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This volume is intended to be the first in a series that will focus on the origin of script and the boundaries of non-scribal communication media in proto-literate and literate societies. Over the last 30 years, the domain of scribes and bureaucrats has become much better known. Our goal now is to reach below the élite and scribal levels to interface with non-scribal operations conducted by people of the «middling» sort. Who made these marks and to what purpose? Did they serve private or (semi-) official roles in Bronze Age Aegean society? The comparative study of such practices in the contemporary East (Cyprus, Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt) can shed light on sub-elite activities in the Aegean and also provide evidence for cultural and economic exchange networks.

Writing is a complex aspect of human behaviour, whose underlying mechanisms, genesis, inception and applied principles still deserve an exhaustive investigation in the specific contexts of its use. A close examination of the relationship between a fully-fledged writing system and the emblems, icons, symbols devoid of phonographic connotations, needs to be explored. Periploi 9 sets the scene for such dynamic and fluid interactions, exploring the underpinnings and the preconditions that intermingle before, during and after the introduction of a functioning writing system.

From a methodological standpoint, we asked our contributors to explore the grey areas of this interface, to characterise a specific, if still neglected phenomenon, which we could refer to as the «broad concept of literacy», to shed light on what happens when communication, not strictly or uniquely in the specificities of linguistic notation, is harnessed through different media and to different purposes. This phenomenon encompasses symbols for marking or identifying objects, commodities, transactions, property and the like.

Our intention is to not shy away from attributing meaning to these mechanisms, but rather to pinpoint the cultural implications of the different agendas at play (whether ideological, utilitarian or tied to social differentiation), while addressing local complexities and patterns of progressive centralised control. This effort is geared towards building a full contextual environment for the whole of the Aegean, with counterpoints provided by other regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. This is why particular attention has been devoted to the role of marking systems as starting points for the development of script in response to new or expanding socio-economic needs.