

Debating on the origins of the Greek alphabet

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Abstract

The origin of the Greek alphabet remains a central topic in historical linguistics and epigraphy, divided broadly into the mainstream consensus and alternative native-origin hypotheses. The prevailing scientific consensus holds that around the 9th to 8th century BCE, Greeks adopted and adapted the West Semitic (Phoenician) consonantal script (*abjad*). This theory is supported by the identical ordering, physical shapes, and Semitic names of the letter forms (*aleph* to *alpha*, *bet* to *beta*), alongside the historical account of Herodotus's that references the *phoinikeia grammata*. The monumental innovation of the Greeks lay in assigning unused Semitic consonant characters to represent vowels, effectively creating the world's first complete phonetic alphabet. Conversely, proponents of the autochthonous (or Aegean-continuity) hypothesis argue that the Greek alphabet evolved directly from earlier Aegean scripts, such as Linear A and Linear B, or prehistoric regional traditions. By citing archaeological findings and alternative readings of ancient scholars, this perspective contends that the writing system originated natively or that Phoenicians adapted an existing Aegean script. Alongside these claims, this work will also highlight as distinct cases the Byblos script and the Cypriot influence on the origin of the Greek alphabet.

Keywords: Greek alphabet, Phoenician abjad, alphabet, Aegean continuity hypothesis, Cyprus Hypothesis, Byblos script, autopictographic, acropictographic, acrophonic principle

Introduction

The history of how the Greek alphabet came to be is a fascinating detective story involving ancient traders, shifting language systems, and a massive technological leap in how humans record speech. Most modern scholars agree that the Greek alphabet was adapted from the Phoenician script, a North Semitic "abjad" (a writing system that only uses consonants) around the 9th to 8th century BCE ^[1, 2]. However, within this agreement, there are several key theories and debates regarding how, when, and where this adaptation occurred. Moreover, there are notable disagreements on the Phoenician origins of the Greek alphabet.

The attested history of the Greek language sums up to 3500 years (since the 15th century BCE). During this time, three scripts have been used to record Greek, i.e., Linear B, Cypriot Syllabary and the Greek alphabet, in chronological order. According to Steele ^[3], all of them were not initially created for Greek. Linear B is the earliest one (15th-11th century BCE), being a syllabary directly derived from either Linear A ^[3] or both from their original Cretan Protolinear script ^[4, 6] that rendered the Minoan/Eteocretan language of Bronze Age Crete. Cypriot Syllabary is the second script that rendered Greek, from the 8th to the 3rd century BCE in Cyprus. It was derived from the Cypro-Minoan script that rendered a non-Greek language ^[7] and it was not used at all by the rest of the Greeks ^[3]. Finally, the Greek alphabet has been in continuous use since the 8th century BCE ^[8]. The predominant/ conventional yet disputed theory is that it was derived from the Phoenician abjad, through modification and addition of signs (letters) for explicitly denoting vowels, becoming so a fully alphabetic script. In abjads, only consonants are represented ^[9].

The debate over the origin of the Greek alphabet has traditionally divided scholars, researchers and commentators into two opposing currents, known in public and scientific discourse as "Phoenicianists" and "Hellenists" (or

supporters of an indigenous origin). In this paper, the conventional theory of the origins of the Greek alphabet from the Phoenician abjad will be reconsidered and questioned. The adversary theory will be presented, as a set of various approaches, arguing for an indigenous creation. Finally, this work will also highlight as distinct cases the alternative theories on the origin of the Greek alphabet, such as the Cypriot influence, that bridge the gap between the two previous ones.

