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Philip J. Boyes¹

How to cite: Boyes, P. J. Writing and Social Diversity in Late Bronze Age Ugarit. *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 2022, 33(1): pp. 1–25. DOI: 10.14324/111.444.2041-9015.1379

Published: 30/04/2022

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind review.

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Open Access:

Papers from the Institute of Archaeology is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

¹Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge; pjb70@cam.ac.uk

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS: ANCIENT LIVES, NEW STORIES: CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST²

Writing and Social Diversity in Late Bronze Age Ugarit

Philip J. Boyes

Abstract: Writing at Ugarit has received a great deal of scholarly attention for the wide range of languages and writing systems used, and especially for the city's distinctive alphabetic cuneiform script which accounts for around half of the inscribed material from the site. The vast majority of the rest is in the Akkadian language and logo-syllabic cuneiform script. This written material is, justifiably, usually seen as scribal, in that the vast majority stems from the state bureaucracy and from professional writers formally trained in a curriculum derived from the Mesopotamian cuneiform tradition. However, by using the blanket term 'scribe' we risk obscuring potential diversity in who used writing and why. This paper will explore the extent to which we can identify social diversity within writing practices at Ugarit and will focus in particular on three main areas: gender and women's literacy; social mobility and writing outside the traditional literate establishment; and the relationship between writing and possible minority communities within Ugaritian society.

Introduction

Late Bronze Age Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra, near Latakia on the Syrian coast) is one of the most important sites for understanding writing culture in the Ancient Near East during the later second millennium. Since excavations began ninety years ago, the site has produced thousands of inscribed objects in a diverse assortment of scripts and languages. Several of these were used at Ugarit itself, while others (such as

²**Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East** was a conference held at the British Museum in London between 1st and 2nd December 2018, organised by Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán and Mathilde Touillon-Ricci. This paper is part of the proceedings of that conference and have been edited by the organisers, with the support of *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*.



Hittite and Luwian) occur only on material imported from elsewhere. The vast majority of this written material takes the form of clay tablets and utilises two cuneiform scripts —alphabetic and logosyllabic — which more or less correlate with use of the Ugaritic and Akkadian languages respectively (although there are a handful of exceptions to this general rule). Chronologically, both scripts belong to the final period of the Late Bronze Age, but their dates do not overlap exactly. The alphabetic cuneiform corpus begins around 1250 BC and continues up to the city's destruction in the first quarter of the twelfth century; the logosyllabic material has the same endpoint but begins around a century earlier, in the mid-14th century BCⁱ.

The written material of Ugarit is found in a range of locations across the site, as well as at ancillary sites such as the harbour village of Minet el-Beida and the seaside palace at Ras Ibn Hani. These tablet collections demonstrate that writing was not solely the preserve of the royal palace or the principal temples but was also utilised by prominent individuals across the city. Often, such individuals were involved in both commercial and administrative activity and their discovered tablet collections testify to the lack of rigid demarcation between personal and state activity: royal diplomatic correspondence may occur in a non-palatial domestic setting alongside personal business documents (see, for instance, the most recently-excavated major archive, the so-called House of Urtenu: Lackenbacher & Malbran-Labat 2016).

Previous treatments of writing culture at Ugarit have, entirely justifiably, treated it in terms of scribal culture – as a peripheral and slightly idiosyncratic example of the kind of cuneiform scribal culture known from across the Near East but whose heartland is seen as existing in Babylonia. If Ugarit was pursuing a distinctive local path with its adoption of an alphabetic version of cuneiform written in the local vernacular, this is not seen as altering overmuch a general literary culture which was borrowed or calqued from Mesopotamia, from its education system (Ugarit is probably our best source in the whole Near East for scribal training in the late second millennium) to its choice of writing materials, document formats, stylistic features and so on. In its fundamentals, this view is undoubtedly essentially correct, but it is nevertheless open to modification and nuance. Every society, and probably every town, in the Near East had slightly different local versions of cuneiform culture, adapted and modified to suit the local context. To fully explore the writing culture of Ugarit and its relation to social context is a task well beyond what is possible here,

but is the subject of my ongoing research within the ERC-funded CREWS Project at the University of Cambridgeⁱⁱ. This article focuses on one small aspect of writing culture in Ugarit – the question of who was writing. It aims to explore to what extent it is possible to tease out aspects of social diversity among the writers of Ugarit, often given a veneer of homogeneity through the catch-all term ‘scribe’, and in particular to pay attention to questions of gender, social mobility and ethnicity.

I wish to state at the outset that those hoping for firm conclusions are liable to be disappointed: as will be made clear, the available evidence, at least insofar as it has been published, rarely allows for certainty. Nevertheless, there is value in asking the questions and highlighting the present state of our ability to answer these questions. The matter is, after all, a particularly important one for the Levant, since it has frequently been suggested that alphabetic writing may have begun as a rather marginal and low-status undertaking (see especially the work of Orly Goldwasser 2011; 2012; 2013, but also responses to it such as Rainey & Goldwasser 2010 and Rollston 2010), in stark contrast to the globalised, elite culture of logosyllabic cuneiform. The appropriation and adaptation of the alphabet by a state elite at Ugarit is the first example of this known to us, and so the social dynamics among and between users of the different writing systems at the site is of special interest.

