

About the Deciphering of Scripts

A new book presents extensive conversations with Dutch linguist and archaeologist Frederik C. Woudhuizen from the last year of his life. Some of the earliest scripts of the Mediterranean region are considered undeciphered and indecipherable because they have survived in too few documents. These include the Cretan hieroglyphs, the Linear A script, the Byblos script, and the Cypro-Minoan script. With the help of the transcriptions developed by Fred Woudhuizen, documents in all these scripts are now understandable.

Zurich, Switzerland, January 5, 2022 – *Conversations about Space and Time: Early Mediterranean Scripts* is the title of a book published in December 2021 and written entirely in dialogue form. For six months, Swiss geoarchaeologist Eberhard Zangger conducted conversations with Dutch linguist Fred Woudhuizen about the latter's most important research findings. These dialogues are now available in eleven thematically organized chapters on more than 200 pages. The most important findings of the scientist, who died unexpectedly in September 2021, are thus preserved for posterity in an understandable form.

For more than four decades, Woudhuizen studied the writing systems of the second millennium BCE in the Mediterranean region, which were considered to be undeciphered. Step by step, he was able to develop transcriptions to decipher the Cretan hieroglyphs and the Linear A script from Crete, the Cypro-Minoan script from Cyprus, and the Byblos script from Lebanon. His scientific work has been published in 25 books and over 100 articles in academic journals. The new book now provides an overview of how these results are interrelated. The proposed decipherments were only possible because each of the writing systems reflects an Indo-European language. Many signs and their sound values occur in several scripts. A double-page table in the book (pages 210 and 211) shows how the phonetic values were transcribed from one script to the other. Thanks to such a transcription key, the words become readable. They can then be looked up in a dictionary of the language in question. "The key to success is to look beyond the borders," said Woudhuizen.

In addition to indecipherable scripts, there are documents written in the alphabet but which are unintelligible because the meaning of the words is unknown. These include mainly texts in Etruscan, but also in Lydian, Carian, and Sidetic. Woudhuizen was able to decipher these languages as well, after realizing that they were all ultimately derived from Luwian. Finally, Woudhuizen dealt with Southwest Iberian, which is preserved in an early alphabetic script dating to the ninth century BCE. According to Woudhuizen, Phoenician traders brought the alphabet to Iberia, where it was used to compose texts in Celtic.

When so many previously indecipherable documents suddenly become legible, the question arises as to whether their contents will yield new insights for historiography. In fact, the book presents a remarkable novelty. Its cover shows a scene in which a Cypriot nauarch dictates a letter to a scribe. This document is now on display at the Archaeological Museum in Nicosia, Cyprus. The admiral had advanced with a flotilla from Cyprus through Lycia to Rhodes and on into the Aegean. At Samos, he unexpectedly encountered a formidable and determined fleet. The Cypriot turned away and headed for the haven of Lymera in Lycia, where he dictated the letter to his king warning Cyprus of an impending attack. Apparently, the admiral was the first official who had sighted the attacking Sea Peoples.

Fred Woudhuizen said, "In my opinion, it is a prerequisite to use an interdisciplinary approach and to combine all the sources about ancient cultures that we can possibly put our

hands on. We also need to cross boundaries and look at the influence Anatolia has had on Crete but also on Greece. The impact of the Levant on Crete is also highly relevant. It is pretty much the same story for the Iron Age: The Phoenicians go all the way to Spain and impact everything between Lebanon and Iberia. Basically, we ought to do everything at once: consider the archaeological record, the linguistic evidence, as well as the extant historical sources.”

Further information about the book:

<https://luwianstudies.org/a-comprehensive-introduction-to-fred-woudhuizens-lifework/>

Reading sample (page 1-50):

<https://luwianstudies.academia.edu/EZangger>

Online-Bookshop:

<https://www.zerobooksonline.com/en/product/url/early-mediterranean-scripts>

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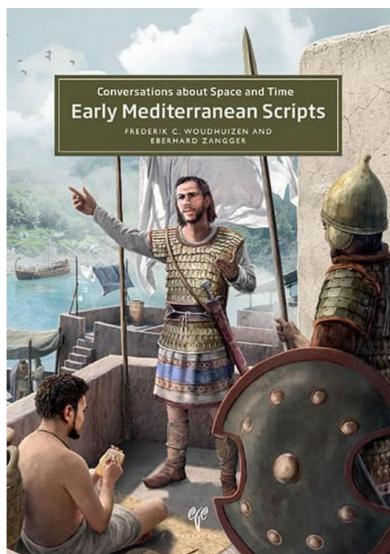
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