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The Iron Age city of Kition: the state of research 85 years after the Swedish Cyprus Expedition's excavations

Sabine Fourrier

Introduction

Between October 1929 and April 1930, the Swedish Cyprus Expedition made a small but fruitful sounding on the so-called 'acropolis' of Kition, at *Bamboula* (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 1–75). Originally conceived as a stratigraphic examination of the *Bamboula* mound in order to obtain an archaeologically fixed point for the dating of the Phoenician colonisation of Cyprus (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 1), the excavation was subsequently enlarged after the discovery of a large deposit of sculptures. The results of this excavation have been instrumental in Gjerstad's narrative of the 'Phoenician colonisation' of Cyprus (Gjerstad 1948: 436–442; 1979). This narrative, as well as Gjerstad's stratigraphic method, was also influential in the re-evaluation of the Iron Age levels from Kition and of their historical interpretation as recently proposed by Smith (2009).

Since the 1930s, many new excavations have renewed and expanded our knowledge of the ancient city of Kition, well beyond the fence of the archaeological site of *Bamboula*. But I shall take the challenge and address the same issues as our Swedish predecessors by adopting their point of view: an archaeological, stratigraphic view from a site, *Bamboula*, where the French archaeological mission of Kition and Salamis has been working since 1976. I rely on the results of the French excavations, recently published (Caubet *et al.* 2015), but also on the unpublished sherd assemblages from the Swedish excavations. I am deeply thankful to Christian Mühlenbock and Giorgos Bourogiannis, who not only organised a successful conference at Stockholm but also enabled and facilitated access to this material in the storerooms at Toumba for Anna Cannavò and myself. Of important note is that some sherd-boxes from the Swedish excavations at *Bamboula* were not found at that time. A sample of the contents of these boxes was subsequently photographed by Christian Mühlenbock, but the ceramics were not directly examined.

The Geometric horizon (11th–9th century BC)

The Swedish excavators place in this chronological horizon two stone walls with mudbrick elevations (Walls 1 and 2) (Fig. 1, M1 and M2). The dating of the associated floor levels (Periods I–3) is problematic. The relevant evidence comes from square K2 of the Swedish excavations. In the original publication, a section running through this square shows three successive layers abutting Wall 1 (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 15, section

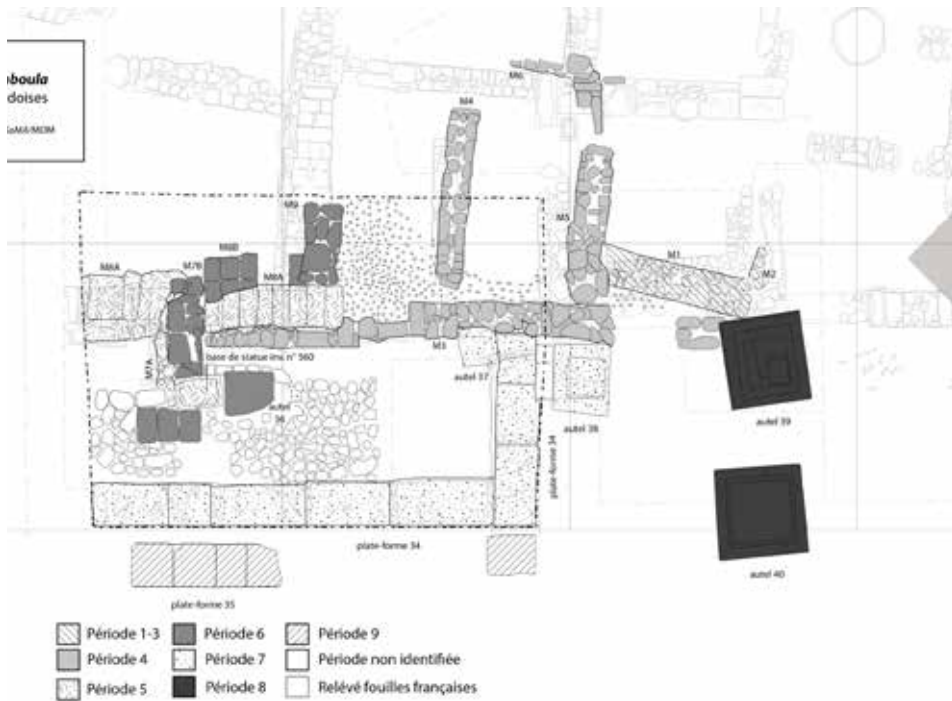


Figure 1. Kition Bamboula. Plan of the Swedish excavations positioned on the plan of the French excavations (Mission Kition-Salamine, A. Rabot)

