

Estratto

RIVISTA DI STUDI FENICI

LIII-2025



 Edizioni Quasar

Estratto

Rivista annuale
fondata da Sabatino Moscati

*

Direttore responsabile / Editor-in-chief

IDA OGGIANO

*

Comitato scientifico / Advisory Board

ANA MARGARIDA ARRUDA, BABETTE BECHTOLD, CORINNE BONNET, JOSÉ LUIS LÓPEZ CASTRO,
FRANCISCO NÚÑEZ CALVO, ROALD DOCTER, AYELET GILBOA, IMED BEN JERBANIA,
ANTONELLA MEZZOLANI, ALESSANDRO NASO, HÉLÈNE SADER, PETER VAN DOMMELEN,
NICHOLAS VELLA, JOSÉ ÁNGEL ZAMORA LÓPEZ

*

Redazione ed editori di settore/Editorial Board and Field Editors

GIORGOS BOUROGIANNIS, MARIANNA CASTIGLIONE, SILVANA DI PAOLO, ANDREA ERCOLANI,
GIUSEPPE GARBATI, ADOLFO LA ROCCA, TATIANA PEDRAZZI, FABIO PORZIA, SEBASTIANO SOLDI

*

Webmaster

SALVATORE FIORINO

*

© CNR – Istituto di Scienze del Patrimonio Culturale

Area della Ricerca di Roma 1
Via Salaria km 29,300, Casella postale 10
00015 Monterotondo Stazione (Roma)
rst.fen@ispc.cnr.it
<http://www.rstfen.cnr.it/>

*

Stampa e distribuzione / Printing and distribution

Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon s.r.l.
Via Ajaccio 41-43 – 00198 Roma
Tel. +39 0685358444, Fax + 39 0685833591
email: info@edizioniquasar.it
www.edizioniquasar.it

CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE DELLE RICERCHE
ISTITUTO DI SCIENZE DEL PATRIMONIO CULTURALE

Estratto

RIVISTA DI STUDI FENICI
FONDATA DA SABATINO MOSCATI

LIII-2025

ROMA
EDIZIONI QUASAR

Estratto

© Copyright 2025 by CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE DELLE RICERCHE
Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Roma
n. 218 in data 31 maggio 2005 e n. 14468 in data 23 marzo 1972
ISSN 0390-3877
ISBN 978-88-5491-753-8
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19282/rsf.53.2025>
All content of this journal is licensed under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license

INDICE / TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAPERS

JOSETTE ELAYI, ALAIN GÉRARD ELAYI, <i>The Phoenician City of Atri (Tripoli) in Lebanon</i>	7
DANIELA GALAZZO, <i>Louis de Clercq, A Passion for the Levant: Selected Objects from at the Louvre Museum</i>	25
BÄRBEL MORSTADT, <i>Incense, Abstracted Space, and the Visualisation of Phoenician Deities</i>	45
MARIA BIANCO, <i>Alasiōtas and Elewitas: Two Distinct Epithets of Apollo/Resheph in the Greek-Phoenician Inscriptions of Phrangissa (Cyprus)</i>	63
GIUSEPPE GARBATI, <i>Making Gods. Divine Plasticity and the Agency Ritual Practice. Reflections on the Phoenician Context</i>	71
STEFANO FLORIS, ALESSANDRA GILIBERT, <i>The Tophet of Bithia – Su Cardolinu (South Sardinia). A Synthesis of Five Excavation Seasons by Ca' Foscari University of Venice (2021-2025)</i>	91
RAFFAELLA BONAUDO, LUCA CERCHIAI, GÜNTHER HÖBL, MARIA TOMMASA GRANESE, ANTONELLA MASSANOVA, ALESSANDRA SPERDUTI, <i>Two New Scarabs from EIA Settlement of Pontecagnano: Symbols of Prestige for an Evolving Community</i>	121
CARLO GIURANNA, «Some Say Phoenicians Were not the First to Make This Discovery»: <i>The “Anti-Phoenician Theory” about the Origin of Writing</i>	143

NOTE E DISCUSSIONI / NOTES AND DISCUSSION

CHRISTINA IOANNOU, <i>Reflections on the Phoenician Bowls of Cyprus. Evidence from an Exhibit at the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia</i>	159
---	-----

LOST IN TRANSLATION

IDA OGGIANO, <i>The Identification of the “Sant’Imbenia” Amphora Type: The Story of a Friendship and of two Similar Yet Distinct Amphorae</i>	169
---	-----

Estratto

«SOME SAY PHOENICIANS WERE NOT THE FIRST TO MAKE THIS DISCOVERY»: THE “ANTI-PHOENICIAN THEORY” ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF WRITING

CARLO GIURANNA*

Abstract: This article aims to analyse a collection of ancient sources recently interpreted as preserving a memory of Linear B behind the classical Greek expression *phoinikeia grammata*. Rather than reflecting an earlier scriptural tradition, a careful diachronic analysis shows that these texts can be interpreted as belonging to a coherent “anti-Phoenician” current, emerging from the 4th century BCE. These sources aimed to challenge one of the most influential paradigms explaining the emergence of writing in Greece: the Herodotean theory describing writing as a craft imported from Phoenicia. The article examines how these sources, through reinterpretations of linguistic data, alternative mythical figures, and literary motifs, endeavoured to undermine the role credited to the Phoenicians in this action. By surveying the development of this current, the study demonstrates that it did not preserve a technical memory of pre-alphabetic writing but participated in a dynamic reconfiguration of the discourse on the origins of Greek literacy, negotiating cultural authority and identity within the Hellenic world.

Keywords: Writing; Anti-Phoenician; Cadmus; Myth; Invention

1. INTRODUCTION

In ancient Greek, one of the recurrent ways of referring to writing was *phoinikeia grammata*, an expression that can be translated as “phoenicians letters”.¹ From an early stage, this formulation lent itself to interpretation, and it is probably from this linguistic element that one of the most long-lasting narrative patterns for the appearance of writing in Greece took shape. From the Classical Age to Late Antiquity, both Greek and Latin authors frequently turned to mythical narratives that traced the origin of writing back to Phoenicia, often through the figure of Cadmus or other cultural heroes, thereby establishing what may be called a “Phoenician theory” concerning the origins of Greek literacy.²

In this framework, however, starting from the 4th century BCE we find several sources that seem «désireux d’éliminer les Phéniciens de l’histoire de l’alphabet grec en expliquant autrement que par eux l’appellation “phéniciennes”»³. These texts do not simply offer minor variations on the dominant narrative, but

* Independent Researcher; c.giuranna94@gmail.com

1 Several literary and epigraphic sources from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE attest to the spread of this expression. For a comprehensive overview of the issue, see Corcella 1986 and Svenbro 1993. For the quotation in the title of the work, derived from a passage by Diodorus (D.S., V 74, 1) and potentially attributable to Dosiades (458 F 1 FGrHist = 468 F 1 BNJ), please refer to notes 35-36 below for further details.

2 Among a collection of 69 sources, which span from Herodotus to Tacitus, 38 of them reference the Phoenicians, Cadmus, or Phoenix, representing more than 55% of the total sources. In the compilation of mythical narratives concerning the invention of writing that I have assembled for my doctoral thesis, it becomes apparent that the Phoenician influence is significant, even rivaling that of Palamedes, the hero renowned for his widespread and enduring reputation in this domain. Regarding the necessity and heuristic potential of such a corpus, see Piccaluga 1991, p. 539.

3 Schneider 2004, p. 136. To my knowledge, this scholar is the only one who has recorded the presence of a coherent “anti-Phoenician current” within the classical sources regarding the traditions about the origin of writing. A similar current seems to be perfectly

rather question, downplay, or actively undermine the role attributed to the Phoenicians in the transmission of writing.

