

Interkulturalität in der Alten Welt

Vorderasien, Hellas, Ägypten
und die vielfältigen Ebenen des Kontakts

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The stele of Sargon II of Assyria at Kition: A focus for an emerging Cypriot identity?

Karen Radner, London

The Kition stele is the most western Assyrian monument presently known to us and in all likelihood this is not just due to archaeological chance: as we shall see, it was intended to mark the extreme edge of the “officially existing world” from the viewpoint of the king of Assyria. Inscribed with an Akkadian cuneiform inscription but situated in a polyglot environment where Eteocypriot, Greek and Phoenician were spoken and also written it is a fine example of an epigraphic document in multilingual context¹.

In this paper, I will argue that, locally and quite unintended by the Assyrian king who commissioned its erection, this monument came to acquire meaning as a monument commemorating a joint and prestigious undertaking of several local Cypriot rulers and as such may have played a role in the emergence of a pan-Cypriot identity, transcending the political boundaries of city-states. Yet before we consider its meaning and impact – intended or otherwise – on the local audience, we will establish the place and date of its erection, incorporating the recent advances in the editorial progress of the Assyrian inscription corpus.

The discovery of an Assyrian stele at Kition

In 1844, a large basalt stele (fig. 1) was discovered in the debris of the medieval ruins to the west of the old harbour of Kition, situated between the modern settlement of Larnaka and its port²; this corresponds to the site of Bamboula³ where more

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was given at the London Ancient History seminar series “Multiple voices: Re-examining epigraphic documents in multilingual contexts” in October 2007 and I wish to thank the participants and especially my respondent Thomas Kiely for their comments.
- 2 During investigations undertaken by the German archaeologist Ludwig Roß (1846, 69-70: “Assyrisches Basrelief auf Cypern”).
- 3 Yon 1994, 93. There seems to be no reason to suggest that the stela was found at Idalion as already Schrader (1882, 4), on the basis of the documentation kept in the Berlin Museum, had pointed out when discussing the “Fundort, als welcher den Engländern aus einem noch nicht aufgeklärten Grunde Idalium auf Cypern, in der Mitte der Insel, gilt” (Börker-Klähn 1982, 202-203 n. 1, when claiming that Schrader reports Idalion as the stele’s findspot, is wrong). This confusion is in evidence even in rather recent works such as Reyes 1994, 51.

recent archaeological work, most importantly the French excavations conducted since 1976, brought to light the ancient Phoenician settlement, including the temple of Ashtarte (34° 55' N, 33° 37' E).



Fig. 1

To the modern scholar, the monument's shape, decoration and inscription instantly identify it as a Neo-Assyrian royal stele, and the popularity of all things Assyrian in Europe in the 1840s, at a time when the activities of British and French explorers in Mossul, Nimrud and Khorsabad were closely followed by an interested international audience and the decorated stone slabs from the Assyrian royal palaces were eagerly expected by the British Museum and the Louvre, guaranteed that the

nature of the stele was immediately recognized also when it was first discovered⁴. The monument was purchased in 1846 by the Berlin Museum (inventory number VA 968), keen to start an Assyrian collection of its own: the stele has been part of its permanent exhibition ever since while a replica of the stele is on display in the Archaeological Museum of Larnaka. Had the monument remained in Cyprus it probably would be as complete as it was when found, yet in order to facilitate the shipping of the heavy stone to Berlin, a slab with a thickness of c. 13 cm was cut off its back⁵.

The monument shares the characteristic shape of the Neo-Assyrian steles: it is a massive oblong stone block with a rounded top of a height of 2.09 m and a rectangular cross-section: front length = 68 cm, side length = 45.5 cm (now 32 / 33 cm)⁶. When the reverse of the stele was sawn off, this caused damages to the cuneiform inscription in 167 lines which cover the front and the sides of the monument⁷: the end of all 65 lines inscribed on its right hand side (column II) and the initial characters of the 74 lines engraved on its left hand side (column III) are now lost; the whereabouts of the missing slab are unknown. Otherwise, the text written on the sides is well preserved, in contrast to the rather damaged 28 lines which are inscribed over the lower part of the figure of the Assyrian king (column I). The king is identified by the inscription as Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE). Dressed in the typical Assyrian royal attire – the long fringed robe and the headdress reserved exclusively for the ruler – Sargon is shown in profile and faces to the right, holding a mace in his left hand while raising his right hand in prayer. Eight symbols representing Assyrian gods are engraved in the empty space in front of the king's head: from the left to the right and from top to bottom, these are the horned crown of Assyria's supreme god Aššur; the crescent of the moon god Sin; the star of Ištar, goddess of sexuality and war; the lightening fork of the storm god Adad; the spade of Marduk, lord of Babylon; the writing stylus of Nabû, patron deity of the scribal arts; the seven dots representing the divine Seven (Sebeti); and the winged sun disc of the sun god Šamaš. The inscription on the front is an invocation of the very same deities. According to the usual Assyrian conventions, it is written in the archaic Babylonian dialect reserved for literary texts; also, as Sargon's other monumental inscriptions, e.g. those engraved on the stone decoration at his new residence city Dūr-Šarrukīn (Khorsabad), the cuneiform script used for the stele combines the classic signs of the Neo-Assyrian ductus with archaizing characters modelled after ancient Babylonian monumental inscriptions.

4 See Yon 1994, 92-95 and Yon 1995, 162-165 on the reactions in the contemporary popular media.

5 Börker-Klähn 1982, 202-203 n. 2.

6 Schrader 1882, 5; Börker-Klähn 1982, 202. Yon 1994, 93 repeats the incorrect measurements of a Parisian newspaper article published in 1847 which must be corrected.

7 Copy: Messerschmidt / Ungnad 1907, no. 71. The last edition was presented by Malbran-Labat 2004 (with earlier literature).

Where was the Assyrian stele made?