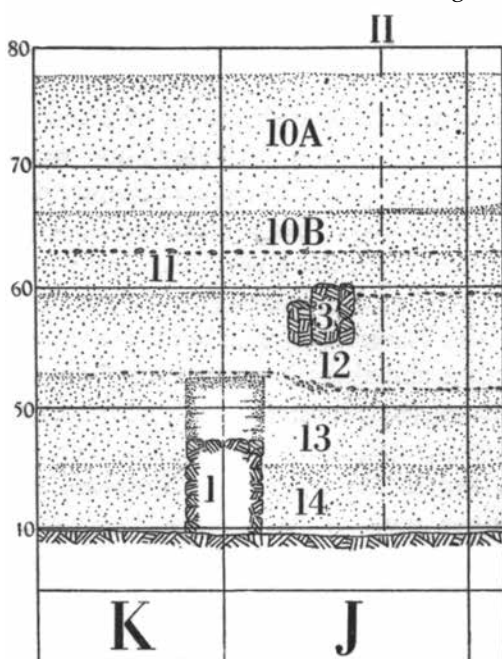
VI, plan V, 4): Layers 14 (Period 1), 13 (Period 2) and 12 (Period 3). In a revised study of the section (Fig. 2), Gjerstad reduced the height of the bricks of Wall 1 and drew Layer 12 (Period 3) on Wall 1 (Gjerstad 1948: 438–439, no. 5), thus implying that Wall 1 was no longer in use when the floor of Period 3 was laid.

The total height of the stratigraphy is about 380cm; Layers 14 and 13 represent approximately the last 120cm (Layer 14 rests on the rock, from about level 40.00 until level 45.00, Layer 13 from about level 45.00 until level 52.00). Gjerstad lists a series of successive ceramic assemblages (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 68): according to this listing, the levels of Period I date to Late Cypriot III B–Early Geometric I (11th century BC) and those of Period 2 to Cypro-Geometric I–II (10th century BC). Amongst the unpublished sherd material stored at Toumba, a box (no. 74) contains the ceramic assemblage from square K2, at a depth of 3.50–3.80m under the surface. The assemblage comprises Late Cypriot, Proto-White Painted as well as White Painted I sherds, but also a fragmentary Black-on-Red bowl. Unless intrusive, this last fragment shows that this Period I layer cannot antedate the Cypro-Geometric III period. The ceramic assemblage found at a depth of 3.40–3.80m under the surface to the inner side of Walls 1 and 2 in a space called ‘Room I’ by the Swedes (box no. 50) is also comprised of local Red Slip and Black-on-Red sherds. Three other boxes contain material found at a depth between 2.90 and 3.30m under the surface, thus *a priori* belonging to Periods I and 2 (box nos 4, 5 and 846). The assemblages are very similar, with a fair proportion of Early Geometric fragments, but also Black-on-Red and local Red Slip sherds. Gjerstad identified these Red Slip and Black-on-Red

sherds as imported foreign pottery dating to the Cypro-Geometric I period (Gjerstad 1979: 231). Recent studies, however, have convincingly shown that Black-on-Red ware was a local (Paphian) production, which cannot antedate Cypro-Geometric III (Georgiadou 2013: 117–126). Black-on-Red does not constitute a 'problem' anymore: an early dating of Black-on-Red sherds found at Kition is not sustainable (contrary to what Smith 2009: 188–189 suggests). All assemblages thus comprise a fair amount of Early Iron Age material, which points to a continuous occupation in the area, at least from the 11th century BC onwards, but they date the associated floor levels to the beginning of the Cypro-Geometric III period at the earliest.