Beyond the Scribe

The figure of the scribe is ubiquitous in discussions of ancient Near Eastern writing practices. However, concerns have occasionally been raised about the term’s usefulness (e.g., Landsberger 1960; Michalowski 1987: 51) and there are good reasons why we should be rather more circumspect. ‘Scribe’ can be used in several ways in Near Eastern studies, which only imperfectly overlap – as a translation for any of a number of local words such as Ugaritic *spr*, Akkadian *ṭupšarru*, or the cuneiform logograms DUB.SAR and A.BA; to refer to any writer; to refer to someone who has undergone formal literate training; to refer to a bureaucratic functionary or servant whose principal job is to write, or to describe a political or religious official with other duties who uses writing in carrying them out. Likewise, it is common to talk about ‘scribal training’ when what we really mean is literate education. As Carr (2005) has pointed out, writing was a part of the education given to elite professionals of the



kinds mentioned above, but it was a means to an end, not the end in itself. Literacy was no more the end goal of Bronze Age ‘scribal training’ than the ability to use a word processor or bibliographic software is the main purpose of a modern PhD.

To call this education ‘scribal’ is to misrepresent its breadth and purpose; to call those who had completed it ‘scribes’ blurs together a wide range of professions and ranks, from the genuine professional writers whose purpose was to take notes or draft legal tablets, to diplomatic messengers-cum-ambassadors, priests and high priests, exorcists and diviners, senior politicians and administrators, and professional philologists and other career scholars. When we use ‘scribe’ to refer to any writer, we imply that such education was universal among all literates, which seems unlikely. There is limited but nevertheless significant evidence of literacy outside the formal administration and even at sub-elite levels in the Near East at various times and in various places, from the exchanges between Old Assyrian merchants at Kanesh and their families back home (Larsen 1976; 2015; see also Pearce 1995: 2273) to the possible use of alphabetic cuneiform outside the standardised elite writing culture of Ugarit (Boyes 2019b). ‘Literacy’, of course, is a broad-brush label in itself, and it is widely recognised that it is much more useful to think about different types of literacy – the ability to write or recognise one’s name, to produce basic labelling or other specific genres necessary for a given profession, comprehensive ‘general’ writing and reading ability, advanced literary or scholarly expertise and so on (e.g., Thomas 2009; Veldhuis 2011: 70-80). We should be wary of simplistic statements that a certain percentage of a given population were ‘literate’, since these are likely to obscure rather than illuminate. But evidently there is at least a *prima facie* reason to believe that writing was not solely the preserve of professional writers in the ancient Near East, and that even among those formally trained in ‘scribal schools’, there was a great deal of variety in actual profession, status and in how they actually used writing (on scribal culture in Mesopotamia, see Charpin 2010; van der Toorn 2007, esp. Ch. 3; and for the various professions of Ugarit’s ‘scribes’, see Mouton & Roche-Hawley 2015). This also raises the question of differences in the background of writers – whether such difference can be detected at all and, if so, whether it correlates in any way with genre, script, language or other features of the writing itself.

Women and Writing at Ugarit

Let's begin with the question of female writing at Ugarit, a question which has received rather little attention, most likely because the evidence is not very good. We know that women, particularly queens, made use of writing to conduct their business. Letters to and from Ugarit's queens comprise a significant proportion of the royal correspondence. Letters sent by the queen were both commercial and diplomatic in nature and were sent to both men and women. We also have an inscribed dedicatory stele recording a sacrifice by Queen T_{ari}yelli. There is no evidence, however, that any of Ugarit's queens personally wrote or read letters or other written material themselves. Rather, we know that they employed literate staff: RIH 77/9 and RS 22.437B both feature colophons naming their writers, who are said to be in the service of the queenⁱⁱⁱ. Is there any evidence that beyond engaging and interacting with writing, any women wrote and read at Ugarit?

There are a number of circumstantial reasons why we might expect some female literacy at Ugarit. The first is comparative: female literacy is fairly well attested in small numbers in Mesopotamia throughout its history. In the Sumerian period, the principal deity associated with writing was a goddess – Nisaba, who is still mentioned in colophons at Ugarit. High-status women are occasionally named as 'authors', most notably the princess and priestess Enheduanna, although in her case, and possibly others, this may owe more to later writers seeking to associate their works with her for reasons of prestige or ideology, in much the same way as occurs with male royal 'authors' (see Lambert 2001 and Black 2002). Literate women are more securely attested in the Old Babylonian period, such as fourteen female scribes within the cloister of *nadītu*-priestesses at Sippar, or nine from Mari (Meier 1991: 542). We have already mentioned the letters found at Kanesh, which include examples written by women. Evidence is less good for the later second millennium, but women are again attested in the Neo-Assyrian period, such as in the queens' palaces at Nineveh and Kalah (Hallo 1996, 263). The evidence for small numbers of high-status, literate women throughout Mesopotamian history seems pretty secure.

