</i>	005	<i>lo</i>
AB 03	<i>pa</i>	006	<i>pa</i>
AB 05	<i>to</i>	008	<i>to</i>
AB 06	<i>na</i>	013	<i>na</i>
AB 08	<i>a</i>	102	<i>a</i>
AB 09	<i>se</i>	044	<i>se</i>
AB 11	<i>po</i>	- missing? -	<i>po</i>
AB 28	<i>i</i>	104	<i>i</i>
AB 31	<i>sa</i>	082	<i>sa</i>
AB 37	<i>ti</i>	023	<i>ti</i>

attested Cypro-Minoan inscriptions.⁷⁵ However, overall these eleven signs provide reliable evidence that the Aegean linear scripts are closely related and that their adaptations always retained *some* sign values from earlier scripts: the corresponding shapes and values cannot be a coincidence.

The *da* or *ta* sign and the *ro* or *lo* sign present us with an interesting problem related to epigraphic developments.⁷⁶ Linear B has two features that look strange for a script that was adapted specifically to write the Greek language: it distinguishes /d/ from /t/ even though it does not distinguish voicing in any other series (i.e. /b/ is not represented separately from /p/, nor /g/ from /k/ nor /g^w/ from /k^w/), and it fails to distinguish between /l/ and /r/ (which are separate phonemes in Greek). We can almost certainly explain this by postulating that Linear B inherited these features from

⁷⁵ See Steele (2013) 71–3 for further discussion. Olivier (2013) 8 and Valério (2016) 170 consider Cypro-Minoan sign 012 to correspond with the *po* signs in other scripts.

⁷⁶ Also discussed in Steele (2014b).

Linear A, presumably because the (still unknown) language written in Linear A had a very different phonemic repertoire from Greek.⁷⁷ The philologist Lejeune suggested that both features might be explained by the ‘Minoan’ language having had a distinction between /l/ and /r/ phonemes that were quite different from the Greek ones: by his reckoning, the /l/ would be close to a [d] sound, and so was heard by Greeks as closer to their /d/ phoneme than their /l/ phoneme, which left them with only one set of signs (for the original Minoan /r/ phoneme) to represent both of their /l/ and /r/ phonemes; however, Lejeune could not explain why a Minoan /l/ sign would come out in the much later Cypriot Syllabary as a /t/ sign, and so postulated that Cypro-Minoan was not a direct descendant of Linear A, but rather Linear A and Cypro-Minoan were both descended from a common ancestor script of which all traces were lost.⁷⁸ This remains the only convincing reason for postulating that Cypro-Minoan and Linear A could be ‘sister’ scripts, but it cannot be confirmed with any degree of certainty; furthermore, it seems unlikely that a script sufficiently widespread and prestigious to be adopted both on Crete and on Cyprus would have been lost completely from the epigraphic record.⁷⁹ It is perhaps possible to explain the phonological peculiarities in another way, for example the Linear B /d/ series arising from what was originally a Minoan dental flap that was closer to /r/ but perceived as closer to a /d/ by Greek speakers (and also perhaps liable to be interpreted as a /t/ in other languages).⁸⁰ A different explanation for distribution of these sign values would make the hypothesis that Linear A and Cypro-Minoan could be ‘sister’ scripts much less attractive, and overall it is more economical to assume that Cypriot writing was borrowed directly from the Cretan Linear A tradition, even though certainty remains elusive.

The signs shown in Table 1.6 must correspond to only a fraction of the overall sign repertoire of any form of Cypro-Minoan, given that related syllabaries always have more than 50 signs and most more than 70.⁸¹ This leaves us with a further question: where do the rest of the attested Cypro-

⁷⁷ On the validity of applying Linear B values to Linear A signs, see Steele and Meißner (2017).

⁷⁸ M. Lejeune (1958) 327.

⁷⁹ This has however been argued by Sherratt (2013), who suggests a now lost ancestor script originating from a different geographical area such as Anatolia.

⁸⁰ I am indebted to Rupert Thompson for the suggestion. Other ways of explaining these features have also been suggested; see for example Valério (2016) 198–215 and 288–99 (that Linear A may not have been entirely lacking in voiced/voiceless contrasts in the stops), or Davis (2014) 204–14 (that Linear A possessed a dental fricative).

