

TWO GRAFFITI FROM ANCIENT CORINTH

(PLATE 88)

TWO TEXTS inscribed on pottery from Ancient Corinth, although minimal, contain points of interest.¹ The first is on a sherd from the contents of a pit, apparently sealed by the earliest poros surface spread for a racecourse.²

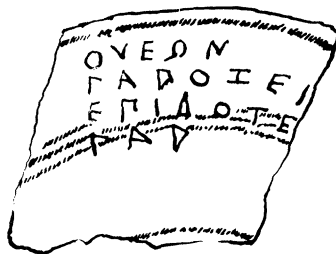
1. (C-73-12). Attic cup foot with graffito

Pl. 88

Max. pres. dim. 0.050, Th. of wall 0.004 m.

Findspot: Forum West, grid 63–64 H. Pottery deposit under 5th-century pavement.

Reddish buff Attic clay, slightly micaceous; black glaze, not especially thick on upper surface, with slightly metallic sheen. Glazed lines on undersurface of foot more dilute.



Concave cup foot rises slightly from edge to close to bottom of cup wall. Underside and outer edge are reserved. Five dilute black-glaze concentric circles run around the underside: one at the edge, one at the inner break, and three close together, midway between the other two. The graffito, scratched into the undersurface after firing, consists of four lines reading from foot edge to center.

ΘΥΕΩΝ
ΓΑΡΟΖΕΙ
ΕΠΙΔΟΤΕ
ΓΑΡ

L.H. 0.002 m.

Omega in line 1 may have only a left foot, in which case, cf. Immerwahr 1990, p. xiii (S-6). Guarducci 1967, p. 260 has omega in its oldest form with only one foot, stipulating, however, that it be the right foot. In the present text, surface damage may have effaced a right foot.

The alphabet is Ionic. An Athenian might have written the letters. “Athenian” seems a possible conjecture, since the first two letters of each line may show awareness of a stoicheidon pattern, which Henry Immerwahr considers “basically an Attic phenomenon.”³ The

¹ I thank Charles K. Williams, II for permission to publish these texts and for helpful advice. I also thank Henry Immerwahr, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, and Ronald Stroud, each of whom has improved a version of this note.

² For further discussion of the poros crust and underlying pottery, see Williams and Russell 1981, p. 9, note 9.

³ *Per litt.* Cf. Immerwahr 1990, p. 96. “Samian” is not excluded. Cf. *Agora XXV*. Of the 1045 ostraka catalogued here, most of which reflect private efforts, at least 17 show awareness of a possible stoicheidon arrangement of letters: nos. 25, 55, 74, 107, 228, 651, 660, 732, 947, 950, 1054, 1058, and 489, 493, 503, 505, 506 (these last 5 by the same hand).

text may be complete as it stands, for lines 2 and 3 run right up to the break and stop. It looks as though, when the engraver incised his words, the present shape of the piece defined what surface was available for writing.

θυέων γὰρ ὄζει. ἐπίδοτε γάρ is a text that yields sense: "In fact it smells of sacrifices. Yes, add <to it>." No metrical scheme makes itself immediately apparent.

The archaeological context in which the sherd was found is dated by its pottery to 550–500 B.C. The sort of Little Master Cup from which the fragment comes is generally thought to be of 6th-century manufacture, and the style of writing matches fairly well some examples that our best authorities date to the 6th century.⁴ The first indicators, therefore, by which we assign dates to ancient objects and writing point to a time in the second half of the 6th century.

