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Inscribing Texts in Hellenistic Cyprus

Epigraphic Habit as a Tool for the Study of Social Interactions Under Ptolemaic Rule

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Abstract This paper aims to explore the role of epigraphic habit(s) in the definition of a mixed society in Cyprus during the Hellenistic period. Like many areas of the Hellenistic world, Cyprus has experienced great changes in the way of inscribing and erecting texts in civic and religious space from the late fourth century BC onwards. In this paper, we will try to answer questions related to the connection between social contacts of Cypriot communities with foreign agents and the development and use of inscribed texts in the context of Ptolemaic rule. In doing so, we will examine the changes occurring in the making and use of inscriptions in Cyprus from the fourth century BC until the last decades of the first century BC and explore the role of local traditions in the shaping of some hybrid epigraphic practices.

Keywords Epigraphic habit. Hellenistic History. Ptolemaic administration. Greek inscriptions. Cypriot society. History of literacy. Writing systems. Multilingual inscriptions. Materiality of texts. Cultural history. Intercultural contacts.

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1 Introduction

The concept of epigraphic habit was first applied to Greek epigraphic studies to describe and analyse the practice of inscribing texts in Classical Athens,[1] before arising in other – well documented – areas as well. The main theoretical goal of this concept is to explain why one community inscribed some information on stone, and therefore to investigate the evolution of engraving practices through time. Therefore, epigraphic habit is in a broader sense closely related to various questions covering the field of ancient literacy.

Given the specificities of the corpus, applying the questions linked to the concept of epigraphic habit to the inscriptions of Cyprus can be challenging. Even if one focuses on one specific period of the island's history, one may quickly feel discouraged by the heterogeneity of the texts, the state of publication of the inscriptions[2] and that of the related archaeological contexts. Moreover, among the 3,000 alphabetic inscriptions of Cyprus,[3] no information regarding the engraving process is preserved, which could shed direct light on the status of the letter-cutters, the costs, and on the administrative process of engraving inscriptions. The absence of information regarding the inscriptions' materiality also impedes a more comprehensive understanding of epigraphic practices. This is also the case in Hellenistic times. Hellenistic Cypriot inscriptions are brief, often fragmentary, and poorly documented in their archaeological and material aspects. These characteristics have certainly contributed to isolate them from the other epigraphic ensembles coming from different areas of the Hellenistic world, which could have shared a similar sort. Although the state of the corpus may prevent us from using the concept of epigraphic habit in all its dimensions, this paper aims to mobilise the problematics linked to epigraphic habit as a tool to analyse the ways of interactions between the foreign Ptolemaic agents and the populations of Cyprus.

In a major book published recently, Philippa M. Steele (2019) attempted to connect the development of the Cypriot writing systems with the social developments of the island. In her study, she outlines the relationship between epigraphic customs and social developments and contributes to establishing the act of writing as a matter of study *per se* for the Cypriot studies. Steele thoroughly discusses the

1 The concept first occurred in the field of Roman epigraphy. See MacMullen 1982. The first application to the field of Greek epigraphy can be found in Hedrick 1999.

2 This situation has been improving since the publication of the first volumes of the *Inscriptiones Graecae Cypri*. See Karnava, Perna 2020 and Kantirea, Summa 2020.

3 Approximative amount given by M. Kantirea (2015). The author evaluates that the full corpus of Cypriot inscriptions comes to about 5,000 texts, including syllabic inscriptions and inscriptions written in Phoenician alphabet.

question of the survival of syllabic writing and of Cypriot dialects down into the Hellenistic period, and by doing so draws powerful and inspiring conclusions on the evolution of writing culture on the island, which restore the balance with previous dominating readings of Cypriot history (Mitford 1953, 90 quoted in Steele 2019, 233). Within the imposed restrictions of this paper, we wish to extend the question beyond the linguistic aspects in order to examine different epigraphic practices of Hellenistic Cyprus.

The beginning of the Hellenistic period is traditionally associated with the loss of linguistic and epigraphic diversity that goes along with the fall of the city-kingdoms. This situation is intimately linked to the often-debated question of the survival of a Cypriot identity under Ptolemaic Rule. Indeed, we can observe that Ptolemaic rulers and Ptolemaic officials enjoy a very high visibility in the inscriptions from Cyprus, that, at first sight, can be considered to have been achieved at the expense of Cypriots (e.g. Roesch 1980, 250; Michaelidou-Nicolaou 1976, 24). Yet, it would be wrong to say that Cypriot epigraphy died with the Ptolemaic conquest. During the period of Ptolemaic administration of the island, different groups of populations, active in mixed contexts, are recorded in the inscriptions. Various traditions coming from different areas meet, while new ones emerge. Some social features undergo dramatic changes, while others remain unchanged until the advent of Roman administration (Michel 2020a). In such a mixed-up situation, what is the point in describing the epigraphic habit(s) of Hellenistic Cyprus? In fact, the Hellenistic period is key to the study of epigraphic customs and of their role in the definition of new social settings. Social transformations emerging with the end of the city-kingdom era will deeply affect the island and will be effective in the long-term. Moreover, Cypriot epigraphical evidence is strongly connected to phenomena appearing elsewhere, as the island entered into new political, economic, and cultural networks during the fourth century BC.

Keeping in mind the complexity of the questions addressed in this paper, and denying any claim of exhaustivity, we shall investigate epigraphic habits not only as the choices regarding writing and language uses, but also in a broader sense as the ways of formulating and displaying in the epigraphic landscape pieces of information intended to a mixed audience. This approach meets broader theoretical questions, many of them linked to the notion of adaptation and integration in intercultural contexts.