⁸¹ We can also observe that Cypro-Minoan did not inherit the system of ideograms known in Linear A, perhaps because it was encountered outside of the bureaucratic sphere to which those ideograms were restricted.

Minoan signs come from? Perhaps some Cypro-Minoan signs are related to Linear A ones but their shapes have been so altered over time that this is difficult to confirm. Valério's research, based on close attention to palaeographic variation in both writing systems, suggests that we may be able to reconstruct more links between Linear A and Cypro-Minoan signs, leading him cautiously to posit the values of some 56 signs (although with varying degrees of confidence in different cases; discussed in more detail in section 1.4 above).⁸² On the other hand, it is possible and indeed likely that the development of writing on Cyprus involved a degree of innovation, whether in terms of the overall repertoire of signs or the shapes of the signs, or both.⁸³ Whatever the process of adaptation, the end result of the adoption of literacy on Cyprus was a writing system that was characteristically Cypriot and could not be confused with similar scripts in other areas. This began a link between Cypriot writing and Cypriot identity that was to last until the abolition of the city kingdoms around the end of the 4th century BC and probably even later, as we will see in the other chapters of this book.

1.6.2 Multiple External Influences

The previous section (1.6.1) has shown that we can confidently ascribe the origin of Cypriot writing to the Aegean, with the initial adoption of writing almost certainly based directly on Linear A. But why did Cyprus borrow an Aegean writing system? At least two alternative possibilities could be envisaged. The first is that Cypriots could have borrowed cuneiform: Cyprus is located very near to the Levantine coast, tucked under the Anatolian peninsula a long way to the east of the Aegean, and so is considerably closer to the civilisations of the Near East than it is to Crete. Admittedly, some small traces of Linear A have been found as far east as Israel, and so Cypriots might have had opportunities to encounter literate Cretans nearby as well as through the mechanism of direct trade with Crete.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the choice of an Aegean script over the nearby well-developed cuneiform writing systems is a curious one, and all the more so given that Cypriots at this time were evidently aware of literate or para-literate Near Eastern traditions such as seal usage.⁸⁵

⁸² Valério (2016) esp. 301 (Table 3.126).

⁸³ Bombardieri and Jasink (2010) have suggested influence from the contemporary decorative repertoire.

⁸⁴ See Finkelberg, Uchitel and Ussishkin (1996) and Oren et al. (1996) for the finds from Lachish and Tel Haror in Israel.

⁸⁵ See Palaima (1989b).

The second possible scenario is that Cypriots could have invented their own script *ab initio*, although this may sound a less likely option given the proximity of other literate societies in possession of writing systems that could be borrowed easily. However, the *ab initio* creation of distinctive writing systems within an already literate environment is not unknown, making this at the least a plausible counterfactual suggestion. In fact, just such a development took place in nearby Anatolia in the Bronze Age with the creation of the script known as Anatolian Hieroglyphic (or ‘Hieroglyphic Luwian’ after the primary language written in it). The invention of this writing system is usually ascribed to the period of the Hittite empire, at which time a form of cuneiform (developed from Akkadian cuneiform) was used to write the Anatolian language Hittite.⁸⁶ At the same time, however, a more pictorial-looking system that we label as hieroglyphic (bearing no relation to other Mediterranean ‘hieroglyphic’ systems such as the Egyptian or Cretan) began to be used within the same context where cuneiform was being used but for different types of texts: e.g. where cuneiform was used for record-keeping on clay tablets and recorded the Hittite language, the hieroglyphic script was used for monuments on stone and came to be associated primarily with a related Anatolian language, Luwian.⁸⁷ It has been suggested that it was the bilingual setting that drove the creation of the hieroglyphic script,⁸⁸ effectively giving a visible manifestation to one local language. For this reason the impetus to write in the hieroglyphic script has been linked with the promotion of local identities.⁸⁹ That link with identity must play a significant role in the continued use of the hieroglyphic writing system after the fall of the Hittite empire and into the 1st millennium BC, when it became the tool of the Neo-Hittite states. The relationship between writing systems and identity is something to which we will return in relation to Cypriot writing shortly.

