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THE INSCRIPTION FROM ÇATAL HÜYÜK
IN THE PLAIN OF ANTAKYA*

In 1934 an expedition of the University of Chicago recovered an inscription on a spindle whorl (Fig. 1,2) during the course of excavations at Çatal Hüyük, a site in the plain of Antioch, about half-way between modern Antakya and Aleppo. Finally published in 1967¹, its authenticity has been strongly attacked in a learned article stemming from Harvard University². Charges of forgery have greeted many new discoveries from the Stone Age cave paintings of southern France to the Dead Sea scrolls, and the ensuing defense and offense have taken up too much space in scholarly journals and too much time of scholars both in the preparation and reading of such arguments.

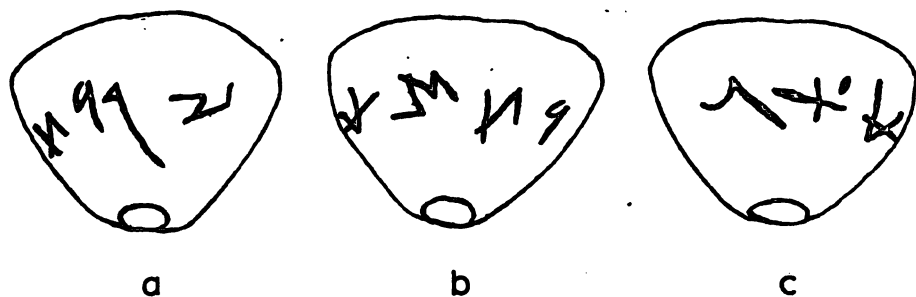


Fig. 1

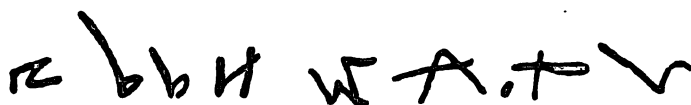


Fig. 2

* This article expands a presentation to the Middle West Branch of the American Oriental Society at Chicago in November 1973. The author gratefully acknowledges expert suggestions and guidance on matters Indo-European from Professor Gernot Windfuhr of the University of Michigan.

¹ Stanley Gevirtz, A Spindle Whorl with Phoenician Inscription, JNES 26, 1967, 13—16. Figure 1a, b, c are based upon the photographs in this original publication.

² Jon D. Levenson, The Spindle Whorl Inscription from Chatal Hüyük: A Forgery,

Fakes and forgeries of all sorts have been produced for many centuries, if not several millennia. The vast majority are easily recognized at first sight by the expert, some prove to be fakes only after further and often very technical examination. Others have been accepted as genuine for decades, only to be proven fakes after the development of new methods of analysis. Some cannot be evaluated at all since there is no direct evidence for the original, and there is no point in wasting ink (and Canadian forests) on arguments³. But there is a large group such as this one that have been ignored or dismissed as forgeries simply because they do not conform to contemporary ideas about the evolution of the alphabet⁴. In such cases, a persuasive argument that it is a forgery may simply be destructive of valuable evidence, at least for a couple of generations. Even worse, it may result in the perpetuation of a scholarly theory that has outlived its usefulness, since it cannot cope with new evidence, and is too narrowly conceived. In a particular academic field this would be tolerable, but when different disciplines are interdependent, the dismissal of evidence on the part of one discipline can have very far-reaching deleterious consequences.

There are at least five theoretical considerations that need serious attention in view of the much too frequent tendency of academicians to dismiss evidence that does not fit existing theory:

1. Early writing-systems are local. In societies that have not developed a specialized class of scribes with equally specialized social or political functions, writing-systems are usually if not always the result of a local response to a local need, usually of a commercial or private nature. Writing-systems are therefore in origin parochial but are often preserved long after they have outlived their functional value, simply because they serve also as parochial symbols of social solidarity.

To illustrate, there are 32 local scripts of archaic Greece⁵, 26 Etruscan

BASOR 209, Febr. 1973, 37—40. The author concludes with the statement: "There is no way to save the little inscription from North Syria. The spindle whorl inscription from Chatal Hüyük is a fraud and must be excised from the corpus." Figure 2 is derived from the article in BASOR, with corrections based upon the photographs in the original publication.

³ The famous Shapiro forgeries and the alleged Brazilian inscription are prime examples. Neither can be used for any further purpose, especially not history.

⁴ Several example of this category occur in the chapter on Falsificazioni in D. Diringer, *Le Iscrizioni Antioco-Ebraiche Palestinesi*, Firenze 1934, 319—325.