In recent years, these sources have been read as preserving a memory never fully obliterated of another writing system. From this perspective, the formula *phoinikeia grammata* did not refer to the Greek alphabet, as commonly presumed, but alluded to Linear B and was later misinterpreted during the 4th century BCE, starting with Herodotus. According to this line of interpretation, the so-called “Phoenician theory” would thus emerge as a result of this misunderstanding, while some later sources would preserve the memory of an older and more accurate use of this expression.⁴

While this interpretative approach has the advantage of highlighting a previously overlooked group of sources, it also presents several methodological challenges. Notably, it often regards these testimonies mainly as repositories of descriptive information about early writing systems, rather than as discursive interventions embedded within specific historical contexts. Consequently, sources that differ in chronology, genre, and cultural setting are read collectively, as if they all demonstrate the persistence of a technical memory, without adequately considering the argumentative roles they play within their respective frameworks. These challenges suggest that the hypothesis of an underlying memory of Linear B may not be essential to explain the evidence, and that an alternative interpretative framework might provide a more economical and historically grounded account of the material.

The aim of this article is therefore to analyse this current in a systematic manner, reconstructing its diachronic development and its main argumentative strategies. After outlining the context in which the Phoenician tradition concerning the origin of writing took shape and achieved its long-lasting success, the article will turn to an examination of the sources that oppose it, in order to assess their underlying motivations, their discursive strategies, and their long-term effects on ancient discourse, including both phases of attenuation and moments of renewed vitality of the Phoenician paradigm.

2. THE “PHOENICIAN THEORY” FROM THE CLASSICAL TO THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

The question of the origin of writing – that is, where this technology was first developed and, above all, who should be credited with this achievement – is a topic that has been a matter of discussion for Greek authors since the Archaic period. As with other cultural artefacts, there have been several proposals for *protoi heuretai* who should be attributed with this accomplishment since the 6th century BCE.

The conceptual framework within which these traditions can be organised is characterised by a bipartite structure: this technology was perceived either as the result of an epichoric invention or as a craft imported from outside.⁵ As early as the 6th century BCE, this bipartition is evident in the tradition relating to Stesichorus and certain Milesian authors, including Hecataeus and Dionysius. While the former does attribute the invention of writing to Palamedes in the second book of his *Oresteia*, the latter two are inclined to attribute it to Danaos, anchoring this cultural action in the ancient Egypt.⁶

consistent with what Sergio Ribichini said about the representation of the Phoenicians in Greek and Latin sources: «L'indagine sulle fonti letterarie greche e latine non potrà comunque che confermare, ampliare, e meglio caratterizzare la presenza di un determinato modulo di interpretazione per la civiltà ed il commercio fenicio, nel quadro di un programmatico atteggiamento di “recupero”, “controllo” e “neutralizzazione” di ogni temibile alterità culturale» (Ribichini 1983, p. 448). On this point, see also Piccaluga 1991.

4 This interpretative perspective, introduced shortly after the decipherment of Linear B (Mylonas 1966, Ahl 1967), has been recently reexamined by Willemijn Waal in her work *Deconstructing the Phoenician myth: 'Cadmus and the palm-leaf tablets' revisited* (Waal 2022).

5 Ceccarelli 2013, p. 63. For the mythical pattern of “writing that comes from afar” both in classical sources and in other cultural contexts, see Piccaluga 1996.

6 For the 6th century tradition about Palamedes, see Stesich., fr. 213 Davies. For the one related to Milesian authors, see Hecat., 1 F 20 FG rHist and Dionys. Mil., 687 F 1 FG rHist. For the discussion about the latter, see Biondi 2025.

2.1. Emergence (5th century BCE)

As the transition from the 6th century BCE to the classical period was marked by a substantial increase in the available sources, it is evident that this period is characterised by a significant proliferation of historical documentation. The traditions handed down to us by these sources, the majority of which are linked to authors active in 5th-century BCE Athens, follow the two-part division shortly described for the earliest evidence, but with a significant new development. In addition to the Egyptian origin asserted by the Milesian authors, a new perspective emerges, attributing the responsibility for this acculturative action to the Phoenician people. The first author to report this testimony was Herodotus of Halicarnassus.⁷

The passage under consideration is drawn from an excursus of Book V, in which Herodotus engages with the question of the origin of the Gephyraeans. The digression follows the account of the assassination of Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogeiton (V 55–57).⁸

58. [1]. οἱ δὲ Φοίνικες οὗτοι οἱ σὺν Κάδμῳ ἀπικόμενοι, τῶν ἦσαν οἱ Γεφυραῖοι, ἄλλα τε πολλὰ οἰκίσαντες ταύτην τὴν χώραν ἐσήγαγον διδασκάλια ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας καὶ δὴ καὶ γράμματα, οὐκ ἔοντα πρὶν Ἕλλησι ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, πρῶτα μὲν τοῖσι καὶ ἅπαντες χρέωνται Φοίνικες· μετὰ δὲ χρόνου προβαίνοντος ἅμα τῇ φωνῇ μετέβαλλον καὶ τὸν ῥυθμὸν τῶν γραμμάτων. [2]. περιοίκεον δὲ σφεας τὰ πολλὰ τῶν χώρων τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον Ἕλλήνων Ἴωνες· οἱ παραλαβόντες διδαχὴν παρὰ τῶν Φοινίκων τὰ γράμματα, μεταρρυθμίσαντές σφεων ὀλίγα ἐχρέωντο, χρεώμενοι δὲ ἐφάτισαν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἔφερε ἐσαγαγόντων Φοινίκων ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, Φοινικήϊα κεκληθῆσθαι.⁹

Herodotus recounts the introduction of *grammata* in Boeotia by the Gephyraeans. In doing so, he follows a rationalising pattern organised in four stages: 1) the arrival of the Phoenicians – those who came with Cadmus (“οἱ σὺν Κάδμῳ ἀπικόμενοι”) – in Boeotia and the introduction of their alphabet; 2) the subsequent modification, over time, by the Phoenicians themselves of the order of the set of symbols; 3) interaction with adjacent Ionian populations and their adoption, upon encountering the Gephyraeans, of that set of symbols; and 4) the coining of the name Φοινικήϊα, used to indicate the graphic code adopted, because of its Phoenician origin. The excursus then concludes, in the part of the text not quoted, with the mention of three epigraphs that Herodotus claims to have read on three tripods at the temple of Apollo Ismenius in Thebes, which would essentially prove the reconstruction he proposed.

This source contains two elements of particular interest. Firstly, as mentioned above, the connection with the linguistic data which. Even if not originally provided by Herodotus, the Greek historian certainly played some role in the formalisation of this conjecture. Secondly, the role assigned to Cadmus who, unlike the sources that will follow, does not have any particular role in this action, but is used by Herodotus mainly

7 There has been much discussion about whether this tradition actually originates with Herodotus. Modern scholarship is divided between those who consider this theory an innovation entirely attributable to him, and those who believe it predates the historian of Halicarnassus and may reflect the local interests of the Boeotian sanctuaries. For the first school of thought, see Corcella 1986; for the second, see Accame 1981.

8 It is precisely the mention of the tyrannicides, who belonged to the Gephyraeans (“γένος ἔοντες τὰ ἀνέκαθεν Γεφυραῖοι”, V 55), that leads the historian to wonder about the first Greek site they reached before settling in Athens. The Gephyraeans claimed they came from Eretria. Herodotus disagrees with this story, as Accame notes (Accame 1981, p. 4). He says they came from Phoenicia and, once arrived in Greece, they settled in Boeotia. From there, expelled first by the Argives and then by the Boeotians, they arrived in Athens, where they were partially integrated among the citizens.

9 Hdt., V 58, 1-2: «These Phoenicians who came with Cadmus (of whom the Gephyraeans were a part) at their settlement in this country, among many other kinds of learning, brought into Hellas the alphabet, which had hitherto been unknown, as I think, to the Greeks; and presently as time went on the sound and the form of the letters were changed. At this time the Greeks that dwelt round them for the most part were Ionians; who, having been taught the letters by the Phoenicians, used them with some few changes of form, and in so doing gave to these characters (as indeed was but just, seeing that the Phoenicians had brought them into Hellas) the name of Phoenician» (translation by Goldley in Goldley 1922, pp. 63-65).

as a chronological marker.¹⁰ Herodotus' reconstruction, most likely based on linguistic and archaeological data, shows a certain distance from the heurematologic treatises of the 4th century BCE. The aim of the *exkursus* is not to identify the *protos heuretes* to whom we can attribute the invention of writing. Instead, it is a rationalising discussion that attempts to describe the adoption of Phoenician writing in Greece by reasoning in chronological stages and moments of assimilation.

