

THE GRAVE OF POSTHON AT SOUNION

(PLATE 32)

EXTENDING FROM MONT MICHEL southeastward to a point on the coast 1.8 kilometers northeast of Cape Sounion, the Agrileza valley cuts a swath about four kilometers long diagonally through the heart of the deme of Sounion. In its upper and middle part, where the valley floor is deep, the side walls of the valley are rock cliffs. The valley's lower third is less deep, and the border here, except near its end where the valley opens out onto a narrow coastal strip, consists of shelves of the upper marble which form broken terraces on either side. These terraces are bare of ancient remains, in contrast to the cliffs further inland upon which ancient farmsteads and other installations are perched.¹ Indeed, my explorations of the lower Agrileza valley have so far turned up only one spot where there are any antiquities worth noting, an ancient grave with a rupestral inscription.²

The spot in question is on the west side of the valley, 200 meters north of and at the same contour as the Church of Ayia Paraskevi.³ Horizontal expanses of bedrock are here exposed at different levels. On the uppermost level one flat area of rock carries the retrograde inscription (Pl. 32:a and Fig. 1, upside down in both):

[Πόσθ]ονος μνῆ[μα]

The letters are between four and six centimeters high. The restoration of the name is confirmed by the fact that it is carved again, retrograde and complete, just to the south of the name fragment (Pl. 32:b). There it is upside down to the fragment and in the nominative case: Πόσθον. The letters are three to four centimeters high. A third example of the name is carved orthograde, in letters three to four centimeters high, just east of the name fragment and again upside down in relation to it. Only the first four letters are preserved. Near by, a solitary cartwheel theta may be the sole surviving remnant of yet another example of Posthon or simply a stray letter. The other two preserved thetas are also cartwheel thetas.

The rough contemporaneity of the three inscriptions seems assured by the similarity of the letter forms among them, although we cannot be certain that they were cut at the exact same time. The differing orientations might even militate against this. In any case the letter forms of all three indicate the same time period, late 6th or early 5th century B.C.

The grave of the deceased does not require a long search to locate. A much larger expanse of bedrock lies to the east of the inscribed patch (Pl. 32:c; the inscribed rock occupies

¹ These are described by J. H. Young, "Studies in South Attica," *Hesperia* 25, 1956 (pp. 122–146), pp. 122–131.

² My investigations were carried out in the autumn of 1983 as part of research on a larger work on the deme of Sounion. I wish to acknowledge the receipt of a grant from the Penrose Fund of the American Philological Society, which paid for my travel to Greece.

³ The church is modern and so does not appear on the relevant sheet of the *Karten von Attika* (Sheet XV). It is plotted but not labeled on the maps which accompany the book by K. Konophagos, *Τὸ ἀρχαῖο Λαύριον*, Athens 1980. The church is some 500 meters southeast of the Princess Tower (cf. Young, *op. cit.* [footnote 1 above], pp. 122–124), situated at about the point where the marble terraces begin.