⁵ L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*, Table of Letters

alphabets⁶, 18 pre-Islamic Arabic alphabets⁷, and several Cypriote syllabaries, of both the Late Bronze⁸ and Iron ages⁹. This same complexity is even more dramatically noticeable in the cuneiform writing system¹⁰, and it helps to explain why there is in the ancient Near East no necessary correlation between a particular graphic tradition and any particular language. To judge from the evidence we have everywhere else, it is the unification of a writing system (as well as a 'classical' language) over a large geographical area that needs explanation, not diversity. This is especially true when the unification takes place across what are known to be earlier cultural boundaries.

Such unification may be a function of any combination of a range of non-linguistic factors such as political power, commerce, educational systems in the broad sense, and religion¹¹. If, then, there was a uniform alphabet for West Semitic in the tenth century B.C. (which I most seriously doubt)¹², it could only be the result of a combination of political and commercial factors and the scribal training systems associated with those factors, for which we have direct evidence in the South Canaanite

⁶ G. Buonamici, *Epigrafia Etrusca*, 122—24, 148—49, for Etruscan as well as Italic dialects.

⁷ F.V. Winnett and W.L. Reed, *Ancient Records from North Arabia*, Table of Scripts, p. 205, which merely gives those eight scripts from the Northwestern part of the Arabian peninsula. Note particularly the enormous varieties of form *within* each category. The same is true of archaic Greek scripts.

⁸ The Fifth International Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies, *Kadmos* 9, 1970, 182.

⁹ Olivier Masson, *Les Inscriptions Chypriotes Syllabiques*, 57—67.

¹⁰ Particularly in the Western regions do local script traditions seem quite distinctive (i.e. Anatolian and Syro-Palestinian), but nowhere is a Western system derived from a *contemporary* Mesopotamian system. There seems characteristically to be a lag of at least a couple centuries. These systems, needless to say, must be almost entirely the product of professional scribes, since the writing-system is extremely complex, and the documents are diplomatic or bureaucratic in nature. See now R.D. Biggs, *On Regional Cuneiform Handwritings in Third Millennium Mesopotamia*, in *Approaches to the Study of the Ancient Near East*.

¹¹ Religion has functioned both as a unifying factor, e.g. Islam, and as a factor perpetuating a parochial writing system, e.g. Hebrew, Coptic, and late Aramaic. The function of religion in writing-systems depends upon the nature of the religious system, whether it is socially isolating or agglutinative in its value system.

¹² Note Cross's argument that the Old South Arabic alphabet had separated from the Canaanite alphabet before the end of the Bronze Age, with which I entirely agree. Similarly, the Cypriote syllabic system has to have some continuity from the Late Bronze Age systems. Where we have evidence, it is clear that there was no absolute discontinuity, but a radically diminished usage of writing traditions except in the Greco-Aegean region where Bronze Age writing seems to have been exclusively

'Gezer Calendar'. But that alleged unification is much more probably the result of modern theory that looks at similarities and ignores differences, plus the extremely meager body of evidence available.

Therefore, canons of criticism developed for one cultural area are not at all necessarily relevant to inscriptions from another area, particularly at early stages in the history of writing. The mystique of some mysterious *Uralphabet*¹³ is based upon the same kind of nineteenth century concept of unilinear evolution that has been given up in the face of evidence in almost every other field of academic inquiry, and its rejection in the investigation of the history of writing systems is long overdue. This is particularly urgent when such theories lead to the effective destruction of evidence.

2. Levels of literacy differ and produce different phenomena. Canons of criticism based upon regularities observed in the writing of professional

professional and minimal. It must be emphasized as strongly as possible that contemporary theories are based upon only a very few inscriptions resulting from accidental finds, and the northern Syrian cultural area is virtually *terra incognita*. The point is that there has to be a continuous writing tradition between the Late Bronze Age of Syria and the tenth century in South Arabia, to account for the formal similarities. The lack of direct evidence so far is partly to be explained by the unexplored nature of the territory, and partly by the ignorance or dismissal of available evidence such as the inscription under discussion. It is very tempting, in view of existing evidence, to conclude that the more remote a writing-system, the more archaic its origin. This would place the Italic systems in a radically new context, for which I think we now have good evidence, namely, from the 'Philistine' documents from the Hebron area (see note 20) that seem to be more Italic than Greek, and date no later than the eighth century B.C. They have also been pronounced 'forgeries' from Harvard University scholarly canons of formal criticism without the benefit of careful analysis of the paleographic forms and equally variant spelling rules that characterize these fortunately very liturgical documents, most probably of mortuary nature.