2 Inscriptions as Indicators of Contacts Between Cypriot Communities and Ptolemaic Agents

To begin with, we shall provide a glimpse of the evolutions and changes appearing in epigraphic practices during the three centuries of Ptolemaic Rule. These present an obvious correlation with political changes as inscriptions are a key witness of the political and administrative changes encountered from late fourth century BC onwards. Indeed, if the island was far from hermetic to external influences during the Archaic and Classical periods, the fall of the city-kingdom system and the installation of a foreign administration based outside Cyprus bring dramatic changes in the history, and therefore in the epigraphy of the island.[4] Inscribed texts play a major role in the study of Hellenistic Cyprus as they stand as the main indicators of the contacts between the Ptolemaic army and administration, and the populations of the island. Indeed, the epigraphic documentation of Ptolemaic Cyprus is one of the main sources to spot the presence of foreigners, some of whom can be undoubtedly related to the administrative and military occupation of the island.

Obviously, new voices emerge on stone with the Ptolemaic conquest, such as the one of foreign Ptolemaic soldiers and officials. These are recorded in different types of inscriptions. Among the numerous epitaphs of strangers dated to the Hellenistic period,[5] few funerary monuments clearly suggest that the deceased belonged to one of the foreign armies fighting in Cyprus during the Hellenistic period and even fewer are the ones that certainly belonged to Ptolemaic soldiers. Yet, this type of document can be found in an extraordinary funerary epigram discovered in Kition. The verse-written epitaph of Praxagoras[6] formally identifies the deceased as a high-ranked Ptolemaic official.

More generally, funerary texts are more diverse than we can think at first sight and may convey more information than historiography usually suggests. The many epitaphs of foreigners found in Cyprus (especially in Amathous and Kition) not only give us access to an exogenous prosopography but, in some cases, they also reveal a variety of practices related to the conservation of the memory of the

4 Kantirea 2015. For the study of Cypriot epigraphical sources before the dawn of the city-kingdoms, see Steele 2019.

5 Thirty-three texts are recorded in Michaelidou-Nicolaou 1967. The deceased come from regions as diverse as Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus, Illyria, Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Persia, Egypt, and Libya.

6 *IG* XV, 2, 1, no. 84 (*I. Kition* 2070; Michel 2020a, no. 9).

deceased and to the transmission of the information over time.[7] As one can observe in Cyprus and elsewhere, this information, as concise as it may be, is tightly linked to engraving traditions. The versified epitaph of Nikogenes of Kalymnos (Voskos et al. 1997, E20; Michel 2020a, no. 1), with its moulded and painted stele depicting a standing armed warrior (the deceased himself?), has an outstanding position in the funerary epigraphy of Hellenistic Cyprus. This document belongs to a small group of painted steles from Amathous, which suggests the existence of a local workshop in the early third century BC and its connections to Macedonian, Thessalian and Alexandrian models (Hermary 1987, 72-5). The evidence for such funerary markers in Amathous suggests the adoption of Mediterranean and Hellenistic epigraphic practices by a wealthy part of the people living there in the third century BC. However, Nikogenes' stele is the only one to bear an inscription and we cannot determine whether the unique painted steles from Amathous were basically intended to a foreign population looking for a distinctive visual marker or were valued more broadly by the city's population. Perhaps, the fact that the one and only preserved inscribed epitaph of the series belongs to a stranger may be interpreted as an extra strategy of distinction.

The presence of strangers in Cyprus during the Ptolemaic Rule led to the production of different categories of inscribed texts on stone. Leaving the field of the individual expression, we can move to inscriptions evidencing the structured military and administrative organisation of the Ptolemaic presence in Cyprus. Dedications of *koina* show in an explicit manner the organised character of the presence of mercenaries[8] staying in the garrisons of Cyprus. These groups have been explored in detail by historians (Dana 2011; Fischer-Bovet 2014, 290-5). A. Mehl (2018, 270) describes as "parallel societies" the precisely structured and powerful groups composed in Cyprus by Lycians, Achaeans, Thracians, Cretans, Ionians, Cilicians mercenaries. The dedication[9] of a statue of the *strategos* Seleukos son of Bithys to the Olympian Zeus in the mid-second century BC by the group of the Achaeans and the other Greeks offers evidence of the wealth and public visibility of the mercenaries stationed in Cyprus, although the word *koinon* does not appear in the text. In Cyprus, foreign *koina* decide the erection of many statues mainly dedicated to Ptolemaic high-ranked officials. Two inscriptions from

7 The prosopographic and geographic evidence has been collected by I. Nicolaou (Michaelidou-Nicolaou 1967; 1976).

8 *IG* XV, 2, 1, no. 26 (*I. Kition* 2023) offers clear evidence for the presence of high-ranked officials specialised in the recruitment of mercenaries. For a brief overview of the documentation and bibliography, see: Michel 2020a, 55-7.

9 *I. Olympia* 301.

Paphos may also evoke the daily life of these mercenaries in Cyprus. A very fragmentary text discovered in Nea Paphos, interpreted as a petition of soldiers,[10] documents, although imprecisely, the difficulties encountered by foreign soldiers stationed in Cyprus. This is the unique appearance of this category of texts in Cypriot epigraphy. Another inscription, discovered in Palaepaphos and dated to the last quarter of the third century BC presents a unique list of contributors for the provision of oil for the gymnasium.[11] All the mentioned contributors bear a foreign ethnic related to cities of Asia Minor. This indication suggests that the eight men were related to the Ptolemaic army. The Paphian list adds to the discussion an epigraphic practice otherwise unknown in Cypriot epigraphy.

