AN OSTRACON FROM THE TAGANROG SETTLEMENT (EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY)

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During collections of materials in the Taganrog settlement in 1989 an amphora ostracon was found which had been worn smooth by the sea. It was acquired by the private collector A.L. Gleizer and later passed on to the Taganrog Museum (KL-89, No. 49). To judge from the Greek inscription on it (analysed below) approximately half of the sherd — the left side — has been lost: it would probably have been more or less oval in shape originally. The maximum dimensions of the sherd are 5.5 × 4.3 cms and the height of the letters varies between 0.5 and 1.0 cms (fig. 1).

The graffito has been scratched quite deep and neatly in the boustrophedon arrangement. The first line can be distinguished from the others not only because the letters are larger and more widely spaced, but also because of the way it has been written. The first two lines are written in the so-called pseudo-boustrophedon manner, when the tops of the letters point upwards, while the last line curves round smoothly from the middle one into a line of true boustrophedon (‘Schlangenschrift’), when the letters going from left to right are turned upside down. If we were to assume that the ‘Schlangenschrift’ was constant throughout (and turn the whole text the other way round), then our Line 1 would become the last line and the tops of the letters would be pointing downwards, which would be a case without precedent in epigraphy.¹ This Archaic manner of writing provides us with an initial pointer for the dating of the inscription, since the boustrophedon arrangement became widespread in Greece in general and in Western Ionia in particular in the 6th century BC.²

The second indicator making it possible to provide a more precise date is the diagnostic shape of the letters: alpha in one place has a sloping cross-bar which meets the side-stroke of the letter at an angle, while in the other instance, apart from a cross-bar of the type described, the side-stroke nearest the edge of the

sherd arches out into a curve; the *epilons* are leaning forward with lowered horizontal bars and each has a vertical stroke, which protrudes below the line and at the top as well; a sloping *nu* leaning slightly over towards the right; the three-barred *sigma* as found in Eastern Ionian centres: Ephesus, Smyrna and Chios (possibly in Miletus as well, as can be seen from Archaic inscriptions from its colonies and, in particular, the early *omega* with its 'moustaches' (hastae) sloping downwards at different angles. All these diagnostic shapes, together with the boustrophedon arrangement of a traditional type make it imperative to date the Taganrog graffito to the third quarter of the 6th century, nearer to rather than further from the middle.

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4 SEG XXXII 724; the publishers of a new supplement to LSJ (p. 225) after apparently omitting corrigenda, including an erroneous reading in it ed.pr., my correction of which (Bulletin épigraphique, 1990, 553) was supported by S.P. Tokhtasiev (SEG XXXV 858), who in his latest publication (Y.A. Vinogradov, S.P. Tokhtasiev, Hyperboreus, 1998, 4.1, p. 42, Note 49) still did not clarify in what respects his criticism of my artificial interpretation was inappropriate, a criticism that started out from an incorrect exegesis of Hesychios' glossa οὐδῆλας as “voluptuous impotent” (“for Idanthemis even that amount of wine is enough, more is not good for him — after all, Idanthemis could become impotent from hard drinking”). For an extended list of paradigmatic composita consisting of a local theonym plus Greek root see: Ju.G. Vinogradov, Fontische Studien, Mainz, 1997, p. 153. On the alternation of long and short vowels in 'obscene' vocabulary (e.g. βεψ = βεψ, encountered also in Olbia!) see: D. Bain, Classical Quarterly, 1991, 41, pp. 54-62. The vase term άριστιγός, which did not, of course, bear any relation to standards for measures of liquid either, found its way into Lexicon vasorum Graecorum, Vol. 1, Ed. M.I. Guleta, Pisa, 1992. The home-made design on a small mug dedicated to Idantheimes is definitely not “the depiction of a dwarf shaking down (sub-)tropical fruit with a stick, from which evidently aromatic substances would be obtained that used to arouse ‘lascivious Idan’” as imagined by V.P. Yuilenko (Greek Colonization in the 7th-3rd Centuries BC, Moscow, 1982, p. 69) but was merely an ineptly scratched copy of a banal design found on black-figure vases: a warrior in his panoply and the usual decoration consisting of flowers and a lotus bud, with which the gift-bearer had modestly adorned his present. S.P. Tokhtasiev was only a small step away from the correct interpretation.

5 The third letter from the left in the middle line might initially be taken for an *epsilon*, which would make it imperative to assume that there had been an incorrect omission of an *iota* in the dative διοισ (on this form in Ionian cf. CIRB, p. 805, Para 12), which would have undermined this version from the methodological point of view. In actual fact what we have is an Archaic *gamma* with a raised horizontal, which was also familiar to the Milesians from Naukratis (M. Guarducci, Epigrafia greca, Vol. I, Rome, 1967, p. 261, No. 3, Fig. 115).

6 What prevents us from dating this inscription to the first half of the century is the absence of the closed *eta*, see: L.H. Jeffery, The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece, Oxford, 1990, p. 325. It is striking