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SOMMARIO

SIGNIFICANT OBJECTS AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH: AN INSCRIBED HANDLE FROM MISIS IN CILICIA

Anna Lucia D'Agata, Valentina Cannavò, Massimo Perna, Daniele Putortì

Νεωτέρῳ φιλίας χάριν

Summary

In 2016 the fragmentary handle of a plain container in coarse ware bearing incised Cypriot Syllabic signs was collected within the Iron Age II monumental fortress at Misis in Cilicia. A particular segment in the life history of our vessel is reconstructed here through the study of aspects relating to manufacture, consumption, exchange and symbolic value, as well as deposition and discarding. The results of this research shed light on the social mechanisms by which a community of the Eastern Mediterranean forged its social identity in a period of revolutionary social changes. They also help to understand the complex nature, and entangled and transcultural character of Cilician society at the beginning of the first millennium BC.

INTRODUCTION

It is a common belief that, unless the history of an object can boast written documentation, the available archaeological evidence will never be sufficient to reconstruct its entire lifecycle (Joy 2009). Though mindful of this limitation, we have adopted a biographical approach (Appadurai 1986; Hoskins 1998; Gosden, Marshall 1999) to the study of the meagre remains of a clay vessel: the fragmentary handle of a plain coarse ware container found at Misis on the höyük during the 2016 excavation campaign. What makes this object particularly significant are the signs incised in Cypriot Syllabic on the surface of the handle.

Misis is a multi-period site located in the plain of Cilicia on the right bank of the Ceyhan river (D'Agata 2017a; 2017b; 2019a; 2019b; Salmeri, D'Agata 2012) (Figs 1-2). From at least the end of the ninth to the end of the eighth century BC, Misis was a large town that controlled the lower plain of the Ceyhan, directly connected to the Mediterranean through the seaports on the Cilician coast (Blue 1997; Taffet 2001). The recent archaeological excavations carried out on the mound of Misis have revealed that during these centuries of the Iron Age a rich material culture, deeply entangled with that of the island of Cyprus and to a much lesser extent of the Levant, emerged at Misis as at other sites in the plain of Cilicia (D'Agata 2019a). A particular segment in the life history of the vessel to which our inscribed handle belongs is reconstructed here through the study of aspects relating to manufacture, consumption, exchange and symbolic value, as well as deposition, discarding and abandonment (cf. for a similar experiment, Maeir *et al.* 2015).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND RELATED FINDS

In 2016, a fragment of the handle of a closed Iron Age vessel, bearing incised signs in Cypriot Syllabic script (Fig. 3a-f), was brought to light within Building I, the monumental fortress built in the second half of the eighth century BC on the summit of the höyük at Misis as a result of the political reorganization underway in the Ceyhan region in the years immediately preceding its annexation to the Assyrian empire (cf. D'Agata 2017a; 2019b).

Between 2012 and 2019, the excavation campaigns on the south-western slopes of the Misis mound allowed us to gradually bring to light an impressive stratigraphic sequence that includes superimposed buildings of the Chalco-

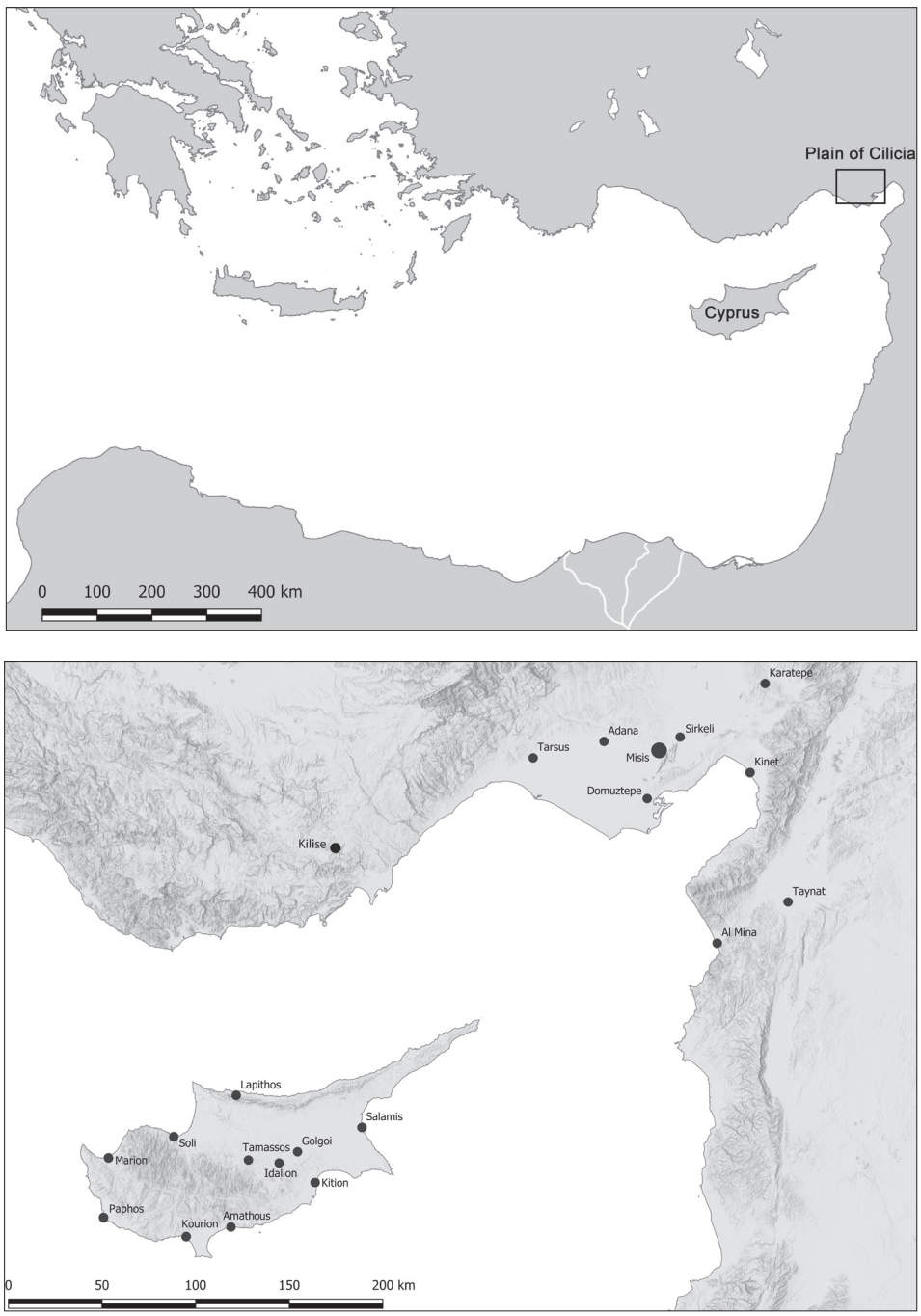

Fig. 1a-b. The Eastern Mediterranean with the plain of Cilicia and Cyprus.

lithic, Iron II/Middle Iron, Roman Imperial, Late Antique, Islamic and Medieval periods (D'Agata 2017a, b; Salmeri, D'Agata 2011) (Fig. 4).