The Phoenician Origin

"Phoenicianism" is the term (often with a critical tone from the other side) for the position that constitutes the scientific consensus of international linguistics, epigraphy and archaeology that the Greek alphabet was born from the adoption and adaptation of the Phoenician (West Semitic) consonantal writing system (abjad) during the 9th–8th century BCE. The proponents of this theory are conventionally called "Phoenicianists", while the connection between the Phoenician script and the Greek alphabet is considered by them undeniable due to several pieces of evidence ^[2, 10], as they perceive them ^[11, 15]. Their main arguments are the following:

1. Regarding the historical sources, Herodotus (Histories, 5.58) explicitly states that Cadmus brought the "Phoenician letters" to Greece. Also, ancient inscriptions (e.g., from Teo or Crete) call the letters Phoenician and the scribe/recorder "poenicasta".
2. Regarding the letter names and their semantics, the letters (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta) have no etymological meaning in Greek, while in Phoenician/Semitic they correspond directly to Semitic words (*aleph* = ox, *beth* = house, *gimel* = camel, *daleth* = door).
3. Regarding the form and order of letters, the external form of the ancient Greek letters and their exact alphabetical order (A, B, Γ, Δ...) are identical to the

Phoenician/Semitic abecedaria found in ancient sites like Ugarit ^[2].

4. Regarding the direction of writing, the earliest Greek inscriptions, such as the Dipylon Inscription (c. 740 BCE), were written from right to left, just like Phoenician ^[10].

The major breakthrough of the Greeks was the systematic introduction of vowels. Phoenician script only recorded consonants (abjad). Because Greek is an Indo-European language where vowel sounds change the fundamental meaning of a word, a purely consonantal script wouldn't work well ^[1]. Consequently, the Greeks took Phoenician consonants that represented sounds missing from the Greek language (such as the laryngeal phonemes aleph, he, yod, ayin) and transformed them into the first complete vowels (A, E, I, O). For example, the Semitic glottal stop 'aleph became the Greek vowel alpha (A) ^[10]. Thus, they brought about the revolutionary transition from the consonantal system to the first complete alphabet in history.

Even so, there are three major scholarly hypotheses and debates nowadays on the timeline, the location and the evolution of adoption and adaptation (see subsections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 respectively). Yet, before presenting them it is interesting to look at the Ancient Mythological Theory, i.e., what the ancient Greeks themselves believed. The most famous legend comes from the historian Herodotus (2.i), who wrote that a Phoenician prince named Cadmus founded the Greek city of Thebes and introduced the alphabet to the Greeks ^[10, 16]. It is because of this legend that classical Greeks often referred to their letters as Phoinikeia grammata ("Phoenician letters") ^[2].

1. The Timeline Debate

These hypotheses refer to the early vs. the late transmission ^[2]:

- a. The *antiquity view* (Early Date - 11th Century BCE or earlier), proposed by some modern scholars, like Willemijn Waal ^[2], argue for an earlier transmission dating back to the 11th century BCE. They suggest the Greeks adopted it during the "Greek Dark Ages". The lack of early physical evidence might simply be because they wrote on perishable materials like wood, leather, or wax rather than pottery or stone.
- b. The *classical view* (Late Date - 8th Century BCE), proposed by most classicists believe the transmission happened shortly before the earliest surviving Greek inscriptions in the 8th century BCE. They argue that if the alphabet existed earlier, we would have found archaeological evidence of it.

2. The Location of Adoption

Where did Greeks and Phoenicians hang out enough for an alphabet to be traded? There are two localized hypotheses:

- a. A prominent hypothesis (*The Trading Posts*) suggests the alphabet was forged in a multicultural trading colony, where Greek and Phoenician merchants lived together, such as Al Mina in modern-day Syria, or Pithekoussai, an island off the coast of Naples, Italy.
- b. Other researchers favor Crete or Cyprus (*The Island Connection*) because these islands sat directly at the crossroads of Aegean and Near Eastern maritime trade

networks and possess some of the most archaic local variants of the Greek alphabet ^[10].