The monument is fashioned out of the very dense and heavy black basalt stone (gabro)⁸ locally available on Cyprus in the Troodos massif⁹, and we may therefore, in my opinion, safely assume that the stele was made in Cyprus¹⁰; note that the famous Black Stone representing the deity in the temple of the goddess of Paphos¹¹ (now on display in the museum of Kouklia) seems to consist of the same material.

Nevertheless, the idea that the stele was transported to Cyprus from the mainland has had many advocates¹². Yet there is no reason for doubting the possibility that an Assyrian stone mason could be sent to Cyprus: rock reliefs are the formal equivalent of the free-standing steles¹³, without any distinction made in the Assyrian terminology (*šalmu šarri* “image of the king” or *šalmu šarrūti* “image of kingship”)¹⁴, and the reliefs and inscriptions engraved on various rock faces in Turkey, Iraq and Iran were quite obviously fashioned by Assyrian craftsmen, working far away from their home¹⁵. That Ancient Near Eastern rulers would routinely dispatch their artisans abroad to create their royal monuments is clear also from the letter from Merneptah of Egypt (19th Dynasty, late 13th century BCE) in reply to the request of the king of Ugarit (who calls himself “the servant of the king, the Son of Re” despite his vassalage to the Hittite king) to send Egyptian sculptors to Ugarit to set up the pharaoh’s statue in the Ba’al temple¹⁶.

Where was the Assyrian stele set up?

The circumstances of the recovery of Sargon’s stele in a secondary position offer little certainty in regard to its original location, beyond the general area of Kition. We are therefore dependent on the information given in the inscription, yet the relevant passage was unfortunately damaged when the back of the stele was removed: The most likely restoration, in my opinion, is: “I erected (the stele) [facing Mount] Ba’al-harri, a mountain [towering above the country of Adnana] (III 52-53)¹⁷.”

8 Classified by J. Roth (*apud* Schrader 1882, 5) and cf. Myres 1940-1945, 100-101.

9 For a distribution map see Moores / Vine 1971, 445 fig. 1.

10 As already argued by Schrader 1882, 5.

11 On the Queen of Paphos see Bazemore 2002, 162-163.

12 Hawkins 2004, 163, for example, maintains that the monument was “sent to the island” without specifying his reasons for this assumption while Yon 1995, 165 writes: “Doit-on penser qu’un sculpteur assyrien est venu travailler à Chypre? Ou bien, si la provenance chypriote du matériau n’est pas incontestable, s’agit-il d’une stèle faite en Assyrie et destinée à être transportée à Chypre?”

13 Reade 1981, 146.

14 Winter 1997, 364-366; Radner 2005, 114-115.

15 For references see Börker-Klähn 1982, 177-224.

16 For the letter RS 88.2158 see Lackenbacher 1995 and Singer 2000, 22.

17 ⁵² [*ina* ZAG KUR].*Ba-il-har-ri* KUR-*i* ⁵³ [*ša ina r*]e-eš KUR.*Ad-na-na ul-ziz*. The restoration of l. 53 follows Tadmor 1996, 287 (accepted also by Na’aman 1998 and Na’aman 2001). For the translation of *ina rēš Adnana* as “above Adnana” compare the parallel Neo-Assyrian attestations collected in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* R (1999) 282-283 s.v. *rēšu* 3e.

Hayim Tadmor¹⁸ suggested to interpret the mountain's name as West-Semitic *bl hr* "lord of the mountain". This is a characteristic type of mountain names, very well attested in the first millennium Levant: compare the mountain ranges Ba'al-zaphon, Ba'al-hazor, Ba'al-hermon and Ba'al-perazim¹⁹. It is conceivable that also Mount Ba'al-harri is a mountain on the mainland, as Edward Lipinski assumes who advocates an identification with Rās aš-Šaqqā, a north-western spur of the Lebanon range²⁰. But I would maintain that Mount Ba'al-harri is most likely to be found on Cyprus and in the proximity of Kition. In the area of Kition itself, the most suitable elevation for identification with Ba'al-harri is the mountain range around Mount Stavrovouni (34° 35' N, 33° 26' E; altitude: 689 m), situated to the northeast of Kition and overlooking the entire coastal plain, with excellent views of the Lebanese coast on a clear day. Yet whether we must therefore assume that the stele was originally erected atop of this peak and only subsequently moved to Kition, as e.g. Nadav Na'aman likes to think²¹, remains open, as all we can possibly know from the broken passage is that the stele's location was meant to provide a link with Mount Ba'al-harri: this connection could just as easily have been achieved by placing the stele opposite of the mountain peak which is visible from Kition itself. In my opinion, the restoration *ina pūt* "facing; opposite of" is far more likely than *ēli* "on top of", especially if we bear in mind that the substantial weight and size of the stele strongly favour the assumption that it was found in relative proximity to its original location²².

When was the stele set up?

The stele bears, as all inscribed Assyrian steles do, a cuneiform inscription the contents of which may be summed up like this:

§ 1 = I 1-28: Invocation of Aššur, Sin, Šamaš, Adad, Marduk, Nabû, Ištar, Sebeti.

18 Tadmor 1996.

19 Ba'al-hazor: Na'aman 1999a; Ba'al-hermon: Na'aman 1999b; Ba'al-perazim: Na'aman 1999c; Ba'al-zaphon: Niehr 1999. See also in general Na'aman 1999d.

20 Lipinski 2004, 29-30; but note that the identification of this mountain with Hor hā-har in Numbers 34, 7-8, which goes back to Aharoni 1967, 67, is not universally accepted, especially and most importantly as it is not at all clear that the Biblical reference is indeed to a mountain.

21 Na'aman 1998, 240, restoring line 52 to [*e-li* KUR].*Ba-il-har-ri* "[on Mount] Ba'al-harri": "It is thus clear that at later time, the stele was removed from its original location to the city of Kition, where it was discovered."