Obviously, inscriptions also vividly attest the presence of the Ptolemaic administration in Cyprus. If the corpus of Ptolemaic laws found in Cyprus is very poor,[12] the repertoire of Ptolemaic administration affects more generally an important part of Cypriot epigraphy: the corpus is teeming with titles and functions of the Ptolemaic aulic hierarchy. The numerous statue bases for Ptolemaic officials found in Cyprus have been seen as a phenomenon *per se* and used as a "knockout argument" to prove the stifling character of the Ptolemaic domination over the island (Roesch 1980, 250), although the analysis of such monuments is far from complete. Be that as it may, Ptolemaic *strategoi* and other officials form one of the best documented groups in the epigraphy of Hellenistic Cyprus. The many statue bases dedicated to Ptolemaic officials reveal the existence of a dense hierarchised network of Ptolemaic agents active in Cyprus. The variety of the military or administrative positions recorded on Cypriot inscriptions, and the names of their holders, when preserved, are thought to have considerably improved our knowledge of the Ptolemaic court-system and the Ptolemaic prosopography.[13]

In parallel with the phenomena alluded to above, the traditional Cypriot identity markers consisting in the use of syllabic writing and of dialectal language are fading, arousing a general impression of imbalance between foreigners and Cypriots in the Hellenistic written documentation. Undoubtedly, the most striking consequence of the Ptolemaic conquest can be seen in the decline of the linguistic diversity visible on stone, in favour of the generalisation of Greek

10 *I. Paphos* 70; Michel 2020a, no. 23.

11 *I. Paphos* 66; Michel 2020a, no. 74. For the ἐλαιοχριστίον, see Fröhlich 2009, 61.

12 One of the few examples can be found in the copy of a Ptolemaic edict from 145/144 BC: *IG* XV, 2, 1, no. 1; *I. Kition* 2017; Lenger 1980 (Bielman 1994, no. 27; Michel 2020a, no. 25). See also the fragmentary law from Marion-Arsinoe mentioning the *apomoira*: Segre 1952, 319-30 (Michel 2020a, 131, no. 52).

13 Bagnall 1976, 38-79; Mooren 1977; Van't Dack 1990; Michel 2020a, 44-51.

alphabetic writing. Indeed, from the last decades of the fourth century BC onwards the use of the syllabic writing will be restricted to very limited contexts while the Phoenician texts will also decrease in numbers. If we remain cautious in drawing conclusions on the linguistic diversity in other forms of Cypriot literacy, we may certainly relate this new epigraphic configuration to the Ptolemaic domination and interpret it as a turn towards Hellenistic Mediterranean customs (Steele 2019).

However, the development of alphabetical Greek in Hellenistic times cannot, at any instance, be considered as a rupture in Cypriot literacy. P. Steele has shown that this evolution is related rather to a positive choice than to the supposed passive situation of Cypriots towards Ptolemaic domination. Moreover, she demonstrated that the idea of a fatal break in syllabic and Cypriot dialectal literacy results from several analytical biases, so that the traditional interpretation of the 'death' of Cypriot writing system and of Cypriot dialect may in fact be no more than a matter of perspective. That is the conclusion we can draw from the study of two well-known ensembles: Kafizin's inscribed pottery sherds and Nea Paphos' sealings (Nicolaou 1993). We do not intend to discuss this material in detail here; we shall limit ourselves to giving the readers a basic outline that will help them to understand the importance of the aforementioned inscriptions for our subject.

The first ensemble[14] owes its name to the conical hill of Kafizin, located in the Mesaoria plain around 7 km South-East of Nicosia,[15] and on the top of which a big amount of pottery sherds bearing incised dedications to the local Nymph was found. Most of the fragments came from a natural cave situated on the top of the hill to the West, from the Western slope of the hill and from a cistern dug on the South-West terrace outside the cave. No less than 310 dedications (most of which were made by Onesagoras son of Philounios) appear on Kafizin's vases. Thirty-five of these inscriptions are written using both writing systems and 32 using syllabic writing only. All the offerings were made in an interval of 6 years related to the regnal years of two successive kings, whom S. Lejeune identified with Epiphanes and Philometor.[16] Lejeune's meticulous argumentation leads to a dating of Kafizin's dedications between 183 and 177 BC. The Kafizin's dossier does not only record the continued use of syllabic writing in a religious context, but it also demonstrates the influence of Cypriot dialect on the local use of the *koine* dialect (Steele 2019, 237). This

14 Inscriptions incised in alphabetical Greek: *IG* XV 2,1, nos. 474-779. See also Lejeune 2014.

15 Today the hill is inaccessible, since it has been inside the *Bufferzone* since 1974.

16 *Contra IG* XV 2,1, 147.

later point is perhaps a more powerful indication of the vitality of the Cypriot dialect among the local populations.

The sealings coming from the archives of Nea Paphos date from the mid-second to the end of the first centuries BC and were found under the mosaic pavement of the House of Dionysos (Nicolaou 1993). They probably belonged to the public archives of the city destroyed by fire and abandoned before being reused by the end of the second century AD in the filling of the foundations of the mosaic. On some sealings we can see syllabic signs and abbreviated names. This ensemble offers the latest evidence of the use of syllabic writing in Cyprus.