Ugarit, of course, is not Babylonia, and we should never assume that what was true in one place necessarily transferred to another, even if other aspects of writing culture do seem to have been borrowed. However, female literacy would fit well with a view



of the role of women in Ugaritian society which has often been reconstructed as fairly liberal, at least in comparison to other Levantine societies around that time, the primary point of comparison typically being with early first-millennium Israel (Amico Wilson 2013; Marsman 2003). Amico Wilson (2013: 204) goes too far when she concludes that '[t]here is nothing whatever of misogyny in the culture. If the queen and goddesses were models, women's opinions were respected, and women were expected to take part fully in Ugaritic life.' High-status women at least were able to participate in a wide variety of public life, including the wielding of political power and the ability to own property and conduct business on their own behalf, but queens and goddesses are unlikely to have been representative of ordinary women's lives. Marsman largely agrees with Amico Wilson on the relative liberty afforded to women of the highest rank but is considerably more circumspect when it comes to the general population, given their almost total absence from Ugarit's economic administration texts: 'Ordinary women were probably worse off. Their contribution did not count, not even if they participated in the economic life of the kingdom. To a large extent they were invisible' (Marsman 2003: 680).

It is hard to argue with this assessment. The very lack of data supports the marginalisation of Ugarit's women, ancient and contemporary. What archaeological indications do exist also support this interpretation. In the city's urban planning and architecture, for example, Schloen (2001: Chapter 6) discerns a strong concern with privacy and restriction of access to domestic space from those outside the family unit, which he argues cross-culturally often goes together with practices limiting the visibility, freedom and agency of women. However, to the best of my knowledge there have been no major studies of what archaeology can tell us about non-elite women's lives at Ugarit. Their invisibility, both then and now, represents a major gap in our understanding of the city and its culture, one that goes unremarked far too often.

If we are to find signs of women's literacy at Ugarit, it is likely, then, to come from the elite – most probably the very highest social strata. We know Ugarit's queens made use of writing for commercial, diplomatic and dedicatory purposes. There is no reason to believe that royal women would have written any of this material themselves, any more than their male counterparts did. But our best chance of finding signs of female writing practices at Ugarit is likely to be in elite households.

In many ancient Near Eastern societies, high-status women had largely female coterie of slaves and servants, so it might not be surprising if scribes serving in the queen's household were women. However, the available evidence from Ugarit does not bear this out. There are no female names among any of scribes known from Ugarit, either among the written material associated with the queen or more widely; nor does the word for scribe occur in the feminine at the city in either Ugaritic or Akkadian. Where we have colophons from writers working on behalf of the queen, such as those mentioned above, they use male determinatives.

It very much appears that, despite the potential for high-ranking women to wield considerable power and participate actively in certain aspects of civic life, women did not write at Ugarit, at least not in formal contexts that found their way into archives and libraries; or, if they did, they did not draw attention to this fact through signing their names in colophons. With evidence relating to gender being so scanty, it would be vain at this stage to speculate on reasons for this apparent difference from Mesopotamian norms. It is clear that there is much more research to be done in this area, and one suspects it will show that Ugarit's reputation for a somewhat progressive attitude towards female agency has been rather overstated.

Social Mobility

The next question to consider is the background of writers in terms of geography and social status. The traditional Assyriological assumption is that, like most professions, professional literacy was usually passed on from father to son. It was also a relatively high-status artisanal profession whose members were conscious of this prestige. They jealously guarded their knowledge and writing was regarded as a restricted secret, accessible only to people from appropriate backgrounds (van der Toorn 2007: 65-67). In other words, the literati were a self-selecting, self-perpetuating clique of the elite, deeply conservative and not readily accessible to outsiders. Elsewhere in the Mesopotamian 'periphery', there are a few hints of flexibility within this system: adoption or purchase could represent routes into such households and from there to literate education. This seems to have been the case with two young children from Late Bronze Age Emar, sold as slaves by their destitute parents to the household of Ba'al-malik, the literate chief diviner (Zaccagnini 1994; Cohen 2005).



The boys later appear as apprentice diviners and writers themselves. Their sister, also sold at the same time, noticeably does not).