22 With the same argument but another reading of the broken passage, Lipinski 2004, 51-52 argues that the monument "was probably set up '[in the House of the Baal of Mount Hor [and the god]s of the land of (I)adnana', [*ina Ē^d*]Ba-il Hur-ri KUR-i [*u* DINGIR.M]EŠ KUR.Ad-nana", an otherwise unattested shrine which he assumes at the site of Bamboula. The main argument against this restoration is that there are no parallels for a temple that would be described as the shrine of an unspecified number of gods: in the Mesopotamian view, a temple has one owner and is identified by his or her name (although it can of course house additional deities).

- § 2 = II 1-8: Introduction of Sargon, with royal titles and as the protégé of the gods.
- § 3 = II 9-65: Summary of military successes: the subjugation of the Babylonian cities (9-21); the rule over all people between the Upper Sea and the Lower Sea (22-27); the victories against Elam, in Iran and in Hatti (27-38); the humiliation of Urzana of Mušāšir and Rusa of Urarṭu (39-50); the defeat of Hamath (51-65).
- § 4 = III 1-22: Sargon as the guardian of the Marduk temple at Babylon.
- § 5 = III 23-42: The delegations from Dilmun and Adnana.
- § 6 = III 43-53: The erection of the monument in a connection with Mount Ba'al-harri.
- § 7 = III 54-61: Instructions for future kings to safeguard the monument.
- § 8 = III 62-74: Curses against those who harm it.

As the Kition stele specifically mentions Sargon's third year as king of Babylon (III 21), that is 707 BCE, a first date *post quem* for the erection of the stele in Cyprus is provided, but whether we must assume that the stele was set up in that very year²³ or sometimes later in the remaining years of Sargon's reign²⁴ cannot be securely established from that text alone.

Yet Sargon's activities are of course documented in other inscriptions as well, and the best chronological skeleton for his reign is provided by what we today term his annals, reports of his military campaigns given in the form of yearly accounts. From a passage of the Khorsabad Annals, which was only recently restored by Nadav Na'aman²⁵, we know that sometimes between 709 and 707 BCE Sargon came to the aid of his ally Šilṭa of Tyre and assisted him in regaining control over his vassals, the seven kings of Ya' on the island of Adnana. We also know that Sargon spent the year 708 BCE in Babylon²⁶ and it was specifically there that the Cypriot delegation was sent to meet him; this mission was certainly a direct result of the military intervention in aid of Tyre which therefore preceded it, dating either to 709 or 708 BCE. Consequently, we would gain 708 BCE, the date of the Cypriot delegation to Babylon, as another date *post quem* for the erection of the stele; in conjunction with the fact that Sargon's third regnal year on the throne of Babylon is mentioned, it is extremely likely that the stele was indeed erected in that very year: 707 BCE.

As representations of the king's self²⁷, Assyrian royal images and inscriptions could not be commissioned without the king's explicit order. For Sargon's reign, we have a good illustration of this principle in the shape of a letter from the governor of Arrapha to his king: "Šamaš-bēlu-ušur (i.e. governor of Dēr) wrote to me from Dēr:

23 As is assumed by e.g. Yon 1994, 91.

24 As is assumed by e.g. Reyes 1994, 52.

25 Na'aman 1998, 242-244; see also Na'aman 2001, 359-360.

26 Fuchs 1994, 382.

27 Radner 2005, 22-23, 114-155.

‘There are no inscriptions. Are we indeed not to place any (inscriptions) in the walls of the temple?’ I am now writing to the king, my lord: may they write just one inscription (and) send it to me, so that they may write the remaining (inscriptions) accordingly (and) place (them) in the temple’s walls”²⁸. The royal command to have a monument set up on Cyprus was in all probability directly inspired by the meeting with the Cypriot delegates, and not by the successful military intervention on Cyprus, in which Sargon was not personally involved²⁹. Bearing in mind the example of the king of Ugarit who, as we have already discussed³⁰, actively lobbied to have Merneptah of Egypt send his sculptors to create a statue of the pharaoh for the Ba‘al temple in Ugarit, the erection of a monument representing a foreign ruler need not necessarily be seen as an imposition forced onto the locals, but as a symbol of a close and friendly relationship.

An Assyrian conquest of Cyprus?

Nevertheless, the creation of the stele was also a result of the military assistance given to Šilṭa king of Tyre. Yet this ruler is not at all mentioned in the inscription of Sargon’s Kition stele; this is not surprising as the stele celebrates, after all, the Assyrian ruler as the king of the world: “King of the universe, king of Assyria, governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four corners (of the world)” (II 2-3). But is it reasonable to talk of an Assyrian conquest of Cyprus³¹? Certainly not.

Cyprus, or at least that part of the island known to the Assyrians as Ya³², was at that time dominated (to use a deliberately vague term) by the Phoenician kingdom of Tyre which, according to the Assyrian testimony, treated the local city-states as its vassals. Sometimes in the 9th century, after entertaining close contacts with Cyprus for at least two centuries (as did other Phoenician states), Tyre had established a formal colony on the island at Kition in order to gain sole control over the rich cop-

28 Fuchs / Parpola 2001, no. 4: 17-Rs. 6: ^{1d}UTU-EN-PAP TA* URU.De-ri i-sap-ra ma-a muš-ša-ra-ni-i la-áš-šú ina ŠÁ É.SIG₄.MEŠ ša É-DINGIR la niš-kun ú-ma-a a-na LUGAL be-lí-ia a-sap-ra 1-en muš-ša-ru-u liš-ṭu-ru lu-še-bil-u-ni ina pi-it-ti re-hu-ti liš-ṭu-ru ina ŠÁ-bi É.SIG₄.MEŠ ša É-DINGIR liš-ku-nu.