¹³ Bronze Age writing-systems for West Semitic display a very wide range. First, the Byblos Syllabic system (c. 2000 B.C.), many forms of which survived into the later alphabetic system; the McClellan sherd (c. 1800 B.C.) which has some surprising affinities with later Cypriote and Anatolian systems; the Proto-Sinaitic (c. 1500 B.C.), much more archaic than the Byblos Syllabic in forms, but also geographically very remote; the adaptation of cuneiform at Ugarit (1500—1400 B.C.?) the Kamid el-Lôz ostraca (1400 B.C.) that have some relationships to later archaic Arabic signaries; and finally the Deir 'Allā clay tablets that could well be related to the same tradition that produced the Hieroglyphic Luwian (1200 B.C.). Then, of course, we have the various 'main-line' inscriptions, constituting a continuity of diversity leading to the professional scribal hand of tenth century Phoenician. The fact is that, the further back we go, the greater does local diversity seem characteristic, and the same is probably even more true of local dialects. It must be emphasized that we cannot possibly have more than a tiny fraction of potential evidence, particularly from the north Syrian cultural area.

scribes or highly literate persons are largely irrelevant to inscriptions produced by minimally literate persons¹⁴. The rigidities of *form* in language and writing so characteristically taught and enforced by schools from Sumer to Harvard are both irrelevant and inaccessible to the non-professional man in the street or field. But, in a society that has not yet developed either demand or supply of trained professional scribes, such canons of formal rigidity can hardly and indeed do not exist. It is necessary to have such a group, in which concerns for professional pride and status produce an increasing formal rigidity, before minutiae of form and stance can be useful for critical analysis.

Furthermore, the changes in fashion among professionals, so important to paleography, are not likely to be reflected immediately in the writing of those termed by the later Greeks βραδέως γράφων, 'slow writer'. Such inscriptions are very likely to perpetuate more archaic forms, but not in a systematic way. When local societies then do develop bureaucracies and the consequent rigid formalization of the local writing tradition of non-professional literates who learned writing in some other social context, it follows as a matter of course that there can hardly be any rigid systematic correspondence with forms of the original source. Since writing is typically used for private purposes in society long before the development of professional bureaucratic elites¹⁵, it is in all probability such private scripts rather than professional signaries and their schools that account both for the diffusion of the alphabet and the seeming chaotic, unsystematic, nature of the relationships between origin and recipient.

¹⁴ H. Youtie, βραδέως γράφων: Between Literacy and Illiteracy, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 12, 1971, 239—261. Virtually all the 'mistakes' cited by Levenson as evidence of forgery are mentioned by various editors of Greek papyri as characteristics of the βραδέως γράφων. The term 'slow writer' presupposes its opposite: 'fast writer.' This term actually occurs in the Late Bronze Age in an Egyptian hieroglyphic transcription of a West Semitic (Canaanite) phrase. It recurs in the form *sofer mahir* in tenth-century Canaanite (Psalm 45:2), and again at the time of the Persian Empire (Ezra 7:6). The equation of speed with skill is already transferred to other specializations at least by the late Iron Age (Isa. 16:5 where "fast in righteousness" is an attribute of the ideal king; and Prov. 22:29 where skill in handicraft enables its possessor to obtain tenure in the royal court). At about the same time the transference from rapid writing to 'cursive' reading is attested ("...that its reader may run," Hab. 2:2).

¹⁵ This seems to be true in the Iron Age, but would probably not apply to the complex professional systems of Egyptian hieroglyphic and Sumero-Babylonian cuneiform.

3. Where writing systems of different origin and different languages are long in contact, 'feed-back' phenomena should be expected. So far as literature on the subject of the alphabet is concerned, this is evidently something to which scholars have not been sensitized but which can be of enormous potential for understanding the otherwise inexplicable. It is axiomatic that a writing system transferred from one language to another will undergo considerable modification in the adaptive process. But, in a locality where the writing systems for two different languages remain in contact for any time, there is likely to be a constant feed-back between the two systems, particularly among non-professional writers. There can be no doubt that before 750 B.C. the western Semitic alphabet complex had been adapted to the writing of non-Semitic languages, and the adaptation included the use of signs as indications of vowels both in the Phrygian and the Greek alphabets, and very likely the invention of new signs or the re-introduction of very archaic signs as well.

It is most suggestive, therefore, to learn from the famous work of Cross and Freedman that the earliest use of vowel letters in the Semitic alphabets occurs in the tenth-century Aramaic inscription from Tell Ḥalaf¹⁶, a comparatively provincial site far to the East of the Mediterranean coast. There must be a strong influence of extraneous origin to account for such a radical departure from many centuries of tradition. The phenomenon of 'feed-back' can account for it, since the Çatal Hüyük spindle whorl is for all practical purposes contemporaneous, and it includes two purely vowel signs.

4. The Phrygian and Greek alphabets must ultimately have a north Syrian origin¹⁷. It is now a strong suspicion bordering on certainty that the writing systems of at least two different non-Semitic languages derived from the western Semitic alphabet systems before the eighth century B.C., and all indications point to the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea as the point of diffusion. Phrygian inscriptions dated

¹⁶ Early Hebrew Orthography, 31. If feed-back is involved, the process must be pushed even further back toward the Bronze Age.

