DOCUMENTS OF THE SAMOTHRACIAN LANGUAGE

(Plates 39 and 40)

"Now I shall survey the islands of Greece and of the Aegean Sea taking my start in Samothrace. Some authors say that this island was originally called Samos and that when what is now known as Samos had been settled the original Samos, because of the identity of names, was called Samothrace because of the near-by situation of Thrace. It was inhabited by men who sprang from the soil itself. Consequently no tradition has been handed down regarding who were the first men and leaders on the island. . . . The inhabitants who had sprung from the soil used an ancient language which was peculiar to them of which a good deal is preserved to this day in their sacrificial rituals.”

Diodorus Siculus thus begins his legendary story of the Greek island world. He goes on to report the legend of a flood at a time when men already lived in Samothrace and earlier than the great flood known from the stories of Deukalion and Pyrrha. The immemorially old origin of human and religious institutions in Samothrace, which Diodorus’ unknown source claimed, induced him to start this section as he did. An old, certainly “pre-Greek,” language still surviving in the liturgy in his time (in the age of Augustus or, at the least, at the time of his Hellenistic source) is quoted as a living remnant of that remotest phase of human history. At least one word of this language, the Samothracian noun for Thursday, pauroakis, has by chance found its way into Hesychius’ dictionary.

Modern writers have connected the names of the Samothracian divinities Axiokersos, Axiokersa, Axieros with this language and speculated on its character. But the modern explorers of Samothrace had not found any documents of the “lingua sacra” mentioned by Diodorus and when we started our full excavation of the heart of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods in 1938, we did not expect to find such documents.

2 See E. Bethe, Hermes, XXIV, 1889, pp. 424 ff.; E. Schwartz, R.E., s.v. Diodorus, cols. 669, 678. As Schwartz points out, local historians were ultimately used for some of the islands, and this is certainly the case for Samothrace, though the use of this source animated by local patriotism may have been indirect.
3 Hesychius, s.v. paurakiai, την πέμπτην Σαμωθράκες καλούσιν.
4 See B. Hemberg, Die Kabiren, Upsala, 1950, p. 88, with bibliography. The word Koios, though strictly speaking not documented for Samothrace, has also been used in this connection: see ibid., p. 118, n. 4; A. D. Ure, J.H.S., LXXI, 1951, pp. 194 ff.

Hesperia, XXIV, 2
In fact, I had seen one of them myself, a fragmentary inscription on stone (No. 40 of the appended catalogue), on a visit to Samothrace in 1937 previous to our excavations. Afterward the stone temporarily disappeared from sight and this single scrap seemed too isolated for me to call attention to it.

But when we continued work in Samothrace after the interruption of the war and its aftermath, enigmatic inscriptions on vases began to appear here and there, some of which have been mentioned in our preliminary reports. In 1951 and 1952, more material was discovered indicating the widespread early use of a non-Greek language. Thus the time has now come to make these documents available for linguistic study. In fulfilling this duty, we have no illusions about the modest and enigmatic character of these finds. With rare exceptions, we must deal with fragmentary scraps of only a few letters or with complete inscriptions containing only one unit of two or three letters. In the appended catalogue of forty items, there may be fragments of Greek which have been included only as conceivably belonging to this language. The selection of such items for the catalogue has been determined by the date and type of inscription where these considerations suggest that they are not Greek. This is the case, for example, of Numbers 26 and 31. I had taken them to be fragments of Greek inscriptions before it turned out that many of the clearly non-Greek inscriptions, like No. 26, are incised on the outer lip of black-glazed kylikes, while none of the carefully incised archaic inscriptions on vases is surely Greek. I may have been too generous in including certain items. But it seems safer to submit all that could possibly belong to this group.

With the exception of the fragmentary stele, No. 40, all the inscriptions are ceramic graffiti, found with one exception (No. 33, a tile) on vases. They are invariably carefully incised in letters as large as space would permit and, save where incompleteness is indicated in the catalogue or the value of a letter is uncertain (Ψ = χ or ψ or ξ for example), the reading leaves no doubt.