2014 saw the first identification of the remains of a complex of small buildings (G) connected to the sanctuary probably devoted to Isis and Serapis that must have stood on the summit in the Roman Imperial period (Phase 7), and of the imposing Building I, which presumably covered the entire mound in the Middle Iron Age (Phase 10) (Fig. 5).

Fig. 2. Misis Höyük from the west, with the Ceyhan river on the right, and the mountain range of Misis Dağ in the background.

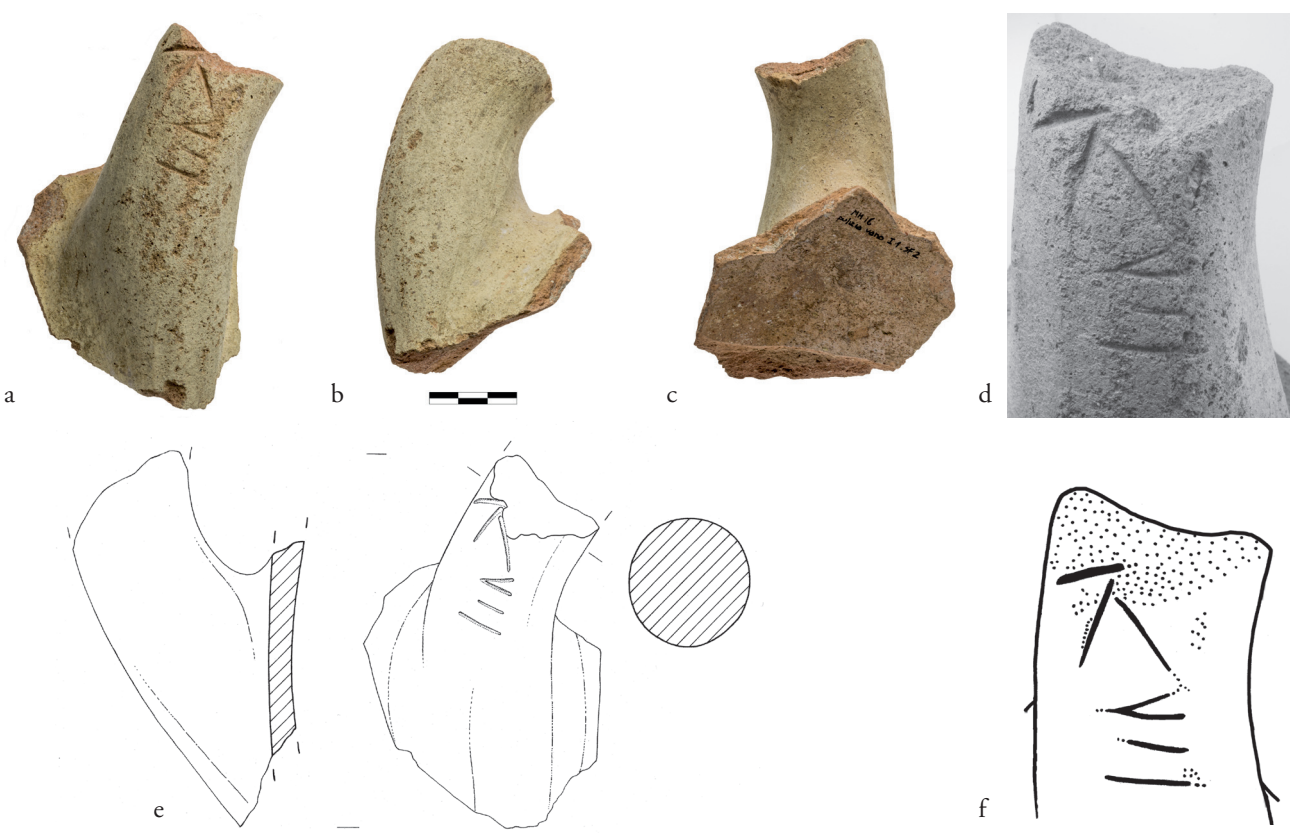

Fig. 3a-f. Clay handle with inscribed signs from Room I1 (MH16_I1_Interface 808/1035_Clearing_SF2).

Fig. 4. General view of the excavations on Misis Höyük.

Fig. 5. Plan of Building I (Phase 10) with indication of Quarter G (Phase 7).

In the west central sector of the excavation area, it emerged that the Roman quarter was built directly above the ruins of the earlier building. Walls 654 and 832, belonging to two different terraces of G, were built above Room I1, the westernmost of the casemate rooms of the Iron Age fortress (4.80 x 2 m) (Fig. 6a-b).

The latter currently consists of three casemate rooms (I1-3) and a massive stone channel to their east (I4) (Fig. 5, Phase 10). No floor levels were detected: a hard, thick earth deposit within I1, which was excavated in 8 layers, was followed up to 48.70 m above sea level (asl) (Fig. 6b). The walls consist of a substructure in roughly parallelepiped stone blocks (in I1: 814 and 824) – of unequal dimensions and assembled with the insertion of small and medium-sized stones – and of an elevation in regular rows of mud bricks (in I1: 800 and 951) (Fig. 7a-b).

Rainwater drainage must have been one of the most significant problems that the builders on the höyük of Misis were forced to tackle, as shown by the numerous channels constructed at different periods in various areas of the hill. In the case of Building I, in addition to the construction of the stone channel (I4) to the east, the openings of a channel with thick edges of beaten earth (1047, 1950) running north-west/south-east – whose use was limited to the worksite phase –, have also been identified in the stone walls of room I1, later filled by 1044 and the underlying layers (cf. Figs 6b and 8).