29 This is not at all unusual. While the contemporary conventions of the Assyrian royal inscriptions dictate that the king is always portrayed as leading the army personally, in reality this task often needed to be delegated to the most senior officials, especially as the Assyrian forces were frequently active in several distinct regions at the same time. For the reign of Sargon, it can be demonstrated that in the years 711 BCE and 720 BCE the king led one part of the army while another was under the command of his officers and in action elsewhere; see Na‘aman 2007, 168-169.

30 See fn. 16.

31 As suggested by Na‘aman 2001 or automatically assumed by Burkert 2004, 7 or Bazemore 2002, 198: “In 709 B.C. Cyprus fell under Assyrian rule, under which it stayed, more or less closely bound, until the end of the seventh century, when the Egyptians gained control of the island.”

32 Probably a West-Semitic designation meaning “the island”. The term is only used in Sargon’s inscriptions, not in the later Assyrian texts.

per deposits³³. The Phoenician colony was surrounded by a network of small city-states ruled by kings, known in Eteocypriot as *pa-si-le-wo-se* and in Greek as *basileus*, a term derived from Mycenaean *qa-si-re-u*³⁴. While the languages used by the natives of Cyprus were Eteocypriot³⁵ and Greek I would agree with A.T. Reyes that it is unnecessary to assume the existence of two separate population groups: he proposes to simply speak of “Cypriots”³⁶, and we will use the term accordingly to designate all native inhabitants of Cyprus except for the Phoenician colonists. Yet following the Assyrian terminology, in evidence from the reign of Sargon onwards, we should perhaps refer to the locals as Adnanaeans. Sargon’s inscriptions (see below) stress that the name of the island, Adnana (also written Yadnana < Ya’ Adnana “island of Adnana”), was entirely unknown to his predecessors. Indeed, Adnana is not the designation used in the Bronze Age when the island was known as Alašiya in the Near East³⁷. The Iron Age name of Cyprus may be linked to the *dnn* (commonly but hypothetically vocalized as “Denyen”), one of the so-called Sea Peoples mentioned in the 12th century BCE in the inscriptions of Ramesses III’s mortuary temple at Thebes and in Papyrus Harris³⁸, and the *dnnym* inhabiting Cilicia in the 8th century BCE according to the Karatepe inscription³⁹, and the assumption that there is also a link with the Homeric term Danaoi would seem probable. The presence and political authority of non-Phoenician Cypriots / Adnanaeans / Danaeans is indicated also by the Assyrian sources of the 7th century, when at least seven of the ten rulers of Adnana mentioned in the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon (r. 680-669 BCE) and Assurbanipal (668-c. 630 BCE) have Greek names: Admetos of Tamassos, Akestor of Idalion, Buthytes of “Nuria” (Marion?⁴⁰), Damasos of Kourion, Etewardros of Paphos, Onasagoras of Ledrai, and Philagoras of Chytroi⁴¹ (cf. fig. 2).

33 Aubet 1993, 42.

34 Iacovou 2006. In the Assyrian texts, this designation is simply translated as *šarru* “king”.

35 The term Eteocypriot (“true Cypriot”) is modern and used as a matter of convention despite concerns regarding its appropriateness to characterize the language; see Petit 1999, 117 who opts for Amathusian, after the city of Amathus from where most of the evidence for it originates.

36 Reyes 1994, 18.

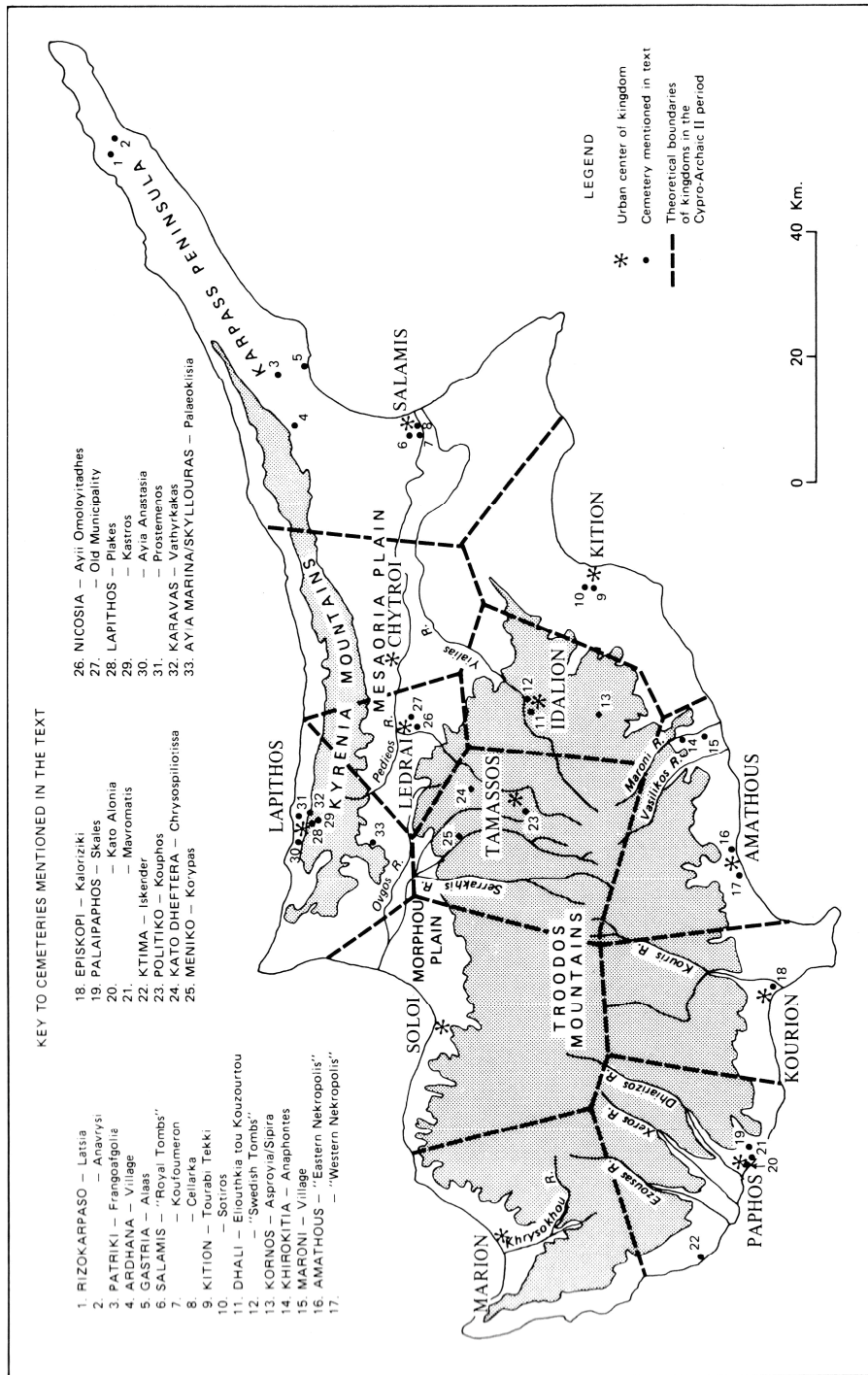
37 Charpin 1990.