Among the extant sources concerning the 5th century BCE Athenian debate on the origins of writing, the Herodotean proposal did not emerge as the prevailing theory.¹¹ However, by the century's end, it appears to have gained considerable traction and acceptance. Proof of the gradual spread of this conjectural reconstruction is provided by a verse from an elegy by Critias, handed down to us by Athenaeus in the first book of the *Deipnosophists*. Among the various proto-heurematic reports concerning peoples and cities credited for significant discoveries, there is also a reference to the *heuresis* of letters by the Phoenicians: this people, says the poet, «found out the letters that stand in opposition to words».¹²

2.2. Canonization and spread (4th-3rd century BCE)

With the transition from the 5th to the 4th century BCE, we see a clear change from several points of view. First of all, the theory of Phoenician origin becomes preeminent in Athens. The other innovation that emerges from the sources is a progressive simplification of Herodotus' proposal. Although caution is necessary when dealing with sources transmitted indirectly, chronologically distant from the original authors and often reported in summary form, this seems to be the picture provided by the sources in our possession. While in the 5th century BCE the focus was on the Phoenicians, the sources from the following century always refer to a single figure, Cadmus, whose role as inventor or conveyor is exalted.

This transition is particularly evident in a fragment taken from an uncertain work attributed to Ephorus of Cyme, an author who was probably active in the first half of the 4th century BCE.¹³

Τῶν στοιχείων εὐρετὴν ἄλλοι τε καὶ Ἔφορος ἐν δευτέρῳ Κάδμῳ φασίν· οἱ δὲ οὐχ εὐρετὴν, τῆς δὲ Φοινίκων εὐρέσεως πρὸς ἡμᾶς διάτορον γεγενῆσθαι, ὡς καὶ Ἡρόδοτος ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης ἱστορεῖ.¹⁴

An intriguing aspect of this fragment is the apparent divergence between Ephorus and authors such as Herodotus and Aristotle. According to the scholiast, this discrepancy primarily pertains to the role as-

10 For a general overview on the Phoenician hero who founded Thebes and was believed to have arrived in Greece seven generations before the Trojan War see Edwards 1979, Rocchi 1991 and Bonnet 2018.

11 In the 5th century in Athens, several figures are credited with the invention of writing. Among them we find Danaus (Anaximand. 9 F 3 FGrHist), Prometheus (Ps.-Aesch., *Pr.* 436-471), Orpheus and the Muses (Ps.-Alcid., fr. 2, 22-28 Avezzù), and, above all, Palamedes (Gorg., fr. 82 B 11a, 29-31 Diels-Kranz and Eur., fr. 578 Kannicht).

12 For the adjective *alexiloga*, an *hapax* in Athenaeus, scholars have proposed several translations. The theories range from «guardians of the logos» (Fantuzzi 1984, pp. 221-227), to «support of the logos» (Pfeiffer 1968, p. 24), or «obstacle to the logos» (Ferlauto 1990, p. 183). The latter, put forward on the basis of the two Eustathian passages that also transmit the source from Critias, is probably the one to be preferred. As Canfora points out in his commentary on the passage from Athenaeus, it seems to be «meglio difendibile se si confrontano composti analoghi [for the discussion of which see the aforementioned article by Fantuzzi]» (Canfora 2001, p. 83 n. 10), but it would also appear to provide us, in an incredibly concise form, with a glimpse into the debate that took place in late 5th-century BCE Athens about the written medium, the doubts it raised concerning its potentially harmful effects on memory, and its relationship to oral communication: this adjective suggests that «la parola scritta impedirebbe di “dire di più” e quindi si contrappone al discorso orale e alla sua tendenza alla ridondanza e al superfluo» (*ibidem*).

13 This fragment has been passed down to us through the scholia on the *Ars Grammatica* by Dionysius Thrax, where it is stated that it came from the «second book», although it is not specified whether the original work was the *Histories* or, as seems more likely, the treatise *On Inventions*.

14 *Scholia in Dionysium Thracem* 183 1-4 Hilgard: «Some, including Ephorus in the second book, say that the inventor of letters was Cadmus; others claim that he was not the inventor, but the one who brought us the discovery made by the Phoenicians, as both Herodotus in *Histories* and Aristotle recount».

cribed to Cadmus, whom Ephorus depicted not merely as a simple *diaktoros*, but as the genuine *heuretes* of writing.¹⁵

There are essentially two problems with this reconstruction. First of all, the apparent bifurcation of the tradition, which according to the scholiast occurred at the beginning of the 4th century BCE. This is disputed by the only text we have the chance to read not through indirect tradition, namely that of Herodotus. As we have seen, the passage taken from the *Histories* does not seem to assign such an important role to Cadmus, who is used there more as a chronological marker than as a character who performs an action. Secondly, a thorough analysis of all the sources in which Cadmus appears clearly shows that the reports of an undeniable *heuresis* are few and all rather recent.¹⁶

Since we cannot say with certainty what role Ephorus assigned to Cadmus, based on our current knowledge, it seems rather that the innovation brought by Ephorus was to shift the focus to a single character: from Herodotus' reconstruction, organized in phases and featuring different ethnic actors – Phoenicians, Ionians, Boeotians – we thus move on to a single action, perhaps of *heuresis*, performed by Cadmus alone. This idea seems to be confirmed by the fact that subsequent sources relating to authors active in Athens always refer only to this hero and never to the Phoenicians.

From the middle of the 4th century BCE onwards, then, the “Phoenician theory” appears to have been fully canonised in Athens. Several accounts from the Hellenistic period mention this idea in passing, without discussing it in any particular detail. A fragment by Timon of Phlius, handed down by Sextus Empiricus, refers to the “phoenician signs of Cadmus” (*phoinikika Kadmeiou*).¹⁷ Similarly, an epigram in memory of Zeno of Citium reported by Diogenes Laertius recalls the Phoenician origin of Cadmus to remind from where Greece received writing.¹⁸ In both cases, the reference is not a matter of discussion but a shared assumption, a sign of its taken-for-granted nature in late 4th-century BCE Athens.

All sources relating to Cadmus as inventor or conveyor of written signs after the 4th century BCE belong to another tradition. This strand, known as “Theory of division”, was probably formalized during the 4th Century in Athens, as stated by Lilian H. Jeffery.¹⁹ This narrative model, followed by various authors since the early Hellenistic period, seeks to integrate several pre-existing traditions into a cohesive whole. It presents the development of the writing code not as a singular event but as a process evolving through successive additions. In this view, a character is often credited with the invention – or, more frequently, the importation – of an original set of signs, to which all other elements are gradually added in subsequent stages.²⁰ In this way,

15 This hypothesis has also been taken up by modern scholarship, including the editor of the entry on the Cumaean historian in Brill's New Jacoby, who interprets this discrepancy as the result of a simplification of the Herodotean source for which Ephorus would have been responsible, «by making Kadmos not merely the one who introduced letters to Greece but the one who actually invented them» Parker 2023, ad 10 F 105a.

16 The most ancient source comes from the *Stromata* by Clement of Alexandria, in which it is stated that Ephorus identified Cadmus as the *heuretes*, but there is no mention of rivalry between these two schools of thought. All the evidence leads us to believe that this opposition between the Ephorean and Aristotelian-Herodotean currents is simply the result of a later reconstruction, based on some source subsequent to Ephorus oversimplifying his position. From this perspective, the passage from the *Stromata* could be the prime suspect.

17 The fragment of Timon of Phlius – a skeptic philosopher who lived in the first half of the 3rd century BCE – is transmitted to us by Sextus Empiricus in a passage of his *Against the Mathematicians* (Di Marco 1989, p. 259).

18 Diogenes Laertius passes down to us this epigram under the name of «Zenodotus, a student of Diogenes». Arianna Gullo has put forward two proposals for identifying this author: the Stoic philosopher, student of Diogenes of Seleucia (2nd century BCE), who was head of the Stoic school in Athens after Zeno of Tarsus (3rd–2nd century BCE), or Zenodotus of Ephesus (ca. 330–260 BCE), an Alexandrian grammarian and the first librarian of Alexandria (Gullo 2023, p. 180). Considering the subject of the composition, however, the first hypothesis is probably to be preferred.