As previously stated, the general assumption has been that Ugarit's writing culture was essentially borrowed from Mesopotamia and so is likely to have involved a similar measure of insularity and elitism. Again, the evidence is insufficient to change this picture dramatically, but some evidence does hint at a slightly more nuanced picture, perhaps relating especially to the alphabetic script. Roche-Hawley and Hawley (2013) have pointed out that colophons in the Akkadian, logosyllabic texts from the site conform to the general picture outlined above in that writers often emphasise their position within an inherited tradition by citing the names of their fathers, who are also often literates. It is possible to trace multiple-generation lineages of writers. They suggest that writers using the alphabetic script and the vernacular language do not do this. Instead, 'Ilimilku – probably the most celebrated writer from Ugarit in any script and evidently a man of high political status, to judge from his titles and his probable appearances in other documents – gives his village of origin: Šubbanu, a small and otherwise unremarkable settlement in the centre of the kingdom. Administrative documents seem to suggest that it contained only fifteen households (RS 94.2411; van Soldt 2005; Vidal 2014). Is there, then, a cultural difference between the logosyllabic and alphabetic scribes at Ugarit, with the former conforming to the insular, patrilineal, elitist and conservative Mesopotamian stereotype while the latter may represent something new and perhaps more open? The suggestion is intriguing, and the colophons Roche-Hawley and Hawley cite do support it. It would also fit well with the idea of the adoption of the alphabetic script and the local language for writing as an act of deliberate 'vernacularisation', a break from the old and a self-conscious display of local populism (on which see Sanders 2004 and Boyes 2019a).

There are a couple of major problems with this intriguing suggestion, however. The first is the quantity of data. We only have colophons from two scribes in the alphabetic script, and one of those is rather fragmentary^{iv}. There are far more logosyllabic colophons, but many do not include patronymics. We are left, then, with a rather small dataset for comparison, and it seems premature to generalise about alphabetic cuneiform writing culture based more or less only on the colophons of 'Ilimilku. The second problem is that this model would imply that scribes specialised

in one script or the other, and that alphabetic and logosyllabic scribes operated sufficiently separately that different cultures and attitudes developed in each cohort. This is rather doubtful. What we know of education in Ugarit suggests that traditional training in Sumerian and Akkadian was at its heart, with education in the alphabetic script added as an extra layer on top. Some tablets in one script feature summaries or labels in the other, and there are cases of possible translations such as the diplomatic treaty document KTU 3.1, written in Ugaritic and alphabetic cuneiform but very probably a translation of an Akkadian original (Pardee 2001). It is possible that we have texts written by or to 'Ilimilku in both alphabetic cuneiform/Ugaritic and logosyllabic/Akkadian, although it was a relatively common name and we cannot be absolutely certain that this is the same individual^v. Overall, then, even if writers tended to specialise in one script and language or the other, it seems unlikely there was an absolute division or that they belonged to very different writing cultures.

Nevertheless, 'Ilimilku does at least represent an interesting case-study for social mobility, albeit one that offers a number of questions and virtually no answers. What route took a boy from an apparently small and unremarkable hinterland village to the capital, to education and ultimately to a career that encompassed high political office and writing apparently all of the most significant literary/mythological texts found at the site? Was he already high-status or was he sent to Ugarit because of his academic or other skills? If so, what opportunities did he have to demonstrate an aptitude for writing in little Šubbanu, and what implications does this have for writing outside the Ugaritian metropolis? Or was he, perhaps, sold like the children in Emar? These questions are impossible to answer at present. Perhaps the only insight we have into his CV is that he says his teacher was 'Attenu the diviner, who may have been the high priest (it is unclear whether this title belongs to 'Attenu or 'Ilimilku himself, but the former is more likely – del Olmo Lete 2018: 49-50). If so, this would seem to imply that the most important part of his education is likely to have occurred at the city of Ugarit itself, which is what we would probably expect anyway.

When thinking about the possibility of writers outside the traditional 'scribal' lineages, we must also consider whether writing was taking place outside the elite, bureaucratic world altogether. This brings us to the world of non-standard forms of alphabetic cuneiform and especially to the so-called 'short alphabet' (Dietrich &

Loretz 1988; 1989). Despite the implication of the name, this is not really a single variant of the script, but a number of very diverse manifestations which are often as different from each other as they are from the standardised, official version of the writing system. They generally have smaller repertoires of signs (a 22-sign repertoire similar to Phoenician is generally reconstructed, but the Beth Shemesh abecedary evidences a 27-sign repertoire in *halaḥam* order, while another abecedary from Ugarit itself has 29 signs in a slightly different *halaḥam* order – Bordreuil & Pardee 1995, Pardee & Bordreuil 2008) and some signs take different forms. Unlike the standardised script, there is considerable variation in writing direction, with both L-R and R-L attested. Only a handful of these non-standard inscriptions are known, mostly from outside the Kingdom of Ugarit and mostly on objects other than clay tablets. One, from Sarepta in modern Lebanon, can even be shown to be written in the Phoenician language rather than Ugaritic (Greenstein 1976).