38 Kuhrt 1995, 387-390.

39 Çambel 1998.

40 The identification of Nuria is prolematic; the two sites that are usually considered are Amathus and Marion, see Reyes 1997, 66 for a summary of the arguments.

41 Analysed by Lipinski 1991 (correct Etewanthros to Etewardros on p. 60); cf. also Reyes 1997, 66 (on Bouthutes). Rupp 1998, in his provocatively named study “The Seven Kings of the Land of Ia’, a District of Ia-ad-na-na: Achaean Bluebloods, Cypriot Parvenus or Both?”, does not consider this aspect at all.



According to Sargon's inscriptions, Šilṭa king of Tyre called on the Assyrian army to assist in disciplining his rebellious vassals, the rulers of Ya' in Adnana. It was Assyria's duty towards its allies to respond to a call of arms (and of course *vice versa*), and there are several good examples for the Assyrian army's intervention in a conflict involving an ally⁴². Accordingly, Sargon had already given military assistance to Tyre some years earlier, in 715 BCE when its maritime network was threatened by Ionian pirates⁴³. But although Assyria's intervention in aid of Tyre may well have been instrumental in restoring Tyre's control over the Cypriot kingdoms, it is extremely unlikely to have changed the existing set-up, with Tyre claiming control over the Cypriot kingdoms, at least at that time. There is no basis for the assumption that the Assyrians subsequently extracted any kind of regular taxation from Cyprus: what A.T. Reyes⁴⁴ assumes to be a reference to *šibtu* taxes is in reality part of the passage referring to Sargon's ancestors' hold over Assyria (*ši-bit KUR.Aš-šur*, III 32). As long as Tyre, where an Assyrian trustee (*qēpu*) was stationed at the king's court⁴⁵, was able to guarantee the loyalty of also its vassals on Cyprus there is very little reason to expect any kind of local Assyrian representation on the island itself, or even a direct line of communications. For to reach the island independently was beyond the powers of Assyria which did not command a navy⁴⁶: while the king of Tyre was eager to involve Assyrian soldiers in settling the conflict with his Cypriot vassals, the means of transport was naturally the Tyrian fleet which offered the only way to cross the sea; according to the Assyrian inscriptions, including the Kition stele, Cyprus is situated in the sea "in a distance of seven days" (see below) and this may be nothing but a fanciful designation for "a long distance away" from the heart of Assyria. It cannot be understood as the distance from the Levantine coast to Cyprus: Tyre and Kition are separated by about 110 sea miles, a distance which can be covered in a voyage of two days; yet one must point out that with difficult wind conditions a sailing boat might indeed need considerably longer to cover this distance⁴⁷.

What is described in Sargon's annals, following the conventions of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions, as an Assyrian campaign is really a conflict between Tyre and the Cypriot kingdoms, with Assyria's army giving military assistance to its ally. The war of 709 or 708 BCE needs to be considered in all reconstructions of the history of Archaic Cyprus; while it can be used to support Susan Sherratt's argu-

42 Parker 1996.

43 Fuchs 1994, 319-320; Khorsabad Annals: 117-119. Discussed by Lanfranchi 2000, 14-22 and Rollinger 2001, 239-240.

44 Reyes 1994, 52.

45 Radner 2004, 161.

46 This is made especially clear by the fact that only some years later, in 701 BCE, Luli king of Sidon and his family fled from the Assyrian forces besieging Sidon by boat to Cyprus; for references see Frahm 2001, 668.

47 Little is known about the exact speed of ships which in any case depends on the type of ship and its cargo as well as the winds and the current; see Aubet 1993, 144-145.

ment⁴⁸ that the establishment of a formal Tyrian colony at Kition eventually led to a definition of the Phoenician element on Cyprus as the “other”, opposed to and thereby strengthening the identity of the Cypriots by the late 8th century, the invasion casts a dark shadow over what is usually reconstructed as a time of “peaceful and profitable co-existence”⁴⁹.

According to the inscriptions of Sargon’s successors Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal⁵⁰ the rulers of the ten⁵¹ Cypriot kingdoms of Idalion, Chytroi, Soloi, Paphos, Salamis, Kourion, Tamassos, the New Town (URU.*Qar-ti-ha-da-as-ti*, representing Phoenician *qart hadašt*⁵²), Ledrai and “Nuria” assisted in renovating a palace in Kalhu (thus Esarhaddon) and in mustering the army set for Egypt (thus Assurbanipal) in the 7th century. This falls under the duties expected of allied countries and would indicate that there is now a direct and more permanent link between the Cypriot kingdoms and Assyria, not any longer managed through Tyre. We must bear in mind that Esarhaddon had annexed Sidon in 677 BCE⁵³ and established this important harbour as a port under Assyrian control, renaming it *Kār-Aššur-ahu-iddina* “Esarhaddon’s Harbour”. It is conceivable that the Cypriot rulers set up regular direct contact with Assyria at this point: Esarhaddon is known to have concluded a treaty with at least one Cypriot ruler⁵⁴, and I would think that all ten kings had entered direct relations with Assyria as Ba’alu, the king of Tyre, is named in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal together with the Cypriot kings (and other rulers), fulfilling the very same roles and not in a superior role. We may connect this change in the relationship between the Cypriot kingdoms, Tyre and Assyria also with the hypothesis that Kition established itself as an independent kingdom, free from Tyrian supremacy, around that time⁵⁵.