19 Jeffery 1967, p. 155.

20 One of the best examples of this type of narrative is found in a passage from Mario Victorinus' *Ars Grammatica* (VI 23, 16-20 Keil): «Inventors of the letters, Cadmus, from Phoenicia to Greece, and Evander to us, brought the letters a b c d e [h] i k <l> m n

the Phoenician tradition was not only consolidated in Athens, but also acquired a narrative structure capable of spreading to broader cultural contexts, forming the basis on which the anti-Phoenician movement would later develop.

3. THE “ANTI-PHOENICIAN” THEORY

Having clarified origin, development, and spread of the “Phoenician theory,” we can finally focus on the set of traditions that opposed the Herodotean version, attempting to deny Phoenicians any credit for the origin of this medium.

This collection of traditions is particularly heterogeneous from several perspectives. The sources under examination belong to a wide range of literary genres, approach the subject from different angles, and span a period of at least three centuries. Nonetheless, in this strand two main lines of argument can be distinguished.

The first includes all those sources that work on linguistic data, proposing new etymologies for the formula *phoinikeia grammata* in order to undermine the Phoenician element. Alongside these accounts, which unfortunately have reached us only through indirect tradition, we find another group of sources, fewer in number but much better preserved. The sources in this second group, although they share the goal of discrediting the role played by the Phoenicians in this development, do not operate on language, but rather on the narrative itself.

3.1. *The “Etymological” Current: Mythical Figures and Material Culture*

Let us then proceed to analyse the first of these two strands, which encompasses all the accounts that attempt to undermine the Herodotean narrative through alternative etymologies. We are not very well informed about this first current, since most of the sources belonging to this strand have reached us indirectly, through the scholia to the *Ars grammatica* of Dionysius Thrax.

Φοινίκεια δὲ τὰ γράμματα ἐλέγοντο, ὡς φησιν Ἐφορος ὁ Κυμαῖος καὶ Ἡρόδοτος <V 58>, ἐπεὶ Φοίνικες εὗρον αὐτά· Εὐφρόνιος δὲ, ὅτι μιλτῶ τὸ πρότερον ἐγράφοντο, ὃ ἐστι χρώμα τι φοινικοῦν· Ἐτεωνεὺς <δὲ> καὶ Μένανδρος, ἐπειδὴ ἐν πετάλοις φοινικεῖοις ἐγράφοντο· ἦ, ὅπερ κρείττον ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν, ὅτι φοινίσσεται ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὁ νοῦς ἡγῶν λαμπρύνεται· Ἄνδρων δὲ καὶ Μενεκράτης ὁ Ὀλύμπιος ἀπὸ Φοινίκης τῆς Ἀκταίωνος θυγατρὸς· Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ ὁ τοῦ Ἀρχιβίου, ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἀντίγραφοι ἀπὸ φοίνικος ξύλου εἶχον καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἔγραφον· Δοῦρις δὲ ὁ Σάμιος ὁ ἱστορικὸς ἐν ὀγδῷ <τῶν> Μακεδονικῶν ἀπὸ Φοίνικος τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως τροφῶ· Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ ὁ Ῥόδιος ἀπὸ Φοίνικος τοῦ Προνάπου καὶ Εὐρώπης, εὐρόντος αὐτὰ ἐν Κρήτῃ, ὃν ἀπέκτεινε Ῥαδάμανθος φθονήσας.²¹

ο p [q] r s t <u>, sixteen in total. Later, some were added by Palamedes and others by Simonides, thus increasing their number to twenty-four [...], as recorded by grammarians such as Demetrius of Phalerum, Hermocrates, and, among our own, Cincius, Fabius, and Gellius. Among them, Cincius said: “with only a few changes made so they would fit our language, the very same letters that Cadmus brought from Phoenicia to Greece were then brought to us by Evander from there”. This account involves the participation of multiple cultural actors and, although in a simplified manner compared to Herodotus, once again describes the adoption of writing as a slow process that unfolds through different stages. In the second part of the text, this source also lists the authors who adopted it over the centuries, thus providing important information about its spread. From this brief list, it can therefore be inferred that this type of theory was most likely coined in Athens within the Peripatetic circle, perhaps gained some currency in Alexandria – if that Hermocrates is to be identified with Hermocrates of Iasos, Callimachus’ teacher – and eventually made its way to Rome, where it was embraced by the Roman annalists. The creation of this theory within the Peripatos is suggested to us also by a series of sources, all of indirect tradition, connected to Aristotle (Arist., fr. 506 Gigon) and Theophrastus (Ps.-Thphr., fr. 735 Fortenbaugh).

21 *Scholia in Dionysium Thracem* 184, 20-185, 2 Hilgard: «They called the letters phoinikeia, ‘Phoenician’, as Ephorus of Cumae and Herodotus say, because Phoenicians invented them; Euphronius however says, because earlier they used to write with a red ochre called milto, which has a reddish colour; and Eteoneus and Menander, because they used to write on palm leaves; or, a better explanation, because the mind is reddened by them, that is, is brightened; but Andron and Menecrates from Olynthus affirm that

After accounting for the version established by Herodotus and followed by Ephorus of Cyme, the anonymous scholiast presents a long list of authors who, over the centuries, have offered alternative etymologies for this formula. The list includes eight authors and does not follow chronological order. Since our knowledge of these sources is limited to the brief mentions within this passage, we lack information on how these proposals were originally presented in their primary texts. Therefore, what we can do is to attempt to organize them and, by considering both diatopic and diachronic levels, to bring out the main lines of development in this initial canon of “anti-Phoenician” sources.

The tradition that appears to be the oldest is the one relating to Andron of Halicarnassus and Menecrates of Olynthus. This is not due to extensive knowledge about these two authors, but rather because the same tradition is transmitted to us through a lemma found in Photius, who attributes it to Skamon of Mytilene, an author likely active in the latter half of the 4th century BCE.²²

Σκάμων δ' ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ τῶν εὐρημάτων ἀπὸ Φοινίκης τῆς Ἀκταίονος ὀνομασθῆναι· μυθεύεται δ' οὗτος ἀρσένων μὲν παίδων ἄπαις, γενέσθαι αὐτῷ θυγατέρας Ἄγλαυρον, Ἐρσην, Πάνδροσον· τὴν δὲ Φοινίκην ἔτι παρθένον οὖσαν τελευτήσαι· διὸ καὶ Φοινικήϊα τὰ γράμματα τὸν Ἀκταίονα βουλόμενον τιμῆς ἀπονεῖμαι τῇ θυγατρὶ.²³

Skamon of Mytilene – perhaps the son of Hellanicus and among the first to write a *Περὶ Εὐρημάτων* – invokes the eponymous figure of Phoinike, daughter of Cecrops, whose tragic death supposedly led her father to give her name to the letters. This account is described by Ceccarelli as the one «in particular worth discussing»²⁴. Among all the different alternatives for the term φοινικήϊα, it shows its great value, as it testifies to the intense debate surrounding writing in Athens between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Even though none of the three cited authors come from there, in fact, the characters contained in it point to a clearly Attic context and, thus, for this tradition, an Athenian origin has always been imagined.²⁵

Notably, aside from Phoinike, the three daughters of Actaeon are identical to those recorded by Pausanias (I 2, 6) as the daughters of Cecrops, the mythical “autochthonous” king of Athens. This parallel has led to the interpretation of Actaeon as a double of Cecrops.²⁶ The hypothesis of the Athenian origin of this tradition has then received further confirmation from the study conducted on this topic by Svenbro in his *Phrasikleia. Anthropologie de la lecture en Grèce ancienne*. Here, he demonstrated how the tradition in which Actaeon is the protagonist seems to have been created as a counterpart to the Theban tradition concerning Cadmus, who was also the father of four daughters and, as we have seen, played an important role in the origin of writing. The tradition attested by these three sources proves to be of great interest in that it reveals the ideological battle that seemed to have taken place in Athens in the mid-4th century BCE, where, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Herodotean proposal had become the dominant tradition. As Svenbro

the name derived from that of Phoenice, the daughter of Actaeon; Apollonius the son of Archibius, because the copying clerks had a wooden instrument made of palm-wood and wrote with it; Duris the Samian historiographer in the eight book of his *Macedonica* suggests that the name derives from Phoenix the tutor of Achilles; Alexander the Rhodian from Phoenix the son of Pronapos and Europe, who would have invented them in Crete; Rhadamanthus killed him out of envy» (translation by Ceccarelli in Ceccarelli 2013, p. 359).