I have discussed these inscriptions at some length elsewhere (Boyes 2019b) and argued that they seem to point to use of alphabetic cuneiform writing outside the formal world of the Ugaritian elite, probably by people who have not passed through the city's traditional literate education. Some – particularly the examples that appear on storage jars, and especially the Phoenician example from Sarepta which was found in a ceramic workshop – may point to craftspeople's literacy and the use of writing in the production and distribution of pottery and the commodities it contained. In many ways, the situation with this non-standard alphabetic cuneiform closely resembles that of linear alphabetic writing further south and may indicate a fairly widespread network within which people were experimenting with different forms of alphabetic writing in diverse ways.

It should be stressed that the numbers of these inscribed objects are small and many are not well-provenanced, which makes it hard to determine how they were produced and utilised and what their relationships were with other forms of writing in the region, especially the standardised alphabetic cuneiform writing system. But such artefacts are an important reminder that the elite, formal structures of literacy in metropolitan centres such as Ugarit were not the be-all and end-all of writing culture at the time, and we should also factor in wider, less formal networks of writing practices.

Minorities, Community Identity and Writing

The final topic I want to discuss here is whether there is any apparent relationship between the use of writing and the articulation of community identities at Ugarit and, in particular, how this relates to the existence of ‘ethnic minorities’ within the Kingdom. In practice, this means considering two main communities which have been proposed to have existed within the kingdom – Hurrians and Cypriots. The linguistic and scriptal situation corresponding to these is complex. Ugarit has produced 100 texts which can broadly be said to be in the Hurrian language, of which 28 are in alphabetic cuneiform and 72 in logosyllabic cuneiform (Pardee 1996: 64-65. For the original publication of most of these tablets, see Laroche in Nougayrol et al. 1968: 447-544). Several of these ‘Hurrian’ texts also feature elements of other languages: five of the alphabetic texts are Ugaritic-Hurrian bilinguals, one of the logosyllabic ones is an Akkadian-Hurrian bilingual and many more are lexical lists in up to four languages. Finally, one text is in a hybrid language combining elements of Hurrian and Akkadian. As for the much smaller Cypriot corpus, we have only one script – Cypro-Minoan – but since it is undeciphered we cannot say with any certainty how many languages are reflected in the nine examples from Ugarit. In the Iron Age and subsequently, Cyprus was characterised by a significant degree of linguistic (and scriptal) diversity for a relatively small island, so it would be unwise to take for granted that all Cypro-Minoan texts are necessarily in the same language.

Hurrian and Hurrians

It is not only the linguistic picture which is complicated, but also the question of whether the use of the Hurrian language at Ugarit corresponds to the existence of an actual community at all. It has been common within Near Eastern Studies to assume that there is an intrinsic correspondence between language, ethnicity and territory – a particular people inhabits a certain place and speaks a certain language. Often, such groups are assumed to have a similarly definable material culture. Ever since the earliest days of Ugaritology, many scholars have assumed that because of the presence of Hurrian language and Hurrian names, Ugarit must have had a significant ‘Hurrian’ minority. The form this was imagined to take has of course varied from one person to another, often shaped by the fashions and prejudices of the time. Schaeffer, for instance, envisaged a stratum of restive ‘natives’ ruled over by a more educated and internationalist Semitic colonial aristocracy (1939). For him, Hurrian



was the language of the streets and the bazaars, and incidents of destruction such as the mutilation of Egyptian statuary in the city were to be attributed to native mutinies against their overlords. In modified form, this colonialist model survives even in current scholarship, especially in German Ugaritology. For several decades, Dietrich, Loretz, Sanmartín and Mayer have promoted a view of the Ugaritian elite as intrusive, hailing from Arabia and superimposing a Semitic superstrate over an increasingly marginalised Hurrian culture (Dietrich & Loretz 1988; Dietrich & Loretz 1989; Dietrich & Mayer 1999; Dietrich, Loretz, & Sanmartín 2013; Mayer 1996). Hurrian influence at Ugarit earlier in the Bronze Age is also discussed by Buck (2018: 10-11) and Mallet (2000). This idea that Hurrian identity was formerly stronger but was declining in Ugarit's later years is very common, even among scholars who do not attribute it to invasion or political subjugation. In most cases, the argument is almost entirely linguistic, deriving from the highly restricted number and range of documents in which Hurrian was used in the city's final decades, contrasted with an evident heritage of Hurrian onomastics, socio-cultural elements and references to the Hurrian pantheon throughout the city's history

The ethno-linguistic approach, however, is contrary to how identity – including community and ethnic identities – has been conceptualised by social studies more broadly over recent decades. This approach has highlighted the contextual, shifting and negotiated nature of identities, that they are not absolute but are constantly being defined and redefined in response to the social context within which people are living. The existence of speakers of the Hurrian language must be separated from the existence or meaning of 'Hurrian' social identity, which can be extremely hard to pin down. 'Hurrian' was certainly a label that was used of certain people in the ancient Near East (see, for example, de Martino 2014: 63-4; Schwartz 2014: 268). It was also used at Ugarit, most strikingly in the so-called 'ritual of national unity' (Pardee 2002: 77ff.; Sanders 2004: 51), a lengthy ritual text in Ugaritic found in two well-preserved copies (KTU 1.40, 1.84), as well as in a number of fragments, indicating a particular interest in matters of identity and demography. Like most Ugaritic ritual texts, however, this one is obscure and makes no effort to explain itself. While the gentilic 'Hurrian' is used here, it is not at all clear how this term is defined in the minds of those involved in the ritual. Unlike certain other 'foreign' gentilics, 'Hurrian' does not appear in the administrative texts as a way of identifying people at Ugarit.