The French re-excavated Walls 1 and 2. Their excavations also revealed two more ancient walls with the same alignment (Caubet *et al.* 2015: 35–37). But the material attributed to this first phase (Period I or Periods I–2 of the Swedish excavations?) is too little to give positive evidence for an early dating (which was tentatively suggested in the publication, following the conclusions of the Swedish excavations). The succeeding architectural phase distinguished by the French (*Phase II.a*) is anterior to the construction of the *temenos* wall (Wall 3 of the Swedish excavations, which they place in their Period 4 = middle Cypro-Achaic I). It must thus coincide with Period 3A (or 2–3A?) of the Swedish excavations. The ceramic assemblage suggests a dating to the Cypro-Geometric III period (Caubet *et al.* 2015: 37–42). The remains of an elongated building document an architectural phase (Caubet *et al.* 2015: plans III–IV), which was not found by the Swedes. This building was part of a sanctuary, as shown by the presence of an altar and a 'platform', as well as by the discovery of terracotta votive offerings.

Summing up: the stratigraphy revealed by the French excavations is in general accordance with the stratigraphy proposed by the Swedes. Yet the chronological interpretation of this stratigraphy can be challenged. The first architectural phase (Walls 1 and 2), which was generally dated to the Early Geometric period, may date to the Late Geometric. This first building, 'of a secular character' (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937:



74), may thus be the immediate predecessor of the sanctuary, if not the sanctuary already. The constructions found further north by the French (*sondage L-N 13*) are the sole remains that document an earlier, much earlier (Late Cypriot IIIB) phase in the *Bamboula* area (Yon & Caubet 1985; on the dating, Georgiadou 2012: 325–326). Kition was continuously inhabited from the Late Bronze Age onwards, as evidenced by the Geometric I and II ceramics found as residual material in later levels in the city as well as by the *in situ* funerary assemblages outside the city (Georgiadou 2012: 326–327). Yet no floor layer surely

Figure 2. Kition Bamboula, corrected drawing of section VI (after Gjerstad 1948: fig. 70)

dating to the Cypro-Geometric I and II periods has been found until now in the *Bamboula* area. A major transformation occurred in the Cypro-Geometric III period, as remarked by Gjerstad (1948: 438). The previous building was not only filled in (as noted by Gjerstad). It was also replaced by a new building. This, perhaps immediate, successor of the first building followed the same orientation. The change was thus not so 'radical'. Was it connected to the arrival of new settlers? In the absence of any evidence of a 'colonial' character, specifically of a separate burial ground, or at least of Phoenician funerary habits—urns with cremated remains, as in contemporary Tyre (Aubet (ed) 2004), this conclusion remains tentative. We may add that the ceramic assemblage of this phase ('*Faciès céramique I*' of the French excavations; Caubet *et al.* 2015: 112–121) is not of a 'Phoenician' character.

The Archaic horizon (8th–6th century BC)

During the 8th century BC (ca 800–725), the architectural layout of the *Bamboula* sanctuary remained basically the same, with the adjunction of a *temenos* wall—Wall 3 of the Swedish excavations, whose first phase antedates the Cypro-Archaic I (*Phase IIb*; Caubet *et al.* 2015: 42–45, plan V, which must coincide with Period 3B of the Swedish excavations).

A change occurred in the following Archaic I period. The old Geometric building was filled in and its space occupied by an open courtyard with cultic furnishings: benches, basins, hearths etc (*Phase III* = Period 4 of the Swedish excavations; Caubet *et al.* 2015: 46–53, plan VI). This open space was framed to the east by a portico, to the north and west by a series of rooms (some roofed, other not), whose southern limits (Walls 4 and 5) were already excavated by the Swedes. This space was occupied by textile and metallurgical workshops, as evidenced by the findings: sets of loom-weights, metallurgical waste (slags) and technical ceramics (Caubet *et al.* 2015: 97–108) (**Fig. 3**). This association of cultic and artisanal spaces parallels the layout of the Kition *Kathari* sanctuary during the Late Bronze Age. It points to a local tradition rather than to an external impulse. Conversely, the ceramic assemblage of this phase comprises many Phoenician imports and local vases of Phoenician derivation ('*Faciès céramique III*'; Caubet *et al.* 2015: 130–139). This ceramic evolution, which can be labelled as a 'Phoenicisation' of the local ceramic repertoire, is accentuated in the following period.