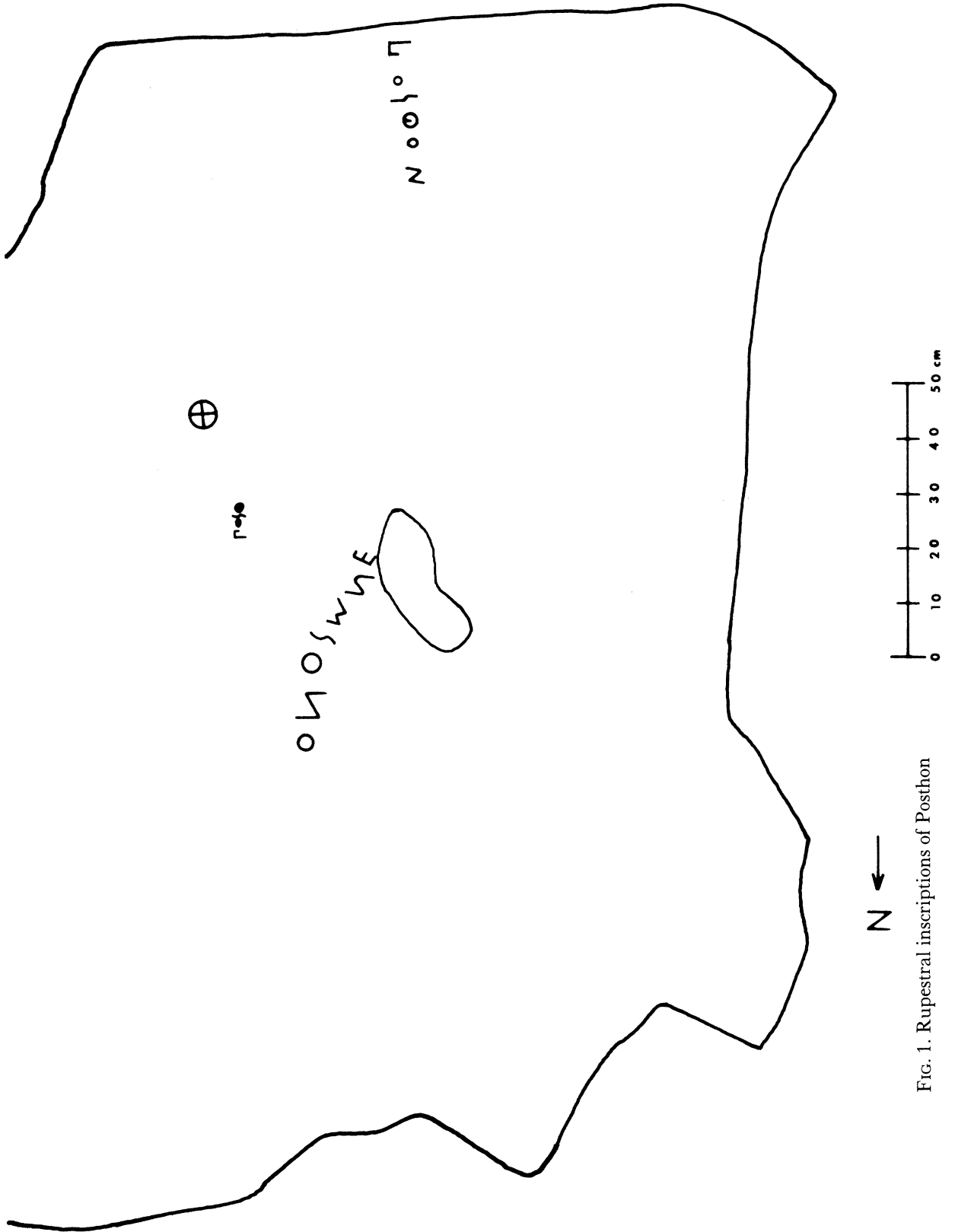


FIG. 1. Rupestral inscriptions of Posthon

the lower half of the photograph, the eastern area of rock the upper half). In it is a natural cleft consisting of two intersecting arms, one extending east–west for 1.40 m., the other north–south for 1.60 m. (Pl. 32:d). The cleft varies from 0.26 m. to 0.48 m. in width. The depth cannot now be determined because it is filled in with earth to a level varying between 0.40 m. and 0.60 m. down from the surface. The fill shows signs of disturbance. There can be little doubt that this is Posthon’s grave.

A good parallel for the form of the grave has recently been discovered by Jere Wickens⁴ just over a kilometer up the valley at the Cliff Tower. There the remains of Deinias and his descendants were buried in a natural cleft in bedrock near the tower. An accompanying rupestral inscription, datable to the 4th century B.C., identifies the occupants of the grave and uses the rare word *σορός* for the grave itself.⁵ Posthon’s grave is earlier, and the more common *μνήμα* is used, but otherwise the two graves are similar. Wickens was unable to cite any parallels for Deinias’ grave, but beside that of Posthon I know of at least one other (unpublished) example of this type of burial further up the Agrileza valley from the Cliff Tower. We may possibly be dealing with a burial practice more common here than elsewhere in Attica.