Regarding the latter hypothesis (2.2.b), especially considering the geographic alternative called the "Cyprus Hypothesis", it does not deny that the Greek alphabet came from the Phoenicians. Instead, it argues that Cyprus was the specific physical birthplace of the Greek alphabet, rejecting the traditional textbook view that the alphabet was invented in Euboea, Crete, or Al-Mina (Syria). According to this argument, Cyprus was the ultimate melting pot of the Iron Age. It is one of the few places where Greek speakers and Phoenician traders lived side-by-side in permanent, bilingual communities (such as Kition) during the 10th–8th centuries BCE. Proponents argue that the structural adaptation of the alphabet (specifically turning Phoenician guttural consonants into Greek vowels) could only have happened in a deeply bilingual, stable environment like Cyprus. Woodard ^[17] provides the most thorough linguistic defense of this hypothesis. He argues that a scribe literate in the *Cypriot Syllabary* was the actual person who adapted the Phoenician consonant system into the Greek alphabet.

3. The Evolution Hypotheses

Three notable hypotheses on the gradual (or not) evolution will be presented herein:

- a. *The "Homeric" Single Inventor*, where scholar Barry Powell ^[14] famously advanced the theory that the Greek alphabet was deliberately invented by a single individual for a specific cultural purpose, i.e., to write down the oral epic poetry of Homer (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) ^[16].
- b. *The Commercial Evolution*, where most mainstream historians lean toward a more practical origin. They believe the alphabet was initially adopted by Greek merchants for bookkeeping, receipts, and trade contracts, and was only later adapted for literature and poetry ^[16].
- c. *The "300 Years of Engagement" Hypothesis*, by Thierry H. de Mortain, that bridges the gap between the Phoenicianists and the Hellenists. In his book/method ^[18], de Mortain uses the term "autopictographic / acropictographic". Rather than arguing against the Phoenician origin entirely, de Mortain's thesis focuses on a unique evolutionary friction between the Phoenician script and the Greek language itself. The hypothesis entail that the Phoenician alphabet was brought to Greece (traditionally by Cadmus of Tyre), but it didn't just instantly become the Greek alphabet. Instead, de Mortain describes a 300-year "engagement" phase (from the 7th century to the 5th century BCE), where the Phoenician letters radically transformed as they collided with the phonetic and visual needs of the Greek language. This culminated in the official adoption of the common Ionian alphabet in Athens in 403 BCE.

To analyze the autopictographic / acropictographic concept (2.3.c) more, de Mortain defines a word or letter as "autopictographic" if a letter within a word physically resembles a pictogram of the word's meaning. For example, the English word ORBIT is autopictographic because the

letter O acts as a visual pictogram of an actual spatial orbit. In his Greek alphabet studies, he illustrates how early Greek letter mutations weren't random stylizations. Instead, the shapes shifted so that the letters began to visually mirror the specific structural or physical ideas behind Greek vocabulary words. Essentially, his work treats the Greek abecedarium not just as a passive phonetic import, but as an active visual adaptation, where the Greeks remolded Phoenician shapes to create an inherently graphic link between the letterform and the Greek spoken word. For a visual breakdown of how this transformation worked, we can watch a short-animated presentation created by Thierry de Mortain and his daughter Pauline ^[19] that illustrates the step-by-step visual mutation of the Phoenician letters into the Greek script.

The Hypotheses of Autochthonous/ Proto-Hellenic Origin

While the dominant consensus among modern historians and linguists is that the Greek alphabet developed from the Phoenician script (around the 9th century BCE), several alternative theories have been proposed. These theories generally argue for either a much earlier indigenous Greek development, a different ancient Near Eastern source, or a process of independent/parallel evolution.

In this respect, "Hellenists" or supporters of autochthonous origin refer to researchers, academics and writers who question the Phoenician origin ^[20]. They claim that writing in Greece has a much older indigenous tradition, or that the Phoenicians were the ones who received writing from the Greeks/Aegeans (Pelasgians or Minoans). Their main arguments are the following ^[21, 23]:

1. Regarding the interpretation of ancient texts, they argue that Herodotus' phrase "as it seems to me" indicates personal assessment and not certainty. They invoke other traditions (e.g., the mythological tradition of Palamedes by Diodorus Siculus) that attribute the discovery of the letters to Greek deities or heroes.
2. Regarding older Aegean writings, they invoke the existence of Aegean scripts (Linear A, Linear B, Phaistos Disc) to support an uninterrupted continuity of Greek writing.
3. Regarding archaeological findings, they present inscribed artifacts, such as the Dispilio Tablet (Kastoria) or the Gioura Ostrakon, claiming that they bear engravings resembling alphabetic elements thousands of years before the 1st millennium BCE ^[24].
4. Regarding the nature of the alphabet, they argue that since the Phoenician system was a syllabary/abjad (without vowels), the real alphabet was born entirely from Greek thought.