¹⁷ Jeffery, 10—12. Rodney Young, *Old Phrygian Inscriptions from Gordion. Toward a History of the Phrygian Alphabet*, *Hesperia* 38, 1969, 252—296. It should be clear by now that, as usual, ancient historical reality was much more complex than modern theories. For example, just what is meant by a 'Greek' in the period from the twelfth to the tenth century B.C.? (cf. note 39) I predict that evidence will eventually emerge that the Etruscan system is a third independent system from the same complex of origins.

to the middle of the eighth century prove beyond doubt the diffusion of the adapted west Semitic alphabet to Gordion, and similar evidence for the adaptations to the Greek and Etruscan languages is virtually contemporary. Both Jeffery and Young argue for a north Syrian locale for the adaptation that must certainly have had a prehistory not yet accessible from concrete evidence.

5. Forgeries cannot create valid new evidence. A forgery is by definition an imitation of something known and valued, created for purposes of economic gain. It must imitate something existent and introduce only minor variations in order to be accepted as genuine, otherwise its economic value would be vitiated. Since a forger must copy, it is, to be sure, errors in copying what he does not understand that most often give him away, but mere deviation from an 'ideal model' of an alphabet and its canonical forms produced by professional scribes is no evidence at all¹⁸. When every character is aberrant, and the deviations from the mythical 'ideal model' fall into quite a number of different categories, it should be clear that we are dealing with a different cultural and epigraphic tradition, especially when we are involved with a time and place where it is almost certain that such alphabet adaptations were taking place. The idea that a village workman could produce an ancient 'Phoenician' inscription with such dramatic relationships to facts not known until decades later is the height of academic folly.

For the above reasons, all the arguments brought forth for a conclusion of forgery are both irrelevant and naïve. Differences in stance seem to be internal characteristics of all early writing systems from old Arabic to Etruscan. It is the uniformity of stance that needs to be explained, not variety. The recumbant *tau* already occurs in the Syllabic texts of Byblos, and is probably nothing but an adaptation to the immediate textual environment. The preservation of very archaic forms is also a constant, for example in early North Arabic inscriptions, whose *dal* goes back to the Bronze Age¹⁹. But it is certainly unnecessary to belabor the point, merely highly necessary to emphasize that precision

¹⁸ To judge from available evidence, the bureaucratic, political scribal tradition in northern Syria used the elegant Hieroglyphic Luwian writing system in the early Iron Age (the period known as Syro-Hittite), where a number of cultural traditions of the Hittite Empire survived for a couple centuries.

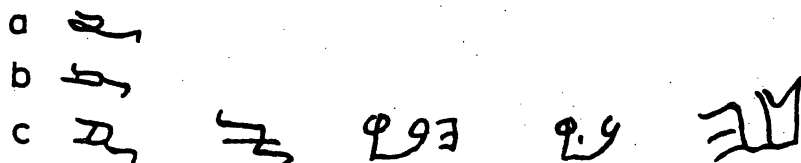
¹⁹ It is regular in Byblos Syllabic, and probably occurs also in the McClellan sherd from Tell Jişr near Kamid el-Lôz in the southern Biqa' of Lebanon. See Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth 24, 13—18: A New Chapter in the History of the Alphabet, by George E. Mendenhall.

in paleography is nonsense except when we are dealing with writers to whom formal precision was socially and professionally important.

In order to avoid what might well be termed the 'Barr syndrome': pontifical criticism of other scholars while failing to make any contribution to the solution of linguistic or epigraphic difficulties, I would propose the following reading and translation of the inscription in question.

IZ RDN MA · TW: "This (is) the spindle (of) Mat(t)uwa"

a) The first character is a ligature consisting of the short vertical, straight *iota* plus the cursive form of the north Syrian *ṣayn*. A similar ligatured *iota* occurs several times in the 'Philistine' documents (Figs. 3, 4)²⁰; at least, this seems at present to be the most probable working hypothesis for the explanation of very curious and otherwise unparalleled forms. Ligatures are definitely a Bronze Age graphic tradition that seem to survive only sporadically in Iron Age scripts²¹, and the phenomenon definitely needs further study.



Figs. 3—7

The word can be analyzed either as 'Phoenician'²², for the demonstrative 'ṣ actually occurs, though in late provincial texts; or as Luwian,

²⁰ See Kadmos 1, 1970, 102—104. The statement in the footnote that the number of the signs is probably less than thirty was an over-hasty projection that has not proven to be correct. There are still about 35 different signs that seem to contrast in environment as well as form. Since there is a fully developed vowel notation system, there is no reason to suspect a syllabary, though there are various consonant and vowel ligatures. Fig. 3 a is from i line 7; 3b from ii line 15; 3c from i line 4. Fig. 4 is from i line 8. Though it is far from certain, at the present stage of study of these most puzzling documents, that these illustrations actually consist of a ligature of another letter with a straight *iota*, it is extremely difficult to conceive of any reasonable alternative explanation.