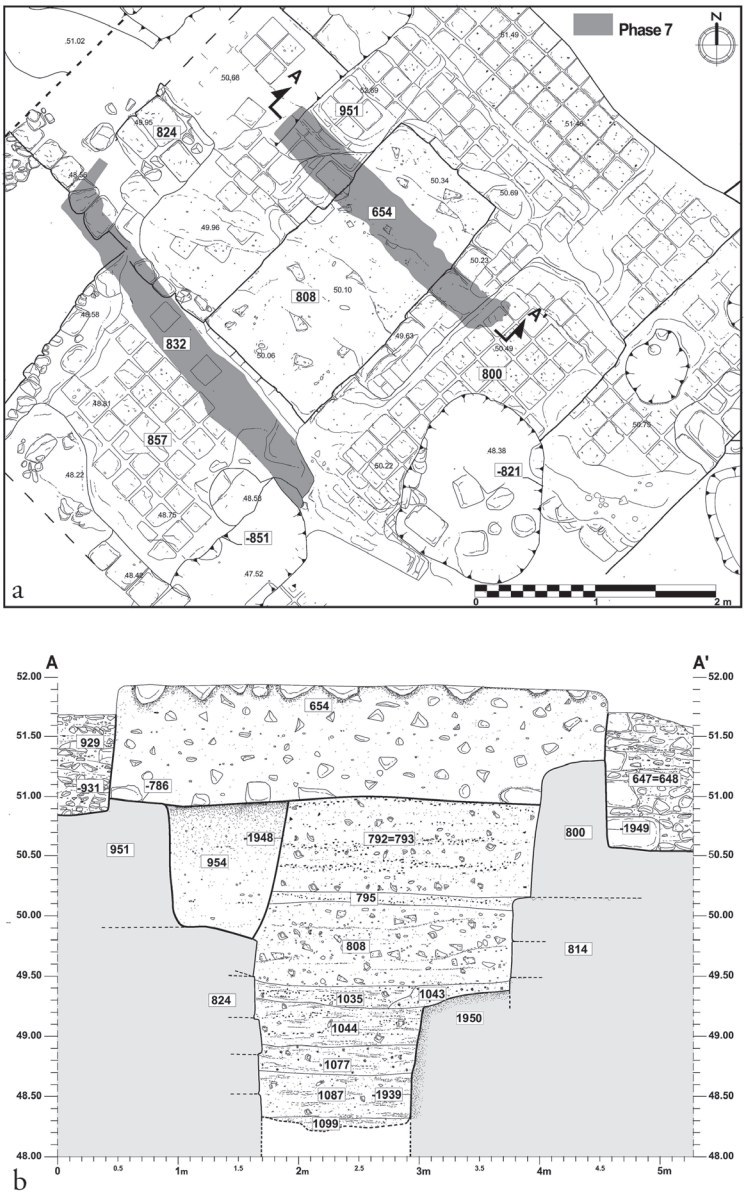

Fig. 6. Room I1: a. general plan including Roman walls 654 and 832, and indication of cross-section A-A'; b. east-west cross-section A-A'.

Disturbances to the integrity of the original fill within I1 were observed in the north-west sector in proximity to the inner surfaces of the mudbrick wall 951 (Fig. 6b). Here, with the aim of creating an even foundation for the construction of wall 654, the builders of G had laid a base layer (954) that had also filled the gap, perhaps pre-existing, in 951. 954 was characterized by loose, sandy soil, and chronologically mixed materials dating back to the Middle Iron Age and Roman Imperial periods. We should attribute to this operation the disturbance to the uppermost layers inside I1, *i.e.* 792-793, 795 and in part 808, which we should imagine originally leaned against 951. The identification among the materials collected amidst the stones of wall 654 of a fragment of a bichrome skyphos, part of the same vessel as a similar fragment collected in the fill of I1, provides further evidence of the disturbance caused to the Iron Age stratigraphic sequence: in this regard, it is worth noting the different state of

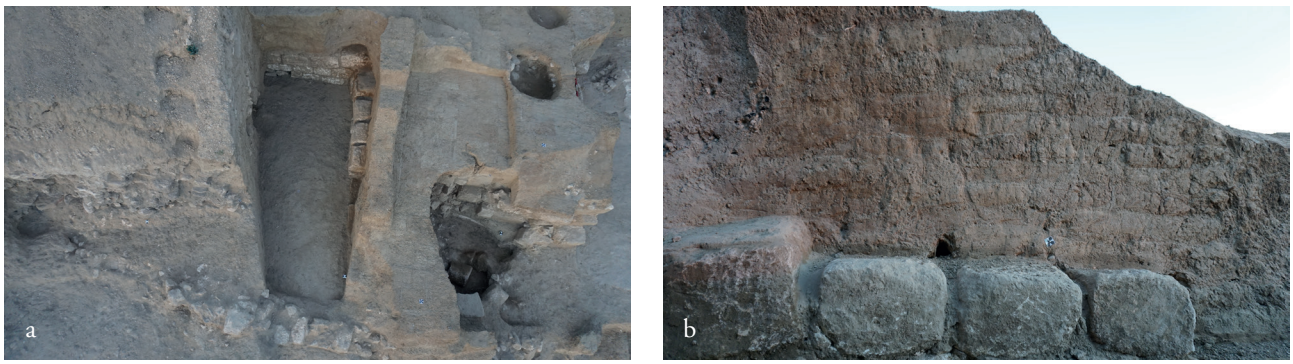

Fig. 7. Room I1: a. general view from the south-west at the interface between 808 and 1035; b. detail of the eastern side with mudbrick wall 800 and stone wall 814 (2014).

Fig. 8. North-west/south-east channel within I1.

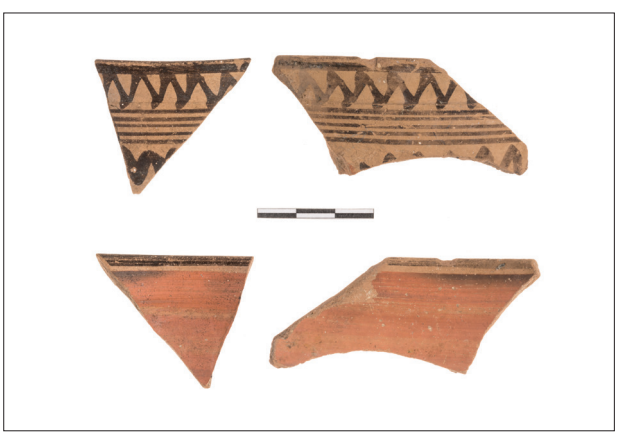

Fig. 9. Fragments of skyphos MH14_808_33: on the left from 808; on the right from within wall 654.

conservation of the surface of the fragment from the original context (Fig. 9 on the left) compared to that found within wall 654, whose surface is relatively worn (Fig. 9 on the right).

Starting from 49.80 m asl, corresponding to the lower part of 808, the fill within I1 was untouched. The hard clay-rich soil matrix yielded a large quantity of pottery attributable to the eighth century BC. Our inscribed handle was collected at 49.50 m asl at the interface between 808 and 1035, well below the level of the disturbances and the cut occasioned by the installation of wall 654 (Fig. 6b).

The chronology of the deposit excavated in I1 is provided by the remarkable amount of fine ware it contained and, in particular, by some fragments of Greek Late Geometric II kotylai (Fig. 10).

On this basis, it appears to have been closed by 720/700 BC (Table 1).[1] The analysis of the materials collected in I1 is still underway. Nonetheless, the study of the 1308 pottery fragments found in 808 provides some indication of the ceramic classes documented in the fill (Fig. 11). Among these, plain pottery, both fine and coarse, is the most common class, followed by kitchen ware and white painted ware; there is also a small percentage (0.4%) of imported pottery. At Misis, this trend in the diffusion of ceramic classes was essentially unaltered throughout the eighth century BC.