At Ugarit and elsewhere, it is impossible to determine whether language – or any other concrete index – was a defining criterion for labelling someone ‘Hurrian’. Although it was one of many labels often associated with people from the region of the former Mitanni empire, it is not able to be restricted to a specific geographical location, nor linked with a particular set of material culture. ‘Hurrian’ religion is not homogeneous, but more a series of overlapping local cults, similar to what we see with ‘Canaanite’ religion (Trémouille 2000). The elusiveness of ‘the Hurrians’ is widely acknowledged, with the result that where modern scholars define their use of the term ‘Hurrian’ at all, it often rests solely on the use of the language. Since we do not know whether this corresponded to what the term meant at the time (or if it meant a single thing at all), it is probably best to place the idea of ‘Hurrians’ at Ugarit to one side and not draw further inferences about the presence or absence of communities or identity groups based solely on linguistic evidence. We can, however, still talk about the choices being made regarding the Hurrian language at Ugarit, its relationship with writing practices, and how these related to wider questions of identity and social change.

The Hurrian language is overwhelmingly used for ritual and religion at Ugarit and is especially associated with music and hymns. This has sometimes been seen as indicating that it had largely ceased to be a living language in the city by the later thirteenth century BC, but Vita (2009: 225-227) argues plausibly that a couple of Hurrian-language letters and some ongoing Hurrian influence on other languages at the city do point to Hurrian continuing to be spoken at this time. The restricted appearances of Hurrian in writing, then, should not be seen as a proxy for the fortunes of a ‘Hurrian’ minority community, but as a deliberate choice by the elite producers of these texts and the ritual practices they record as to how to appropriate and deploy this language for their own purposes.

The same is true in the other main area of Hurrian linguistic evidence from Ugarit – onomastics. Van Soldt (2003) has shown how Hurrian names were used, with evidently differing degrees of prestige in different social contexts. Both Semitic and Hurrian names occur within the same families, he points out, and the trend seems to be towards children having more Semitic names than their parents. This suggests changes in onomastic fashion and is consistent with a decline in the prestige of Hurrian-language names. There are additional quirks, however, when we consider

the elite. Among senior officials like sakins (governors) and administrators, Hurrian-language names were extremely popular: 69% of the former have Hurrian names and 75% of the latter (though sample sizes are small). At the very highest echelon of society, the picture is different again. Unlike in most other coastal Syrian kingdoms, Ugarit's kings never have Hurrian names, although several princes do (van Soldt 2003: 685). It was not the case that Hurrian names were used only for children not expected to accede to the throne - 'Amittamru II's crown prince had a Hurrian name - so may instead be that Hurrian-named princes took Semitic throne names when they acceded to the throne. Unfortunately, we cannot tell for certain: we only hear of 'Amittamru's son because in the scandal surrounding the divorcing of his mother, he was given the choice whether to side with his father and inherit the throne or side with her and forfeit his inheritance. The next king ('Ibiranu) has a Semitic name but we have no way of knowing whether this is the same person with a new name, or another prince who replaced him.

In summary, the decision to write in Hurrian at Ugarit is unlikely to be an index of the fortunes of a 'Hurrian' minority or an act of identity-articulation by these people. Rather, the limited evidence points to this choice - like so much in the city's texts - being far more to do with the ideology, self-presentation and prestige of the elite. Ugaritian elites appropriated and deployed Hurrian language in certain social contexts while restricting its use in others. It is tempting to see this as part of a broader attempt to balance wider regional elite culture (which often drew on features seen in the former Hurrian-speaking empire of Mitanni) with a popular localism, which we see in other aspects of elite practice in the city in the later thirteenth century (Boyes 2019a).