Both ensembles have an obvious common feature: they are not inscribed on stone. Nevertheless, they belong to two distinct spheres (religious/private; administrative/official), and they offer significant evidence for the use of syllabic writing after the traditional breaking point of the end of fourth century BC. Kafizin's sherds and Paphos' sealings open a small window in our understanding of the way syllabic writing and Cypriot dialect survived their disappearance on stone. If we agree that both were still used and understood at least partly by the local population, who maintained them as markers of Cypriot identity but still preferred to use the Greek alphabet and the Hellenistic *koine* when it came to displaying monumental texts, then the probability of a segregate use of Cypriot dialect and syllabic writing on perishable material becomes very high and may explain the general epigraphic layout. From this point of view, the " restriction" observed in the use of the syllabic writing may be deceptive and its decline should be rather interpreted as a reminder of how our understanding of literacy in Antiquity is limited.

The analysis of the impact of political transition on epigraphic habit may lead to a reserved conclusion. The installation of foreign corps and administration undoubtedly modifies the layout of Cypriot epigraphy. Nevertheless, Cypriot identity markers do not perish with the end of Cypriot autonomous polities, and case-studies from the margins of epigraphy (as sealings, and in another way, inscribed pottery are) attest the continued use of Cypriot writing and Cypriot Greek dialect until the first century BC. The situation described above requires introducing the study of functional range into the analysis of epigraphic habit in Hellenistic Cyprus and suggests taking into account social and cultural factors for the study of epigraphic practices in ancient Cyprus.

3 Inscriptions as Indicators of Social Evolutions and Changes

But to what extent can we read Cypriot Hellenistic inscriptions as indicators of social evolutions and changes? Given the configuration of the preserved documentation, this question requires to turn our attention towards the documentation written on stone with an obvious purpose of display. Generally, Cypriot Hellenistic inscriptions on stone have a quite striking position in Greek epigraphy – as it is usually understood in reference to Greek *polis*-centred standards. No accounts or inventories, no public lists, or official records from any civic institution can be found in the preserved documentation. This statement, together with the scarce evidence regarding Cypriot magistratures and institutions, has reinforced the suspicion towards the civic character (in the sense of the Greek democratic *polis* system) of the internal organisation of Cypriot towns before the installation of Roman administration on the island.[17]

Cypriot Hellenistic epigraphy on stone is dominated by religious, honorific, and funerary texts. During the Hellenistic period, honorific epigraphy flourished on the island according to a general tendency that can be observed through the Mediterranean. Statue bases bearing dedications to individuals have a major position in Cypriot epigraphy. When found in sanctuaries, these bases fully evidence the interconnection between religious and honorific intentions which are embodied in the act of dedication (Biard 2017, 95-7). This kind of dedications is well known in the previous periods of Cyprus' history and is particularly important in the late Classical period. Therefore, honorific epigraphy cannot be seen as a Hellenistic innovation. However, the development of this sphere in Hellenistic Cyprus is remarkable. Two major phenomena arise in the wake of the Ptolemaic occupation of the island: the emergence of two distinct categories of recipients of public honours belonging to two distinct hierarchies, and the social broadening of the honours, which seems to begin during the Hellenistic period.

Hellenistic documentation from Cyprus evidences two categories of recipients. The first and better documented group includes representatives of the Ptolemaic administration, while some local figures seem to emerge on the public stage. As we have already said above (see § 2), Ptolemaic *strategoi* and their subordinates have a prominent position in the honours bestowed upon individuals in Cyprus. Around fifty dedications to individuals of this group are preserved, most of them originating from the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Palaepaphos (twenty-eight texts), or from the city of Salamis (eleven texts).

17 *I. Paphos*, 100-1, 219. For a slightly different approach, see Michel 2020a, 70-2.

However, the presence of numerous inscribed statue-bases of foreign officials should not be regarded as an isolated epigraphic phenomenon. On the contrary, the nature of the monuments argues for a more global approach, taking into consideration the spatial and architectural aspects of these dedications. This method suggests reconnecting the honorific dedications to their local environment, which is usually provided with religious and historical aura. In Cyprus, this statement is very vivid, especially in Paphos where the religious complex dedicated to Aphrodite holds an important position in the display of Ptolemaic power.

Obviously, dedicating statues in sanctuaries is not a prerogative of foreigners in Hellenistic Cyprus. In Cyprus, the custom to combine the dedication of a statue to the deity with an inscribed text goes back to the Cypro-Archaic II period (600-480). Moreover, the use of alphabetical Greek as a conveyor of public information accessible to a wider Mediterranean-oriented audience must be attributed to the Cypriot kings of the fourth century BC.[18] The many dedications of Cypriots known in Hellenistic Cyprus show the adoption of new epigraphic habits by a wider, yet wealthy, part of the local population. In the new framework of Ptolemaic Cyprus, these inscriptions help us to discern different groups structuring the local society.

The study of the honorific dedications shows that the priests and priestesses enjoy a privileged position in the context of the Ptolemaic Rule. To limit ourselves to the dedications inscribed on statue-bases, we see local priests and priestesses receiving honorific statues (such as Diodoros, the former priest of Apollo in Kourion, honoured by his sons)[19] and others offering honorific statues (such as Phanion, dedicating a statue of her son Boiskos in Palaepaphos[20] or Diagoras honouring his father in Kourion).[21] Some priests also seem to maintain a close relationship with the Ptolemaic administration of the island. The college of the priests of Aphrodite *Paphia* offers at least one statue to the *strategos* Seleukos[22]and two to Helenos,[23] in gratitude for their *euergesia* towards them. For the same reason they honour Ptolemy IX Soter II between 105 and 81 BC.