1 We have maintained the conventional chronology of the Greek Protogeometric and Geometric periods. For an alternative proposal, Gimatzidis, Weninger 2020.

Fig. 10. Greek pottery from the fill within I: 808_15; 1044_1; 1044_7; 1077_1; 1044_2; I1_ 808/1035_Clearing.

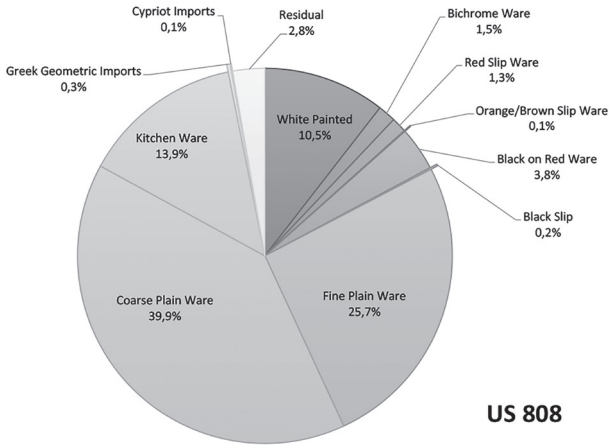

Fig. 11. Pie chart showing the proportions of ceramic classes from US 808 by percentage of sherd count.

The absence on the mound of Misis of materials dating to after the late eighth century BC leads us to believe that the fortress, if its construction was ever completed, can have survived for only a few years. It was certainly no longer active after the end of the eighth century BC. After this date, the site apparently remained abandoned for many centuries.

To summarize, by the end of the eighth century BC our inscribed handle became a discarded item in the fill of a new building. In antiquity, pottery was regularly used as rubble for construction: in addition to being available in large quantities at almost no cost, the use of clay sherds in highly permeable fills was necessary to allow excess damp to drain away (Peña 2007, 250-271). Concurrently, the formation of an archaeological record involving garbage removal and deposition, as in the case of the fill in I1, is a social process implied by the need to clean up the remains of a ruined past and construct a new built landscape (Dawdy 2006). We shall return later to the pre-depositional use of the original object: for the time being, it is sufficient to stress that an act of discarding with multiple meanings marks the final point in the usage lifecycle of the vessel to which our inscribed handle belongs.

Middle Geometric II	800-750 BC
Late Geometric I	760-735/730 BC
Late Geometric II	735/730-720/700 BC

Table 1. Chronology of Greek Geometric pottery (after Coldstream 1998; see also Verdan *et. al.* 2008).

THE HANDLE FRAGMENT AND ITS ORIGINAL VESSEL

MH16_I1_Interface 808/1035_Clearing_SF2 (Fig. 3a-f).
Dim. 11 x 7.9 cm; wall thickness 0.6-0.8; weight: 320 gr.
Paste of deep pink colour with numerous white inclusions; whitish 'slip' (?) on exterior surface. Surface around the insertion of the handle on the exterior was smoothed over with extra clay to strengthen the join; vertical marks from shaving the clay when the vessel was still wet before firing are clearly visible. Good state of conservation. No traces of post-depositional alterations.
Handle fragment of a large closed vessel, attached horizontally to the shoulder. Round section. On top surface at the join with the body, signs incised after firing, of uneven depth (see below).
For criteria to identify if the marks were incised after the firing of the vessel cf. Hirschfeld 1993, 318 n. 27; 2014, 266.

The handle belongs to a large, plain closed vessel in coarse ware with horizontal raised handles on the shoulder. Its technical and typological characteristics, together with the profound cultural affinities between Cilicia and Cyprus during the first centuries of the first millennium BC, suggest that the handle belonged to a storage amphora in Plain White Ware, a vessel that in Cyprus is typical of the eighth century BC (Gjerstad 1948, fig. XLV, 16.1a-17.1b; 1960, 120-121, fig. 15.1-2; Dikaios 1963, 197, fig. 35.29-30; Fourrier 2006, 78-79, figs 377-378; 2015, 127 I-131, fig. 14). The traces of shaving of the excess clay (Fig. 3b) may indicate that the vessel was manufactured by building up coils on a wheel (Winther-Jacobsen 2002, 173). According to Hocking (2001), the drastic difference in colour between the core and surface of the vessel does not result from the application of a layer of slip but from a reducing atmosphere during the firing process. Though the fast wheel becomes widespread in Cyprus in the eleventh century BC, coil building and smoothing techniques remained in use to manufacture large vessels in the early centuries of the first millennium BC (Crewe, Knappett 2012, 181). Ultimately, this is a substantial vessel, on average 65 cm tall (Winther-Jacobsen 2002, 170), characterized by a rim thickened on the outside, horizontal handles rising from the shoulder up to the level of the rim, and a ring base.

This type of amphora appears in a Cypro-Geometric (CG) III – Cypro-Archaic (CA) I context at Kition-Bamboula (Fourrier 2015, 127 I-131, fig. 14), where it is considered rare, and in different CA I deposits all over the island, for example at Kition, Kathari Floor 3 (Karageorghis 2004, Part II, 22, pl. CXXII.2183 and 2183a) and at Amathous (Fourrier 2006, 78-79, figs 377-378). A large number of Plain White (PW) amphorae dated to the middle of the eighth century BC were found in Royal Tomb 1 at Salamis (Dikaios 1963, 197, fig. 35.29-30; cf. Blackwell 2010, 152). This container is the typological predecessor of the so called basket-handled amphora with elongated body and handles rising well above the rim, which by the very end of the eighth century BC inaugurated the seaborne trade of oil and wine from Cyprus to the Eastern Mediterrranean. Basket-handle amphorae, which are considered a production of the area of Salamis (Gunneweg, Perlman 1991, 596-597; Iacovou 2014, 805-806; Demesticha 2017, 132), are attested along the coast of Western Anatolia, in Cilicia and the Levant (Winther-Jacobsen 2002, 170-171; Greene, Leidwanger, Özdaş 2011; Demesticha 2017, 130-132).

The presence of a PW amphora at Misis is not entirely surprising given the aforementioned profound cultural affinities between the ceramic production of this site and other centres in the plain of Cilicia and that of the Cypriot cities of the early centuries of the first millennium BC. To underscore the differing levels of contact that Cilicia and the Levant had with Cyprus during this period, it is worth recalling that at the start of the first millennium BC, before the diffusion of the basket-handled amphora in the markets of the eastern Mediterranean, ceramic exports from Cyprus to the Levant seem to consist almost exclusively of painted ware (Nuñez 2008; Iacovou 2014, 803-805; Karacic, Osborne 2016; Georgiadou 2018), whilst, before the seventh century BC, exports of basket-handled amphorae were circumscribed (Demesticha 2017, 130). A CA I PW amphora, probably made in the area of Amathous and found at Megiddo, represents a very good parallel for our vessel (Kleiman, Waiman-Barak, Finkelstein 2018).