A few general statements are needed for a correct evaluation of the material. As to chronology, the bulk of the inscriptions is archaic, dating from the 6th and early 5th centuries B.C. Seven items come from archaic layers beneath and around the Arsinoeion (4, 5, 7, 13, 16, 25, 38). The fill beneath the renewed floor of the archaic Hall of Votive Gifts is identical in character with the fill of a "black pit" to the south of this building. Both fills in some cases contained fragments of one and the same vase. Though the fills were brought in in the second half of the 5th century,

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7 Hesperia, XXII, 1953, pp. 6 ff.; Archaeology, VI, 1953, pp. 32 ff.
8 For examples of Greek archaic dedications in this position compare: B.S.A., XXXV, 1934-5, p. 162, fig. 13 (Chios); XXXII, 1931-2, p. 187, fig. 4 (Haliartos).
9 Hesperia, XXII, 1953, pp. 6 ff.
10 Archaeology, VI, 1953, pp. 32 ff.
their contents were mostly archaic and together they include the largest amount of the material submitted here. To them one may add typologically related pieces found in this region and clearly washed out of the fill under the floor. Altogether this material constitutes more than half of the documents so far preserved (1, 2, 3, 6, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 34, 35). Objects found inside and outside the Arsinoeion, in the "Arsinoeion Fill," can be safely dated by this building only before ca. 290 B.C. (8, 9, 11, 12, 27, 29, 31, 36), but this fill also contains much archaic material. Only one piece (No. 10) found in it and included in the catalogue may be safely dated by shape and decoration as late as the 4th century B.C., while several may date from the preceding century. One piece of doubtful pertinence (No. 32) was found in the foundation fill of the "New Temple" and may be as late as the early Hellenistic age. No. 33 is archaic because of its lettering, though it is a surface find. On the other hand, clearly Greek inscriptions appear commonly on vases and lamps in the Sanctuary only from the latter part of the 5th century on.\footnote{11 Under the circumstances, should the graffito —\(Y \xi T\)—, \textit{Hesperia}, XIX, 1950, p. 17, also belong to our group? I use this opportunity to correct the date given for the marble lamp, \textit{ibid.}, p. 15, pl. 10, fig. 26. In spite of the archaic tradition of the shape, this example dates from the 4th century as Georges Daux has pointed out: the form of the \(E\) has a shorter center bar. Evidently such lamps of archaic type were still used and dedicated at that time.}

The indications are that the "lingua sacra" of Diodorus was actually to some extent a living language in the archaic age and gradually declined as such only in the 5th century until it disappeared in the 4th century. But in what sense the language remained alive centuries after the foundation of a Greek polis on Samothrace (around 700 B.C.) remains a problem. Were these dedications written by descendants of the pre-Greek inhabitants who still used their old language? Or are they—like Latin in the Middle Ages—documents of the continued if, in this case, religiously restricted use of a dying language by both natives and Greeks? The latter seems more probable. The stele seems to indicate the official liturgical existence of this language around 400 B.C.

As to the function of the ceramic inscriptions from the Sanctuary, it seems clear that most if not all of them have a dedicatory meaning. Such is the indication too of their more specific provenance. As we have seen, more than half of these inscriptions were found in connection with the "Hall of Votive Gifts." We have given this name to the building because in later times it was used for the exhibition of dedications. But the fill beneath its floor, from which a number of our inscriptions come, included remnants of archaic votive gifts, too, ceramic as well as of other varieties.\footnote{12 See \textit{Hesperia}, XXII, 1953, pp. 5 ff.} The occurrence of related combinations of letters in the \textit{graffiti} from the Arsinoeion listed in the catalogue assigns them to the same category. In some cases, this dedicatory function does not, of course, exclude the possibility of fragmentary proper names of
the dedicants. But short and complete texts such as dentole (3, 2?, 4?), dena (6), din (7), di (11, 12), le. (14), del (19), ag (25) should definitely be related to the gods or to some dedicatory expression.