In the succeeding Archaic II phase (Phase IV = Periods 5–6 of the Swedish excavations; Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 20–21; Caubet *et al.* 2015: 53–58, plan VII), the sanctuary experienced no major change. It still comprised an open courtyard with cultic furnishings, framed to the west by a series of rooms. Cultic and artisanal practices were intertwined. This is especially evidenced by the discovery of a statue base (no. 560) projecting from a wall in the workshop area (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 21 and 4, fig. 4) (**Fig. 1**). It was interpreted as the cult statue (of a male deity) by the Swedish excavators, because of its presumably more than life-size dimensions and because of its proximity to a stone block interpreted as an altar (Altar 36). I suggested a comparison, at a reduced scale, with the 'kouros room' in the Amathus palace (Hermay 2000: 5–6). There, a kouros statuette was placed in a niche in the wall, in a room of the palace where cultic and metallurgical practices took place. We have no indication of the possible existence of a cult statue, which would have been the focus of the cult: the hypothesis rests on a Greek model, which is not otherwise documented

in Iron Age Cypriot sources. Besides, cultic practices also took place in the open courtyard nearby. But one may notice that the succeeding 'platforms' of the Classical period were built close to the south of the workshop area, perhaps indicating a shift of cultic activity.

The Classical horizon (5th–4th century BC)

In the first half of the 5th century BC, the whole area of the sanctuary was filled in (Caubet *et al.* 2015: 58–62). This imposing terrace was part of a new urban design of the whole *Bamboula* area, with the construction of the *Bâtiment sud* to the south and of the *neoria* of the military harbour to the north, which occurred at the end of the century. Walls excavated by the Swedes in the southern part of *Bamboula* were not 'external temenos walls', as they interpreted them, but they belonged to the *Bâtiment sud*, extensively excavated by the French. In the open courtyard, successive 'platforms' and associated altars were erected (on these furnishings, interpreted by Gjerstad as an 'inner temenos wall', see Fourier 2014: 293). The Swedish excavators distinguished two successive periods, 7 and 8. The last 'platform' (35) was erected during Period 9 above a *bothros* of sculptures. This act marked, according to Gjerstad, the end of the sanctuary. It coincided with the end of the independent kingdom: 'It is then natural to suppose that the temple of Melkart, the religious sign of the political independence of Kition, was destroyed at the same time [i.e. in 312 BC], in the same way as the temple of the city-goddess Anat-Athena was destroyed when Idalion was conquered by Kition' (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 75). Like the arrival of Phoenician settlers, the demise of the Phoenician dynasty was thus reflected in the stratigraphy. The life and death of the sanctuary at *Bamboula* was inscribed like a Phoenician parenthesis in the long history of Kition.

This conclusion can be challenged. First, the absolute chronology of Periods 7–9 was revised by the French, on the basis of their excavations in the southern part of the *Bamboula* area (*Bâtiment Sud*) (Salles (ed) 1993: 106–110). According to their observations, Period 8 (dated by the Swedes to the 4th century BC) has to be placed after 312 BC and Period 9 dates to the first half of the third century BC. Consequently, the Period 8 sanctuary postdates the end of the independent kingdom of Kition. Besides, why should Period 8 be 'the last one of the successive sanctuaries'? (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 23). What is so compellingly 'secular' in the architecture of Periods 9–10 (Gjerstad *et al.* 1937: 24–26)? In the 3rd century BC, the elongated *Bâtiment Sud* was still perhaps a banquet hall, associated with a sacred space, and not a secular tavern (Salles (ed) 1993: 110). The historical reading of the archaeological remains of *Bamboula*, as they were exposed by Gjerstad in the Swedish publication, was certainly influential in the 'secular' reading of the last phase of the *Bâtiment Sud* as a tavern, as proposed by Yon (1992: 336).

The identification of the patron deity of the *Bamboula* sanctuary as Milqart is a perfect example of what Maier described as a factoid (Maier 1985). Not a single dedication to Milqart has ever been found at *Bamboula*. The only male gods known are Mikal, whose existence seems definitely established (it is mentioned in the so-called 'Tariff of Kition': Amadasi Guzzo 2004: 210–211) and perhaps Baal Oz, to whom king Milkyaton and the people of Kition dedicated a trophy (the original place of dedication of the trophy base is not firmly established, however: see Yon 2004: 201, no. 1144 with references). The identification of a cult of Milqart rests on the iconography