Other Cypriots are known to have been related to civic instances, although their precise development and functioning during the

18 Steele 2019, 223-31. See for example the recent publication of the alphabetic dedication of Pnytagoras' son and Nicocreon's brother Nicocles: Christophi, Kantirea 2021.

19 *I. Kourion* 52 (Michel 2020a, no. 68).

20 *I. Paphos* 80 (Michel 2020a, no. 65).

21 Nicolaou 1996, 177 no. 5.

22 *I. Paphos* 42 (Michel 2020a, no. 28).

23 *I. Paphos* 55-6.

Hellenistic period is poorly documented. One area of public life is largely invested by local figures: the gymnasium and its administration. Many inscriptions attest the activity of Cypriots in the management of this important centre of public life in the Hellenistic period. As *gymnasiarch* of Salamis, Themias son of Aristagoras is known to have offered a statue of Ptolemy Epiphanes,[24] while in the gymnasium of Salamis a statue of the same king has been dedicated by Philokrates son of Naukrates, former *agonothet*.[25] Both men are mentioned on the statue-bases without ethnic, a fact that suggests their local origin. More impressive is the dedication by the *gymnasiarch* of Amathous, Onesikrates son of Onesikrates, of the door and thirteen columns of a stoa, located in the lower part of the city and probably belonging to the gymnasium complex (Prête et al. 2002, 567), in honour of Ptolemy Philometor and Cleopatra II (163-145 BC). This case certainly represents one of the most explicit pieces of evidence of the involvement and the visibility of a local figure in the public life of a Cypriot city during Hellenistic times. In the very late period of Ptolemaic administration of Cyprus, some Cypriots emerged on the civic stage with more precise institutional functions. This is for example the case for Kallippos son of Kallippos, honoured by the Paphians as the former secretary of the *boule* and *demos*, former *archon* of the city, member of the association of the *technitai* of Dionysos, current secretary of the city and former *gymnasiarch*.[26]

Few Cypriots are also known to have entered Ptolemaic aulic circles. Among them, Onesandros son of Nausikrates is the most famous. He is honoured between 88 and 80 BC by the city of Paphos[27] and his destiny is intimately connected to the Ptolemaic dynastic history in the beginning of the first century BC. Evoked as *syngenes*, kinsman, of the King, Onesandros probably entered the highest circle of aulic hierarchy during Soter's sole reign in Cyprus (106/5-88). The Paphian dedication is dated to the second part of Soter's reign, at a time when Cyprus and Egypt were reunited after the death of his brother Alexander (88-80) and attests to Onesandros' successful career both in Alexandria's and in Paphos' Ptolemaic courts, since he is recorded as priest for life of the royal cult, founder of the *Ptolemaion* (of Paphos?), secretary of the city and, last but not least, director of the Great Library of Alexandria. So far, the prestige of this Paphian citizen bears no comparison with any other Cypriot in the Hellenistic period. The dedications of statues for Cypriots quickly mentioned here appear to be solid evidence of the evolution of the honorific

24 *I. Salamine* 65 (Michel 2020a, no. 75).

25 *I. Salamine* 66 (Michel 2020a, no. 77).

26 *I. Paphos* 94 (Michel 2020a, no. 71).

27 *I. Paphos* 89(Michel 2020a, no. 70); now see Kantirea 2023.

practices in Cyprus during the Hellenistic period. This evolution, clearly reflecting new social settings, is also intimately linked to the epigraphic one, as the dedications adopt the standardised form of the Greek honorific rhetoric.

Many other private individuals, who cannot be related to any precise administrative or religious position, are recorded in Cypriot texts as donors or recipients of dedications. The bilingual Greek-Phoenician dedication from Lapethos to Athena *Soteira Nike* and a king Ptolemy (Fourrier 2015, 44; Bonnet, Bianco 2018, 44 no. 2 and 52-6; Michel 2020a, no. 101) tends to show that Cypriots from different linguistic and religious backgrounds acknowledged in the beginning of the third century BC both the prominent position of alphabetical Greek for the display of public inscriptions[28] and the authority of the Ptolemaic rulers. In Idalion, the dedication by Batshilem of the statues of her grandchildren[29] stands as an obvious sign of the vitality of the Phoenician nobility in the first half of the third century BC. Unlike the dedication of Praxidemos son of Sesmas, the inscription from Idalion is not bilingual: the Phoenician language is the one and only choice of Batshilem. However, the calendar reference, besides the civic era of Kition, to the Ptolemaic regnal years and to the priesthood of Amatosiris, the *canephoros* of Arsinoe Philadelphus strongly suggests that Batshilem and her family belong to a multicultural milieu, able to use various cultural repertoires.

Women and children appear also more often on statue-bases, showing the growing importance of familial dedications in Hellenistic Cyprus (Michel 2021) visible in other parts of the Hellenistic Mediterranean as well. This suggests that a new Cypriot nobility was born, further confirmed by another category of inscriptions, closely related to honorific issues: the funerary epigrams. If this category of inscriptions cannot be considered as an innovation in Cyprus (Voskos et al. 1997, 52-62), its development during the Hellenistic period seemingly reveals the influence of a new rhetoric inspired by Mediterranean and Alexandrian models. A notable example is the funerary stele adorned with pediment and acroters of the eight-year-old Aphrodisie in Amathous (Voskos et al. 1997, E28; Michel 2020a, no. 69). Here the elegiac tone of the Hellenistic epigram blends with an explicit will of displaying literary mastery, testifying to the Cypriot nobilities' claim to the prestige of engraving Greek epigrams.

28 Even if the dedicant appears to be more familiar with the Phoenician language, the disposition of the inscription highlights the Greek text. See Steele 2019, 188-9, 234.