What is certainly unusual on the handle from Misis is the presence of signs in Cypriot Syllabic, incised after the firing of the vessel, reminiscent of a Cypriot practice typical of the Bronze Age rather than the Iron Age, but we will return to this below, after discussing the petrographic analysis of the fabric of the vessel.

THE ORIGIN OF THE VESSEL: THE PETROGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

A sample taken from the handle fragment was subjected to petrographic analysis. The thin section was prepared at the Department of Geological and Chemical Sciences, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. The description, with a polarizing microscope, followed the standard proposed by Whitbread (1989) and by Quinn (2013). The fabric is characterized by very few microstructures, open-spaced, which comprise common meso vughs. The voids are not infilled with microcalcitic material and are partially oriented parallel to the margin of the vessel. The groundmass is homogenous throughout the section and the micromass is optically active. The colour is mainly light reddish brown in PPL and in XPL. A light brown zone is visible on one of the margins of the handle, the thickness is irregular from 1.8 mm to 0.3 mm. This is linked to the light buffy surface of the handle but should

not be identified as a slip, suggesting that the difference between surface and body colour was caused by the firing atmosphere. The inclusions (c:f:v 5:90:5) have a weak bimodal grain-size distribution and are quite well sorted. They have a homogenous distribution and are single-spaced. The clasts are angular to subangular, from equant to elongated shapes and are classified as follows:

Coarse Fraction <1mm
Dominant
Feldspars, subangular and elongated, max dimension 0.9 mm
Frequent
Sedimentary rocks, calcarenite (?), subangular and equant, max dimension 0.6 mm
Common
Gabbroic rock fragments (?), altered, subrounded and subangular and equant, max dimension 0.6 mm
Rare
Calcimudstones, rounded and elongated, max dimension 0.7 mm

Fine Fraction <0.3mm
Dominant
Sedimentary rocks, calcarenite (?)
Frequent
Gabbroic rock fragments (?)
Common
Quartz
Few
Plagioclase
Very few
Opaque minerals
Rare
Calcimudstones, biotite
Very rare
Pyroxene

Overall the fabric is characterized by a non-calcareous well-packed groundmass and by silt grain size of feldspars and sedimentary rocks and very few coarse sand grain size of sedimentary and gabbro rock fragments, mostly altered (Fig. 12a-b). Fossils are absent and the calcareous inclusions are very poor. There is no evidence of clay mixing, notably in the textural concentration features. The groundmass packing and the composition of the inclusions are different from the local fabrics of Misis höyük investigated till now. Here coarse wares mainly show the occurrence of micritic limestones, fossils, and chert. Plutonic and metamorphic rocks are also attested in few sherds and should be linked to the local geology. The fabric and the macroscopic features of our fragment suggest a different technology and a non-local provenance.

In terms of petrographic data, as for Iron Age pottery in Cilicia, Kynet Höyük offers an important archaeological sequence (Hodos, Knappett, Kilikoglou 2005). The local geology has similarities with the Misis area due to the presence of limestone, volcanic and metamorphic rocks. Ten fabrics have been identified in the pottery dataset analyzed, but two are the most commonly attested and have been considered of local origin: Group A-serpentinite fabric and Group B-foraminifera fabric. Both have very distinctive features that are incompatible with the handle fragment from Misis given the absence of serpentine rocks and fossils. A provenance from the Syrian region can also be excluded. Distinctive petrofabrics were identified in Qatna (Maritan *el al.* 2005), Tell Hadidi (Mason, Cooper 1999) and Ebla (Ballirano *et. al.* 2014), which are not compatible with the composition of the Misis handle.

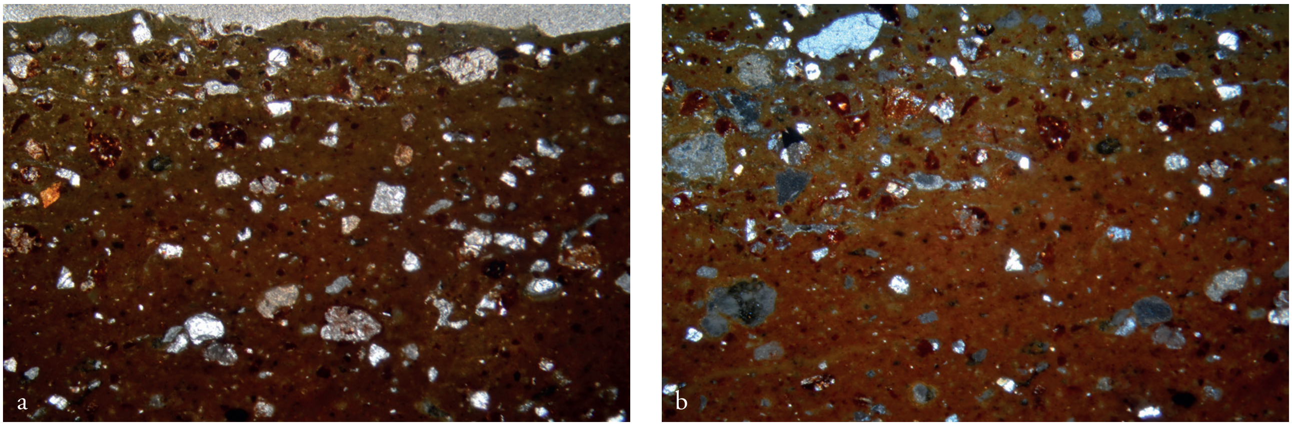

Fig. 12a-b. Thin section photographs of sample from MH16_I1_Interface 808/1035_Clearing_SF2. a. PPL; b. CPL. Width images: 5.5mm.

Examining the petrographic data on Cypriot wares, no similarity can be established with PW wares from Idalion (Bartusewich 2012), primarily characterized by highly igneous (Group A) and lime-rich (Group B) fabrics. A similarity can be seen with Group A from Enkomi, mainly comprising Plain White Wheelmade Ware of the Late Cypriot Bronze Age, as identified in Tschegg, Ntaflos, Hein 2009: our fragment, however, differs in terms of the calcareous inclusions, being poorer than the Enkomi vessels.

Although an accurate matching is difficult to establish, the suggested presence of gabbro and sedimentary rocks (calcarenite), mostly altered, and the presence of mafic and felsic minerals probably due to the disaggregation of the gabbro ones, should be the main markers to assume the provenance of the handle. Both gabbro and calcarenite rocks are present in Cyprus, in particular along the Mesaoria Plain, bounded by the Kyrenia range to the north and by the Troodos massif to the south. Geologically, the eastern Mesaoria Basin comprises sediments of the Pliocene Nicosia Formation and the Pleistocene Athalassa Formation (Tschegg *et al.* 2009). The Nicosia Formation consists of a succession of marine sedimentation, also containing calcarenite. The overlying extensive deposition of fluvial and alluvial material during the Quaternary was related to erosion resulting from the uplift of the Troodos massif, with the Troodos Ophiolite Complex containing gabbro rocks (Tschegg *et al.* 2009).