In a matter so enigmatic, it is not agreeable to contemplate the possibility that in instances where only two or three letters are combined an abbreviation may be involved. Previously, when we recognized the first examples, I suggested that $\Delta l$ may be an abbreviation of $\Delta lN$ and that a single $\Delta$, found not infrequently, may have the same meaning,\(^{18}\) inasmuch as Greek dedications of the 5th and later centuries in Samothrace sometimes abbreviate the full form $\Theta E\Omega l\xi$ to $\Theta E$ or even to a single $\Theta$.\(^{14}\) I have also suggested that a complete graffito $\Delta K$ of which one example is preserved, may refer to $\Delta lN$ KABE$\Pi O l\xi$ or $\Delta l$ K$\Delta M\Pi l\Omega l$.\(^{15}\)

In the grouping of the catalogue, I have attempted to relate what obviously is related and it results that a large group, almost half of the ceramic material, seems to contain the same elements singly or combined (Nos. 2-5, 7-18).

This grouping is based on the perhaps not altogether unconvincing assumption that the same sound was sometimes transcribed as $E$, at other times, as $l$. One will speculate further on the relationship of the formula starting with $\Delta lN$ or $\Delta lN$ to $\Delta lN A$ (No. 6) and $\Delta E\Lambda$ (Nos. 19-20), and on whether the $\Delta E$ of Nos. 21-23 belongs to either group. And, if dedicatory, how do these formulae relate to the stele, where the terminal -le of 3, 17, 18 recurs in line 2 (No. 40) and tole of 2 and 26 in line 8, while $\nu t o$ is not only found in 2, 3, but also in 1, and again in line 9 of the stele?

With these considerations, I trespass into the field that is properly the linguists’ and after toiling over these scraps for a long time, I am glad to stop here, in the hope that they may make some use of this evidence.\(^{16}\)

In the following catalogue, I have dotted uncertain readings. A vertical bar at beginning or end marks vacant space on the fragment, that is, supposedly, completeness. In the same manner, a horizontal bar indicates destruction and possible continuation of the original text on either side.

Unless normal, the forms of letters have been noted in each case. The most remarkable is the occurrence, twice, of the archaic $\mathfrak{K}$ so far known in Greece only from Thera (Nos. 1 and 33).\(^{17}\)

\(^{13}\)Ibid., XX, 1951, p. 29.
\(^{14}\)A.J.A., XLIV, 1940, p. 341, fig. 17; Hesperia, XIX, 1950, pp. 15 ff., pl. 10, figs. 27, 28; 11, fig. 29; XX, 1951, pp. 28 f.
\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 29, pl. 18 b.
\(^{16}\)I am greatly indebted to Professor Bonfante for his willingness to study this material and to add the first expert comment to this publication. See below, pp. 101-109.
\(^{17}\)See I.G., XII, 3, pp. 92 f., 105, 127, 129, 139, 157 f.; ibid., suppl., p. 310. The Theran form is rather rounded, as on our fragment No. 33. The sharply angular form of our No. 1 is not found in Thera.
1. —ἘΠΟΤΕΧΒΝΕΥΣΑΝΤΟΚΑΕ—
From “black pit.”
Before the first ε traces of another letter.
χ(?): Ψ; Β: Ε; ο: Ω, Ω; σ: Ε.
Pl. 39.

2. |ΔΙΝΤΟΛΕ—
On outside of lip of small black-glazed kylix. Restored from several fragments. Acc. No. 52.628.
From “black pit.”
ν: Ν.
Pl. 39.

3. |ΔΕΝΤΑΛΕ|
On outside of lip of black-glazed kylix. Restored from two fragments, with a lacuna of one letter after the ταυ. Acc. No. 52.703.
From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.
The lower end of the two last letters is lost and theoretically they could have been α and ρ. But the restoration ΔΕΝΤ[Ο]ΛΕ seems indicated.
General, VI, 1953, p. 34.
Pl. 39.

4. |ΔΕΝΤ—
Running downward on neck of sizable unglazed amphora, close to one partly preserved handle. Acc. No. 49.777.
From an archaic layer south of the Arsinoeion.
A possible trace of an O near the break at the right end: ΔΕΝΤ[Ο]ΛΕ?
*Hesperia*, XX, 1951, p. 29, pl. 18 c.
Pl. 40.