of the numerous statuettes of the so-called 'Herakles-Milqart' type, which were found during the Swedish excavations (Caubet *et al.* 2015: 309–311). This type, also represented on the coinage of the kingdom (Markou 2015: 115–117), evidently points to a god protector of the ruling dynasty. It is called Milqart at Tyre. It is never called Milqart in Cyprus, where the cult of this deity is well attested (Counts 2008). It appears, for example, on the coinage of king Evagoras I of Salamis, the famous opponent of king Milkyaton of Kition, with presumably the same prerogatives as protector of the ruling dynasty (Markou 2015: 123–124). Interestingly enough, the type also appears at Idalion, in the Apollo sanctuary. Three inscriptions found in this sanctuary attest to the cult of the god Reshef-Mikal (Yon 2004: 78, nos 68–69; Caquot & Masson 1968). The conclusion is tempting: the evidence, both iconographic and epigraphic, suggests a cult of Mikal at *Bamboula*, and not a cult of Milqart; the preference for the latter name rests, consciously or not, on the assumption that *Bamboula* was a colony of Tyre and that it housed, as such, a sanctuary of the patron deity of its mother-city.

The parallel with the abandonment of the Athena sanctuary at Idalion, which was drawn by Gjerstad, is interesting. Contrary to Kition *Bamboula*, the published ceramic assemblages from the Swedish excavations on the acropolis at Idalion do indeed suggest that the sanctuary was abandoned at some point during the first half of the 5th century BC (ca 470 BC according to Gjerstad). But the cult of Athena survived at Idalion, not as a deity cherished by nostalgic Idalians, but as a patron deity of the new Phoenician dynasty, as is evidenced by the dedication (in a new sanctuary?) of king Baalmilk II, second king of Kition *and* Idalion after his father Ozibaal (Yon 2004: 61–62, no. 45). Anat certainly represents in this inscription the Cypro-Phoenician translation of the local Cypro-Greek Athena, not a Phoenician deity introduced by the conquerors of the city (contrary to Gjerstad 1979: 241). It is thus impossible to state that the cult of the city-goddess was 'forbidden' after the conquest of Idalion by the Kitians (Gjerstad *et al.* 1935: 626–628). It was reused and promoted by the new ruling dynasty. I have suggested elsewhere that the cults in the *Bamboula* sanctuary may have been likewise reinvested by the Lagid dynasty in the first half of the third century BC (Fourrier 2015: 39–40).

Conclusion

The excellent excavations of the Swedish expedition at *Bamboula* withstand the challenge of time. Eighty-five years after the Swedish excavations, and after the enlargement by the French mission of their restricted initial sounding, the general stratigraphy of the *Bamboula* occupation remains basically the same. Yet Gjerstad's reading of this stratigraphy can be challenged. According to Gjerstad, a 'radical change' occurred during Period 3 (Cypro-Geometric III), when a former 'secular' building was abandoned. This was interpreted as proof of the arrival of new settlers whose colony 'still had the character of a trading factory' (Gjerstad 1948: 439). In the following period (Period 4, after the middle of Cypro-Archaic I), the *temenos* was erected: the construction of the sacred precinct coincided with the emergence of an independent kingdom, freed from its Tyrian mother-city. The sanctuary went through various phases afterwards, before its destruction when Ptolemy put an end to the local dynasty in 312 BC. According to Gjerstad, two historical events, readable in the soil, marked the birth and the death of the *Bamboula* sanctuary. In a similar manner, the destruction of *Kathari* Temple 1 by fire and its rebuilding for Floor 2A

was interpreted by Smith as illustrating the seizure of power by Phoenicians backed by the Assyrians (Smith 2009: 217–218). It is the interpretation of the specific events that has changed, not the general method.

The stratigraphy of *Bamboula* was used by Gjerstad to illustrate a local, specific history. However, viewed from within Cyprus, the evolution of the occupation in the *Bamboula* area is not unparalleled. The lack of archaeological visibility of the Early Geometric levels (except for the cemeteries) is mirrored in most other Cypriot urban centres: nothing is known, for example, of an Early Geometric city of Amathus, whose cemeteries are extensively documented. Nothing is known of an Early Geometric city of Palaepaphos, but the reflection of its splendour is evident in the tombs. The expansion observed in Geometric III and Archaic I is paralleled in other Cypriot capital cities as well, during a period that has been aptly identified as a time of ‘consolidation’ of the Cypriot kingdoms (Iacovou 2002: 80–83). The earlier floor levels excavated on the acropolis at Amathus, first in the palace, then in the sanctuary, date to this period (Fourrier & Hermay 2006). Like other primary urban centres, Kition presumably also had its ‘royal’ necropolis with built tombs and horse sacrifices in the *dromos*, as can be inferred from a recently found built tomb (Hadjisavvas 2014: 1–33). The same ‘stratigraphic series of successive floor-levels’ (Gjerstad 1948: 438) that attest for Gjerstad the specific history of a Phoenician kingdom can be viewed as documenting the paradigmatic history of a Cypriot kingdom. Stratigraphy does not speak and trying to ‘reconstruct history from the earth’ (to quote an article by Maier & von Wartburg 1985) is always a risky endeavour.