48 Sherratt 2003, 235-236.

49 Sherratt 2003, 236.

50 Esarhaddon: Borger 1956, 60; Assurbanipal (exact repetition of Esarhaddon’s list): Borger 1996, 19; cf. Yon 2004, 54-55.

51 This need not imply a change in the political geography of the island since the reign of Sargon as the inscriptions from that time only ever refer to “the seven kings of Ya’, a district of Adnana”. Note that for the Archaic period, eleven centres have been recognised by archaeological investigations: clockwise around the coast, these are: Salamis, Kition, Amathous, Kourion, Paphos, Marion, Soloi and Lapithos, with Chytroi, Idalion, Tamassos and Ledrai in the island interior, see e.g. the map in Rupp 1989, 347 (= reproduced here as fig. 2).

52 The identification of this city is debated. Marguerite Yon (1997, 11; 2004, 54-55) advocates the equation with Kition but it should be noted that if it is assumed that Kition was still under the direct rule of Tyre then we should not expect its mention among a list of independent kingdoms headed by their own ruler (on this, however, see below). In that case, another identification would seem more likely: Lipinski 1991, 63 proposes either Limassol or Amathous, with Mayer 1996, 474 opting for Limassol.

53 Radner 2004, 160.

54 According to a query to the sun god: Starr 1990, no. 92.

55 Yon 1997, 12; see already n. 52. For this discussion the suggestion of Na’aman 2006 is relevant that Eloulaïos who reigned over Tyre according to Menander (as reported in Josephus, *Antiquities* IX, 284) is better identified with Shalmaneser V of Assyria (727-722 BCE; birth

I would like to argue, therefore, that in the long run the Assyrian military aid given to Tyre in 709 or 708 BCE contributed to the emancipation of Cyprus from Tyrian rule. The dispatch of the delegation of the Cypriot rulers to Sargon II provided an initial contact that bypassed Tyre; the subsequent erection of his stele at Kition commemorated this event and ensured that the link between Assyria and Cyprus, at that time symbolic rather than concrete, was preserved until, some thirty years later and after a decrease of Tyre's hold over the island, the alliance between Assyria and the Cypriot kingdoms became a political reality.

From an Assyrian perspective, what is the stele's significance?

The intensive archaeological investigation of Cyprus has failed to yield any material evidence for a sustained Assyrian presence in the late 8th and 7th century BCE⁵⁶ – with the exception of the Kition stele. We shall therefore turn to the question of what the erection of such a monument signified to the Assyrian mind.

Although there are Assyrian steles that were set up inside Assyria, i.e. the area organised as provinces ruled by Assyrian governors appointed by the Assyrian king, there are also a great many such monuments which were erected outside of the boundaries of the Assyrian empire⁵⁷. The fact that a stele is placed in a particular place is in itself not an indication of a permanent Assyrian claim, at least in administrative and political terms. Yet the monument commemorates the fact that the Assyrians gained knowledge of the place and is a lasting testament to this symbolic achievement; on the ideological level, the erection of a royal stele marks – and safeguards – the insertion of that place in the “officially existing world”, to use Mario Liverani's term⁵⁸: the stele, with its representation of the Assyrian king in image and written word, acts as a substitute⁵⁹ for his presence.

Sargon's Kition stele was meant to mark the western perimeter of his influence, which according to its inscription (and others) reached from the island of Cyprus in the Sea of the Setting Sun to the island of Dilmun (Bahrain) in the Sea of the Rising Sun. Consequently, the delegation of the Cypriot rulers is juxtaposed with the mission sent by Uperi, king of Dilmun:

“Uperi, king of Dilmun, who like a fish set up his home in the midst of the Sea of the Rising Sun in a distance of 30 double miles, heard of the power of

name: Ululāyu), and not Lulī, the king of Sidon mentioned in the inscriptions of Sennacherib of Assyria (705-681 BCE). The analysis of the relationship between Sidon and Tyre in Frahm 2001, 668-669 needs to be modified in light of this consideration.

56 Reyes 1994, 61-68.

57 For example, the steles erected in Western Iran by the kings Shalmaneser III, Shamshi-Adad V and Tiglath-pileser III, see Radner 2003, 119-120.

58 Liverani 1990, 59.

59 Cf. also Winter 1997, 376: “The king, in Hegel's terms, *verdoppelt sich*, doubles himself.”

Aššur, Nabû and Marduk and communicated his subservience; and the seven kings of Ya', a district⁶⁰ of Adnana which is situated in the midst of the Sea of the Setting Sun in a distance of seven days – so remote is their domicile that since eternal days, since my forefathers, the kings who came before me, took over the rule of Assyria, nobody had even heard the name of their country – far away in the midst of the sea, they heard of the deeds that I had done in Chaldea (Babylonia) and Hatti (Syro-Anatolia) and their hearts quivered and terror took hold of them: they sent to me in Babylon silver, gold, furniture of ebony and boxwood, the product of their land and kissed my feet (§ 5 = III 23-42).”