Cypriots in Ugarit

Ugarit is the only place outside Cyprus to have produced significant numbers of objects inscribed in the Cypro-Minoan writing system. As well as a large number of potmarks associated with Cypro-Minoan signs (Hirschfeld 2000; Hirschfeld 2004), nine examples of undisputed writing (that is, strings of multiple signs) have been found at the city: one complete tablet, four fragments (two from the same tablet), two labels, a silver bowl and a pithos rim^{vi}. All of these came from the private residences of high-status individuals: three fragments and pithos rim were all from the House of Yabninu, a further fragment from the House of Rašap'abu, the

complete tablet from the House of Rap'anu, the two labels from the House of Urtenu and the bowl from a house on the acropolis, near the house of the High Priest (Ferrara 2012; Ferrara 2013). Many of these people appear to have connections with Cyprus: Yabninu's archive displays a particular interest in overseas trade and managing foreigners in Ugarit's territory and Cypriot imports were found in his house; Rašap'abu was the *akil kārī* - overseer of the quay - and Rapanu's archive also contained Akkadian diplomatic correspondence with Cyprus. The Cypro-Minoan from Ugarit is often seen as typologically distinct from that found on Cyprus, traditionally being dubbed 'CM3'. Some more recent work has questioned whether this distinction is really so absolute; in particular, Ferrara (2012; 2013) argued in favour of seeing the corpus as more integrated and the differences as palaeographic rather than typological. For example, the complete tablet from the House of Rap'anu, RS 20.25 (##215 in the Cypro-Minoan corpus) is far more similar in form to cuneiform tablets from Ugarit than are any Cypro-Minoan texts from Cyprus itself (Ferrara 2012; Steele 2018: 107-108). For this reason, it has been argued that at least some of the Cypro-Minoan found at Ugarit was actually produced there and influenced by local writing practices, rather than being imported^{vii}.^{viii} Although Cypro-Minoan is mostly undeciphered, certain aspects of RS 20.25/##215 have encouraged commentators to draw conclusions about its content. The layout of the text on the tablet resembles a list, and one repeated string of signs has been interpreted by some as rendering a version of the Ugaritic word for son, *bn* (Masson 1973; Masson 1974: 30-35; Valério 2016: 346-396 and esp. 364-367). This would potentially make it an example of a list of personnel (a familiar type among Ugaritian administrative texts) written in Ugaritic language but Cypriot script.

There is no doubt that contacts between Ugarit and Cyprus were close. We have diplomatic correspondence in Akkadian between them, extensive evidence of trade and a great many tablets from Ugarit that record the presence of Cypriots in the kingdom. There are some signs that this contact went beyond mere visitors and included a relatively settled Cypriot community in Ugarit. The personal name *Bn-'Altn* (Cypriotson) in several administrative tablets (e.g., KTU 4.93, 4.232 and 4.681) seems to point toward second-generation (at least) immigrants (Astour 1970: 122). Another possible hint at something more substantial comes in KTU 4.102, a bilingual administrative tablet listing people by household. The main text is in

Ugaritic and Alphabetic Cuneiform, but at the bottom is an Akkadian label or summary reading URU.A-la-ši-ia, that is, Alašiya preceded by the logogram for town or city rather than the expected KUR – land (although it is not unknown for some alternation between these two to occur, especially where the same names are used for territories and their capitals). Although we are now confident in placing Alašiya on Cyprus, we do not know exactly what kind of geopolitical entity it was. Some estimates place it in the vicinity of the modern Cypriot town of Alassa, in which case we may well have a case of continuity of name and the possibility that Cypriot Alašiya could have been both this settlement and the land it controlled. However, given that KTU 4.102 is a census of families (wives and children as well as just men) presumed to be in the territory of Ugarit, Monroe (2009: 220) reads the label instead as ‘Cyprus-town’, denoting some kind of district or village within either the city or kingdom of Ugarit. This is a wonderfully evocative and enticing notion, conjuring up a Cypriot community clustered in their own particular corner of town. Some of the people listed have obviously West Semitic names, so are we to imagine a mixed community, one where locals live too, or perhaps where second- or third-generation immigrants are starting to adapt to the local onomastic practices?

The evidence for a permanent Cypriot community within the Kingdom of Ugarit remains circumstantial rather than conclusive. We do not know whether the Cypriots mentioned lived in Ugarit permanently or whether they considered themselves part of a distinctive group. Archaeologically, Cypriot wares are fairly prominent among Ugarit’s non-local pottery, but these are primarily finewares of the kind likely to be imported, and of course there is no necessary correlation between the presence of pots and people. We must be cautious then, but on balance it would be surprising if there were not resident Cypriots in Ugarit or its territory.

The question still remains of the relationship between these possible communities and writing, especially the Cypro-Minoan material. This is made very difficult by our inability to read these inscriptions, but as with the Hurrian-language writing, it seems more likely that such examples should be understood in a relatively high-status context rather than as artefacts of the self-expression of minority groups. They were, after all, found in the private archives of members of the Ugaritian elite and in a format that closely resembles the clay tablets of the state’s cuneiform bureaucracy.

Whether they were curios, experiments or Cypriot-produced documents produced in the course of trade or administration is impossible to say at this juncture.

