

NOTE ON A FRAGMENT OF AN ARCHAIC INSCRIPTION FROM DREROS

(PLATE 27)

IN August 1953, while examining a building which the excavators suggest may have been the Prytaneion at Dreros in Crete, I came upon a rough fragment of stone bearing archaic letters inscribed boustrophedon (Pl. 27, a). Although it turned out not to be a new find, there are at least four reasons for calling renewed attention to it: (1) no photograph has previously been published; (2) at least one correction must be made in the facsimile illustration and proposed transcription in the preliminary publication; (3) there are minor discrepancies in the publication as to its physical description; (4) along with several related texts, it forms part of an important late 7th or early 6th century B.C. judicial-religious code which deserves continued careful study and the fullest and most accurate documentation.¹

In their initial publication² the excavators state that there can be no doubt that these thirteen blocks were originally built into the east wall of the contiguous archaic temple of Apollo, and that when this wall collapsed they fell into the cistern, which was already out of use and partially filled up. Their reference to a parallel in the Pythion of Gortyna makes it clear that they believe that the inscribed blocks faced outward. The texts seem to belong to eight separate and somewhat fragmentary inscriptions. One was published in 1937, the others in 1946.³

Our fragment is shown in facsimile (Pl. 27, b)⁴ forming a close join with the left

¹ Thirteen blocks inscribed with archaic letters were discovered in 1936 in the fill of a large Hellenistic cistern which lies a stone's throw to the southwest of the spot where I found the fragment in question. Although they were not particularly bulky or heavy, all but one of the texts were apparently left on the site. I have since been told that several were seen lying at the bottom of the cistern only a few years ago, but as far as I could see, there are none there now. A reasonably careful search failed to turn up any other fragments on the surface of the ground in the immediate vicinity. I conveyed the one fragment in my knapsack to Herakleion where it can now be found in the epigraphical apotheke of the Archaeological Museum. I wish to thank the curator, Dr. Platon, for permission to photograph, measure and study the stone. I have also to thank Miss L. H. Jeffrey of the British School of Archaeology in Athens for its primary identification. Professor Henri Van Effenterre, the original publisher, has been generous in discussing the fragment by letter.

² P. Demargne and H. Van Effenterre, *B.C.H.*, LXI, 1937, pp. 27-32, 333-348.

³ Cf. note 2 for the longest; six were published by Van Effenterre in *B.C.H.*, LXX, 1946, pp. 588-606 with photographs of four on pl. XXX and facsimiles of all; the eighth, an Eteo-Cretan and Greek text, may be studied in *Revue de Philologie*, XX, 1946, pp. 131-138 (mistakenly referred to as "pp. 39 sq." in *B.C.H.*, LXX, 1946, p. 588, note 1). The last mentioned stone is said to be in the near-by Neapolis museum, for which key and keeper were missing during my visit.

⁴ The facsimile is reproduced with the kind permission of Professor Van Effenterre from *B.C.H.*, LXX, 1946, p. 602.

edge of a larger section of the same document (text No. 5). Its thickness of *ca.* 0.03 m., as compared with 0.23 m. for the whole block, shows that it was broken out of the face of the main piece in a fashion similar to a section shown in the facsimile as missing from the right-hand end at the time of discovery in 1936.⁵

The material is a variety of limestone common in that area, locally called *sidero-petra*. It is fine-grained and splits easily along fairly even planes. The very dark blue-gray color of the surface is apparently the result of oxidation. Percussion produces on it a very light gray, almost white effect due to the finely pulverized powder which results. As can be seen from Plate 27, a, the letters are so clear and fresh that one's first impression is that the inscription was made quite recently.⁶ It is extremely difficult to believe that it could have been exposed to the weather for the length of time implied in the publication (i. e. the Archaic to the Hellenistic period).

The over-all maximum length of our fragment is 0.29 m. and the maximum height 0.165 m. Although there are no signs of sawn surfaces, the lower edge is fairly straight and seems to preserve the original limit of the block, except for a small chip broken from the right corner. The left-hand edge is quite irregular, but there can be no doubt that it marks the original limit of the whole document in this direction. Not only do the inscribed letters bend around to follow it closely, but the upper concave section of the edge is worked relatively smooth in the same technique as the letters themselves.⁷ It is not easy to suggest a reason for the rather painstaking smoothing of this surface. It may have been to accommodate a close-fitting contiguous block (possibly inscribed) or some system of bonding into a wall or other structure. It might also have been due to a desire for rough symmetry with a similar depression at the right-hand end of the complete document, which, according to the publisher, probably continued on another block.