²¹ For example, W. C. Brice, ILA Tables 2 and 3. Note also the similar combinations of sub-elements in the cuneiform signary. Curiously, in Minoan A one of the ligatured sub-elements is the sign-cluster *IZ*. Note also the continuation of ligatures in later Carian and Etruscan.

²² *DISO*, sub voce.

where the demonstrative *i* followed by a case ending is regular²³. The nominative case ending is transliterated as *s*, written with a variety of signs, one of which is used to write the name of the author of the Karatepe inscriptions, *ási-tiwata-s*, written with a *ṣayn* in Phoenician, *ʿṣtwā*²⁴. Since the Luwian demonstrative is regular and grammatically explicable, it should be preferred, and it may explain the dialectic Phoenician form that conforms to no known phenomenon of comparative Semitic grammar.

The straight *iota* is exclusive in Phrygian, and in Greek, except for the more remote scripts. The cursive *Z* occurs in the earliest Phrygian, and, if Young is right, so does the normal earlier Phoenician form *I*, though the form cited could easily be the otherwise unused Phoenician *samek*²⁵. In the Philistine documents the *Z* form is an enigma. It often looks almost exactly like a good Phoenician *yod*, but it appears regularly both with and without the central stroke which I believe to be a diacritical mark, the function of which is far from clear²⁶. Diacritical marks occur also as additions to *gamma*, *digamma* and other signs as well, always in the form of a short additional stroke.

b) The second word *RDN* is clearly marked off from the first and third by spacing. The semiticised word occurs not only in Syriac but also in Arabic with the meaning "spindle," *mirdan*²⁷. In Arabic there is also a verb *radana* with the meaning "to spin" that is certainly a denominative, and in both languages the word is almost certainly a loan, since there is a perfectly good word for "spindle" that is widely if not universally distributed through the Semitic languages, Acc. *pilakku*, So. Canannite *pelek*. It is most tempting to see here a very old north Syrian *Kulturwort*, in view of the Greek verb ῥαδανίζω which must also be a denominative from *radan*²⁸.

²³ P. Meriggi, Hieroglyphisch-Hethitisches Glossar, 61. It is futile, in the present state of knowledge, to speculate on the nature of the sibilant.

²⁴ Meriggi, 36.

²⁵ Young, Nos. 25 and 32. Both forms are aberrant from the point of view of the 'ideal model' Phoenician script, the first in stance, and the second in the overlap of the vertical stroke below the bottom horizontal stroke, as in the *nun* of the Çatal Hüyük inscription.

²⁶ It is also sometimes written almost exactly like the *Z*.

²⁷ The Arabic is taken to be a loan from the Syriac *marḏna*.

²⁸ There are also noun forms ῥάδαν, ῥόδαν, and too a dialect form βῥαδανίζω from Lesbos, that must be derivative from ῥαδανίζω with *digamma*. J. Pokorny, Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 1153—4. The Indo-European root is re-

No comments need to be made on the forms of the *rho* and *delta* in view of what has been said above, other than that the later Phrygian alphabet exhibits extravagantly long shafts on many letters, and that the Zencirli inscriptions exhibit the same calligraphic tendency, which reaches a very exaggerated form in the professional hands that produced the ostraca of Samaria in the following century. Note also the same phenomenon on the Rhodian sub-geometric cup (Jeffery p. 347, and Plate 67 no. 1). With this we can correlate the historical fact that there was a sporadic 'philo-Aramean' policy attested in both biblical and extra-biblical sources, from the Israelite king Ahab and his Tyrian spouse Jezebel²⁹ to the Jewish king Hezekiah, in whose time we know that the political bureaucrats of the Judean kingdom could understand spoken Aramaic, while the citizenry could not³⁰.

The form of the *nu* is particularly important, since it has no long shaft. This is not characteristic of any of the archaic Greek alphabets, nor of the Phrygian, but it does occur in many of the Italic systems, which therefore must have separated before the long shaft had become conventional. The form also occurs in a brief graffito at Khirbet Khaled in the middle Euphrates Valley in Syria in a mortuary temple structure that has unmistakable affinities with the Lycian 'temple tombs' of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., but of which we could find no evidence for the date. It could easily be late Iron Age, since all other evidence leads to the conclusion that the Lycian culture represents a western diffusion of much earlier cultural traditions from the East, for which

constructed as *w(e)r-ed*. But the story is much more complex, for the presumed Luwian word begins with an initial *r* that is very rare. The Luwian *r* is certainly a complex sound with probably velar fricative perhaps something like the Semitic *ḡ* (cf. the French uvular *r*); this dropped out of use after the disruption of the Hittite Empire and the consequent wide dispersal of populations. Theoretically, the reconstructed *ḡr-* became reduced to *wr-*, and alternatively to rough breathing in Greek. It is the labialized form that became diffused among most of the Indo-European languages. Evidence for a similar shift exists in the 'Philistine' documents.