Petrographic data are also connected to macroscopic technological features and the observation of the thin section should verify the presence or otherwise of a white slip. This point is crucial and still problematic for Cypriot Iron Age pottery, as in the case of PW ware. In order to obtain buff-coloured surfaces, Iron Age potters used firing reduction as well as buff clay slips, or left buff clay bodies unslipped (Hocking 2001). Firing reduction is evidenced by the presence of ruddy areas (Hocking 2001, 136-137). These are not identifiable on our fragment, however, it represents only a very small portion of the original vessel. Based on such a small fragment we cannot express ourselves in favour of one or other of the hypotheses.

EXTENDING THE MEANING OF THE OBJECT: THE INSCRIPTION

]⊼ ≤ |
]*to-li* ⫰ ↓

Read from top to bottom.
Length of the inscription 4.5 cm.

Our handle presents some possible signs that, as reported by the excavators, were made after the vessel was fired. In Fig. 3d and f, written from top to bottom, the sign *to* (⊼), missing a small part of the upper stroke, could be identified, and attributed to the Cypriot syllabary in its Paphian variant; in the common syllabary this sign has a

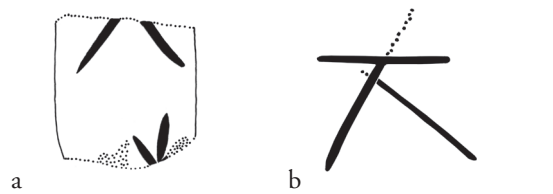

Fig. 13. a. Inscription on handle from Kourion (Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 139); b. Sign incised on handle from Amathous (Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 43). Drawings not to scale.

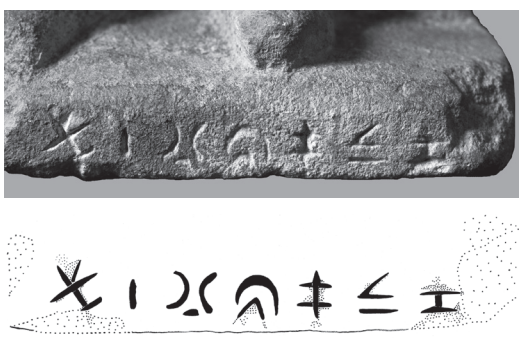

Fig. 14. Inscription from Kourion (Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 110). Drawing not to scale.

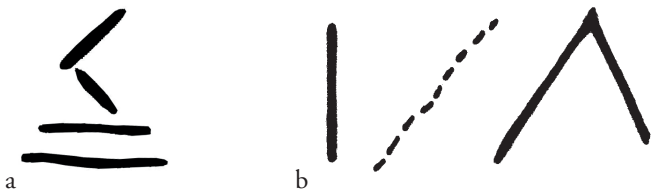

Fig. 15. a. The sign *li* with two horizontal strokes from inscription #041 from Palaeopaphos (Masson, Mitford 1986, 50-51, pl. 13); b. Signs on a handle from Kourion (Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 131). Drawing not to scale.

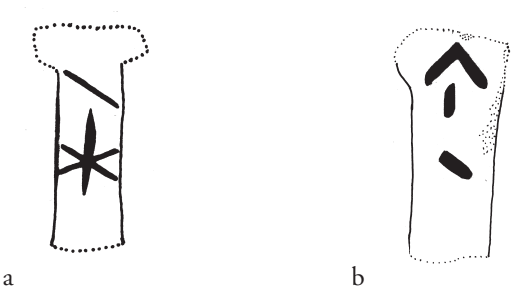

Fig. 16. a-b. Inscribed handles from Kourion (Karnava, Perna 2020, nos. 135 and 143). Drawings not to scale.

different form (Ŧ). Given the eight century BC date of the inscription, however, the standard grid of the Paphian/common signs must be used with great caution. The sign *to* is attested on a handle incised before firing (Fig. 13a), from the sanctuary of Apollo at Kourion (Masson 1996, 179, no. 27), which can be dated to the fairly long period between 750 and 480 BC, and on the handle of a vessel in PW from Amathous, also incised before firing, dating to around the 5th century BC (Fig. 13b).[2]

On our handle, below the sign *to*, we could compare the first two elements – an acute angle and a horizontal stroke – to the sign 𐔦 *li* of Cypriot Syllabic script, followed by a further isolated horizontal stroke. The angle is slightly more 'closed' than in the majority of attested signs of this type, but it finds a parallel in an inscription (*ICS* 187) incised on a clay statuette from Kourion in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 14).

In any case, we should mention a Paphian form of *li* that presents not one but two horizontal strokes. There are few examples of this *li* with two strokes, and they can all be ascribed to the ancient Paphian syllabary: an example is the inscription on stone #041 from Palaeopaphos (Fig. 15a). Though the parts making up the sign – an acute angle and two parallel horizontal strokes – are all present on our piece, the distance between the strokes gives them an unconvincing appearance. A more pertinent comparison might be that with the inscription on a handle from Kourion (Fig. 15b), where the sign presents an acute angle followed by a single stroke (Masson 1996, 179, no. 6); depending on the orientation of the handle, it can be interpreted as a *sa* ∨, or as a *ko* ∧ followed by a horizontal stroke. This detail illustrates how difficult it is, when dealing with signs of elementary form such as a simple angle, to decide one way or the other. In our inscription, the most reasonable hypothesis is a *li* 𐔦 in the common variant of the syllabary followed by a horizontal stroke. This single horizontal stroke is sometimes written obliquely, as on

2 The handle was found in 2017 by Yannis Violaris, whom we thank for allowing us to mention the find, cf. Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 43.

some handles from Kourion (Masson 1996, 179-180, nos. 9 = Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 143, and 35 = Karnava, Perna 2020, no. 135) and generally follows a sign from the syllabary (Fig. 16a-b).

A single sign inscribed on the handle of a vessel should generally not be considered a true inscription. In our case, however, the presence of a second sign and the fact that we cannot rule out the presence of a sign preceding the first (*to*) allows us to consider the one from Misis to be a true inscription. To sum up, the sign *li* on our handle belongs to the common syllabary, while the sign *to* can be referred to the Paphian syllabary. Signs of the latter are sporadically attested all over the island, even in the eastern region, as in the case of *ICS* 241 from Chytroi.

The corpus of Cypriot Syllabic script counts few true inscriptions on handles consisting of at least two signs (Masson 1996, 179, no. FF11, 18 and 27): two incised before firing and one after firing come from the sanctuary of Apollo at Kourion. Also from Kourion there are 14 handles incised before firing with a single sign, and two with a sign incised after firing. From Amathous we have only two handles with a single sign incised before firing. At Marion, which has yielded over 200 inscriptions incised on vessels, two (or more) inscribed handles with at least two signs are attested (Smith 2002, 26-27, fig. 9).