22 For the chronology and the related bibliography on Skamon, Andron of Halicarnassus and Menecrates of Olynthus see Ceccarelli 2013, n. 38 p. 70.

23 476 F 3 FG rHist: «Skamon, in the second book of his *On Inventions*, says that they were named after Phoenice, the daughter of Actaeon. Legend has it that he was childless when it came to male children, but that to him daughters were born, Aglaurus, Erse, and Pandrosus. But Phoenice died while still a parthenos; for this reason Actaeon named the letters ‘Phoenician’, desiring to bestow some honour upon his daughter» (translation by Ceccarelli in Ceccarelli 2012, pp. 69-70).

24 Ceccarelli 2013, p. 69.

25 Jacoby, *ad* FG rHist 476 T 3, Svenbro 1993, pp. 81-82 and Ceccarelli 2012, pp. 69-71.

26 Svenbro 1993, p. 80.

further emphasizes, the aim of such a tradition «seems to be to connect the invention with the origins of Athens, thereby destroying any prior claims by the Boeotians and the Phoenicians in this accomplishment»²⁷.

Returning now to the scholia, the next tradition that we can date with some certainty is the one related to Duris of Samos, an author active between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BCE.²⁸ He too, according to the scholiast, explained *phoinikeia* by referring to a character named Phoenix. However, this was not the daughter of Cecrops, but the one who would have raised Achilles during his childhood. While it is at least possible to hypothesize the reasons behind the fabrication of the previously mentioned Athenian theory, for the tradition promoted by Duris, due to the scant information available to us, it is much more difficult.

Taken from the eighth book of the *Mekedonika*, which we know is dedicated to the reign of Alexander, this tradition was perhaps mentioned by Duris in connection to the relationship between the Macedonian king and his tutor Lysimachus.²⁹ Whatever the interpretation, this passage seems to provide further evidence of the presence, in the 4th century BCE, of various proposals intended to explain the formula *phoinikeia grammata*. These, by invoking different mythical figures, offered a range of alternatives to the dominant “Phoenician theory”.

Moving now to the other fragments present in the passage of the scholia, we see that, alongside the explanations just analyzed, there are others offering completely different proposals. The phrase *phoinikeia grammata* is explained through false etymologies linked to elements of material culture from the graphosphere: these range from the ink used to write in “ancient times” – *minium*, a certain reddish color («χρῶμά τι φοινικοῦν») – to writing supports, such as leaves («ἐν πετάλοις φοινικείοις»), and palm wood («ἀπὸ φοίνικος ξύλον»), up to metaphorical explanations, according to which writing “reddens” the mind, thus enlightening it («ὅτι φοινίσσεται ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὁ νοῦς ἡγῶν λαμπρύνεται»).

If we look at the authors credited for these explanations, they can all be placed between the end of the 3rd and the 2nd century BCE and seem to belong to philological and grammatical circles. Such is the case of Euphronius, who came from the Egyptian city of Chersonesus near Alexandria and was a contemporary of Aristophanes of Byzantium.³⁰ He was probably the teacher of Aristarchus of Samothrace, so his activities should be placed in the second half of the 3rd century BCE. Similar is the case of Menander, who, based on the scant information we have, is usually placed in the 2nd century BCE Pergamon.³¹

The process of systematizing the sources we are able to date with some approximation provides us with a picture of great interest. Despite the variety of traditions conveyed by all these testimonies, we can in fact discern a series of developmental directions that seem to reveal a phased sequence, closely tied to the development of the “Phoenician theory” described in the previous paragraph: when the tradition concerning Cadmus became predominant in Athens, the anti-Phoenician current, following the trend of heurematic research in the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, seem to oppose it by introducing certain characters named Phoenix. At the turn of the full Hellenistic age, dominated by the centres of Alexandria and Pergamon, the way to explain the appellation *phoinikeia* involved the introduction of a series of paronymologies linked to certain elements of material culture.

27 Svenbro 1993, p. 82.

28 Landucci Gattinoni 1997, p. 10.

29 As stated by Landucci-Gattinoni, Lysimachus, according to Plutarch (Alex. 5, 8; 24, 10-12), «amava paragonare se stesso a Fenice e il suo allievo ad Achille» (Landucci Gattinoni 1997, p. 112).

30 For the challenging question about the chronology of this author, see the entry in the *Lexicon of Greek Grammarians of Antiquity* edited by Valeria Novembri (Novembri 2020).

31 The author under consideration is known only thanks to a few scattered mentions made by Josephus (783 F 1, F 3, and F 4), Tatian (783 F 2), and John the Lydian (783 F 6). We know very little about his work and his chronology, but his activity is generally placed around the 2nd century BCE (Naiden 2008, Biographical Essay).

This development scheme is certainly influenced by the narrow lens through which tradition compels us. Nevertheless, it may also help us to approximately date the last two authors mentioned in the passage under consideration. About them we have almost no information. For the first, Apollonius, son of Archibius, we have only uncertain data coming from external sources, which have led scholars to suggest that he dates to around the 1st century AD.³² This hypothesis fits perfectly with the tradition associated with this author who, once again, refers to material elements of the writing universe – the palm wood from which the instrument used by the *antigraphoi* were supposedly made – to explain the phrase. This source, therefore, could then be placed in the second phase of development of the anti-Phoenician current, fitting perfectly thematically with other sources from authors of the fully developed Hellenistic period

A different case, however, is the one related to the last author mentioned in the passage from the scholia, namely an otherwise unknown Alexander of Rhodes, who tells us about a third figure named Phoenix. The son of Europa and Pronapos, he is said to have invented the letters in Crete and, for this reason, was killed by Rhadamanthus, who was envious of him for his invention. This follows the motif of the ill-fated hero often associated with the invention of written signs in 5th and 4th-century BCE Athenian sources.³³ Both the presence of this pattern and the fact that the proposal made by this author focus on a mythical character can lead us to suppose that, if not the author himself, at least the tradition he reports was already circulating between the end of the 4th and the middle of the 3rd century BCE.

The main point of interest in this fragment is the way it relates to the Herodotean tradition. Unlike all the other fragments taken from the scholia passage, in which the Phoenician element is completely obliterated, in this fragment it is present, even if not explicitly mentioned. Indeed, whereas the namesake characters cited by the two traditions previously discussed have no connection with the Phoenicians, here the mother of Phoenix, Europa, is the one who is usually indicated as Cadmus's sister and the principal reason why he set out for Greece. The connection with Phoenicia is therefore maintained, although strongly changed: the Phoenicians no longer bring the *grammata*, but it is their descendants who lay claim to the invention, albeit in a different setting, namely the island of Crete.

This new location for the discovery of letters has been interpreted by the current referenced at the beginning of this work as proof that behind the expression *phoinikeia grammata* there was not the alphabetic script, but rather an ancient memory of the writing system used before it, that is, Linear B. In the subsequent pages, I aim to demonstrate that the tradition linked to Alexander of Rhodes, as noted in the scholia, is not unique. Rather, it exhibits several similarities with two other sources dating from the 3rd to the 2nd centuries BCE. These sources present various traditions, likely influenced by local interests, that propose alternative locations such as Crete or the island of Rhodes. This approach is akin to what has been previously observed: the Phoenician element is not removed but is instead reinterpreted and, in various ways, discredited.

3.2. Claiming Greek Primacy: local traditions about the origin of writing

The last two sources we aim to evaluate here belong to the anti-Phoenician strand, but they differ from those already analysed for two specific reasons. First of all, as in the passage by Alexander of Rhodes, the Phoenician element is not eliminated, but simply readapted. Secondly, also thanks to the less concise and fragmentary form in which they have come down to us, these sources clearly show that their purpose is to

32 Author of a *Λεξικὸν κατὰ στοιχεῖον τῆς τε Ἰλιάδος καὶ Ὀδυσσεύας*, Valeria Bacigalupo has tentatively indicated the 1st century AD as his period of activity (Bacigalupo 2015).

