CONTENTS

ANCIENT HISTORY

Sofia ANDREEVA
ON THE DATE OF THE OLBIAN CALENDAR GRAFFITO
SEG 30: 977 ................................................................. 5

Cristina-Georgeta ALEXANDRESCU
'I HAD A DREAM...' - THE DEDICATION OF AN EQUES OF THE ALA I DARDANORUM IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF TROESMIS AND THE PROBLEM OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN NORTHERN MOESIA INFERIOR .................................... 10

Lucreţiu MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA
EPGRAPHIC AND PROSOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON Q. MARCIUS QUADRATUS FROM IBIDA ......................... 19

Annamária – Izabella PÁZSINT
ROMANS 1 BY 1. AUGUSTA TRAIANA ET TERRITORIUM ...... 25

Ioan Carol OPRIŞ
MILESTONES FROM CAPIDAVA AND THE TERRITORIUM CAPIDAVENSE. AURELIAN'S WAR AGAINST THE CARPI INTER CARSIUM ET SUCIDAVAM, IN A NEW LIGHT ................................................................. 62

Rada VARGA
THE NATURE OF ROMAN DOMINION OVER THE PROVINCE OF DACIA, NOTES ON THE ROMANIZATION PHENOMENON AND ITS LIMITS ................................................................. 89

NUMISMATICS

Silviu I. PURECE
DIVVS AVGSTVS AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE NORICO-PANNONIANS IN DACIA. COINS FROM OCNA SIBIUŁI – FAŢA VACILOR / LA FĂGĂDĂU SITE ........................................ 98

ARCHEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

Marius-Mihai CIUTĂ, Anamaria TUDORIE
NEW TECHNOLOGICAL AND STATISTICAL DATA ON THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION FROM THE EARLY TO THE MIDDLE NEOLITHIC IN THE MUREŞ VALLEY, ROMANIA .................................................... 108

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Sabina VESELI
 AN AUCISSA DERIVATIVE FIBULA IN THE MIDDLE ROMAN PERIOD CEMETERIES IN ALBANIA: MILITARIA OR CIVIL TRENDS? .......................................................... 121

Alina STREINU, Irina ACHIM
 A STREET WITH A VIEW OVER THE CENTURIES. THE CERAMIC MATERIAL FROM THE STREET A IN FRONT OF THE CRYPT BASILICA AT HISTRIA (I) ........... 127

Evgenij V. SUKHANOV
KITCHEN POTS OF THE 8th-9th CENTURIES IN THE PONTIC REGION AS AN ETHNIC MARKER (continuation of the discussion) .......................................................... 156

REVIEW

Csaba SZABÓ
MARLIS ARNHOLD, TRANSFORMATIONEN STADTROMISCHER HEILIGTÜMER WAHREN
DE SPÄTEN REPUBLIK UND KAISERZEIT, CONTEXTUALIZING THE SACRED SERIES 10, BREPOLS, TURNHOUT, BELGIUM, 2020 .................................................. 181

Pim MÖHRING
GROOT, T. DE & J.W. DE KORT, VEILIG NAAR DE OVERKANT. ONDERZOEK NAAR EEN MUNTVOINDST UIT DE ROMINEISE TIDJ IN HET DAL VAN DE AA BIJ BERLICUM (GEMEENTE SINT-MICHELSGESTEL), RAPPORTAGE ARCHEOLOGISCHE MONUMENTENZORG NO. 267, CULTURAL HERITAGE AGENCY, AMERSFOORT, 2021 .................................................. 184
ON THE DATE OF THE
OLBian CALENDAR GRAFFITO
SEG 30: 977

Abstract: The inscription SEG 30: 977, known as the calendar graffito, is one of the most interesting documents from Olbia and attracts scholarly attention for more than forty years. It contains a dedication to the god Apollo with several epiclesis, and a list of the twelve months, identical to the calendar of the Olbian metropolis Miletos, but for the spelling of several months’ names. The list of Apollo’s epiclesis, as well as such a list of the months, are unique in Greek epigraphy. Calendar inscriptions are common since the 4th century BCE, but the Olbian inscription is traditionally dated to the second quarter of the 5th century BCE, and therefore considered as the earliest calendar inscription in the Greek world. This date is however incorrect and should be moved to the beginning of the 4th century, on the basis of the script and spelling of the graffito, as well as the form of vessel.

Keywords: Greek inscriptions, dating, Olbia, calendar, Apollo.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most famous and lengthiest graffiti from Olbia is the calendar graffito SEG 30: 977 on a fragment of a black-glazed Attic skyphos from the Western temenos, which contains a list of all the twelve months of the year and a dedication to Apollo. It was originally published in 1980 by Yu. Vinogradov and A. Rusyaeva with a detailed commentary. The graffito attracts much interest because it is believed to be one of the earliest, or even the earliest Greek calendar inscription. N. Ehrhardt, V. Yaylenko, L. Onyschkevych, M. Feraru studied this document; it became a part of new corpora inscriptionum and got plentiful commentaries. Most scholars focus on the epiclesis of Apollo, the name of the dedicator, and the months’ list; the date however needs to be revised.