This is an entirely new motif in the Neo-Assyrian inscription corpus. Traditionally, the extent of a ruler's control of the world was said to extend from coast to coast, typically from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, described either as “from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea” (also used here, in II 24⁶¹) or “from the Sea of the Rising Sun to the Sea of the Setting Sun”⁶². In the inscriptions of Sargon we find, for the first time, that islands are used to mark the scope of Assyria's might – perhaps an indication of the growing awareness that the world is more than one landmass enclosed by the sea, as the Mesopotamian concept of the cosmology would have it.

In addition to marking the Assyrian grasp of the world, the Kition stele is stated to have been set up in a location linked to a conspicuous place, “Mount Ba'al-harri above Adnana”. This is not an exception, as Assyrian royal steles are usually placed near significant natural landmarks like mountains, the sources of rivers or the shores of the sea; the idea seems to be that such sites provided an immediate connection with the divine world. Therefore, the monument separates not only the known from the unknown according to the concept of the “officially existing world” discussed above; it is also a boundary and bridge between the human and the divine sphere. In our case, the peak's name – “lord of the mountain” – is an indication that also the local population subscribed to the idea that the mount itself was divine. It is therefore not surprising that, according to the inscription itself, the Assyrian monument was set up in a deliberate and explicit connection with the mountain rather than with a human settlement which is not named at all.

This in itself already explains why the question whether the local population was able to appreciate the cuneiform inscription was of little consequence to the Assyrian mind. They were not the intended primary audience – Ba'al-harri was. The name, “lord of the mountain”⁶³, indicates, like parallel names such as Ba'al-zaphon

60 Note that in Neo-Assyrian, *nagû* “district, region” does not have an administrative meaning and simply denotes a geographical subunit.

61 However, in the inscriptions of Sargon II the exact term used is the “Upper Bitter Stream” (*marratu elîtu*) and the “Lower Bitter Stream” (*marratu šaplîtu*), see Yamada 2005, 41, 54.

62 The frequently changing conventions of referring to the seas in the Assyrian inscriptions are discussed by Yamada 2005.

63 Note that Lipinski 2004, 29, 52-53 prefers the reading *Ba-il hur-ri KUR-i* which he interprets

“lord of the north face (of a mountain)”⁶⁴ and Ba‘al-Lebanon “lord of the Lebanon range”⁶⁵, that not only was the mount perceived as a link to the deity, but that it was itself considered a manifestation of the divine: the mountain was a god. The name Ba‘al-harri is West Semitic and was certainly communicated to the Assyrians by the Phoenician inhabitants of Kition, but while the principle of the divine peak is well known as an element of the Phoenician belief system⁶⁶, there is no lack of holy mountains in the Greek world either⁶⁷, so we should perhaps be cautious to connect the concept of the divinity of Mount Stavrovouni – today the site of a famous monastery – exclusively with the Phoenician colony; it may well have been a tradition going back to times immemorial.

The inscription and also the divine symbols engraved on the stele mark the monument as a dedication, embedded in the ritual landscape constructed around Mount Ba‘al-harri. Its erection was a ritual act and it was envisaged by Sargon II that his royal successors would find and honour the stele: “I leave (the monument) forever to my royal descendants. In future days, a succeeding prince shall see the stele and read it, praise the great gods, anoint the stele and perform sacrifices; he must not alienate (it) from its place (§ 7 = III 57-61).” It is only the effect on Sargon’s successors, imagined to be his “sons”, that is worthy of consideration, and also the curses are directed against offenders of royal rank only and give an insight into an Assyrian king’s worst fears: the extinction of the blood line and of the dynasty’s memory; a decline in population numbers; a live as a hostage at the usurper’s court: “He who alienates the stele, who erases my written name, the great gods as many are mentioned by name on this monument and the gods who live in the vast sea may curse him in anger; they shall make his name and his offspring vanish from the land; they shall have no mercy for him; they shall diminish his people by want, famine, hunger and plague (lit. the touch of the pest god Erra); they shall make him sit before his enemy like a captive while his enemy shall govern his land in front of his eyes (§ 8 = III 62-74).” The mention of “the gods who live in the vast sea”, not usually invoked by the Assyrians, is surely an acknowledgment of the specific location in which the stele was set up and certainly a reflection of Phoenician beliefs: we may compare their mention with a curse securing the treaty conducted between Esarhaddon and Ba‘alu, king of Tyre, probably in 676 BCE: “May the gods Ba‘al-šamaim,

as “Ba‘al of Mount Hor”, with Hor as “a nominal *qull* pattern of *harra* ‘growl’” (p. 29) but this cannot be separated from his wish to link the name with the problematic Mount Hor (Hor hāhar) in Numbers 34, 7-8; see already fn. 20.

64 Invoked as ^d*Ba-al-ša-pu-nu* in the treaty between Esarhaddon of Assyria and Ba‘alu of Tyre: Parpola / Watanabe 1988, no. 5: IV 10’.

65 Invoked as *b’l lbnn* in the dedication inscription on a copper bowl from Cyprus: Donner / Röllig 1966, no. 31.

66 Clifford 1990, 57.

67 Buxton 1992, 5-6: “In addition to divinities who were associated with a mountain, there were others who were apparently identified with one. But ... Greek belief (as opposed, for example, to Cappadocian) preferred the model of association to that of identification.”

Ba'al-malagê and Ba'al-zaphon raise an evil wind against your ships to undo their moorings and tear out their mooring pole, may a strong wave sink them in the sea and a violent tide rise against you!"⁶⁸

From a local perspective, what may be the stele's significance?