29 *I. Kition* 82 (Michel 2020a, no. 106); Fourrier 2015, 38-9.

4 Inscriptions as Indicators of Adaptation and Hybridity Processes

Hopefully, the brief panorama of Hellenistic epigraphy drawn in the previous sections has also demonstrated the heterogeneity of the Hellenistic society of the island. The examination of the epigraphic documentation preserved shows: 1) the overwhelming use of Greek alphabet and *koine* dialect for monumental inscriptions, whereas Cypriot dialects and syllabic writing do survive in other contexts; 2) the significant presence of foreigners and their high visibility in inscriptions on stone; 3) the coexistence of two distinct categories of aristocracies, and the specialisation of their prerogatives; 4) the prevalence of honorific texts in public epigraphy and the diversification of the honorands; 5) the adaptability of the Cypriots in the use of Hellenistic-wide epigraphic habits. This statement leads us to examine the role of inscriptions as hybridity markers. Besides the adoption of language and shared writing strategies, can we identify local features and trace intercultural processes in Cypriot epigraphy?

Onomastics are a useful tool to detect intercultural contacts. Even if written in the Greek language and script of the Hellenistic *koine*, the choice of a name and the way to display it in the epigraphic landscape can be meaningful. That said, any conclusion about the significance of these choices for the study of identities is based on speculations. The dedication by Echetime of the statues of her son Agapenor and her daughter Evagoratis in Palaepaphos,[30] for example, proves to be significant. Indeed, the dedicant bears a feminine version of the name of the king of Paphos, Echetimos, while her son's name recalls without doubt the hero supposed to have founded the city[31] and Evagoratis should be read in reference to the king of Salamis, Evagoras. In this case we can assume that such onomastic choices belong to a conscious strategy of evocation of the glorious past of the island. Echetime and her children are not mentioned elsewhere and the connection of their family to the Paphian nobility cannot be proved. Another dedication inscribed on a Paphian statue base may show the adoption of Alexandrian onomastics by local nobles. The *archos* of the *Kinyrads*, probably a religious association related to an ancient local tradition, consecrating to the Paphian Aphrodite the statue of his daughter Aristion together with his wife Eunike, bears the name Demokrates son of Ptolemaios.[32] In the second part of the third century BC, this name could hardly be read without recalling any reference to the royal Ptolemaic family.

30 *I. Paphos* 189. See also: Masson 1963, 5-6.

31 Pausanias 8.5.2-3.

32 *I. Paphos* 81 (Michel 2020a, no. 66).

On a more structural level, one category of public inscriptions holds particular relevance to our question: the Cypriot decrees. The corpus of the Cypriot decrees presents a very specific configuration and may be considered as a key witness of the epigraphic habits and their evolution during the Hellenistic period. Civic decrees – here to be intended as the official orders expressing the resolutions of the decision-taking bodies of the civic community (the *boule* and *demos* in most cities provided with a democratic constitution) – appear in the corpus in a strikingly low proportion in comparison with other areas of the Hellenistic Mediterranean. Different reasons can be found to explain this situation, starting with the chance underlying archaeological finds. Indeed, the few civic decrees discovered in Cyprus are preserved in a very fragmentary state of conservation, which as a result may lead to an inaccurate analysis of the documentation. However, some general features emerge, helping us to discern more accurately the originality of the Cypriot decrees. Having a closer look at the documentation, we can observe that the city of Kourion differs from the other cities of the island by its relatively high number of civic decisions written on stone. Unfortunately, most of them are very poorly preserved and their reading should remain cautious. A small number of texts from Chytroi, Kourion and Salamis offer some pieces of information on the prerogatives of the cities and their internal life.[33] These are the most obvious proof of the activity of civic institutions during the Hellenistic period. According to the preserved inscriptions, these Cypriot cities were at least able to bestow expensive honours upon their benefactors, to collect taxes and/or to control parts of their own territory. This statement sharply balances the generally admitted vision of the political death of the Cypriot cities under Ptolemaic Rule.

Another different category of inscriptions may show more precisely the process of adaptation of the decrees' rhetoric in other areas of public life. Some inscriptions can indeed be read as hybrid texts, as they make use of the formulary shape of Greek civic decrees to promote decisions taken in slightly different frames. We find several

33 Michel 2020a, no. 42 (fragmentary text from Kourion mentioning the siege of the city), no. 45 (fragmentary decree from Chytroi evoking a political crisis), no. 47 (honorary decree from Kourion for a man from Sidon), no. 51 (fragmentary honorary decree from Kourion for a civic magistrate), no. 53 (honorary decree from Kourion bestowing financial privileges to Pasikrates), no. 55 (fragmentary law or decree from Salamis with economical content).

decrees of associations in Cyprus,[34] most of them of religious nature. Three inscriptions coming from religious associations of Lapethos, Amathous and Kourion appear to be of special importance for our discussion. The inscription engraved on the statue base of Noumenios son of Noumenios in Lapethos presents the honours bestowed upon him by the high-priest Praxi*demos* and the priests of Poseidon Narnakios.[35] The shape of the inscription is somehow unusual. Despite its position on a statue-base, where most Cypriot examples hold a simple dedication, Lapethos' text displays the formulary of the honorary decree with its specific terminology: the adverb ἐπειδή introduces the list of the good actions rewarded by the authorities, the verb διατελῶ followed by a participle describes Noumenios' actions, the set phrase λόγωι καὶ ἔργωι underlines his consistency, the aorist ἔδοξεν introduces the identity of the granting authorities in the dative form, finally the invocation to the Good Fortune closes the decisions list. Moreover, we do not find the mention of a statue in the list of the honours bestowed upon Noumenios. This fact can be attributed to an irregularity in the honorific process itself or in the engraving process, or even to a conscious selection of the text intended to be written on stone. The link of this text with the original text of the decree for Noumenios, if it does exist, cannot be further investigated, but it may be interesting to note that the beneficence towards the city coincides, on the statue-base of Noumenios, with the beneficence towards the high-priest and the priests.

