

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2020

Round 1



Problem 6. The Idalion tablet (15 marks)

In 1850, a farmer from a village in Cyprus discovered a tablet dating from the 5th century BCE which recorded an endowment from the city of Idalion to a family of physicians during the Persian Wars. This document, now known as the Idalion Tablet, was of enormous importance for the decipherment of the Cypriot script in which it was written. The tablet is in the Cypriot dialect of ancient Greek.



Here is a portion of the inscription, with a transliteration (showing the sounds) and a translation below. The transcription, like the original, does not show word boundaries; a line over a vowel shows that the vowel is long.

Transliteration: otetaptolinedalionkateworgonmadoikasketiēwesitōiphilokuprōnweteitōonasagoraubaſileusſtaſikuproſkashaptolisedaliēwesanōgononasilontononasikuprōntoniyatērankastoskasignētosiyasthaitosathrōpostoſitaimakhaiikhimamenosaneumisthōn

Translation: When the Medes and the Kitions subdued the city of Idalion in the year of Philokypros son of Onasagoras, King Stasikypros and the city of the Idalians instructed Onasion the son of Onasikypros the physician, and his brothers, to heal the men wounded in the battle, without a fee.

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Q6. In the table below, write the cypriot script for the words on the left; 1a-d are transliterated and 2a-c are translated.

1a	helei	
1b	athanas	
1c	katethiyan	
1d	dowenai	
2a	and	
2b	king	
2c	instructed	

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Solution and marking.

Scoring: (max 22)

- Q6.1: 1 point for each correct **character**. (max 16)
 - Ignore incorrect characters.
 - Insist on correct order.
- Q6.2: 2 points for each correct **word**. (max 6)
 - 1 with more than half the characters correct, or with correct characters in wrong order.
 - Don't accept a transcription.

1a	helei	* 8 *
1b	athanas	* Ւ Տ Մ
1c	katethiyan	Կ Ե Ւ Օ Ի
1d	dowenai	Դ Ո Ւ Խ
2a	and	Ա Բ
2b	king	Ք Ա Ց Ւ Մ
2c	instructed	* Ր Ո Ւ Ի

Commentary

The Cypriot script is a syllabic script (like Japanese Hiragana), reading left to right, with a couple of extra features:

- syllables involving the voiced and unvoiced versions of the same stops are expressed in the same way, i.e. *ka* and *ga* are expressed by the same symbol, as are *to* and *do*, etc.
- the aspirate *h* is ignored, so *ka* and *kha* (for example) are also expressed by the same symbol. Syllables beginning with *h*, such as *ha*, are expressed by the symbol for the lone vowel (*a*). Long vowels are also ignored.
- consonants at the ends of words are *generally* (actually the Cypriot script is not always consistent here) expressed by the symbol for the consonant plus *e*, so the symbol for *ne* is used for words such as *anōgon* and the symbol for *se* for words such as *basileus*. When double consonants appear within a word, the first consonant usually “takes” the vowel of the syllable following it (again, this is not entirely consistent).