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

The graffito consists of three texts: the dedication of Andokidos to Apollo and an abbreviation round the rim, and 12 months of the year, arranged spiral-wise in the middle of the skyphos base:

1. VINOGRAVOD/RUSYAeva 1980, 19-64.
3. YAYLENKO 2017, 37-40, with refs. to his previous studies.
4. ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 4-6, 11-69.
5. FERARU 2015, 13-45.
The inscription should be close to the date of the Olbian vessel was not used for a long time, and the date of the Olbian vessel with the later examples, which are dated skyphos in her opinion, the earlier examples are closer to the Olbian and shape and dated to the late 5th century BCE. L. Onyshkevych disagrees with the first editors and suggests associate the vessel from Olbia with the examples from Athenian Agora, prefer to date the inscription as early as possible, and from 520-s to 340-s BCE.

The archeological context however cannot help the dating, because the inscription was discovered in a displaced layer, among other finds datable to the 5th – 4th centuries BCE, and it is impossible to associate it with a clearly defined layer. Among the published materials which were discovered in the site there are several graffiti dated to the late 5th century BCE, and it is impossible to associate it with a clearly defined archeologic layer and the form of the vessel. They notice that the inscription was discovered in a displaced layer.

The vessel with the calendar graffiti is a black-glazed Attic skyphos; its dimensions are 7.3x4.5x0.5 cm. While the inscription was scratched on the base of the skyphos, and only this part was important for the dedicator, the rest of the sides help to restore the profile of the vessel. Such skyphoi were frequent in the Greek world, and can be dated widely, from 520-s to 340-s BCE. Yu. Vinogradov and A. Rusyaeva prefer to date the inscription as early as possible, and associate the vessel from Olbia with the examples from Athenian Agora, which are dated to the earlier period. L. Onyshkevych disagrees with the first editors and suggests comparing the skyphos with vessels which are closer in size and shape and dated to the late 5th – early 4th centuries BCE, in her opinion, the earlier examples are closer to the Olbian skyphos. There is however no reason against bracketing the Olbian vessel with the later examples, which are dated to 400-375 years BCE. According to all the experts, the Olbian vessel was not used for a long time, and the date of the inscription should be close to the date of the skyphos.

Abbreviation, non liquet

c. Taureon, Θαργελιών, Καλαμαίων, Πάνωμος, Μεταγειτνίων, Βοθριών (όν), Κυανεψίων, Απατούρι (όν), Ποσείδίων (όν), Λιννεών, Ανθιστερίων, Αρτεμισίων

In summary, neither the archeological layer, nor the form of the vessel confirm the dating of the graffiti to the early 5th century BCE.

THE SCRIPT

The second argument in favour of the later dating of the Olbian calendar is its script, which is uncommon, does not correspond to the beginning of the 5th century, but rather to the late 5th – early 4th centuries BCE. The peculiarities of the script are typical of this timespan: alpha has a slightly diagonal hasta; epsilon and zeta feature three bars; the horizontal bars of epsilon are not slanted in most cases; mu is sometimes cursive; kappa has normal (non-shortened) hastas; the side hastas of pi are equal in most cases; sigma has four bars; upsilon is cursive; theta has a short horizontal line instead of a cross. Several letters of either archaic or unusual form, like stretched omega and lopsided nu with reclinced right hasta, may belong to individual style of the engraver. All these features are typical of the late 5th – 4th centuries BCE, but not of the earlier period.

THE SPELLING

Not only the script, but also the abbreviations and spelling of the inscription are unusual and have to be re-examined. Among the spelling peculiarities two are related to the date of the inscription and one is a subject of an intense discussion.

Abbreviations

The abbreviation AZΜΘ one letter for word – is very rare in pre-Roman inscriptions. Yu. Vinogradov and A. Rusyaeva interpret the abbreviation as (ἐν τῇ) ΑΖΜΘ (to Apollo on the seventh day of the month Thargelion). V. Yaylenko suggests reading the first letter as the name of Apollo: ΑΖΜΘ (ἐν τῇ) ΑΖΜΘ (to Apollo on the seventh day of the month Thargelion). The seventh day, was consecrated to Apollo, see BELOUSOV 2021, XXVII-XXVIII.

Other abbreviations of the inscription (Ἀπόλλ. (ον), Δηλφινιών, Θαργηλιών, Λιννεών, Βοθριών, Αθρησκευών, Δηλφινιών, Καλαμαίων, Πάνωμος, Μεταγειτνίων, Βοθριών (όν), Κυαν

References:

1. L. Onyshkevych notes the letter theta and reconsiders it as to an early example (1998, 15). Such thetas are not typical of inscriptions of the Island Black Sea cities in the 5th century BCE but are very frequent since the early 4th century BCE. For the scripts see the next footnote.

2. Cf. LARFELD 1902, tables of scripts in Addenda; KNIPOVICH 1966: 9, table 11; LSAG 63-65; VINOGRAVODOV 2001: 6-12; BELOUSOV 2021, XXVII-XXVIII.

