

## Supplementary Material

### Deconstructing the Phoenician myth: ‘Cadmus and the palm-leaf tablets’ revisited

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#### Appendix: A brief note on the epigraphic attestations of φοῖνιξ and cognates in relation to writing

In the above, I have discussed the expression *phoinikeia grammata* in classical texts, but there are also some possible epigraphic attestations of words related to φοῖνιξ in relation to writing. This material is of huge significance, but unfortunately it does not allow a straightforward interpretation. The most important text for this discussion is the so-called ‘Spensitheos decree’, a document written on a bronze plate in an archaic Cretan script dating to *ca.* 500 BC.<sup>1</sup> The text has generated a lot of interest, not least because of the *hapax legomena* ποινικάστας and ποινικάζεν. The latter verb is usually taken to mean ‘to write’ and the individual Spensitheos, who is appointed as *poinikastas* in the decree, is thought to be the scribe and recorder for the city.<sup>2</sup> A relation between the word φοῖνιξ and writing is further attested in a public curse from Teos dated to *ca.* 480–450 BC,<sup>3</sup> and two inscriptions, *IG* 12.2.96 and 97, found at Mytilene (Lesbos). They mention a φοινικογράφος, which is the title of an official. In the inscription *IG* 12.2.96 this person is named alongside a γραμματεύς at the end of the text. These two lines are perhaps to be understood as a colophon mentioning the two people responsible for the inscription.<sup>4</sup>

In modern scholarship, several explanations have been proposed to explain the connection between φοῖνιξ and cognates and the act of writing in the epigraphic material. The first editors of the Spensitheos inscription, Lilian Jeffery and Anna Morpurgo Davies, suggest a link with the ‘Phoenician’ roots of the alphabet, but leave open the possibility that its original meaning was something like ‘to make red’.<sup>5</sup> This latter suggestion is taken up by Ronald

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<sup>1</sup> *SEG* 27.631; see Pleket and Stroud (1980), and for the first part, now also Colvin (2007) 156–58 no. 56.

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is Beattie (1975), who unsuccessfully attempts to derive the verb from the ποινή, ‘blood money’, ‘requit’; for a convincing rebuttal, see Edwards and Edwards (1977).

<sup>3</sup> Osborne and Rhodes (2017) 11 no. 102 C (d), ll. 19–21.

<sup>4</sup> Further, one may mention the much later, corrupt gloss ἐκφοινίξαι in the lexicon of Hesychius (fifth– sixth century AD). As Chantraine (1972) 15 remarks, the manuscript gives as a meaning ἀναγνώσαι, ‘to persuade’ which does not make sense here. An emendation to ἀναγνῶναι, ‘to read’ has been suggested, or, alternatively, to ἀναχρῶσαι, ‘to colour’.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffery and Morpurgo Davies (1970) 133.

Willetts and Pierre Chantraine,<sup>6</sup> whereas Patrick Edwards and Ruth Edwards prefer the Phoenician interpretation.<sup>7</sup> In light of the discussion in this article, one could also argue for an interpretation connected to writing on palm leaves.

Unfortunately, it is unclear what exactly the function of the *ποινικάστας* in the Spensitheos decree (and the *φοινικογράφος* at Mytilene and Teos) entailed. If Spensitheos really was a scribe who primarily wrote on perishable materials, a connection with palm leaves would be plausible. Alternatively, if he was responsible for making public inscriptions, the connection with ‘making red’ would make sense, as these were often painted in red.<sup>8</sup> There are some indications in the decree, however, that the office of *poinikastas* was quite high and important. If Spensitheos was indeed no ordinary scribe, other interpretations are possible. He may, for example, have served as something like a town archivist, in which case *poinikastas* could be associated with the colour ‘red’, referring to the fact that he used the distinctive ‘red’ colour, as opposed to the ordinary scribes writing in black ink, to classify documents; compare the later use of ‘to rubricate’ and ‘rubrics’.<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, this is speculative, and quite possibly anachronistic.

Of further possible interest for this discussion is the attestation of a *φοινικιστής* in the *Anabasis* of Xenophon (431–354 BC). The Persian Megaphernes, who is put to death, is referred to as the *φοινικιστής βασιλείος*,<sup>10</sup> which is usually interpreted as an honorary title (‘wearer of the royal purple’) at the Persian court,<sup>11</sup> but some prefer the interpretation ‘scribe’ or ‘secretary’.<sup>12</sup>

Considering the limited available evidence and the many uncertain factors, I am hesitant to choose between one interpretation or the other. However, one can in any case agree with Chantraine that the Phoenician explanation, which is commonly accepted,<sup>13</sup> offers the least attractive scenario for the epigraphic material, from both semantic and morphological

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<sup>6</sup> Willetts (1972) 97; Chantraine (1972); cf. also Mylonas (1966).