What then about the people who came into contact with the monument? Although the epigraphic sources for Cyprus in the late eighth century are not abundant, we can nevertheless be certain that it was a highly literate environment, with several languages committed to writing, using a variety of writing materials⁶⁹ and two very different systems: most inhabitants of Cyprus⁷⁰ will have had, in no particular order, Eteocypriot (which, although in principle phonetically reconstructed, remains incomprehensible), Greek or Phoenician as their native tongue, and while the Cypriot syllabic script⁷¹ – the heir of the earlier Cypro-Minoan script⁷² – was used to record Eteocypriot and Greek, the alphabetic script was employed for Phoenician⁷³ (but not yet Greek⁷⁴). However, the Mesopotamian cuneiform script, which had been used on Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age⁷⁵, was no longer in local use at that time; like the Luwian and the Egyptian writing system, it is only in evidence on imported goods such as seals⁷⁶. Therefore, it would make little sense to argue that by erecting a monument with a cuneiform inscription, Sargon was chiefly aiming for the local audience⁷⁷.

But already without the inscription being read, the monument achieves an effect on its audience – as it did upon its discovery in 1844 when cuneiform was not yet fully deciphered. The stele's significance as a dedication to the gods is apparent to any observer: the king's gesture of prayer is immediately recognisable, as are at least some of the divine symbols: the star, the sun disc, the moon crescent, the lightning

68 Parpola / Watanabe 1988, no. 5: IV 10'-13'.

69 Stone: Bazemore 2002, 165; clay: Powell 2002, 245; writing boards (wood, ivory); papyrus, parchment and leather; potsherds: Smith 2002, 8-10.

70 The reconstruction of the population pattern of 8th century Cyprus is a complicated issue, see the remarks by Reyes 1994, 11-21 and Rupp 1997, 71.

71 Masson 1983, 28-45; see also Reyes 1994, 22 (list of Eteocypriot inscriptions from the Archaic period), Bazemore 2002, 155-159 and Sherratt 2003, 226.

72 Sherratt 2003, 226-227 remarks on the relationship between the Cypro-Minoan and the Cypriot syllabic scripts: "It should be emphasized that the two scripts – despite the different names – are essentially the same, and ... one is effectively a continuation of the other."

73 For references see Bazemore 2002, 156 (with n. 10) and Sherratt 2003, 234-235.

74 Sherratt 2003: 234.

75 Cochavi-Rainey 2003.

76 For references to hieroglyphic, cuneiform and Luwian inscriptions from Cyprus see Smith 2002, 33 n. 1-3.

77 As Tadmor 1997, 330-331 argues for the royal steles, even using Sargon's Kition stele as one of his examples.

fork. Also, the massive basalt block itself, whose origin from the Troodos mountains must have been apparent to any local person and which advertised the great expenses incurred to have the stele erected in its place, cannot have failed to proclaim the power of its originator. And both in the Assyrian and the Cypriot perception⁷⁸ the fact that the monument was inscribed was a significant and important message that carried considerable prestige in itself, even without the inscription being read or being comprehensible. Finally, we must also allow for, and even expect, an oral tradition that interpreted and explained the monument.

How the local population reacted to the erection of Sargon's stele is impossible to know in detail, but as the monument was found in good condition it is clear that there was no attempt to destroy or damage it: this may indicate that it was seen in a positive light. To the local people, it may have commemorated the successful – and prestigious – interaction between the Cypriot delegation and Sargon in 708 BCE, rather than the Assyrian military aid lent to Tyre preceding this event; incidentally, this is also how the inscription would have it, which doesn't mention the previous conflict at all. We should also remember that the delegation sent to Babylon was a joint enterprise of the “seven kings of Ya’”, and the event, and the monument that commemorated it, may therefore have been significant in the creation of a pan-Cypriot identity which transcended the political boundaries of the city-states: in the following periods, people from Cyprus would typically identify themselves as “Cypriot” despite the fact that the island continued to be politically divided into small kingdoms⁷⁹.

In this context, we may note that Susan Sherratt⁸⁰ has seen the revival of the local writing system, the Cypriot syllabic script, as an expression of this emerging Cypriot identity – as well as an indication of the increasing antagonism between Cypriots and Phoenicians, an argument which I find convincing: while on the Greek mainland the Phoenician script was adapted for the Greek language by the late 8th century, on Cyprus only the Cypriot syllabic script was employed to record Greek as well as the Eteocypriot language whereas the Phoenician script was used exclusively for the Phoenician language. The fact that Sargon's inscription was written in cuneiform characters may therefore have been received positively by a Cypriot audience. Perhaps the superficial resemblance between cuneiform and the Cypriot syllabic script is of additional importance in a political climate where not only the Cypriot cultural identity was shaped in opposition to Phoenician culture but also the Cypriot kings eventually allied themselves with Assyria, after escaping from Tyrian supremacy.

78 As stressed e.g. by Reade 1981, 150 (for Assyrian inscribed monuments) and Bazemore 2002, 195 (for the Cypriot syllabic inscriptions).

79 The evidence of the inscriptions from Classical Athens shows that in contrast to the Greeks who link themselves to individual cities people from Cyprus residing in Athens identify themselves as “Cypriot” rather than as citizens of a specific kingdom, see Fourrier 2006, 102-103.

80 Sherratt 2003, 236.

Although it is difficult to establish when the tradition started, the use of the Cypriot syllabic script for monumental stone inscriptions, including steles, is very well documented in the Archaic period from the late 8th century onwards, especially in the sanctuaries of Paphos and nearby Rantidi⁸¹. Is it too far-fetched to see the Assyrian stele from Kition as a model or inspiration for these monuments which have no predecessors at all in the world of Bronze Age Cyprus? I would argue that it was the erection of Sargon's stele – rather than Susan Sherratt's hypothetical “publicly visible permanent inscriptions which had the effect of proclaiming [Tyre's] political presence” on Cyprus⁸² – that triggered the novel function of the syllabic script as a “conscious symbol of Cypriot identity”⁸³ on display on public and permanent monuments.

81 Bazemore 2002.

82 Sherratt 2003, 236, 238 (passage quoted).

83 Sherratt 2003, 238.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: VA 968 (after Malbran-Labat 2004, 353 fig. 43).

Fig. 2: Archaic Cyprus (after Rupp 1989, 347 fig. 38.5).