5. —ΙΝ.—
Upside down in large letters on glazed interior of a large vessel. Same type of vase and graffito as No. 7. Acc. No. 49.255.
From fill near archaic altar beneath Arsinoeion.
ν: Ν. Only the lower end of a vertical hasta of a third letter is preserved some distance to the right of the νν. Δ]ΙΝ[ΟΛΕ?

6. |ΔΕΝΑ|
On outside of lip of black-glazed kylix. Restored from two joining fragments. The upper part of the two last letters is lost but enough is preserved to leave no doubt as to the reading and to the completeness of the inscription. Acc. No. 52.522-663.
From “black pit.”
ν: Ν; α: Α.
Pl. 39.

7. |ΔΙΝ|
Upside down in large letters on glazed inside of large double-handled vessel. Cf. No. 5. Acc. No. 48.476.
From an archaic stratum beneath the Arsinoeion.
Probably early 5th century B.C.
ν: Ν.
*Hesperia*, XIX, 1950, p. 17, pl. 11, fig. 3.
Pl. 39.

8. |ΔΙ|
On fragment of a large unglazed vessel. Acc. No. 48.670.
From Arsinoeion fill.
From what is preserved, the third letter could have been Ν.

9. —ΔΙ—
From Arsinoeion fill.
From what is preserved of the third letter, it could have been Ν.

10. —ΙΝ|
From Arsinoeion fill, 4th century B.C.
Δ]ΙΝ?

11. |ΔΙ|
On shoulder of large unglazed amphora. Acc. No. 49.848.
On the neck ΙΑ is more carelessly incised, possibly a numeral: eleven?
From fill of Arsinoeion.
19. $|\Delta E\Lambda|
   \begin{itemize}
   \item On rim of large unglazed flat bowl or basin. 
   \item Acc. No. 51.922.
   \item From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.
   \end{itemize}

18. $|\Lambda E|
   \begin{itemize}
   \item On outside of lip of black-glazed kylix. Acc. No. 52.858.
   \item From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.
   \end{itemize}

17. $|\Lambda E|
   \begin{itemize}
   \item On outside of small black-glazed fragment. Acc. No. 51.816.
   \item From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.
   \end{itemize}

16. $|\Lambda|
   \begin{itemize}
   \item Retrograde. On glazed fragment. Acc. No. 49.815.
   \item From an archaic stratum to the south of the Arsinoeion.
   \end{itemize}

15. $|\Lambda|
   \begin{itemize}
   \item On outside of concave lip of black-glazed kylix. Acc. No. 52.761.
   \item From "black pit."
   \end{itemize}

14. $|\Lambda E.|
   \begin{itemize}
   \item Retrograde. Outside on lip of a fragment of a black-glazed kylix restored from several joining pieces. Acc. No. 51.914.
   \item Unstratified. Found near Hall of Votive Gifts.
   \item The lower part of the E is broken away (thus, theoretically, it could be a $\gamma$); after it, there is a lacuna leaving space, at best, for one more letter.
   \item Pl. 39.
   \end{itemize}

13. $|\Lambda|-
   \begin{itemize}
   \item On outside, beneath lip, of fragment of small black-glazed bowl. Acc. No. 49.1003.
   \item From an archaic stratum outside the Arsinoeion.
   \end{itemize}

12. $|\Delta l|$
   \begin{itemize}
   \item In bottom of interior of fragmentary small black-glazed bowl. Other unintelligible scratches beneath foot. Acc. No. 49.111.
   \item From Arsinoeion fill, outside the building. 5th-4th centuries B.C.
   \end{itemize}
25. | ΑΓ |
   From an archaic layer west of the Arsinoeion.

26. — ΠΙΤΟΛΕΞ! —
   Unstratified, from Hall of Votive Gifts.

27. — ΣΙ! |
   Beneath foot of small black-glazed bowl. Acc. No. 48.442.
   From Arsinoeion fill. 5th-4th centuries B.C.

28. — ΙΤΙΠ —?
   On outside of lip of black-glazed kylix. Acc. No. 51.816.
   From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.
   ρ: Ρ. If the inscription was written retrograde, this would be an initial Δ and one should read: — ΔΙΤΙ —.