As for handles inscribed with a single sign, it is impossible to obtain an overall picture as these are generally not considered in the collections of texts or in the corpora.[3]

For the second millennium, of 35 inscriptions in Cypro-Minoan incised on handles, probably only seven were incised after firing. There thus seems to be a difference between the first and second millennium in terms both of the frequency and method with which handles were inscribed in the two scripts.

As for the date of the signs on the handle from Misis, the epigraphic analysis cannot add any further information with respect to that which is suggested by the excavation data.

In the eighth century BC, only five inscriptions are currently attested in Cypriot Syllabic and can be ascribed to 750-700 BC. Two short inscriptions on bronze objects come from Paphos: these are Kouklia no. 233 (*ICS*^{2}, no. 18d) and a container (Masson 1987, 96). A third inscription, found at Kition, is incised on a clay vessel (*ICS*^{2}, no. 258a) and the last two come from non-Cypriot sites: one is incised on an Attic amphora from Mende in the Chalkidiki peninsula (Vokotopoulou, Christidis 1995, 5-12) and the other on an agate seal found in Cilicia in the Adana region (Poncy *et al.* 2001, 18-20). Finally, an inscription consisting of just two signs comes from Kition-Bamboula (Olivier 2015, 346-347; Egetmeyer 2017, 193-194, no. 13), dated to the CG III; Olivier believes it to be in Cypriot Syllabic and to belong to the transition between the two Cypriot scripts. Since these are two signs with a very elementary *ductus* attested in both scripts, for this inscription, we cannot decide with certainty in favour of either of the two hypotheses, though the date makes it more likely that this is an inscription in Cypriot Syllabic.

Finally, we should mention three inscriptions that can be dated less precisely: the inscription painted on a vessel from Palaeopaphos (Karageorghis, Karageorghis 1956, 353) dated very approximately to between 900 and 750 BC; the inscription incised after firing on a vessel in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Karageorghis, Karageorghis 1956), from the Cesnola excavations and thus without a context, dating to between 750 and 600 BC; the inscription incised on the foot of a bronze tripod from Delphi (Rolley, Masson 1971, 295-304), whose date falls between 700 and 600 BC.

Our inscription is thus one of the most ancient in Cypriot Syllabic. Considering that, alongside the inscribed seal from Adana, an inscription – dated to the seventh century BC – was found at Kilise Tepe (Egetmeyer, Steele 2010, 127-132), the inscription from Misis is further confirmation of the privileged relationship between Cyprus and Cilicia during these centuries.

3 These data are drawn from the database of Nicolle Hirschfeld (1996), from Masson 1961 and from a database created by Jean-Pierre Olivier that represents the starting point for the Corpus of Cypriot Syllabic the first volume of which was edited by Artemis Karnava and Massimo Perna, with the collaboration of Markus Egetmeyer (Karnava, Perna 2020).

THE INSCRIBED VESSEL FROM MISIS AND ITS CULTURAL MEANING IN THE CILICIAN SOCIETY OF THE EIGHTH CENTURY BC

Some elements emerging from the analysis conducted hitherto suggest that the vessel to which the fragmentary handle from Misis belongs may have been made in a Cypriot town. These are the extraneous nature of the fabric, from a petrographic point of view, from the geological profile of the Misis area and from the coarse ware fabrics known for Misis, the typological and chronological analysis suggesting Cypriot PW ware, and the presence of signs incised in Cypriot Syllabic. The similarity with raw materials from the eastern Mesaoria suggested by the petrographic analysis is very interesting and, if confirmed by future research, will be a significant indicator of the potential connection of our vessel with Salamis, which was to some extent the economic and territorial heir to Enkomi (Janes 2015, 155).

As we have already noted, PW amphorae are common in Cyprus in the eighth century BC, but post-firing multi-sign inscriptions on firmly dated vessels of this kind attributable to such an early date are at the moment non-existent. Two handles from a bothros in the rural sanctuary at Polis-Peristeries (modern Marion), referred to pithoid amphorae, bear two- or more-sign inscriptions, but their chronology is still under study and could be later than the eighth century BC (Smith 2002, 26-27, fig. 9; for contexts see Smith 1997).[4] At the same time, the incised signs on the handle from Misis are in keeping with the well-known Cypriot practice of marking vessels with post-firing signs – large, easily visible and placed on the handles – which is typical of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and connected to the trade network that at the time was based in the Cypriot polities. In this context – but the observation can easily be extended to other cultural and chronological contexts – the signs added *after* the firing of the vessel have rightly been interpreted as made *not* by the manufacturers of the vessels but rather by the operators who handled them subsequently "in the process of trade, exchange, or deposit" (Hirschfeld 1993; 2002, 95; see also Valério, Davis 2017). The practice of marking vessels can best be explained by some form of administrative procedure adopted for the circulation of goods and containers in long distance trade. At Enkomi, the politically most important site of the Cypriot Late Bronze Age, various potmarking systems have been identified. Incised marks on the handles of local plain jugs and jars belong to a marking system that differs from those documented at the site on contemporary Aegean and Canaanite-type amphorae, *i.e.* on pottery imported from different Mediterranean regions. Within the potmarking system documented on the local ceramic production, it is important to note that PW wheelmade jars are the most commonly marked vessels (Hirschfeld 2002, 92; for potmarking at Kition in the LBA, Smith 2009, 55).

Though the use of writing saw no interruptions after the end of the LBA in Cyprus, the innovations that emerged during the Cypro-Geometric include the almost complete disappearance of the practice of marking handles with inscriptions (Steele 2018, 84). The only example has been identified at Kition, inscribed in Cypro-Minoan and dated to the Cypro-Geometric (Steele 2018, 67, fig. 2.9; see also Smith 2009, 119).

The signs incised on the fragmentary handle from Misis, whose meaning is enigmatic as we have seen, thus join the older examples of Cypriot Syllabic which in the eighth century BC document the transition from Cypro-Minoan to the new writing system: of these, at least two were found outside Cyprus (in Cilicia, in the Adana region, and at Mendes in the Chalkidiki peninsula, mentioned above). As the Phoenician script is widely attested on Cyprus during this period, all this indicates not just continuity with the previous tradition of literacy, but also the importance attributed to writing here; as we have already said, its use, from its introduction in the LBA, was never interrupted and it must have circulated throughout the island.