While there is little point in considering why Cypriots did not invent a new script *ab initio*, their decision to shun cuneiform, a script they were clearly to some extent aware of, deserves some explanation. Cuneiform was the principal script of several nearby civilisations, and following its initial development from tokens and primitive accounting documents, it was adapted for multiple languages to create different forms of cuneiform: there

⁸⁶ However, for a different view, seeing the script as created much earlier (the late 3rd or early 2nd millennium BC), see Waal (2012).

⁸⁷ On the range of uses of the hieroglyphic script and the possibility that it was used in wooden documents, see Waal (2011). On the Luwian language and its sociolinguistic setting, see Yakubovich (2010).

⁸⁸ Yakubovich (2008).

⁸⁹ E.g. Payne (2008). See also Payne (2015) more generally on the writing system.

are several variants including Sumerian, Babylonian, Akkadian and Hittite, all of which are predominantly syllabic systems with logographic components, as well as the later Ugaritic cuneiform consonantal alphabet. Just as we have observed for the Aegean scripts, cuneiform underwent several processes of adaptation for these different languages and different societies and administrations. The longstanding cuneiform tradition stretched back into the 3rd millennium BC, and was the tool of well-developed Near Eastern economies long before Cyprus underwent its transformation from a village-based to a town-centred, urbanised settlement pattern with its concomitant burgeoning of the economy and related social stratification. When Cyprus became ready to adopt literacy, why did it not look to these nearby literate societies for the technology of writing?

During the Late Bronze Age, there is much evidence to suggest that Cypriots knew of cuneiform, and some may have been able to write it. By about the LCII period (i.e. around the 14th century BC, after the initial Cypriot adoption of writing) we know from the Amarna Letters, as well as the Hattusha archive and later archives at Ugarit (13th century BC), that Akkadian cuneiform was sufficiently prestigious to be adopted as the script of official diplomatic correspondence between the great powers of the eastern Mediterranean: particularly Egypt, Assyria, Hatti and Ugarit, and also notably Cyprus itself. These diplomatic records include letters sent by the king of Alashiya, a toponym widely accepted to correspond to Cyprus, to the kings of other civilisations.⁹⁰ Petrographic analysis on at least one tablet from Ugarit thought to pertain to Alashiya has identified the probable provenance of the object as Cypriot, which further adds to the impression that Cyprus was playing an active part in international diplomacy via the mechanism of cuneiform letters.⁹¹ It seems quite likely that there were at least some individuals in Cyprus who were sufficiently trained in writing Akkadian in cuneiform to have written these documents, although the possible employment of trained scribes from another location cannot be ruled out completely.

At Ugarit, on the coast of northern Syria facing nearby Cyprus, cuneiform was just one of the scripts in use; in fact, Cypro-Minoan is also attested there in the 13th century BC (the 'CM3' documents, particularly the tablets ##212–15).⁹² The Alashiyan diplomatic documents from Ugarit mentioned

⁹⁰ On the Amarna letters see Moran (1992). On the Alashiya correspondence from Ugarit, see Malbran-Labat (1999).

⁹¹ See Goren et al. (2003) esp. 238–40.

⁹² On the context of Cypriot writing at Ugarit, see Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 132–45.

above also belong to the 13th century and were found in the residence of Urtenu, among an archive of around 500 tablets; two Cypro-Minoan inscriptions were found in the same residence (##210–11), clay labels preserving two and three signs respectively.⁹³ Similarly the Cypro-Minoan tablet ##212 was found in a library that also included texts in both Akkadian and Ugaritic cuneiform. The evidence strongly suggests that by this period Cypro-Minoan was coming into contact with cuneiform, and Ugarit is a location where Cypriots could have encountered cuneiform even earlier, since cuneiform is first attested at the site by at least the 15th century BC. In fact, as a cosmopolitan city where writing flourished during the Late Bronze Age, Ugarit became home to multiple writing systems (Cypro-Minoan, Egyptian hieroglyphics and multiple forms of cuneiform including an Ugaritic ‘alphabetic’ variant are attested) and multiple languages (at least Babylonian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Hittite, Canaanite, Hurrian and the language underlying the Cypro-Minoan inscriptions, as well as some late examples of Sumerian after the language had probably already died out).⁹⁴ In this milieu, whatever language Cypriots were speaking it would have been only one among many.