The Greek words are also certainly loanwords. An ancient authority comments that "women use the word in memory of Heracles" who had to spin wool for the queen of Lydia, Omphale. In North Syrian treaties, one of the curses for breach of treaty promises that "your warriors shall become as women," and Heracles of course was condemned by Apollo's Oracle to act like a woman for three years as a punishment for murder. The word probably came into Greece with the Heracles cycle of folklore, perhaps even with the Pelasgian migrations of the early Iron Age.

²⁹ Ahab contributed a large contingent of chariotry to the coalition of Syro-Palestinian kings that fought the Assyrians at Qarqar in the Orontes River valley in 853 B.C.

³⁰ II Kings 18:26.

see the discussion of architectural forms of the Solomonic kingdom by D. Ussishkin ('King Solomon's Palaces', *Biblical Archaeologist* 36, 1973, 78—105). This diffusion to the South of Anatolian architectural traditions is perfectly paralleled by the similar evidence for scribal fashions argued above, though the evidence comes from a later date.

c) The third word is also marked off by spacing and is the proper name to be expected. I read it as *MA.T(u)W(a)*, in every way a very typical and well-attested Anatolian form. In addition to the basic element *mad/tu/i/a*³¹, it includes the final element *-wa* that Laroche has already isolated as very typical of the Hittite-Luwian onomastics³². For example, of the Iron Age kings of Carchemish, two have names ending in *-wa*, Katuwa and Asdaruwa³³. It is for this reason that the reading *matuwa* is preferable to the equally possible reading *mat(t)u*, in which the final sign would be read as a vowel also. For this we may compare the Ivriz inscription, where the Hieroglyphic Luwian has Warpalawas, and the Assyrian rendering of the name is Urballu.

The first character is a multi-stroke *mem* in a stance that can explain the *M* form with isosceles legs known in later alphabets, from some Italic inscriptions to the very early Arabic from Umm Rujûm (just north of Amman in Jordan) and Carian. Among the Greek Alphabets, Jeffery lists in the charts only the alphabets of Megara, Byzantion, Siracusa and colonies as having a *mem* in which the legs are of equal length, in the most archaic form. So far as my experience goes, it is only the Carian *mem* and that of Umm Rujûm that illustrate a sign in which the more-or-less parallel legs of this *mem* are joined by a horizontal stroke: *M*. The Çatal Hüyük inscription can furnish the archaic origin of both, since its *mem* has a stroke that could easily have been reversed in its direction, thus forming the enclosed *mem* of both Carian and the very early North Arabic scripts, and for which there is no alternative explanation, at least at the present time. Similarly, I have found no parallel for this enclosed *mem* anywhere in the western alphabets.³⁴

³¹ E. Laroche, *Les Noms des Hittites*, Nos. 785—794.

³² Laroche, 244—46. Actually the ending *-a* with *w* after *u*, and *y* after *i* or *a*.

³³ D. Ussishkin, *Observations on Some Monuments From Carchemish*, JNES 26, 1967, 91f. Compare also the Etruscan name *matva*.

³⁴ Fig. 7 illustrates from the Hebron documents (vii line 10) a *mem* that is both enclosed and isosceles, and in addition is ligatured to a preceeding vowel. Document vii is one that is incised on parchment, and displays many phenomena that stem from a monumental script in contrast to the cursive script illustrated in the brush or pen-written documents i—v.

The upside-down *A* Mr. Levenson could easily have seen on a seventh-century Greek Aryballos in the Boston Museum, and it occurs also in a curious inscription of the twelfth century B.C., from the Palestinian site of, strange to say, Raddana³⁵.

The diacritical dot is certainly not a word-divider; it is best interpreted as a *nota bene* sign best illustrated by the names of the two vowels in later Greek: ἔ ψιλόν and ὕ ψιλόν. In other words, it indicates what would have been called ἔ ψιλόν, i.e. the vowel without the glottal stop. Diacritical dots were used later in Etruscan to indicate the absence of a *vowel*, and short diacritical strokes occur also in the Philistine documents, the meaning of which is, at the present stage of analysis, unknown³⁶.