Here are the primary theories against a purely Phoenician origin, along with their key context and references.

1. The Cretan / Minoan-Mycenaean Continuity Theory

This theory argues that the Greek alphabet was not imported from the Phoenicians but evolved directly from the earlier, indigenous Aegean scripts—specifically Linear A (Minoan) and Linear B (Mycenaean Greek). Proponents suggest that after the Bronze Age Collapse, these scripts did not

completely vanish but morphed into the phonetic Greek alphabet during the Greek Dark Ages. Their main arguments point out structural similarities between certain Linear characters and archaic Greek letters. They argue that the Greeks adapted their own existing syllabaries into an alphabetic system rather than borrowing a Semitic consonantal alphabet (abjad). Specifically, while Evans discovered Linear A and B ^[25], later alternative historians used his documentation to argue for indigenous script evolution. Various independent researchers (e.g., Dr. Steven Fischer) have attempted to link early Aegean hieroglyphics directly to the later Greek alphabet, though these remain highly contested ^[26].

2. The Pelasgian / Indigenous Theory

Rooted partly in ancient Greek mythology and early 19th/20th-century nationalism, this theory claims that the alphabet was invented by the Pelasgians, the mythical or prehistoric indigenous inhabitants of Greece who predated the Hellenes. This view often cites ancient writers out of context. For instance, Diodorus Siculus mentions that the letters were originally called "Pelasgian" before being altered. Diodorus ^[27] notes a tradition where the Pelasgians used these characters first, though he also acknowledges the Phoenician narrative elsewhere. Another historical linguistics attempt ^[28] argues that the Pelasgian language was the true precursor to Greek and carried its own early script. To summarize, proponents argue that the Phoenicians merely transported or renamed an already existing European/Aegean writing system.

3. The "Independent Invention" or Parallel Evolution Theory

This model suggests that the structural jump from a consonantal abjad (Phoenician) to a true alphabet with vowels (Greek) was so profound that it constitutes an independent invention rather than a simple adoption. According to this argument, the Phoenician script had no vowels. The Greeks introduced a systematic vowel system (A, E, I, O, Y). Scholars holding this view argue that the structural logic of the Greek alphabet is an entirely Greek innovation, making the Phoenician influence merely cosmetic (borrowing letter names and general shapes) rather than structural. For example, while Powell ^[14] accepts that the shapes came from Phoenician, he argues that the *alphabet as a system* was invented independently by a single Greek adapter specifically to record Homeric hexameter poetry, fundamentally altering the nature of the script.

Alternative Theories

Beyond mainstream linguistics, there are alternative theories denying the predominant Phoenician link, as presented next.

1. The Proto-Sinaitic / Direct Semitic Borrowing Theory

Rather than opposing a Semitic origin entirely, this theory argues against the *Phoenicians* specifically as the middlemen. It suggests that the Greeks borrowed their script much earlier and more directly from Proto-Sinaitic or Proto-Canaanite scripts. Accordingly, some scholars argue that certain archaic Greek letter shapes (like the sideways *Alpha* or early *Theta*) resemble older Proto-Canaanite shapes from the 12th–14th centuries BCE more closely than they do the standardized 9th-century Phoenician characters. This implies a much earlier date of transmission, bypassing the

Phoenician maritime trade golden age. For example, Naveh^[13] famously argued for a much earlier borrowing date (around 1100 BCE) based on Proto-Canaanite scripts, challenging the classic 9th-century Phoenician consensus.