33 This narrative model, highly successful among the tragedians and Attic prose writers of the classical era (Ps.-Aesch., *Pr.* 436-471, Gorg., fr. 82 B 11a, 29-31 Diels-Kranz, Eur., fr. 578 Kannicht and Ps.-Aldid., fr. 2, 22-28 Avezzi), describes the figure of a hero who proves to be a benefactor of humanity through his discoveries. Despite his benevolent acts, he meets the death because of his inventions or the envy they generate, as in the case of the account by Alexander of Rhodes. For the use and success of this narrative pattern, frequently employed with figures such as Prometheus or Palamedes, see Ceccarelli 2013, pp. 72-75.

claim for the Greeks the credit for the invention of writing.³⁴ To do this, these texts naturally engage with the Phoenician theory, which, having become dominant in Athens, began to spread throughout the Mediterranean in the 3rd century BCE.

The first testimony we will examine shares with the tradition related to Alexander of Rhodes the island of Crete as the setting for the invention of letters. The passage comes from a long *excursus* in Book V of the *Historical Library* of Diodorus Siculus and has been attributed by various scholars to a Cretan historian, Dosiades of Kydonia, who was probably active in the first half of the 3rd century BCE.³⁵

The passage is mentioned in the section dedicated to the island of Crete and, more specifically, in the part where Diodorus recounts, within a clearly Euhemeristic framework, the birth of Zeus, his rise to power, and the subsequent division among his children of his cultural discoveries. After reviewing all the civilizing actions that earned him the transition from heaven to earth, Diodorus reports that he distributed to each of his children «the knowledge of the deeds accomplished and the honors of the inventions» (τῶν εὐρεθέντων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ συντελουμένων ἔργων τὰς ἐπιστήμας καὶ τὰς τιμὰς τῆς εὐρέσεως). After that, he proceeds to describe all the discoveries entrusted to the various children, until he arrives at the Muses, to whom Zeus assigns the invention of letters.

74 [1] ταῖς δὲ Μούσαις δοθῆναι παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων εὐρεσιν καὶ τὴν τῶν ἐπῶν σύνθεσιν τὴν προσαγορευομένην ποιητικὴν. πρὸς δὲ τοὺς λέγοντας, ὅτι Σύριοι μὲν εὐρεταὶ τῶν γραμμάτων εἰσὶ, παρὰ δὲ τούτων Φοίνικες μαθόντες τοῖς Ἕλλησι παραδεδώκασιν, οὗτοι δ' εἰσὶν οἱ μετὰ Κάδμου πλεύσαντες εἰς τὴν Εὐρώπην, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τοὺς Ἕλληνας τὰ γράμματα Φοινίκεια προσαγορεύειν, φασὶ τοὺς Φοίνικας οὐκ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εὐρεῖν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς τύπους τῶν γραμμάτων μεταθεῖναι μόνον, καὶ τῇ τε γραφῇ ταύτῃ τοὺς πλείστους τῶν ἀνθρώπων χρῆσασθαι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τυχεῖν τῆς προειρημένης προσηγορίας.³⁶

From this passage, we can deduce little about the Cretan theory reported by Diodorus. What does seem to emerge, however, is a true clash between traditions. On one hand, there is the tradition we have seen spread throughout the Mediterranean as the dominant theory between the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE.

34 It is worth remembering that locating the invention of writing in Greece is not something new in these narratives. As seen in the previous paragraphs (see § 1.1), the proposals about the origin of this medium oscillate between theories of exogenous importation and others of epichoric invention since the 6th century BCE. The novelty of this period, rather, is that the sources seeking to claim the merit of the invention for the Greeks have this as their main objective, whereas those from the Classical period took this fact for granted in order to focus on other issues, such as the functions and characteristics of the medium. In the sources from the classical age that attribute the credit for the discovery to a cultural Greek hero «a focus on function is much more prominent, possibly because writing, when it appears in this context, is mostly presented not per se, autonomously, but as part of a series of civilizing inventions» (Ceccarelli 2012, p. 66).

35 For the chronology of this author, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1972, pp. 25-6. Based on Wilamowitz's proposal, Bertelli states that «it may therefore be possible to date Dosiadas' work around 285-270 BCE with a high degree of probability» (Bertelli 2009, ad 458 T 1). The attribution of this passage to Dosiades is uncertain, since Diodorus does not specify exactly which parts come from which of the various sources that recount the events he reports. At the end of the section (V 80, 4), the Sicilian historian cites several Cretan authors as sources without specifying who contributed what, and even explains that these authors often differ from each other on various points (ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν τὰ Κρητικὰ γεγραφότων οἱ πλείστοι διαφωνοῦσι πρὸς ἀλλήλους, οὐ χρὴ θαυμάζειν, ἐὰν μὴ πᾶσιν ὁμολογούμενα λέγωμεν). Jacoby therefore included this long fragment in the "Anhang" on Crete (= 468 F 1 FGrHist). Despite the difficulties, regarding the brief part that concerns us, we may perhaps have a bit more certainty. It can perhaps be attributed to Dosiades thanks to the support given by a passage from the scholia to Dionysius Thrax's *Ars grammatica*, where it is said that this author identified the invention of writing as having taken place on the island of Crete (*Scholia in Dionysium Thracem* 183, 12 Hilgard).

36 D.S., V 74, 1 (458 F 1 FGrHist = 468 F 1 BNJ): «To the Muses, we are further told, it was given by their father Zeus to discover the letters and to combine words in the way which is designated poetry. And in reply to those who say that the Syrians are the discoverers of the letters, the Phoenicians having learned them from the Syrians and then passed them on to the Greeks, and that these Phoenicians are those who sailed to Europe together with Cadmus and this is the reason why the Greeks call the letters "Phoenician" men tell us, on the other hand, that the Phoenicians were not the first to make this discovery, but that they did no more than to change the forms of the letters, whereupon the majority of mankind made use of the way of writing them as the Phoenicians devised it, and so the letters received the designation we have mentioned above (translation by Oldfather in Oldfather 1939, pp. 297-299).

This proposal assigns a role of utmost importance to the Phoenicians, although it is presented in a rather confused manner even by our own source: after a first part in which the Syrians are named as the inventors and the Phoenicians merely as those who brought the invention to Greece, there follows a second reference in which the full authorship of the discovery is ascribed to the Phoenicians.³⁷ On the other hand, there is an alternative theory, which attributes the origin to Zeus and the Muses and, in order to affirm itself, downplays the role of the Phoenician people.

Similarly to Alexander of Rhodes' source, therefore, in this text the Phoenician element is not eliminated, but rather reinterpreted so as to align it with another proposal. This theory, presumably of Cretan origin and possibly an expression of local interests, claimed that the use of letters was widespread on the island of Crete well before the journey of Cadmus. To explain the phrase *phoinikeia grammata*, the Phoenicians are no longer credited with any invention of writing: their contribution is reduced to merely modifying the shape of the characters, which were already part of an existing and fully functional system.³⁸

Shortly before the passage just read, Diodorus provides us with another account of great interest to the subject under discussion here. Regarding the island of Rhodes, in fact, the Sicilian historian presents a lengthy excerpt from an anonymous work by Zeno of Rhodes, in which there is also a reference to the "Phoenician theory".³⁹

The passage addresses the events preceding the Trojan War. Zeno offers a narrative concerning his native island, structured into three chronological phases. These phases are punctuated by cataclysms that periodically result in the cessation of life and the obliteration of all technological advancements achieved up to that point. After the first moment, characterized by the presence of the Telchines (V 55, 1-56, 2), Rhodes becomes sacred to Helios, who dries its lands and populates it with his own children. These, similarly to the account of Zeus in Dosiades, distinguished themselves through the discovery of astrology, the division of time into hours, and the nautical arts. Following the violent death of the most gifted among them, Tenages, the brothers left the island and thus, according to a diffusionist model, spread all the arts they had discovered to Cos, Lesbos, and Egypt.