The locution, however, is like that of Greek and Roman comedy: one can easily imagine two different persons speaking, each his own short sentence.⁵ But this fragment of a dialogue is possibly a hundred years or more earlier than the first fully preserved play from Old Comedy, Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, produced in 425 B.C. It is, moreover, a generation or so earlier than 487/6 B.C., the traditional date for the first performance of a comedy at the Dionysia at Athens.⁶ To look a little further into the past, the graffito can be later than the fat men of Sparta and Corinth but possibly is contemporary with some of the Attic black-figure representations of cocks, dolphin-riders, ostriches, knights, and the like, which are generally associated with early choruses.⁷

To make the most of these exiguous hints, one could imagine someone brought up in Ionia (or Attica), who on a visit to Corinth sometime late in the 6th century B.C. used a fragment from an Attic drinking cup to write down what could be a bit of dialogue, not necessarily poetic or literary but possibly so.

The second inscribed pottery fragment comes from an Athenian lamp:

2. (L-70-46). Athenian lamp fragment with graffito

Pl. 88

Max. pres. dim. 0.057, est. Diam. 0.008 m. Single fragment, shoulder, and rim.

Findspot: Forum West, well 1970-1, lot 6493

Pinkish buff Attic clay, slightly redder than 5YR 6/6. Lustrous black glaze, partially worn.

Howland Type 20 lamp with convex body; raised rim surrounding fill hole. Black glaze on shoulder and rim; reserved stripe surrounding rim. Like *Agora* IV, no. 149, pp. 43–44, from a fill of 510–480 B.C. (cf. *Agora* XII, p. 390, *Agora* deposit G6:3).

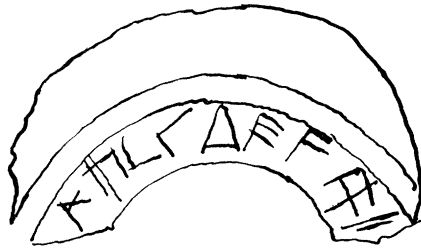
There are traces of light glaze wash at the top of the vertical side, flaking black at the shoulder, and a reserved stripe where the edge of the rim rises. The flat rim surface is glazed with strong black glaze. The interior is reserved.

⁴ Jeffery 1961, p. 325 shows comparable letters in texts from the Ionic Dodekapolis. See her $\theta 3$, $\nu 2$, $\epsilon 3$, $\omega 3$, $\nu 3$, $\gamma 1$, $\alpha 2$, and $\rho 3$ (for which compare a grave stele at Perinthos in Samian script, *ibid.*, no. 36, p. 365). The other letters, namely \omicron , ζ , π , and τ , are stable in the Ionic Dodekapolis. A votive stele from Samos (Guarducci 1967, no. 8, p. 267, fig. 120; Jeffery 1961, no. 35, p. 365) dated *ca.* 580–560 by Guarducci, has similar ν , α , π , ω , ϵ , and ν , no ζ , and θ with a cross. Jeffery (*loc. cit.*) says that "the lettering suggests a date after the middle of the sixth century" and that the legless $\rho 2$ "is characteristic of Samian and occurs with increasing frequency on stone from the second quarter of the sixth century onwards" (p. 328).

⁵ To take a recent example, see Henderson 1987, p. 151, on $\delta\zeta\epsilon\omega$ in *Lysistrata*, and p. 158, on $\epsilon\pi\iota\delta\iota\delta\omega\mu\iota$.

⁶ See, e.g., Pickard-Cambridge 1962, pp. 189–190.

⁷ Pickard-Cambridge 1962, pp. 306–308, note 5; cf. Sifakis 1971, pp. 73–93.



Seven (eight?) letters of the Corinthian alphabet starting from A are scratched left to right into the flat rim surface:

A, B, Γ, Δ, E, F, H, I L.H. 0.005 m.

The shape of beta (Β) is like that of beta no. 3 (β) in Jeffery 1961 (p. 114), although a redundant vertical stroke and an inappropriate lengthening of the lower right horizontal distract the eye. The letter right of vau can be heta, a carelessly formed Η, in which case the next vertical stroke right can be either an intended zeta (Ζ) or a straight iota. Alternatively, the letter may be a crudely formed, tetragonal theta. Whichever the case, the scribe has not followed any canonical order of letters in a Greek alphabet.