2. The Structural Alternative of the Cypriot Syllabary

When looking specifically at Cyprus and the origins of the Greek alphabet, the academic conversation splits into two separate concepts. The first is a geographic consensus that the Greek alphabet was born on Cyprus via the Phoenicians (2.2.b). The second is a structural theory that the Greek alphabet was influenced by or evolved from the indigenous *Cypriot Syllabary* rather than the Phoenician script. The specific arguments, mechanics, and academic references for both models are broken down below.

This theory positions the Cypriot Syllabary (also known as Linear C) as a structural contributor or predecessor to the Greek alphabet, challenging the notion that the Greeks were entirely illiterate before meeting the Phoenicians. Specifically, while mainland Greece forgot how to write after the Bronze Age Collapse (forgetting Linear B), the Greeks on Cyprus never stopped writing. They adapted an old Minoan script (i.e., Cypro-Minoan^[29]) into the Cypriot Syllabary and used it to write the Greek language continuously from the 11th century down to the 4th century BCE. Therefore, scholars of this theory argue that because Cypriot Greeks already had a fully operational writing system that captured vowels, they did not passively accept a Phoenician script. Instead, they actively modified the Phoenician script based on linguistic habits already formed by the Cypriot Syllabary. For example, the creation of standalone vowels (A, E, I, O, Y) was heavily inspired by the fact that the Cypriot Syllabary already possessed dedicated, standalone signs for pure vowels.

Considering the overall Cypriot context, Palaima^[30] outlines the deeply entrenched literacy of Cyprus and how it co-existed with Phoenician script, while Morpurgo Davies^[31] analyzes how the unique Greek-Cypriot dialect was intrinsically linked to the Cypriot Syllabary, demonstrating that the Greeks had a robust, native framework for writing vowel-heavy words long before the standardized alphabet took over. By the 4th century BCE, under rulers like King Evagoras of Salamis, Cyprus officially abandoned its indigenous syllabary and replaced it entirely with the Pan-Hellenic Greek alphabet we know today.

3. The “Missing Link” Theory

Many paleographers view the Byblos script as a critical evolutionary laboratory for writing^[32]. Because it sits chronologically between highly complex pictorial systems (Egyptian hieroglyphs and Cuneiform) and the streamlined Phoenician alphabet, some theorize it represents an early, localized attempt by Canaanites to simplify writing before they invented the pure linear alphabet. Dutch scholar Jan Best^[33] claimed that the Byblos script was a Semitic-based syllabary that migrated outward, acting as the grandfather to Linear A in Crete. His thesis was heavily contested by Aegean script specialists. In this respect, there are connections proposed between the Byblos script and the Greek alphabet, though they are indirect, evolutionary, or structural rather than a direct linear descent. Because the Byblos syllabary remains officially undeciphered, these connections exist in the realm of paleographic theories

regarding how writing evolved in the ancient Mediterranean.

The *Byblos (Geba) script*, also widely referred to as the *Byblos syllabary* or *Pseudo-hieroglyphic script*, is an ancient, enigmatic writing system discovered in the coastal city of Byblos (modern Jbeil, Lebanon). It dates generally to the Middle Bronze Age, roughly 1800–1400 BCE, though dates are heavily debated. The script was excavated between 1928 and 1932 by French archaeologist Maurice Dunand^[34]. Crucially, it remains undeciphered, despite multiple claims by scholars to have “cracked” it^{[34]_[36]} that none have achieved academic consensus. The primary proposed connections can be categorized into three main academic perspectives:

1. The *Standard Linear Evolution* is the most widely discussed connection that treats the Byblos script as a critical “laboratory step” in the evolution that eventually led to the Greek alphabet. Many paleographers argue that the Byblos script (c. 1800–1400 BCE) represents an early, localized attempt by Canaanites to drastically simplify the complex Egyptian hieroglyphic system. This reduction from thousands of characters to around 90 symbols laid the conceptual groundwork for the next stage of simplification, i.e., the 22-letter Proto-Canaanite/Phoenician abjad. Under this model, the Byblos script is the grandfather of the Phoenician alphabet, which makes it the great-grandfather of the Greek alphabet. Dunand^[34], who discovered the script, explicitly proposed that the Byblos characters evolved into the linear Phoenician letters. Accordingly, scribes in Byblos eventually abandoned the Byblos syllabary and adopted the Phoenician linear alphabet. Excavated palimpsests (materials where one text was erased to write another) show Phoenician text written directly over older, faint Byblos script, demonstrating a clear cultural succession.
2. The *Aegean-Levantine Link* model proposes a shared ancestry with Aegean scripts. Some alternative and minority-consensus scholars argue for a much more direct, horizontal connection between the Byblos script and the Aegean writing systems (Linear A, Linear B, and the Cypriot Syllabary). Specifically, Best^[33] attempted a decipherment claiming the Byblos script was a Semitic-based syllabary that actively fathered Crete’s Linear A, creating a structural template that heavily influenced early Greek literacy. This model suggests that the Byblos script did not just stay in the Levant but migrated or developed alongside early maritime trade networks. Proponents point out that the Byblos script has roughly the same number of signs (~90) as the Minoan Linear A/B and the Cypriot Syllabary, which were used to record early forms of Greek. Therefore, it is theorized that the Byblos script directly influenced the indigenous Bronze Age Greek scripts before the Phoenician alphabet ever arrived.
3. The *Acrophonic Expansion Model*^[37] proposes a highly specific structural connection involving how vowels were handled. Here, scholar Brian Colless maps out how the structural traits of the Byblos script passed down into West Semitic and subsequently Greek writing traditions. The standard Phoenician alphabet had *no* vowels (abjad). When the Greeks adopted it,

they had to invent vowels (A, E, I, O, Y). Colless argued that the Byblos script was actually a “logo-syllabary” containing 22 consonants mixed with a few specific vowel indicators. He suggested that the structural concept of isolating vocalic/vowel sounds wasn’t an entirely Greek invention, but a re-emergence of structural mechanics that had existed centuries earlier in the Byblos script and survived in the regional scribal tradition.

To summarize, if we hold to the mainstream view of history, the Byblos script is connected to the Greek alphabet as a distant evolutionary ancestor, i.e., the bridge where pictorial symbols first began compressing into phonetic units. If we look at minority scripts theories (like 4.3.ii), it is viewed as a direct sibling to the early syllabic systems used in ancient Greece and Cyprus.

Commentary

Evaluating these competing models requires assessing how effectively each one accounts for the earliest physical evidence and linguistic shifts. A comprehensive analysis should examine each theory against three key criteria: epigraphic dating, trade-route plausibility, and the structural innovation of explicit vowel representation. Yet, before that, a brief presentation of the Acrophony (or the Acrophonic Principle) is useful, since it perfectly bridges the concepts of pictograms (picture writing) and the alphabetic origins.

1. The Acrophonic Principle

The acrophonic principle describes the exact mechanism by which early humans transitioned from drawing pictures to using an alphabet. Acrophony comes from the Greek words *ákri* (“edge”) and *phōnē* (“voice”). It is the process where a pictographic symbol that represents a physical object is repurposed to stand only for the *initial sound* of that object's name.

Conventionally regarding the origin of the Phoenician abjad, this exact cognitive leap occurred in the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt between 1900 and 1500 BCE. Semitic-speaking workers encountered Egyptian hieroglyphs (which were complex mixtures of logograms and syllables) and adapted them using their own language. For example:

- They took the hieroglyph for an ox head. In their Semitic language, the word for ox was **alpu*. Using acrophony, the ox head symbol came to represent just the first glottal stop sound. Over centuries of stylized rewriting, the ox head turned upside down and became the Greek Alpha (A).
- They took the hieroglyph for a house floorplan. In Semitic, a house is *bayt*. The picture became the sound “B”, which evolved into the Greek Beta (B).
- They drew wavy lines for water (*mayim*). It became the sound “M”, turning into Greek Mu (M).