<sup>7</sup> Edwards and Edwards (1974) 48–49.

<sup>8</sup> For the practice of painting stelae red (with cinnabar), see Colvin (2007) 157; Brecoulaki (2014). With respect to the inscriptions from Lesbos, the *grammateus* may have been the registrar or scribe responsible for composition, whereas the *phoinikographos* the one who painted the inscription in red, which would explain both their roles in the making of the inscription.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Edwards and Edwards (1974) 53.

<sup>10</sup> Xen. *An.* 1.2.20: ἐν ᾧ Κύρος ἀπέκτεινεν ἄνδρα Πέρσην Μεγαφέρνην, φοινικιστὴν βασιλείου, καὶ ἕτερόν τινα τῶν ὑπάρχων δυνάστην, αἰτιασάμενος ἐπιβουλεύειν αὐτῷ, ‘and during that time Cyrus put to death a Persian named Megaphernes, who was a wearer of the royal “purple”, and another dignitary among his subordinates, on the charge that they were plotting against him’; tr. Brownson and Dillery (1998).

<sup>11</sup> See LSJ s.v. *φοινικιστής*: ‘a wearer of purple ... i.e. one of the highest rank’, cf. Lat. *purpuratus*.

<sup>12</sup> S. West (1985) 290 n.58 with references.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Daniels and Bright (1996) 261.

perspectives. As observed above (section XV), it is highly unlikely that the Greeks would refer to the act of writing in their own language as ‘doing as a Phoenician’. Edwards and Edwards concede that a meaning ‘to act like a Phoenician’ does not readily lead to a meaning ‘to write Phoenician letters’.<sup>14</sup> They therefore propose that the verb was not derived directly from φοῖνιξ, but rather from the neuter plural φοινικῆια, ‘to do Phoenician (letters)’. To solve the morphological problems of this explanation, they invoke the plural φοινικικά (= φοινικῆια), suggesting that φοινικάζω could have arisen by haplology from \*φοινικικάζω, or from a haplological form of φοινικικά (φοινικά). This solution is unattractive, if only because of its complexity. Moreover, though the combination φοινικῆια γράμματα is well attested, there is little evidence to support the claim that the adjective φοινικῆια (or φοινικικά) was also used independently referring to letters. The only potential attestation hereof is an inscription from Teos, dating to *ca.* 470–460 BC (*SIG* 37.38), but this example is ambiguous and forms a rather feeble basis for the claim that the adjective φοινικῆια was used independently with the meaning ‘letters’.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards and Edwards (1974) 50–51 and (1977) 132–33.

<sup>15</sup> The inscription reads: ὃς ἂν τὰ στήλας : ἐν ἧσιν : ἡπαρῆ : γέγραπται : ἢ κατὰξει : ἢ φοινικῆια : ἐκκόψει [:] ἢ ἀφανέας ποιήσει : κένον ἀπόλλυσθαι : καὶ αὐτὸν : καὶ γένος [: τὸ κένο]), ‘Whoever either breaks the stelae on which the curses are written, or erases the φ., or makes them invisible, may he perish, himself and (his) family’ (Osborne and Rhodes 2017: 6–7 no. 102 B, ll. 35–41). The phrase φοινικῆια ἐκκόψει is generally read as φοινικῆια <γράμματα> ἐκκόψει, and taken to refer to the erasing of the letters of the inscription. This interpretation is not without problems, however. Apart from the fact that one is forced to assume that a noun has been omitted, the sequel ‘or renders them invisible’ (ἀφανέας ποιήσει) is awkward. The feminine plural accusative ἀφανέας must refer to the stelae. If one reads φοινικῆια <γράμματα>, one has to suppose an object switch; the stelae are the object of the first verb (κατὰξει), the letters that of the second (ἐκκόψει) and again the stelae of the third verb (ἀφανέας ποιήσει): ‘Whoever breaks the stelae, or erases the letters, or makes [the stelae] invisible’. One could therefore also take φοινικῆια to refer to the red paint of the stelae. In this way, no emendation would be required, nor an abrupt object switch. This interpretation does, however, leave the problem that φοινικῆια is a neuter plural, where one might expect a neutral singular to refer to red paint. Note that Edwards and Edwards (1974) 57 also seem to interpret the well-known attestation in Herodotus 5.58 as an example of the independent usage of φοινικῆια with the meaning of letters, but the adjective here clearly refers to the γράμματα mentioned earlier.

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