This is not to underestimate the ‘Phoenicised’ character of Kition, which is obvious in the material culture of the city from the beginning of the 8th century BC onwards (and not before). True, study of the ‘Phoenician colonisation’ of Kition can benefit from recent developments in the study of the ‘Achaean colonisation’ of Cyprus: the first step towards progress is certainly to drop the colonial narrative, as has been done for the Late Bronze Age (Fourrier 2008: 116; Cannavò 2014; Iacovou 2014). But it shouldn’t be replaced by another ‘emporion narrative’ (Bondi *et al.* 2009: 80). Both are Greek concepts that refer to other historical circumstances. One would expect, in the case of an *emporion* as well as in the case of a colony, traces of a distinct community, with its own cultural habits (sanctuaries, cemeteries), separated from the local ones. This was attested elsewhere in Cyprus in the Archaic period: cultic and funerary evidence suggests that such was the case at Amathus (Fourrier & Petit-Aupert 2007). Nothing in the archaeological evidence from Kition sustains this hypothesis. In the absence of better evidence, we have to content ourselves with descriptive words: ‘migration’, that is now used to describe the arrival of Greek-speaking populations in the Late Bronze Age, is one of them. This does not mean that the migration(s) was/were necessarily peaceful, nor that it was not encouraged or even perhaps managed by a Phoenician city, as the mention of a revolt of the Kitians at the time of Luli of Tyre seems to suggest (on this passage of Menander of Ephesus quoted by Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, IX, 283–284, and its interpretations, see Cannavò 2014: 145–146). It means that we do not know the *modus operandi* of this migration, which we can only grasp when it has had its effects on the material culture of the city, ‘not as a mixture but as a compound’, to quote Catling (1973: 38–39) describing the culture of the Late Cypriot III period.

Migrations in the Late Bronze Age, migrations in the Iron Age: the similarities are many, but there are also differences. Cypriot material culture of the Late Bronze Age is profoundly ‘Aegeanised’ at Kition as well as in other Cypriot cities (it is especially obvious in the ceramic repertoire, from drinking sets to cooking pots).

Yet it then evolves during the whole Geometric period with no other major impulse from the west. One cannot confuse an Aegean Geometric vase with its Cypriot counterpart. Imitations are immediately recognised for what they are, imitations (Coldstream 1979). On the contrary, the material culture of Kition, which was profoundly 'Phoenicised' in the 8th century BC, remained very close to the culture of the continental Phoenician cities in the following centuries: 'Indeed, even with direct access to the material, it is still often difficult to decide what is Phoenician and what is 'Cypro-Phoenician' — Cypriote copies of Phoenician forms, and Phoenician copies of Cypriote forms' (Bikai 1987: 2). We should better write: 'Kitian copies of Phoenician forms and Phoenician copies of Kitian forms'. This implies continuous and close contacts, and not only a transfer of models and techniques, of language and script.

Viewed from *Bamboula*, the history of Iron Age Kition remains complex and beset with many unanswered questions. Gjerstad invited 'anybody (...) still sceptical' about his reconstruction of the Phoenician colonisation of Cyprus 'to study the stratigraphic series of successive floor-levels on the acropolis of Kition' (Gjerstad 1948: 438). One may not share, however, his positivism. I wonder what was most influential: the stratigraphy itself or the reading of this stratigraphy through the lens of secondary written sources? From Kition (the possible name of the city in the Late Bronze Age) to Qarthadasht (its possible name in the 8th and 7th centuries BC) and back again (Gjerstad 1979: 233–241; Cannavò 2014: 149–150), there may be more than one play of names: the unique and far from well-understood trajectory of a Cypro-Phoenician Iron Age kingdom.

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