This distinction matters because acrophony decoupled visual art from semantic meaning. Scribes no longer needed to memorize thousands of individual pictures for thousands of distinct objects. By using acrophony, they only needed about 22 to 30 pictures to capture every fundamental sound in their language.

Discussion

Considering the main arguments of the *Phoenicianism* (see section 2) in contrast to *Hellenists* (see section 3), the first

point of the former is based on Herodotus (2.i), who had written the oldest opinion on this matter that everyone else since then is based on, yet, the adverse argument of the latter points out the uncertainty of Herodotus himself (3.i); in fact, the ancient sources/scholars in favour of the indigenous Hellenic origin of the alphabet, as well as of modern scholars, are many more ^[21], ^[23], ^[38], ^[39]. The arguments of the Phoenicianists on the order of letters (2.iii) and the direction of writing (2.iv) cannot really also prove the actual direction of borrowing (i.e., from Phoenicians to Greeks or vice-versa), especially when the right-to-left writing was already familiar to the Greeks through previous syllabaries, and where in an environment of coexistence, “The contemporary Greek oral tradition that was recorded in Odyssey, as an anachronism, mentions the familiarity of the Greek world with the Phoenician mariners of the Iron Age” ^[40]. There is more to be noted on the semantics and form of the letters.

The two features of letters, regarding their form (2.iii) and semantics (2.ii) are inextricably linked due to the *acrophonic principle* (see subsection 5.1). In this respect, it is highly questionable (even in Proto-Canaanite) how: *beth* depicts a house, *daleth* depicts a door/fish, *he* depicts a window/jubilation, *wāw* depicts a hook, *zayin* depicts a weapon/manacle, *pē* depicts a mouth/corner or *šādē* depicts a papyrus plant/fish hook. Even for the names of letters, Greek etymologies have been proposed for all of them ^[23], for example, *alpha* (“A”) has not been derived from *aleph* but from the verb *ἀλφω* (alfo = “to find first”) ^[21]. Consequently, according to Kenanidis ^[41]: “their names were nothing more than mnemonic devices and had nothing to do with what the letters originally depicted”, since the Phoenician alphabet has been derived from the Cypro-Minoan script and its related Gebal (see subsection 4.3). The relevant influence of Cyprus (see subsection 4.2) is overall noted by Sherratt ^[42]: “... in the case of Cyprus – in view particularly of its geographical setting, but also of the archaeological data – it is not difficult to imagine rather more extensive bilingualism in relation to Levantine coastal centres from the Middle Bronze Age onwards, and in relation to southern Anatolia (...) perhaps continuously from the second half of the third millennium down to the beginning of the Late Bronze Age.”

As new archaeological findings are discovered, mainstream views are continuously questioned or reconsidered in various aspects ^[43]. While systematic studies suggest that the creation of the Greek alphabet “was the result of a synthesis of forms of the Aegean Linear scripts with script(s) of the Levant” ^[44], others compare scripts further back in antiquity than usual ^[45] and note a more ancient existence of the Greek alphabet ^[46, 47], strongly denying its Phoenician origin ^[48]. Continuously accumulating artifacts that are discovered and examined not only in Greece ^[49, 50] but elsewhere in Europe ^[24], dated up to 10,000 years BCE and bearing signs either identical or remarkably similar to the Greek letters support the view that there are still more to be questioned and written on this subject.

Conclusion

The origin of the Greek alphabet remains a central debate in classical scholarship. While consensus acknowledges its adaptation from Phoenician script, scholars diverge regarding the exact transmission date, geographical point of contact, and structural innovations. This discussion

evaluates those established models against existing epigraphic and historical evidence to clarify the alphabet's evolutionary timeline. Nevertheless, the adversary theories present strong arguments and evidence against the mainstream thesis. To determine which model offers the most compelling explanation, each framework must be tested against both physical artifacts and historical context. This paper critically assesses these theories by weighing arguments and evidence.

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