

Title:

In Their Footsteps: A Copper Merchant in Enkomi

Word Count:

936

Summary:

As you tour Enkomi, North Cyprus, imagine you're a copper merchant circa 1300 -1100 B.C. North Cyprus copper mines bustle as Cypriot copper is exchanged for wheat and dried fish. The Siege of Troy has driven up prices, so you note this using your Syllabary or Cuneiform writing pad.

Keywords:

North Cyprus copper mines, Cypriot copper, syllabary, cuneiform writing, Enkomi, Siege of Troy, North Cyprus Site, Northern Cyprus, North Cyprus, Cyprus, Norther Cyprus Site

Article Body:

As you tour Enkomi, near Famagusta in North Cyprus, you might imagine you are a copper merchant during the city's heyday between 1300 and 1100 B.C. Your city is now only about 500 years old.

Let us imagine you are leading a donkey caravan laden with copper ingots. You have been to the copper mines in the interior of the island. Copper is smelted from its ore close to the mines, where there is a lot of wood to keep the smelting fires hot. Your ingots are shaped like oxhides and are famous throughout the eastern Mediterranean world.

You approach your walled city through the farmland that feeds it and are filled with civic pride as you near the massive walls. Your city is thoroughly up-to-date for its time, with gates set symmetrically and streets crossing at right angles. Not for you the ancient cities with their rabbit warren of twisting alleys. You didn't call your city Enkomi, but probably Alasia.

Your home is built of good stone. Its many rooms surround a central court, where your donkeys are unloaded. In our time, you can see the first few courses of stone and trace the outline of the houses.

First you, the merchant, must instruct your scribe to record the shipment. He uses Enkomi's own invention, a script similar to Minoan and Mycenaean, which in our time we will call Cypro-Minoan. He writes on the clay tablets so traditional

in the Middle East, but uses a simple syllabary, rather than the complex cuneiform writing.

You greet your family and trade your dusty robes for finer, embroidered clothes that befit your wealth. Then you are quickly off to the market sector near the port. You want to hear news of the great battles at Troy. Troy controls the passage to the North Sea, where Cypriot copper is exchanged for wheat and dried fish. In fact, political and military conditions throughout the known world are important to you, for your copper is traded everywhere. The siege at Troy has dragged on for years, and copper prices have risen with the demand for weapons.

The market is vibrant with color and sound. You hear Hittites arguing with Syrians and Egyptians haggling with Cilicians. Most of the people are robed in brilliantly dyed cloaks, but the Egyptians stand out in their snow-white linen. You find your favorite tavern, where your cronies welcome you. They want to know about road conditions on the way to the copper country. You want to catch up on local news.

After a good gossip and perhaps some wine, bread, and olives, you go down to the harbor at the river's edge. Changes in the coastline have silted up the harbor in modern times. But you, the merchant, find many ships berthed in its harbor. You are looking for a captain who will buy your copper. You are surrounded by a variety of languages, especially Greek and Semitic dialects; you know enough to get by in several of them.

After a good hagggle, you sell much of your copper to a fellow from Syria, who has wonderful ivory carvings to trade. He has beautiful glassware from Egypt and luxury pottery from Mycenae in Greece. Your copper will be only part of his load. His ship will leave port with ten tons of copper ingots.

And he's told you some shocking news. You hardly wait to tell your wife that the High King of the Greeks, Agamemnon, has been divorced and deposed at his home in Mycenae. Clytemnestra, the Queen, has taken a new husband. This, you know, will not end well.

But first, you must visit the temple of the Horned God. The Horned God is Hittite and Alasia was under the sway of the Hittite Empire for several centuries. The Hittites considered Alasia "the outer limits" and sent their exiles here. Now the Egyptians have the mastery of Cypriot affairs. But the Horned God has been good to your family, and a quick visit will surely help your affairs to prosper.

Hittites yesterday, Egyptians today, tomorrow, perhaps the upstart Greeks. As

long as business is good, and pirates are kept to a minimum, you care not a fig which foreign ruler considers himself to be in charge.

As you pass the craftsman's quarter, the acrid smell of copper smelting assaults your nose. Here the copper is further refined, mixed with tin, and made into bronze. Enkomi/Alasia is famous for its bronze statues and for its tripods, but you can find any tool or weapon you need on these streets. Now the air is sweeter and the noise is gentler as you pass the shops where fine jewelry is made. You have a little gold in your moneybag, perhaps you should have a trinket made for your wife. Here are the ivory carvers. There, that is just the thing - a game board and pieces inlaid with ivory. She loves the Phoenician style.

The Phoenicians and Syrians have been coming to Enkomi for centuries. They were always competitive among themselves, but now, with the Mycenaean Greeks elbowing themselves a place, the markets are even more volatile. All to the good, for a canny bargainer such as yourself.

And now, to home, where you make a quick but reverent bow to your ancestors buried beneath the floor. How pleasant it is in the courtyard, beneath the grape arbor. Your meal is simple -- bread, fish, olives, figs, wine. Some night soon you will entertain your business associates and serve that lamb you've been fattening, but for tonight, you will dine with your family.