57 [3] ὕστερον δὲ παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλησι γενομένου κατακλυσμοῦ, καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐπομβρίαν τῶν πλείστων ἀνθρώπων ἀπολομένων, ὁμοίως τούτοις καὶ τὰ διὰ τῶν γραμμάτων ὑπομνήματα συνέβη φθαρῆναι. [4] δι' ἣν αἰτίαν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καιρὸν εὔθετον λαβόντες ἐξιδιοποίησαντο τὰ περὶ τῆς ἀστρολογίας, καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων διὰ τὴν ἀγνοίαν μηκέτι τῶν γραμμάτων ἀντιποιουμένων ἐνίσχυσεν, ὡς αὐτοὶ πρῶτοι τὴν τῶν ἀστρῶν εὔρεσιν ἐποίησαντο. [5] ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι κτίσαντες ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ πόλιν τὴν ὀνομαζομένην Σάιν, τῆς ὁμοίας ἔτυχον ἀγνοίας διὰ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν. δι' ἧς αἰτίας πολλαῖς ὕστερον γενεαῖς Κάδμος ὁ Ἀγῆνορος ἐκ τῆς Φοινίκης πρῶτος ὑπελήφθη κομίσαι γράμματα εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα· καὶ ἀπ' ἐκείνου τὸ λοιπὸν οἱ Ἕλληγες ἔδοξαν αἰεὶ τι προσεῦρίσκειν περὶ τῶν γραμμάτων, κοινῆς τινος ἀγνοίας κατεχούσης τοὺς Ἕλληνας.⁴⁰

37 Behind the reference to the Syroi there is perhaps an allusion to the Assyrians, if we trust a passage from Herodotus in which he explains that the Greeks called Σύριοι those whom the barbarians called Ἀσσύριοι (Hdt., VII 63: οὗτοι δὲ ὑπὸ μὲν Ἑλλήνων καλεῖονται Σύριοι, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν βαρβάρων Ἀσσύριοι ἐκλήθησαν).

38 A similar reconstruction is evidently set in opposition to the Herodotean tradition, from which it nevertheless draws various elements. Of the different phases described in Herodotus's passage, this source attributes to the Phoenicians only the last and probably least significant one, that of graphic adaptation, excluding them both from the invention and from the transmission of this cultural object.

39 The work in question is in all likelihood that single-volume local history mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (FGrHist 523 T 1), notable for being "by far the longest of his fragments" (Champion 2008, ad FGrHist 523 F 1).

40 D.S., V 57, 3-5 (= 523 F 1 FGrHist): «But when at a later time there came a flood among the Greeks and the majority of mankind perished by reason of the abundance of rain, it came to pass that all written monuments were also destroyed in the same manner as mankind; and this is the reason why the Egyptians, seizing the favourable occasion, appropriated to themselves the knowledge of astrology, and why, since the Greeks, because of their ignorance, no longer laid any claim to writing, the belief prevailed that the Egyptians were the first men to effect the discovery of the stars. Likewise the Athenians, although they were the founders of the city

Similarly to what was observed with the source from Dosiades, this account features divine or semi-divine figures who organize relationships within the human community and between humans and gods through the creation of various cultural artifacts. Following a diffusionist scheme that also borrows the classical motif of the ill-fated hero, these artifacts originate from Rhodes and are then exported to other contexts. With the arrival of the second flood, the letters are lost, and as a consequence, the memory of the arts preserved by them fades as well. In this way, the peoples who had come into contact with the techniques developed by the sons of Helios were able, after the Greeks lost this knowledge, to claim that they themselves had been the first to invent them: according to Zenon's reconstruction, this is what happens both with astrology, whose paternity the Egyptians "stole," and with the letters, which from that moment on were considered to have been invented for the first time by the Phoenicians.

In addition to the presence of divine figures involved in the narrative, this source certainly shares with that of Dosiades the ultimate aim, namely that of discrediting Herodotus's theory. Furthermore, another feature they have in common is the greater emphasis placed on the *pars destruens* of the argument as opposed to the *pars construens*. In fact, after reading the passage, there remains some doubt as to which character is identified by Zeno as the inventor of writing, since he does not make a clear reference to the invention of this medium by the sons of Helios. However, this element seems to be taken for granted, given that the entire passage implicitly assumes it.

If, therefore, several elements connect the fragment attributable to Zeno with that of Dosiades, it should nevertheless be noted that the narrative methods of discredit differ from those employed by the Cretan author. In the latter, the delegitimization of the "Herodotean theory" involves the downgrading of the Phoenician element, whereas Zeno steadfastly upholds the tradition that the *phoinikeia grammata* were imported by Cadmus, which here is not called into question. Alongside this, however, he posits knowledge of this technology well before the arrival of the Phoenician hero and explains its loss by drawing on the theme – made famous by the famous passage in Plato's *Timaeus* – of cataclysms that would have cyclically devastated Greece.⁴¹ While the motif of the Greeks as «always children» left «without writing» by cataclysms is a well-established theme of Platonic origin, its adaptation within a local tradition and its connection to the Herodotean tradition regarding the *phoinikeia grammata* appears, based on current knowledge, to be an innovation attributable to Zeno or the sources he utilized.

In addition to providing another valuable example of the narrative strategies used to discredit the Herodotean theory, this source is of enormous interest because it shows what fate befell the Phoenician theory once, having left the borders of Attica, it came into contact with other local realities of the Mediterranean. In the paragraph following the one quoted here, Zenon recounts that Rhodes, after the second flood, was visited by several heroes traveling to Greece. Among them is also Cadmus, who, having survived a storm, stopped on the island and, as a vow for having been saved, dedicated in the temple of Athena at Lindos a bronze *lebes* with inscribed Phoenician characters on it. In this way, Rhodes takes shape as the first landing point for writing technology in the form of *phoinikeia grammata*.

in Egypt men call Sais, suffered from the same ignorance because of the flood. And it was because of reasons such as these that many generations later men supposed that Cadmus, the son of Agenor, had been the first to bring the letters from Phoenicia to Greece; and after the time of Cadmus onwards the Greeks were believed to have kept making new discoveries in the science of writing, since a sort of general ignorance of the facts possessed the Greeks» (translation by Oldfather in Oldfather 1939, pp. 253).

41 Pl. Tim. 21e–23b. Here Plato recounts the episode in which Solon was reproached by one of the Egyptian priests whom he was visiting. The priest, in response to the clumsy attempts of the Athenian legislator to present Greek traditions as ancient, pointed out how these pale in comparison to Egyptian memories – precisely because of the natural catastrophes that have cyclically struck Greece, leaving its inhabitants uncultured (*ἀμούσους*) and illiterate (*ἀγραμμάτους*).

This information is already known to us thanks to the *Chronicle of Lindos*.⁴² In the third entry of the list of dedications, we find written that «Kadmos [dedicated] a bronze *lebes*. Inscribed with 15 Phoenician letters, as Polyzalos reports in the fourth book of his *Investigations*».⁴³ Without delving now into the question of whether such an artifact actually existed in the temple of Athena at Lindos, this source is extremely useful because it could perhaps allow us to date the spread of the tradition about Cadmus's passage through Rhodes on his journey to Greece. Considering the mention of Polyzalos, a local historian dated at least to the third, if not the late 4th century BCE, we can then place the spread of this information within that chronological framework.⁴⁴ The combination of these two Rhodian sources – Polyzalos', cited by the *Chronicle of Lindos* and also indirectly by Diodorus Siculus, and Zeno's, handed down only by Diodorus – allows us, therefore, to outline an articulated pattern of development.

The Phoenician theory, in the simplified form perhaps attributable to Ephorus of Cyme with Cadmus instead of Phoenicians at the center of the narrative, was certainly known in Rhodes in the 2nd century BCE and perhaps even as early as the 3rd, if the information concerning Polyzalos were to prove true. If this is the case, one could imagine its development in two phases: initially, the Rhodians would have adopted the Herodotean tradition, skillfully modified to present the island as the first point of reception for writing technology coming from Phoenicia; in the second phase, corresponding to the chronological context of Zenon of Rhodes, that same tradition – originally adopted for reasons of prestige – was rejected. Thus, it was still believed that he had passed through, but the notion that this could have been the Rhodians' first contact with writing was called into question by means of the narrative motif of the cataclysm that had struck the island and had caused the knowledge of letters, already known, to be forgotten.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article has reconstructed the development of an “anti-Phoenician” current in ancient reflections on the origin of writing by situating it in direct dialogue with the emergence, canonization, and diffusion of the Phoenician theory from the 5th century BCE onward. After outlining the formation and long-lasting success of that paradigm, the analysis examined a heterogeneous set of sources that, from the 4th century BCE through the Hellenistic period systematically downplay the role attributed to the Phoenicians.