The fact that in this brief inscription only two out of six possible vowels are indicated by specific signs is not surprising and constitutes no objection to the proposed reading. Exactly as in the later Semitic *matres lectiones*, vowel notation seems to have been added where it was necessary to specify a phonemically important contrast, or where the morpheme itself was a vowel. The phenomena are characteristic of later Lycian, Lydian, and probably Carian writing systems, as well as of the Philistine documents.

There is another inscribed spindle whorl, that is almost equally enigmatic, from a site not far away in time and space, Tell Sukas on the Syrian coast about 40 km. South of Ras Shamra³⁷. It reads: πῆσαϑορες ἐμι. The *eta/epsilon* and *mu* in the second word are ligatured, and the latter character has the isosceles *M* form.

The reading is probably, "I am of Pesa's-daughter", cf. Gk. *kora*, (*kour-*) "daughter". The spelling with a *koppa* before the omicron

³⁵ Cross and Freedman, An Inscribed Jar Handle from Raddana, *BASOR* 201, 1971, 19—22. From that time and place, the inscription could easily be non-Semitic.

³⁶ A. J. Pfiffig, *Die Etruskische Sprache* 1969, 23f. The elaborate theory of an original syllabic writing to account for the diacritical dots seems completely unnecessary.

Figs. 5 and 6 from the Hebron documents may illustrate the use of diacritical marks. Fig. 5 is one illustration of a very common morpheme in these documents, that probably corresponds to the Indo-European *-que*. (i line 1). Fig. 6 is from i line 4 and illustrates a context in which the *qu* is not followed by a vowel. It must be emphasized as strongly as possible that these documents stem from a non-professional scribal tradition. The closed and open top forms of particular letters that have been such important chronological criteria in some modern academic circles are thus irrelevant. The *dal* of the inscription under discussion already (in the 10th Century) prepares the way for the open top *dal* of the later Aramaic scripts.

³⁷ P. J. Riis, *Sukas I*, Copenhagen 1970, 158 and fig. d, p. 157. I owe this reference to Mr. Henry MacAdam of the American University of Beirut.

represents no difficulty. Compare the name of the contemporary Rhodian poet, Peisander³⁸. The peculiar genitive case ending in *-es* could easily be accounted for on the ground of the East Mediterranean areal shift from *a* to *e* in nearly all languages from Luwian to South Canaanite and even Arabic (though the phenomenon is extremely difficult to date in the latter two cases). The inscription dates probably to the early sixth century B.C.

For other illustrations of early Syrian non-semitic writing, compare the two inscriptions from Hama that must date from prior to 720 B.C. They have, as Ingholt correctly saw, affinities with Phrygian³⁹, but, typically, local peculiarities that do not seem to be present in the Northern Phrygian inscriptions.

Conclusions

We now have a modest documentation for the adaptation of Phoenician writing systems to non-Semitic languages in Syria itself, from the tenth century B.C. into the Roman period⁴⁰, most or all of which must be indigenous in origin and local in usage. Since there is a gap of three or four centuries between Late Bronze Age origins and the earliest inscriptions of pre-Islamic Arabic, it can confidently be predicted that excavations will continue, as they have in the past, to turn up enigmatic inscriptions which, since they do not fit into contemporary academic theories, are usually ignored by the scholarly world or are dismissed as 'forgeries'.

The whole problem of the transmission of the alphabet to the West therefore is placed into a new context. The old assumption that the professional scribal hand of tenth-century Phoenicia is the origin of all the Greek and Etruscan and Italic alphabets is a priori absurd. Nevertheless, the old Greek tradition of migrations from Phoenicia (including,

³⁸ The element *pas/pes/pis* occurs in most Eastern Mediterranean onomastics from the Bronze Age on, and there is little chance of identifying it correctly here.

³⁹ H. Ingholt, Rapport Préliminaire sur Sept Campagnes de Fouilles à Hama en Syrie, Copenhagen 1940, Pl. XXXIX and p. 1117.

⁴⁰ There are, in addition to those mentioned in this article, a fair number of inscriptions that must be re-examined, ranging in date from the twelfth century B.C. to the Roman period. Many of these have been published, many declared fakes, most of them simply ignored—all because they did not conform to the then-held theories about the evolution of the alphabet. Some of them have been known for a century.

no doubt, largely non-Semitic North Syria) must be taken seriously, for it is an authentic reminiscence of migration to the West both at the end of the Bronze Age, and again probably (as an aftermath of Assyrian conquest) in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. from the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea, which includes both North Syria and Cilicia.

The time is long past when one can undertake the study of writing on the basis of mere formal comparisons, while ignoring the concrete historical context, which it is possible to know, and the historical dynamics of societies in which literacy becomes substituted for complete illiteracy. Factors involved in the diffusion of literacy certainly included migration, though commerce must have been just as important in early stages. But it is becoming increasingly probable that the diffusion took place before any large-scale development of political bureaucracies developed a precision of writing that can be used for minute paleographic analysis. The further factor that seems universal in the Iron Age, of superimposition of a foreign military domination upon an older local population with its own tradition of literacy, the Philistines for example, must certainly also have been a powerful stimulus to adaptation of the alphabet to the foreign language.