Conclusion

This brief overview has highlighted some of the issues and challenges with identifying examples of social diversity in writing practices at Ugarit. Each of the areas discussed could, of course, be examined in much more detail, and will be in the final product of this on-going research (Boyes 2021). However, even at this preliminary stage, a number of clear themes emerge. The first is the difficulty of addressing these demographic and social questions. They were not issues Ugarit's ancient writers were accustomed to writing about and nor were they foremost in the minds of many of the excavators who carried out the initial archaeological work at the site. As a result, data on Ugaritian society outside the elite is extremely lacking. We are forced to read between the lines and, as is evident from the discussion above, to speculate and ask questions rather than providing firm answers or solid conclusions. While this may seem unsatisfactory, it does not mean that these questions are useless. Imperfect though our current understanding may be, it is still important and valuable to explore the relationship of writing to multiple different groups within Ugarit's society and to attempt to move the discussion about Ugarit's population and social structure beyond a traditional focus on the elites.

The second overarching theme is that what evidence we do have does not tend to support the idea of great social diversity among writers at Ugarit. There are perhaps some minor indications for a degree of social mobility or for writing outside the formal literate establishment, but we have to push the evidence quite hard to find them. Although elite women used writing, there are no clear signs they were personally literate, and while minority groups and minority languages are represented in Ugarit's texts, these do not seem to be examples of self-expression or the use of writing to define their own identities. Rather, while diversity is recognised and to certain extent embraced in texts such as the 'Ritual of National Unity', groups are labelled and defined by Ugarit's administrative elite, not themselves. 'Minority' languages such as Hurrian were utilised in service of elite prestige and ritual. The use and meaning of Cypro-Minoan is highly enigmatic, but its context of discovery within



Ugarit suggests it is most likely related to Ugaritian elite commerce and management of immigrant groups.

The picture, then, is of writing as primarily an elite, state-affiliated practice at Ugarit. This is not particularly surprising given the generally high-status, official uses of literacy across the Near East in this period, but it contributes both nuance and definition to our understanding of the ways in which Ugaritic writing culture reproduced or deviated from the dominant Mesopotamian ‘cuneiform culture’ that influenced it. While in many ways the elitism apparent in Ugarit’s writing is typical of the region, it does not merely reproduce exactly a homogeneous set of attitudes and practices that pertained across the Near East – indeed, such homogeneity clearly did not exist. Rather, the specific form of that typically cuneiform elitism in writing is particular to Ugarit and stems from the particular social and cultural context existing in that kingdom. The wider dynamics of this writing culture, and its implications for Ugarit’s relationships with global and local networks of identity, culture and prestige, will be subject to continuing research.

Acknowledgements

This research was carried out as part of the Contexts of and Relations between Early Writing Systems (CREWS) Project at the University of Cambridge. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 677758). I am grateful to our Principal Investigator, Philippa Steele, for reading and commenting on drafts of the paper itself and on the wider project research it incorporates. I am also grateful to the organisers and attendees of LPCANE (London Postgraduate Conference for the Ancient Near East) for allowing me to speak and for their helpful comments

ⁱ It is possible – indeed, likely – that Akkadian and logosyllabic cuneiform would have been used at Ugarit before this time, since the city was certainly in contact with the Mesopotamian world and cuneiform-inscribed objects such as the dynastic seal of king Yaqaru do occur. The reasons why no tablets survive from earlier are unclear. For a fuller discussion see Boyes (2019), esp. 188-189.

ⁱⁱ CREWS stands for Contexts of and Relations between Early Writing Systems. The end product of this research is a monograph (Boyes 2021), and this article represents a preliminary and somewhat abbreviated presentation of work discussed more fully in sections of two chapters in that work.

ⁱⁱⁱ The *editiones principes* of most documents from Ugarit can be found via the concordance by Bordreuil and Pardee (1989). A relatively small number of documents discovered or edited after this date are, obviously, not included. For the alphabetic cuneiform material, Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín 2013 (KTU) provides the most up-to-date collection.

^{iv} The very lack of colophons may itself point to a difference from ‘traditional’ practice, pointing to a writing culture less concerned with claiming responsibility for a document.

^v The addressee of the Akkadian letter RS 6.198 and the ‘Ilimilkus referred to in RS 19.070, 18.20+, 94.2445 and 94.2483 may indeed be the writer of the alphabetic literary texts, as Tugendhaft suggests (2018, 31-35).

^{vi} Steele (2018, 204) considers the silver bowl inscription questionable as an example of Cypro-Minoan. A further Cypro-Minoan inscription was found on a cylinder seal at nearby Latakia (Steele 2018, 202).

^{vii} Ferrara seems to have changed her views: in her corpus she judges that the Cypro-Minoan examples from Ugarit are ‘not unlikely’ to have been produced there (Ferrara 2012, 171ff.), but more recently she has argued that the tablet fragments from Yabninu’s archive are probably imported (Ferrara 2016, 235). Steele considers this unlikely (pers. comm.), and thinks the Ugarit inscriptions were most likely produced by Cypriots resident in the city (Steele 2018, 203-204).

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