Lillian Jeffery (1961, pp. 116–117) has only two examples, both incomplete, of Corinthian abecedaria, namely a plaque from Pendeskouphi⁸ and a graffito from Kyme on a conical oinochoe.⁹ Since publication of her magisterial collection, one complete abecedarium, a dipinto on a Late Corinthian aryballos, has been published.¹⁰ A fragmentary example from Dardania may be Corinthian but lacks distinctive features.¹¹ The new text therefore has interest if for no other reason than the rarity of such documents. It is also a point of interest that the form ε follows delta: Corinthians as late as *ca.* 478 B.C. were still using a unique form of epsilon/eta (ε) which one might have expected to find in a position as early in this series as eta or heta in other Greek alphabets. Jeffery, however, had speculated that the letter ε would have been added at the end of the Corinthian epichoric alphabet, along with other non-Phoenician letters, and the Troilos aryballos partially confirms her surmise: after a punctuation mark at the end of the alphabet two letters are added, namely chi and the Corinthian eta. Note that in the schematic catalogue in Jeffery 1961 (p. 114), beta as it is formed on 2 is reckoned as roughly contemporary with the figure E rather than with ε.

It may be useful here to signal an additional piece of information, recently published, concerning placement of letters in the epichoric Corinthian alphabet. Part of a starting platform for races has been uncovered at Corinth, revealing a series of letters which labeled starting posts.¹² Twelve starting posts in all can be identified. The letters that label them, reading from left to right (and numbering the posts 1–12) are (1) F, (2) I, (3) Η, (4) [], (5) Θ, (6) I, (7) K, (8) Λ, (9) M, (10) N, (11) O, (12) Γ.¹³ Traces of a letter in no. 3 of the

⁸ See Lorber 1979, no. 143.

⁹ Alan Johnston, in his Supplement to Jeffery 1990, p. 440, directs readers to Frederiksen 1984, pl. IV, where it can be seen that the facsimile in Jeffery 1961 (and Jeffery 1990) is not quite accurate.

¹⁰ The Troilos aryballos: Amyx 1988, II, no. 51, p. 528.

¹¹ See Lejeune 1989.

¹² Williams and Russell 1981, pp. 2–15; *SEG XXXI*, 285.

¹³ Zeta, which has now disappeared, had the form I. It was recorded as eta by Morgan (1937, p. 550), who had only the one letter and so could not distinguish it from eta by orienting it with the other letters. In Williams and Russell 1981 (p. 7, note 6), the same zeta is misquoted A.

series are perhaps compatible with heta (H). There are no visible traces of a letter in position no. 4, nor in a canonical alphabet would a letter be expected in that position. But the space is there; possibly a non-alphabetic sign or a letter from a foreign alphabet was inserted.

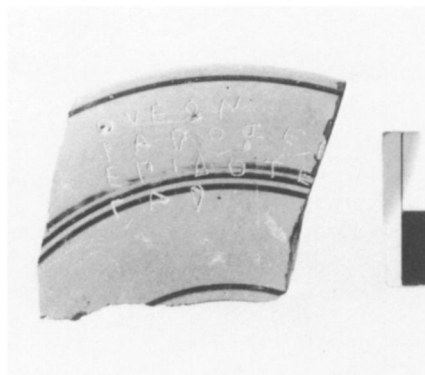
The letters of the posts, while not intended to be an abecedarium, constitute a sequence from *vau* to *pi*, showing a notable feature. The absence of *xi* after *nu*, noted by the excavator, can be compared with the Pendeskouphi plaque, where *xi* follows *pi*, and the Troilos aryballos (note 10 above), where *xi* is missing entirely. The Dardanian example (above), if Corinthian, shows *xi* in its canonical position, *viz.* after *nu*. The starting platform therefore adds another certain Corinthian instance where the placement of *xi* is problematic.

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1 (C-73-12)



2 (L-40-46)