Both Jeffery and Young have argued for an origin of the Greek and Phrygian alphabets in the north-east corner of the Mediterranean. It would seem much better to describe this locality as the starting-point for a diffusion of literacy to both cultures⁴¹, by a very complex process beginning in Syria itself and continuing there for some centuries until it died out in favor of the Greek and Aramaic alphabets. For the evidence strongly suggests a beginning long before we have evidence of any political entity that can be called 'Greek' in the classical sense, or Phrygian. Homer's *σῆματα λυγρὰ* in the Bellerophon story strongly suggest a still earlier diffusion to Lycia, a conclusion that is very strongly supported by the evidence of proper names that survive into the Hellenistic period⁴².

This is precisely what we should expect, for northern Syria had, for a traceable millennium before Homer, been a region where at least four major languages were in contact, and no doubt others that we do not

⁴¹ The spindle whorl inscription evidently antedates the very existence of an identifiable Phrygian culture. See Crossland in *CAH*³ I Pt. 2, 857: "...no Phrygian settlement has been identified which is certainly older than the ninth century."

⁴² Houwinck Ten Cate, *Luwian Population Groups*, Chap. I.

know. At Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age there have been found inscriptions in nine identifiable languages, written in six different writing-systems, including one that must have been locally devised. The personal names from Ugarit demonstrate the diversity of origin of its population⁴³, including as they do almost every known language of Western Asia, but not Greek. The same is true on a lesser scale all over the Near East wherever we have evidence. In a very important article that should be required reading for anyone dealing with ancient history, E. Pulgram has pointed out the fact that language, culture and race have no necessary connections with each other⁴⁴. Unfortunately, such political fairy tales of some linguistic-racial mystique are still too widely accepted as historical fact.

The explosion of literacy that we can safely project between the tenth and eighth centuries B.C. resulted in the transmission of writing from Yemen to Spain. This is also, of course, a period of development of petty states all over the Mediterranean, but at this time we have only accidental historical information and the barest of inscriptional evidence to support theories. The multitude of undecipherable inscriptions, such as that on the Çatal Hüyük spindle-whorl, bears witness to the fact that at this time the situation regarding local dialects must have been much more complex even than that with respect to the alphabet, and it is historically a very safe hypothesis that the process of 'Creolization', in which linguists have recently become interested, must have been taking place all over the Mediterranean. This in turn could well explain the inability of philologists to classify Etruscan and the other Anatolian languages into their respective 'pure' family groups.

To sum up: the forms and stances of the letters in the Çatal Hüyük inscription have very impressive correlations with those characteristic of a host of other typically early writing systems; the reading yielded is entirely in keeping with its context; and we have a good parallel not too far away in time or place. It is almost certainly the sort of document that we have been seeking: one that provides evidence for the adaptation of the West Semitic alphabet complex (not *the* alphabet) to a non-Semitic language, of which there were probably dozens of local examples before literacy began its diffusion to the North and West:

⁴³ F. Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit*, Rome 1967. At least 50% of the names are non-Semitic, and the same is more or less true all over the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age. See A. Glock, *A New Ta'annek Tablet*, BASOR 204, 1971, 17—30. As would be expected, in Palestine the non-Semitic names are roughly about 30%.

⁴⁴ Linear B, Greek, and the Greeks, *Glotta* 38, 1960, 171—181.

Since the levels being excavated at the time of discovery were of the tenth century B.C., there is little reason to doubt that the inscription dates to that time, and must be taken seriously in any future discussion of the mythical 'Greek' who learned *the* alphabet from the equally mythical Phoenician scribe. It is most probable that writing was diffused in the private sector of daily life which was concerned with commerce, commemoration of the dead or the living, recording that "Kilroy was here", and protecting claims to spindle whorls. The early Arabic inscriptions beautifully illustrate the process as well as the motley variety of the phenomena. Precision of form, spelling and grammar are always the functions of professional scribes, and a 'comparative grammar' based upon the compulsive spelling rules of ancient scribes can never cope with ancient reality, for, at any given time or place, the colloquial language and writing must always have been more archaic than the professional, educated language. After all, it is the *job* of the bureaucrat to make what has too often been termed 'progress', when all he has actually done is to obscure understanding by the introduction of a formal precision that has often no function other than to guarantee his own social status and income. The pride and status of the scribal class is already celebrated in the early part of the Middle Bronze age in Egypt ('The Satire on the Trades', ANET p. 432—34), and in a different way in the denunciations of scribes by Jesus of Nazareth.