Although it is more difficult to find direct evidence for Cypriots encountering cuneiform in the LCI period, the proximity of the Near East and its longstanding writing traditions suggest that it would have been at least theoretically possible for Cypriots to adopt the technology from that direction. Cypriots certainly knew of the Near Eastern usage of cylinder seals, which were strongly associated with literate practices in the Near East and in Cyprus may have had similar literate associations (see section 1.3 above). The fact that they were sometimes inscribed with Cypro-Minoan signs could also suggest this, and there is even one example of a reused Babylonian seal with a cuneiform inscription that was later incised with a short Cypro-Minoan text (##194). We certainly cannot argue that Cypriots were not aware of cuneiform, whether or not they were well acquainted with its wide range of uses in Near Eastern administrative systems.

Palaima has suggested that cuneiform was overlooked by Cypriots because of its large and complex repertoire of signs that made it a specialised tool of professional scribes in the Near East.⁹⁵ This is difficult to substantiate,

⁹³ A photograph of ##211, which was listed in Olivier (2007) but not analysed because at the time it remained unpublished, appears in Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 2 254 (no. 211).

⁹⁴ See Schaeffer (1939) 37–9 and (1956).

⁹⁵ Palaima (1989a) 161.

however: how complex is too complex? A counter-argument might be that cuneiform was and had already been adopted by multiple societies, and that some incarnations show much more streamlined systems (e.g. the Ugaritic consonantal alphabet and even the later Old Persian semi-syllabic system). Indeed, Cypriots seem not to have borrowed the Linear A system wholesale, but rather to have adopted the core of syllabic signs and ignored the ideographic ones (if they were aware of them at all considering that they were predominantly used in quite restricted administrative contexts⁹⁶). On the other hand, some scholars (including Palaima himself) have suggested more convincingly that the choice of an Aegean script is related rather to the creation and maintenance of a unique and distinctive Cypriot identity.⁹⁷

One striking aspect of writing in Late Bronze Age Cyprus is the apparently mixed nature of influences on writing, with a script that seems to be based directly on an Aegean model, while the objects being inscribed are sometimes inspired by Near Eastern and sometimes by Aegean types. In the earliest stages of Cypriot literacy, as far as we can tell from the surviving LCI inscriptions, there seems to be a significant debt to Aegean clay document types, while on the other hand the new fashion for cylinder seals clearly looks towards the Near East for its primary inspiration. Chapter 3 will treat in more detail the range of inscribed items in use during the Late Bronze Age, where it will become evident that the mixture of Aegean and Near Eastern influences on Cypriot writing were not confined to the earliest period of literacy alone. What is striking, however, is that over time it appears that Cypriots developed their own distinct traditions, most evident in the use of clay cylinders (which are not very close in type to cylindrical and conical clay texts inscribed in cuneiform in the Near East and unparalleled in the Aegean) and especially the small, spherical clay balls that are almost completely unknown outside of Cyprus (see Chapter 3, section 3.2.3 on the clay balls and section 3.2.4 on the range of document types in use). Cyprus was not simply a passive agent in Mediterranean literacy, and as well as the element of innovation evident in the creation of new document types, we can also observe that the appearance of Cypro-Minoan at Ugarit shows Cypriot writing having some influence outside of the island. This may also apply to two Cypriot-looking clay balls found at Ugarit that were inscribed not in Cypro-Minoan but in cuneiform.

Cypriots were certainly contributing to an epigraphic environment during the Late Bronze Age that was quite at home in a setting so close to

⁹⁶ See Steele (2017).

⁹⁷ Palaima (1989a) 162, Ferrara (2012/13) vol. 1 63.

the Near East and yet not far from the Aegean, and linked to both by commercial and maritime connections. The mixed influences on writing indicate what are probably conscious choices on the part of Cypriots to create their own unique written tradition, and this is particularly something that developed over time and became more obvious in the LCII and LCIII periods. Nevertheless, among the three earliest Cypro-Minoan inscriptions of LCI, this mixture is already apparent and shows the early stage of a phenomenon that was to last more than a millennium.