The inscription recording the decisions of the *hegetor* Ariston son of Euphranor in Amathous tends to define the text as a ἱερὸν δόγμα (Fourrier, Hermary 2006, 7-8; Michel 2020a, no. 62, 74-5). Dated by the mention of the local priest of Aphrodite, the interpretation of this inscription remains hypothetical. Nevertheless, it reveals, with the Greek participles τῶν ἐστρατηγηκότων, γεγυμνασιαρχηκότων and ἀρξάντων in the lines 3-5 and 8-10, that priests hold the main public functions in Hellenistic Amathous and that the traditional religious repertoire seems to blend with the rhetoric of civic offices.

Finally, the honorary decree for Andronikos found in the city of Kourion stands as the longest and the best-preserved decree of

34 The dedication by the *thiasos* of Artemis in Soanta (*IG* XV, 2, 1 no. 22; *I. Kition* 2019; Michel 2020a, no. 86), the honorary decree of the association of the *technitai* of Dionysos for Isidoros in Paphos (*I. Paphos* 91; Michel 2020a, no. 92) and, most importantly, the remarkable decree for a Ptolemaic official from Patara found in Paphos (*I. Paphos* 75; Michel 2020a, no. 21), reveal the influence of the institutional practices of Greek cities on the organisation and the epigraphic practices of these associations. This last document is usually attributed to a military *koinon* (Robert 1963, 187 no. 300), suggesting that the decision to display a statue in the sanctuary of Palaepaphos as well as the erection of a marble stele in the *epiphanestatos topos* of the sanctuary most probably depended on the Ptolemaic administration.

35 *LBW*, no. 2779; Fourrier 2015, 44-5 (Michel 2020a, no. 61).

Hellenistic Cyprus (Thonemann 2008; Michel 2020a, no. 63, 73-5). Dating from the end of Cleopatra's VII reign, the text recalls in detail the irreproachable attitude of Andronikos son of Poseidonios in the achievement of his many civic tasks both as priest of the royal cult and as member of the association of the *Epilykoi*. He is sumptuously honoured by the *Epilykoi* and *Parepilykoi* (ἔδοξεν τοῖς Ἐπιλύκοις καὶ τοῖς Παρεπιλύκοις, l. 34) with a golden crown, a bronze statue, a portrait painted on a golden shield and the engraved stele recording the list of his privileges. Again, this inscription confirms the status of priests and religious associations in the public life of the Cypriot cities in the Hellenistic period. Moreover, the inscription from Kourion adds explicitly a new component to the discussion, demonstrating the intrusion of Ptolemaic administration into the religious and institutional life of the city. Indeed, Andronikos is mentioned as priest of the Kings (probably Cleopatra and her son Caesarion), in the name of which he also carries out the public religious rites of the city (l. 16).

These three inscriptions, although belonging to distinct contexts, present some common features both in the shape of the texts and in their content. Formally, they all hint at the influence of the democratic-style rhetoric of decision-taking, proper to the Hellenistic decrees, on the institutional practices of the Cypriot cities. The epigraphic reflex of this phenomenon reveals, however, the combination of foreign components and local traditions. The invocation to the Good Fortune (l. 10 of the text engraved on the statue-base of Noumenios, l. 1 of the ἱερὸν δόγμα from Amathous, l. 33 in the honorary decree for Andronikos) may, for example, parallel a traditional Cypriot formula used at the end of religious dedications (Steele 2019, 189), while the use of the emblematic sentence built on the aorist ἔδοξεν + dative seems restricted to decisions of priests and religious associations. This statement appears to be significant, especially in the absence of decrees of the *demos* and the *boule* in most Cypriot cities.

The prominent position of the religious authorities in the corpus of the Cypriot decrees underlines indeed the lack of evidence regarding honours awarded by the cities to Ptolemaic officials, although this category of honours is well documented by the dedications engraved on the statue-bases. Can this situation be connected to differentiation practices of the functional range assigned to the inscriptions on stone? Following this hypothesis, we could assume that these dedications on stone are the visible reflection of an institutional process recorded on another type of material, maybe written in another language and/or in another writing system. From the study of such a limited ensemble, it would certainly be risky to draw conclusions on the epigraphic habit related to the institutional process of decision-taking in Hellenistic Cyprus. Still, we can assume that the monumental display of decrees resulted from a restrictive selection, the criteria of which remain obscure.