These sources should not be regarded as isolated anomalies, nor do they merely preserve remnants of an earlier writing system. Instead, when analysed within their specific literary and historical contexts, they reveal themselves as discursive interventions intended to renegotiate the explanatory primacy traditionally attributed to the Phoenicians. Through various argumentative strategies, these texts engage in an internal re-evaluation of one of the most prevailing narratives concerning the origins of Greek writing.

From this perspective, the interpretation of *phoinikeia grammata* as a lingering memory of Linear B appears less convincing. The recurrence of shared motifs and narrative patterns across sources of different genres and periods is more economically explained by their engagement with a consolidated explanatory framework than by the survival of an otherwise obliterated technical memory. What is at stake in these texts is not the preservation of an alternative historical record, but the contestation of a dominant paradigm.

42 It refers to an inscription on a monumental stele composed in 99 BCE that lists the dedications made to the sanctuary of Athena Lindia in Rhodes throughout its history, as well as four epiphanies of the goddess. The accounts reported by this inscription are somewhat problematic, since most of the dedications no longer existed at the time the inscription was made, due to a fire that destroyed the temple in 392/1 BCE. The purpose behind the creation of this document, as explicitly stated in the introductory section, is precisely to gather information about the various votive offerings and inscriptions that had accumulated in the sanctuary and were irretrievably lost.

43 Translation by Higbie in Higbie 2003, p. 23.

44 For the chronology of this author, see Higbie 2003, p. 72.

Taken as a whole, the anti-Phoenician current thus emerges as a coherent, diachronically articulated phenomenon, shaped by specific intellectual agendas and, in several cases, by local interests. Its development illustrates how ancient discourse on cultural origins was continually reshaped through polemic, reinterpretation, and selective appropriation. Within this contested tradition, *phoinikeia grammata* does not gesture toward a forgotten pre-alphabetic past, but functions as a privileged site of ideological negotiation, where questions of authority, precedence, and cultural identity in the ancient Mediterranean were repeatedly and deliberately redefined.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Accame 1981 = S. Accame, *Erodoto e l'introduzione dell'alfabeto in Grecia*, in L. Gasperini (ed.), *Scritti sul mondo antico in memoria di Fulvio Grosso*, Roma 1981, pp. 3-11.
- Ahl 1967 = F.M. Ahl, *Cadmus and the Palm-Leaf Tablets*, in «AJPh» 88, 1967, pp. 188-194.
- Bacigalupo 2015 = V. Bacigalupo, Eteoneus, in «LGGA», 2015. in F. Montanari – F. Montana – L. Pagani (edd.), *Lexicon of Greek Grammarians of Antiquity*, Leiden 2015, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-9278_Eteoneus_it
- Bertelli 2009 = L. Bertelli, *Dosiadas (458)*, in I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby*, Leiden 2009.
- Biondi 2025 = E. Biondi, *Dionisio di Mileto (FGrHist 687 F1) e le origini dell'alfabeto greco*, in «Historia», 74, 2025, pp. 2-23.
- Bonnet 2018 = C. Bonnet, *Kadmos Reloaded. The Shaping of Cultural Memory between Phoenicia, Greece and Rome*, in G. Garbati (ed.), *Cercando con zelo di conoscere la storia fenicia: Atti della giornata di studi dedicata a Sergio Ribichini (Roma, CNR, 20 marzo 2015)*, Roma 2018, pp. 49-61.
- Canfora 2001 = L. Canfora (ed.), *Ateneo. I deipnosofisti: I dotti a banchetto. Volume I (libri I-IV)* (a cura di). Roma 2001.
- Ceccarelli 2013 = P. Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek letter writing: A cultural history (600 BC-150 BC)*, Oxford 2013.
- Champion 2008 = C.B. Champion, *Zeno of Rhodes (523)*, in I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby*, Leiden 2008.
- Corcella 1986 = A. Corcella, *Dionisio Skytobrachion, i phoinikeia e l'«alfabeto pelasgico»: Per una corretta interpretazione di Diodoro III.67.1 (FGrHist 32 F 8)*, in «AttiAcTorino», 120, 1986, pp. 41-82.
- Di Marco 1989 = M. Di Marco (ed.), *Timone di Fliunte, Silli. Edizione critica, introduzione, traduzione e commento*, Roma 1989.
- Edwards 1979 = R.B. Edwards, *Kadmos the Phoenician. A Study in Greek Legends and the Mycenaean Age*, Amsterdam 1979.
- Fantuzzi 1984 = M. Fantuzzi, *Gli ἀλεξίλογα γράμματα di Crizia*, in «QuadStor», 19, 1984, pp. 221-227.
- Ferlauto 1990 = F. Ferlauto, *L'invenzione dei γράμματα ἀλεξίλογα secondo Critias (Athen. I 28 B-C)*, in «BCI», 11, 1990, pp. 178-83.
- Godley 1922 = A.D. Godley (ed.), *Herodotus. The Persian Wars, Volume III: Books 5-7*, Cambridge 1922.
- Gullo 2023 = A. Gullo (ed.), *Antologia palatina. Epigrammi funerari (libro VII)*, Pisa 2023.
- Higbie 2003 = C. Higbie (ed.), *The Lindian Chronicle and the Greek Creation of their Past*, Oxford 2003.
- Jeffery 1967 = L.H. Jeffery, *ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ. Some Ancient Greek Views*, in W.C. Brice (ed.), *Europa. Studien zur Geschichte und Epigraphik der Frühen Aegaeis. Festschrift für Ernst Grumach*, Berlin 1967, pp. 152-166.
- Landucci Gattinoni 1997 = F. Landucci Gattinoni, *Duride di Samo*, Roma 1997.
- Mylonas 1966 = G.E. Mylonas, *Mycenae and Mycenaean Age*, Princeton 1966.
- Naiden 2008 = F.S. Naiden, *Menander (783)*, in I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby*, Leiden 2008.
- Novembri 2015 = V. Novembri, *Euphronius*, in F. Montanari – F. Montana – L. Pagani (edd.), *Lexicon of Greek Grammarians of Antiquity*, Leiden 2015, https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-9278_Euphronius_it.
- Oldfather 1939 = C.H. Oldfather (ed.), *Library of History, Volume III: Books 4.59-8*, Cambridge 1939.
- Parker 2023 = V. Parker, *Ephoros (70)*, in I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby*, Leiden 2023.
- Piccaluga 1991 = G. Piccaluga, *Processi di formazione dei miti greci. La fondazione della scrittura*, in D. Musti (ed.), *La transizione dal miceneo all'alto arcaismo. Dal palazzo alla città. Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma 14-19 marzo 1988*, Roma 1991, pp. 539-49.

- Piccaluga 1996 = G. Piccaluga, *La scrittura che viene da lontano. Una questione di metodo*, in E. De Miro (ed.), *Atti e memorie del 2° congresso internazionale di micenologia, Roma-Napoli 14-20 ottobre 1991*, Roma 1996, pp. 845-55.
- Pfeiffer 1968 = R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age*, Oxford 1968.
- Ribichini 1983 = S. Ribichini, *Mito e storia: l'immagine dei Fenici nelle fonti classiche*, in P. Bartoloni (ed.), *Atti del I Congresso internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici (Roma 5-10 novembre 1979)*, Roma 1983, II 443-448.
- Rocchi 1991 = M. Rocchi, *Kadmos e i "phoinikeia grammata"*, in E. Acquaro (ed.), *Atti del II Congresso internazionale di studi fenici e punici: Roma, 9-14 novembre 1987*, Roma 1991, pp. 529-533.
- Schneider 2004 = J. Schneider, *Les Traditions relatives à l'origine de l'alphabet grec dans les scholies de la tekhnè de Denys le Thrace*, in «BAAssBudé», 1, 2004, pp. 120-157.
- Svenbro 1993 = J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, Ithaca 1993.
- Waal 2022 = W. Waal, *Deconstructing the Phoenician Myth: 'Cadmus and the Palm-Leaf Tablets' Revisited*, in «JHS», 142, pp. 219–254.
- Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1972 = U.V. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, in R. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Kleine Schriften. Teil 2 Hellenistische, spätgriechische und lateinische Poesie*, Berlin 1972.

Estratto