The signs incised on the handle from Misis do not, however, seem to document an accountancy system linked to trade, or in any case an administrative practice in force during the eighth century BC: there is no trace of this either at Misis or in Cyprus. Consequently, we must conclude that the individual responsible for the Misis

4 Interestingly, the handle inscriptions from Polis-Peristeries are normally marked at or near the top of the curve, away from the join with the body (Joanna Smith, personal communication, July 2020), while the Misis handle bears the inscription just at the join with the shoulder of the vessel.

inscription must have had some familiarity both with the earlier Cypriot practices of potmarking and with the Cypriot syllabic script. The inscription on the handle from Misis does not appear to be one of utilitarian type, functional to the use of the vessel. Rather, we should ascribe to it a symbolic significance, aimed first and foremost at establishing a connection with the far more ancient practice of placing writing signs on transport vessels, which clearly enhanced the value of the container that was exchanged or given as a gift, and that may also have conferred authority on the person using it (cf. Iacovou 2013, 162).

In the early centuries of the first millennium BC and up to the end of the eighth century BC, the export of transport vessels from the Aegean is extremely limited. This has led to the suggestion that the few examples of Protogeometric or Geometric amphoras found outside the Aegean should be given a symbolic importance within the system of gift-exchange in which tableware circulated (Luke 2003, 54; Dickinson 2006, 209-210, 215-216; Demesticha 2017, 143). The ceremonial meaning that amphorae in PW Ware could take on within specific contexts of use is well documented by their presence in the Royal Tombs at Salamis, and especially in Royal Tomb 1 (Dikaios 1963, 135, fig. 8 and fig. 35.120, 11 specimens; Karageorgis 1969, 25-28; see also the Cypriot amphora from Megiddo, Kleiman, Waiman-Barak, Finkelstein 2018). Belonging to the same Salaminian tomb there was also a large set of Greek vessels, dating to the Middle Geometric II (Dikaios 1963; Coldstream 2003, 62). The social significance ascribed to the Geometric Greek pottery found on Cyprus, which has long been recognized, is signalled by the fact that its use is limited to the convivial activity of drinking and eating, and its distribution restricted to the capital cities of the Iron Age kingdoms (Coldstream 1998; Crielaard 1999, 275; Luke 2003; Petit 1993, 707, fig. 55).

Greek Geometric vessels, and, in smaller quantities, small Cypriot containers in Black-on-Red dating to the eighth century BC, were also found in the Iron Age settlement at Misis, both in the fill of the Building I casemates and in the primary and secondary contexts discovered in Building L, which dominated the south-western slopes of the höyük at Misis before the construction of Building I (D'Agata 2019b). These clearly indicate that the local elites at Misis shared the social values, lifestyle and taste for luxury tableware of the ruling groups of the capital cities of Cyprus as well as of the Levant.

The amphora to which our inscribed handle belongs may thus have arrived from Cyprus with a cargo of Greek, and imitations of Greek, tableware, and small containers for perfumed oils, produced on the island. The inscription on the handle would thus have served to enhance the value of the vessel, connecting it, as we have said, to the LBA practice of marking transport amphorae and perhaps conferring an official nature on the transaction: it could thus be ascribed to an 'entrepreneur' or to the central authority of one of the Cypriot Iron Age kingdoms (cf. Iacovou 2013, 142; 2018).

In the eighth century BC, Misis clearly had an entangled culture shaped by continuous cultural interactions with neighbouring cultures and fed by the presence at the site of groups of different origins: a variety of objects and, consequently, diverse social traditions and languages, were in use, helping to shape the local inhabitants' new entangled identities (cf. D'Agata 2019b). The sharing with Cyprus of numerous features of material culture should also be viewed from the perspective of the development of the Cypriot kingdoms, for which the eighth century BC was a period rich in crucial transformations, from territorial expansion to the emergence of the earliest palaces (Hermary 2013; Petit 1996; 2019), from the foundation of extraurban sanctuaries (Papantoniou 2012) to the formation of regional styles (Fourrier 2007, 101-124; Smith 2009, 237-240; Georgiadou 2014; in general, see Iacovou 2013, 142). For some cities on the island, Cilicia may thus have represented an opportunity for expansion: economic, commercial, and perhaps even demographic. People with connections to Cyprus are present at Misis from the foundation of the Iron Age town, which dates back to at least the end of the ninth century BC (D'Agata 2019b). It is also possible that Misis acted as a hub in the plain of Cilicia for the regional export of imported materials towards the sites located on the eastern edge of the area. Greek Geometric pottery is known at Sirkeli (Seton-Williams 1954, 138; Kulemann-Ossen, Mönninghoff 2019, 119, fig. 21i), Soyali and Hesegin Tepe (Seton-Williams 1954, 138), and it probably arrived here via Misis. However, it should be stressed that according to the present state of knowledge, the limited presence of materials imported from Cyprus or from the Aegean in

the lower plain of the Ceyhan seems to suggest that in the exchange network of the eighth century BC, imports of fine table ware and small containers of perfumed oil seem to be aimed more at meeting the needs of the local elite at Misis than at regional distribution.

Finally, we should mention the possibility that the inscription on the amphora was placed there at Misis, and not in Cyprus. This circumstance, though less plausible since the vessel may have been made in Cyprus, does not affect the symbolic interpretation of the use of writing as conferring 'status' on the inscribed object. Rather, it underscores the entangled and transcultural character (Stockhammer 2012; 2013; Hitchcock, Maeir 2013) of Misis' material culture (D'Agata 2019b) and leads us to reflect on the use of writing in the region during the eighth century BC. In Cilicia at least three different scripts – Luwian, Phoenician and Cypriot – were in use at this time, confirming that, in parallel with what has been found for the development of material culture, scripts and languages were adopted drawing on a variety of different backgrounds, but as Maria Iacovou has noted for Cyprus (2005, 125; 2013, 134-135), none of the languages, or of the individual artefacts of material culture in use at Misis (Cypriot, Levantine, Greek), can be definitively attributed to a specific ethnic group; rather, elements of diverse origin were adopted and reworked at various levels of social complexity to construct a cultural system that appears unitary.

From this perspective, Misis becomes a case study of the *middle ground* invoked to understand the composite culture of the colonial world (cf. D'Agata 2019b): with the fundamental distinctions that our city cannot be compared to a true colonial context (Liverani 1988, 876), and that in the early centuries of the first millennium, as for much of its existence, it fell within the sphere of influence of an imperial power or even belonged directly to it: in this case Assyria. Whilst during phase 10, corresponding to Building I, the town was probably under the control of the Adaniot dynasty of Azatiwata, during the earlier phase 11, when the acropolis was occupied by Building L, the political status of Misis is unclear: we do not know to what extent it was the tributary of a regional power. What does appear to be incontrovertible is that, throughout the eighth century BC, the material culture in use at the site is the outcome of a phenomenon of transculturalism, generated by the interactions of social actors of multiple origins, and implying different social and cultural traditions and practices of materiality at work simultaneously, with the result that new cultural and social identities were successfully developed in this corner of the Mediterranean.

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Abbreviations

ICS Masson O. 1961, *Les Inscriptions Chypriotes Syllabiques*, Paris.
ICS^2 Masson O. 1983, *Les Inscriptions Chypriotes Syllabiques*, 2nd edition, Paris.
SU/US Stratigraphic Unit

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