We will close this discussion on epigraphic habits and their connection to broader social and cultural phenomena with an evocation of cultic practices related to the development of the royal Ptolemaic cult in Cyprus. If the origins and development of royal Ptolemaic cult are deeply rooted in Egyptian traditions, its broad diffusion in the Mediterranean may find an explanation in its great capacity of adaptation to local traditions. In Cyprus – one of the main stages in the shaping of Ptolemaic propaganda – this process of adaptation appears through archaeological and epigraphic evidence. Many Cypriot inscriptions document the establishment of the Ptolemaic royal cult and the presence of a local organisation devoted to it throughout the Hellenistic period. If some other sovereigns seem to enjoy peculiar popularity on the island, the reign of Philadelphus reaches an indisputable peak mainly due to the personality of Queen Arsinoe II. Alongside the copious series of altars bearing the name of the goddess Philadelphus in the Genitive form (Michel 2020b), some inscriptions convey more information shedding light on the causes of the successful implantation of the Ptolemaic royal cult in the society of Hellenistic Cyprus. The polymorphic nature of Goddess Arsinoe seems to have played a decisive role in this implantation, allowing the assimilation of the Queen Goddess with Cypriot deities, and mainly with Aphrodite. I discussed elsewhere the role of Cypriot components in the development of Ptolemaic propaganda (Michel 2020a, 135-44; 2020b). Here I limit myself to briefly pointing out the evidence suggesting that the development of the Ptolemaic royal cult in Cyprus, largely attested in the inscriptions, rests on the use of bilingual repertoires (Stephens 2003) as well as on the heritage of local traditions, and that it can be therefore interpreted as part of a larger sociocultural phenomenon.

The inscription engraved on a fragment of a pediment belonging to a *naiskos* from Idalion[36] bears the most explicit evidence of the activity of at least one *Arsinoeion* in Cyprus. Its location inside the sanctuary of Apollo-Resheph suggests that the goddess enjoyed common features with the Cypriot goddess, traditionally depicted as a consort deity of a male god. The bilingual dedication of Sesmas (see above §3) connects in a unique way King Ptolemy with the goddess Anat-Athena. This remarkable association hints at the idea of a shared competence of the sovereign and the goddess as providers of safety and victory to their people. This idea may be interpreted as a common feature of Cypriot and Ptolemaic ideologies. Finally, the epithet of Queen-Goddess Arsinoe associated to the Nymph on a pottery sherd

36 *IG* XV, 2, 1, no. 378 (Michel 2020a, no. 105).

coming from the already mentioned ensemble of Kafizin's sanctuary[37] shows the deep integration of components belonging to the royal propaganda into the religious life of Cypriots and, in return, their ability to assimilate and to use these components to carry on and promote their own traditions.

5 Conclusions

Closing this brief discussion on Cypriot epigraphy in Hellenistic times, we shall assume that epigraphic habit is a useful tool to describe the evolutions and changes occurring in the island's society during the three centuries of Ptolemaic Rule. As inscriptions remain the main source for writing Cyprus' Hellenistic history, the study of epigraphic practices is inextricably linked to the understanding of Cypriot cultural and social landscape in Hellenistic times. Inscriptions stand as a key witness of the cultural, political, and administrative changes encountered from late fourth century BC onwards. Nevertheless, Hellenistic inscriptions document also in a vivid way the active participation of Cypriots in the development of new epigraphic practices, revealing phenomena of social evolutions and changes. The role of Cypriots in the honorific *agon* taking place in the religious and civic centres is not negligible and epigraphic evidence tends to display flexible nobilities, willing to remain visible (and readable) and quick to make foreign components fit in their own repertoire and *vice versa*.

The connection between epigraphic habit and royal cult in Cyprus is particularly indicative of the mutual influences observed in intercultural contexts and can be used as a reminder of the strategic functions assigned to the acts of writing and displaying inscriptions on stone. More generally, the study of Cypriot inscriptions reveals an effort to stimulate intercultural contacts and to take part in wider Hellenistic and Mediterranean tendencies – a fact that is also visible in the external documentation evidencing Cypriots living abroad, which remained beyond the scope of this paper. At this stage, we can assume that Cypriot society tends to be involved in similar evolutions as the rest of the Hellenistic Mediterranean. Besides this statement, the study of inscriptions coming from non-monumental contexts, like the Kafizin's sanctuary inscribed sherds, warns us against functionally biased interpretations and encourages us to remain cautious concerning the indicative character of stone inscriptions in Hellenistic Cyprus for the reading of broader sociocultural phenomena.

37 The text reads as follows: Νύμφῃ [τ]ῇ ἐν τῷ στρ<ό>φιγγι Φιλαδέλφ[ῳ ἀ]νήθηκε Καλλικλῆς (*IG* XV, 2, 1, no. 752).

Abbreviations

IG XV, 2, 1 = Kantirea, M.; Summa, D. (2020). *Inscriptiones Graecae. Inscriptiones Cypri*. Pars II, *Inscriptiones Cypri Alphabeticae*. Fasciculus I, *Inscriptiones Cypri Orientalis. Citium. Pyla. Golgi. Tremithus. Idalium. Tamassus. Kafizin. Ledra*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter.

I. Kition = Yon, M. (2004). *Kition-Bamboula V. Kition dans les textes. Testimonia littéraires et épigraphiques et corpus des inscriptions*. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations.

I. Kourion = Mitford, T.B. (1971). *Inscriptions of Kourion*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.

I. Paphos = Cayla, J.-B. (2018). *Les inscriptions de Paphos: la cité chypriote sous la domination lagide et à l'époque impériale*. Lyon: MOM Editions. Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée no. 74.

I. Olympia = Dittenberger, W.; Purgold, K. (1896). *Die Inschriften von Olympia*. Berlin: Asher.

I. Salamine = Pouilloux, J.; Roesch, P.; Marcillet-Jaubert, J. (1987). *Salamine de Chypre XIII, Testimonia Salaminia 2. Corpus épigraphique*. Paris: De Boccard.

LBW = Le Bas, Ph.; Waddington, W.H. (1847-77). *Voyage archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure: fait par ordre du gouvernement français pendant les années 1843 et 1844 et publié sous les auspices du ministère de l'instruction publique*. Paris: Didot.

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