3. Cf. AVI-YONA Ha 1940, 12-14; 20.


5. VINOGRAVODOV/RUSYAeva 1980, 33.

6. VINOGRAVODOV/RUSYAeva 2001: 6-12; BELOUSOV 2021, XXVII-XXVIII.

7. L. Onyshkevych notes the skew theskyphos from Olbia can be also compared with AA nos. 345 and 349 (1998, 16-18).

8. ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 15; VINOGRAVODOV/RUSYAeva 1980, 24, n. 20;
Archaeologists suggest that the calendar graffito is dedicated not only to Apollo, but also to Artemis; he reads Ἄρτων Εὐείδης. L. Dubois suggests that the calendar graffito is dedicated not only to Apollo, but also to Artemis: he reads Δηλφισ. The analogies are attested to in Attica, beyond Olbia, the cult of Apollo Ietros is known in Apollonia, Histria, Tyras, Panticapeum, Myrmekion, Nymphaios, Phanagoria, Hermonassa, Gorgippia. All the early inscriptions feature the form Ἰπρός, this spelling persists even in the Roman time. The Classical Greek form Ἰπρός was spelt as Ἰπρός in the Ionia dialect, both in the noun meaning ‘healer’, or an epiclesis. The earliest examples of the spelling Ἰπρός as an epiclesis of Apollo appeared in the 4th BCE, most probably under the influence of the literary tradition. The cult of Apollo Ietros is not attested to in the Greek world beyond the North-Western Black Sea region before the Hellenistic period.

Thus, the spelling of the calendar inscription allows its dating to the early 4th century BCE.

CALENDAR INSCRIPTIONS

Calendar inscriptions are not rare in the Greek epigraphy, most of them however differ from Olbian graffito. Months are usually indicated in connection with festivals, dedications to gods, or special occasions. Inscriptions containing a full list of months are rare in Greek epigraphy. The Olbian graffito is the only complete list of the months of the Milesian calendar. The earliest calendar inscription in Greek epigraphy is from Attica, and it is dated to 430s BCE or slightly later. Several others are dated to the 4th century

39 R. Wacher suggests calling such abbreviations 'semi-mistakes' (WACHER 1991, 74); M. Avi-Yonah puts forward two criteria of abbreviations: the size of the save space and labour; their meaning is clear (AVI-YONAH 1940, 9). L. Threatte calls this way of writing 'shortening or curtailment' (THERATTE 1980, 99). For Olbia see GOP 29, nos. 15-18; 34, nos. 29-31 and many others.

40 LGPN, s.v.

41 IGDOLBIA 99. For a different position see: TOKHTASIEV 1999, 191.

42 VAYLENKO 2017, 37-38.

43 IGDOLBIA 99. For a different position see: TOKHTASIEV 1999, 191.

44 VAYLENKO 2017, 37-40 considers this inscription as an oracle which was engraved by two different persons and brought to Olbia from Athens, but he does not substantiate his suggestion. Both the script and the spelling contradict his idea. Cf. LAZZARINI 1976; VINORADOV 1979, 188.

45 LGPN, s.v.

46 GOP 25-27, nos. 1-5; IO 58 + IOSPE F 307; SEG 34: 768 (= IO 56), etc. For the cult of Apollo Delphinius in the Greek world and origin of the epiclesis see: GRAF 1979, 2-22.

47 GOP 107, no. 5, see also IGDOLBIA 99. The date of the inscription is approximate, according to the script it is not earlier than late 5th century BCE. The graffito is unfortunately lost. For details see ONSYKHLEVCH 1998, 47, esp. n. 113.

48 On the basis of the spelling Δηλφισ- for Δελφισ- in this inscription, L. Dubois suggests that the calendar graffito is dedicated not only to Apollo, but also to Artemis: he reads Δηλφισ, the epiclesis of the goddess Artemis without her name in an asyndetic form of dedication (IGDOLBIA 99). His reconstruction of the formula is not convincing and has no analogies in Greek epigraphy.

49 For the Milesian colonies of Bosporus see CIRB 800.

50 Cf. SLAVOVA 2004, 45.
Studies Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology No. 8.4/2021

BCE, and this type of inscriptions becomes common only in the Roman period.\(^4\)

Most scholars maintain that the Olbian graffito predates all the calendar inscriptions. It is however highly improbable that the inscription from the faraway city of Olbia predated the Milesian and even Athenian materials, rather than vice versa.

**CONCLUSION**

The Olbian calendar graffito SEG 30: 977 is not the oldest calendar inscription in the Greek world. Its date is the early 4\(^{th}\) century BCE according to its script and spelling, as well as the date of the skyphos. The later date does not diminish the importance of the graffito, which features a distinct script and spelling, and contains the only full list of the months of the Milesian calendar and a unique set of Apollo’s epicleseis.

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**GOP**

**IGBR**

**IGDolbia**

**IO**

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**ISM**

\(^4\) HANNAH 2005, 71 ff.; LANGDON/WATROUS 1977, 162-177 (Attica); SEG 44, 1295 (Armagus), CIG 4672 (Seleukeia on the Tigris).

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