The upper edge is definitely broken at the right, but there were no higher inscribed lines on the block and very little of the original surface has been lost. Along the right-hand edge there is a sharp irregular break which makes a close join with the larger part of the block.

The letters on our fragment are perfectly clear and unmistakable except where

⁵ The discrepancy in thickness between the fragment and the main block is not made clear in the publication and might lead to considerable confusion when the smaller piece is examined with the larger section not available for comparison.

⁶ I was at first suspicious that some perverse person had tampered with the stone between 1936 and 1953. Discussion with colleagues in geology strengthened my doubts, although they are naturally cautious about committing themselves without seeing the rock in question. But photographs which Professor Van Effenterre kindly sent me prove that the letters not only of this but also of his text No. 2 showed the same surprising freshness in 1936 when they were first discovered.

⁷ The tooling can readily be seen in Plate 27, a. Although the publication says specifically that there is no working on the block, the 1936 photograph makes this feature quite clear and reference to it was inadvertently omitted.

parts of a few are broken away. They are not sharp in outline or very deep but are formed by a network of small round indentations produced by the punch and hammer. Probably the term “picking” best describes the technique.⁸ The letters vary considerably in size. Extremes of height are 0.05 and 0.027 m.; extremes of width 0.07 and 0.02 m. The *omicrons* are lowest and the 5-bar *mu* widest. The average dimension for both height and width is *ca.* 0.035 m.

The published transcription for the whole of the preserved text runs as follows: ———σ | τυπρηρηγια ὀμόσαι δ' ἄπερ ἐν ὀρκιοισι | α ——— καθαρὸν γένοιτο. Although the readings are said to be certain, we have clearly to do in the bottom left corner of our fragment, not with an archaic *sigma*, but with *nu tau*. Thus, ὀμονται seems to be the correct reading and not ὀμόσαι as appears in the facsimile and transcription.⁹ There are other discrepancies between our part of the stone and the facsimile. Some of them may be due to the circumstances mentioned in footnote 9. At the top right it is difficult to accept the rounded contour of the (broken) first letter as retrograde *iota*. And the approximately equal length of the two straight strokes preserved of the third letter from the right in the same line would not be realized from the facsimile. Nor would one get the impression from the facsimile that there are three rather distinct forms of *alpha*—one with straight cross-bar, one with sharply sloping cross-bar and curved long stroke at the left, and one where the cross-bar begins from the base of the left-hand long stroke. Finally, the low curving line at the extreme right of the lowest line does not look nearly so much like part of a retrograde *iota* as it does in the facsimile.

The main purpose of these notes is to make the new information available to epigraphers and students of the religion and law of the Archaic period, rather than to propose any controversial readings.¹⁰ It is clear, as Professor Van Effenterre says, that we have to do here with some formula of oath-taking and purification. When one considers them as a group, the inscribed blocks are of such remarkably homogeneous dimensions that, although the techniques of inscription vary, the matter they carry should probably be regarded as a series of related prescriptions. It may be that only

⁸ Nearly all the other stones have chiselled letters, and according to the photographs the depressions are as dark in color as the rest of the surface. Consequently the letters are not nearly as easily legible. But a technique such as ours was used for text No. 2 where the letters are said to have been “gravée comme par un piquetage à la pointe mousse,” and a 1936 photograph shows that its letters too stood out clear and white.

⁹ Professor Van Effenterre now accepts this reading. He believes that when it was first discovered some kind of incrustation must have obscured this part of the inscribed surface. This is borne out by the fact that his 1936 photograph is virtually illegible at this point. It appears that the conditions to which it was exposed later rid the surface of the accretion so that the true reading is now unmistakable. One can only hope that the other missing blocks have fared as fortunately.

¹⁰ If the reading is correct, the *πρμ* cluster of consonants in the larger section of the text is foreign to Greek. The publisher suggests the possibility of an Eteo-Cretan word here. My colleague, Professor Tom B. Jones, doubts this and proposes εἰς τὰ πρῶτανήμα.

a fraction of the original total is preserved, but it is not impossible that some thread of textual continuity can be established which might in turn indicate the original spacial arrangements of the blocks.

As to where they stood and for how long, the condition of our fragment should form an important clue. It would appear to rule out a situation where they were exposed to the elements for any considerable time, and it might suggest that they were rather quickly superseded and discarded.

WILLIAM A. McDONALD

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



Stoa of Attalos: First Pergamene Columns erected

HOMER A. THOMPSON: ACTIVITIES IN THE ATHENIAN AGORA: 1955



a.



b.

WILLIAM A. McDONALD: NOTE ON A FRAGMENT OF AN ARCHAIC INSCRIPTION FROM DREROS