29. — ΕΤΙ |
   Upside-down on inside beneath lip of flat unglazed bowl. Acc. No. 49.917.
   From an archaic stratum south of the Arsinoeion.

30. — ΑΡΚΑΙΕ —
   Found in “black pit.”
   Badly preserved. ρ: Ρ; α: Α. The fourth letter could be a Ρ.

31. — ΕΚΑΙΕ —
   From an archaic context in Arsinoeion fill.
   ε: Ξ.
   Hesperia, XX, 1951, p. 29.

32. | ΤΑΕΕ —
   On fragment of black-glazed vase. Acc. No. 50.28.
   From early Hellenistic fill around foundations of “New Temple.”

33. | ΘΙΟΒΗ! —
   Along edge on fragment of a tile. Acc. No. 50.29.
   Unstratified, from region of Arsinoeion.
   θ: Θ; ο: Ο; β: Β (cf. No. 1); γ: Π. The last letter could have been a Γ or Π as well as an l.

34. — ΥΟΔΙΕФ:|
   On outside beneath lip of small black-glazed vase. Acc. No. 51.301.
   Unstratified, from Hall of Votive Gifts.
   υ: Υ; σ: Σ; ι: Ι. The first preserved letter could be a mutilated K.
   Hesperia, XXII, 1953, p. 7.

35. | ΤΩΜ|ΜΥ|
   In two lines, possibly boustrophedon, beneath foot of unglazed vase. Acc. No. 51.294.
   Unstratified, from region of Hall of Votive Gifts.
   μ: Μ; ν: Ν. Possible readings: ΤΩΧΜΥ, ΜΥΤΩΜ, ΜΟΤΥΜ, ΥΜΜΩΤ.
   Hesperia, loc. cit.

36. — ΦΙ!|
   Retrograde. Outside, on fragment of black-glazed vase. Acc. No. 49.947.
   From Arsinoeion fill.
   φ: Φ.

37. — ΛΧΙ|
From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.

χ (or ξ): X. (See above No. 1).

38. — ΛΝ]

Retrograde. On inside of fragment of large vase of type of Nos. 5 and 7. Acc. No. 48.792.
From an archaic stratum beneath Arsinoeion.
ρ: Ν.

39. — ΛΩΚ —

From fill beneath floor of Hall of Votive Gifts.

40. Fragmentary block of reddish limestone.

Pl. 40.

Broken above and at left. The lower end is in part preserved. Preserved height: 0.32 m. Preserved width: 0.205 m. Thickness below: 0.09 m.; above: 0.07 m. Right preserved edge also tapers upward. The side is finely tooled, the back roughly picked. The fragment is undoubtedly part of a free-standing stele which may have been twice as wide and considerably higher. The beginning, the end, and presumably half or more of the text, at the left, are destroyed. The preserved portion consists of the ends of 9 lines and part of two additional lines. Lines 1-9: height of letters 0.016 m.; lines 10-11: 0.01 m. Lines 1-8 are closely set one beneath the other, though not exactly, stoichedon. Line 9 is separated from line 8 by an interval of 0.01 m. Lines 10-11, in turn, closely set one above the other, are separated from line 9 by a large interval of 0.026 m.

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18 I saw the stone near the beach in Palaeopolis on the occasion of a short visit to Samothrace in 1937 and made an apographon. At the start of our excavations, it had disappeared. After the outbreak of the war, in 1940, Mr. V. Kallipolitis, whom I had asked to visit Samothrace and inspect the excavations, found the stone again and rescued it for the local museum. He then sent me an apographon which corresponded to my own. In the meantime, I had shown the inscription to certain epigraphists who politely indicated that they thought my copy was incorrect inasmuch as the text made no sense. From the beginning I had the idea that this inscription might be written in a language other than Greek. There can be no doubt about the reading as the photograph shows. But before publication, it seemed advisable to await the possible appearance of other fragments and documents.

19 See the hymn from Palaiokastro, though of the Imperial period, supposedly a copy of an original dating about 300 B.C., B.S.A., XV, 1908-9, pl. 20.