The name of the deceased, Posthon, deserves some comment. It is, I believe, the legitimate name that the man bore in life rather than some hypochoristic joke with which he was saddled after death. The main inscription, [Πόσθ]ονος μνή[μα], conforms to a standard manner of labeling a burial with a person’s real name, and the fact that the name is inscribed twice more underscores the loved one’s identity. The name derives from *πόσθη*, *membrum virile*. Its only other occurrence in Attic prosopography is the appropriate appellation of a satyr.⁶ It is attested elsewhere, however, as a person’s name at least twice, and the variant forms Ποσθίων and Βόσθων increase the number.⁷ In view of this and the range of other legitimate Greek personal names derived from anatomical parts below the belt,⁸ we should not be surprised at the occurrence of Posthon as a real name in Attica. It is not possible to determine whether he was a demesman of Sounion or a foreigner, a miner or a farmer. Nor do we know why his grave occupied such a conspicuous spot. There are no mine workings in the area nor any traces of a farmstead, although there are some vestiges of ancient walls a few dozen meters northwest of the grave. Perhaps Posthon was a small farmer, the scion of a rude homesteader whose coarseness was extended to his offspring by means of a name with which the latter lived and died.

In addition to the inscriptions, the outline of a left foot is carved on the rock. It is cut just

⁴ “Deinias’ Grave at Timesios’ Farm,” *Hesperia* 52, 1983, pp. 96–99.

⁵ Although Jere Wickens was the original discoverer of Deinias’ grave, his is not, *stricto sensu*, the *editio princeps* of the inscription. M. Waelkens rediscovered the inscription a year and a half later, although he failed to recognize the cleft grave. Given the vagaries of publication timetables the publication of Wickens was preceded a few months by that of Waelkens: *Miscellanea graeca* 5, 1982, pp. 149–162. Although not *princeps* the edition by Jere Wickens is the *editio melior*. M. Waelken’s article may be dispensed with. There is a risk that scholars will confuse the two articles because of the similarity of the authors’ surnames.

⁶ *RE*, s.v. Posthon.

⁷ In addition to the references in the *RE* article see O. Masson, “Notes d’anthroponymie grecque et asianique,” *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 10, 1959 (pp. 159–170), pp. 162–163.

⁸ These are collected by F. Bechtel, *Die historischen Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit*, Halle 1917, pp. 482–483.

above and upside down to [Πόσθ]ονος μνῆ[μα]. The two missing letters at the end of the inscription do not appear to have been obliterated by the cutting of the foot outline but were lost as the result of weathering. Although they are not right side up in relation to each other, I take the outline and the inscription to be closely contemporary. The foot outline has no funerary symbolism but is there simply as a memorial to the deceased in an area where he spent his life.⁹

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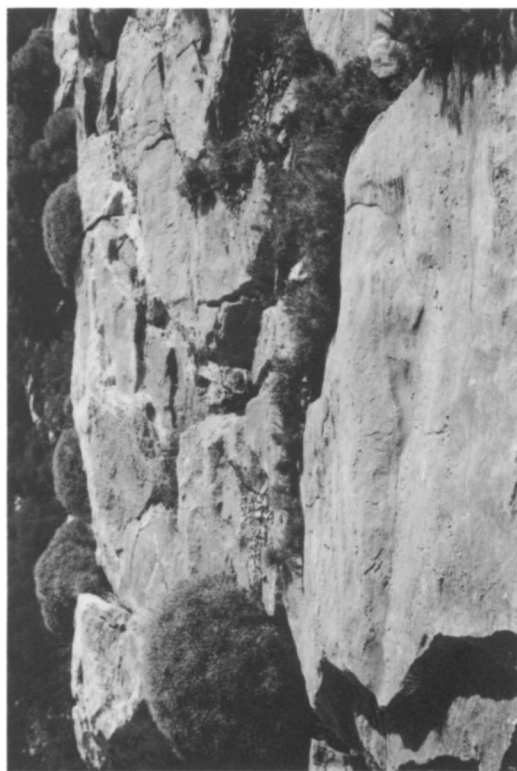
⁹ I would ascribe a similar memorial function to the only other foot outline known by me to occur in an Attic funerary context, that carved with *SEG XXIII*, 147 on a columella in Athens in the 2nd or 3rd century after Christ; cf. G. Manganaro, "Peregrinazioni epigrafiche," *ArchCl* 16, 1964 (pp. 291–295), p. 294, pl. 72:1. Manganaro notes only the possibilities that this outline might indicate the person's profession, shoemaker, or serve a good-luck function. The true explanation is probably simpler. The outline commemorates the deceased who once lived and walked among the surviving members of his family. For further discussion on *plantae pedis* see "Hymettiana I," forthcoming in *Hesperia*.



a. Funerary inscription of Posthon



b. Another inscription of Posthon



c. Area of inscriptions of Posthon



d. Cleft grave of Posthon