

PANAGIOTIS BALATSOS

INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE ACADEMY

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 86 (1991) 145–154

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn



## INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE ACADEMY

### *The find*

The inscriptions which I publish here were discovered by Ph.Stavropoulos during the excavations performed by him in 1958 in the archaeological area of the Academy in Athens.<sup>1</sup> Stavropoulos extended the excavations along Telephanous St. on the east side of a wall that had been discovered previously. This is a poor and simple curled construction of stones and rubble with buttresses on its outer (west) side. In spite of its poor appearance Stavropoulos chose to call it "the wall of Hipparchos".<sup>2</sup>

The find is constituted of about a hundred tablets of slate-like schist. The tablets were discovered just inside this wall, most of them between it and part of another enigmatic wall, ca. 3.30 m. in length, that stretches somewhat obliquely along the so-called "wall of Hipparchos". The tablets were found at a level 1.80-2 m. below the ground.<sup>3</sup>

The slates are irregular in shape and of very different size.<sup>4</sup> Only sixteen of them are inscribed.<sup>5</sup> The inscriptions have been carved or scratched with a pointed tool. Partly due to the nature of the slates and their uneven surfaces most of the inscriptions are rather irregular. Words (notably proper nouns), singular letters and some other signs or symbols are distinguished, some of them clear and easy to read, others less distinct and of uncertain identification. One tablet has inscriptions on both sides (Nos. 11a, 11b).

Most of the tablets, whether inscribed or not, have a hole or incision or inward bend, mostly near one end, as for suspension. This would remind us of the lead tablets (*defixiones*, *Fluchtafeln*) designed for application on temple walls and other places.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The excavator reported the find in *Praktika* 1958, pp.12-13, and *Ergon* 1958, pp.12-14 where some items were published, among these No.1, the biggest of the inscribed tablets, which has also the longest inscription on it. The find was commented upon by E.Vanderpool, "News letter from Greece", *AJA* 63, 1959, pp.279-280 and G.Daux, "Académie de Platon", *BCH* 83, 1959, pp.579-582.

<sup>2</sup> This appellation derives from a proverb reported in the *Suda* T 733 Adler and in *Codex Bodleianus in Paroemiographi Graeci* ed. Th.Gaisford, p.60, No.511. Cf. Leutsch-Schneidewin, *Paroemiographi Graeci* I 374 (Gregorius Cyprius III 81 with the apparatus).

<sup>3</sup> See *Praktika* 1958, p.12, and 1959, pp.8-9.

<sup>4</sup> The smallest inscribed tablet (No.16) is only 3.2 x 2.7 cm., the largest (No.1) is 55.5 x 23.8 cm.

<sup>5</sup> The archaeologist Ch.Critsas together with Marie Mauzy, photograph at the Swedish Institute in Athens, and her husband Craig Mauzy, made the inventory and examination of the whole board of slates in autumn 1987. Only on sixteen there were scratchings which could be identified as letters. These tablets were then photographed by Marie Mauzy.

<sup>6</sup> See *CIA* III: 3. Appendix. *Defixionum tabellae Atticae* ed. R.Wuensch, Berlin 1897; A.Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, Paris 1904; E.Ziebarth, "Neue attische Fluchtafeln", *Nachrichten von d. kön. Ges. d. Wiss. zu Göttingen, Ph.-hist. Kl.* 1899, pp.105-135; id. "Neue Verfluchungstafeln aus Attika, Boiotien und Euboia", *Sitzungsberichte d. preuss. Ak. d. Wiss., Ph.-hist. Kl.*, Berlin 1934, pp.1022-1059.

The excavator interpreted the short wall beside which the tablets were found as part of a building and conjectured that this was a γραμματοδιδασκαλεῖον and that the inscriptions had been produced by young pupils, beginners who were learning to write.

*The inscriptions*

1

Inv.No 194

Plate XI

55.5 x.23.8 cm.

This is the largest of the inscribed tablets and the only one that has hitherto been published and commented upon.<sup>7</sup>

ΑΘΙΝΑ ΑΡΙΣ ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ  
ΔΙΜΟΣΘΕΝ[Ι]ϛ

The iota is substituted for the eta throughout. The last letter of the fourth word is readily identified as ϛ. There is no room for an eta between it and the preceding nu. In the same word there is an additional letter between Σ and Θ which may be either O or Θ (the dot may or may not be due to damage to the stone). It is observed that only one plausible instance of the dotted theta is found on the tablets.<sup>8</sup>

2

Inv.No.34

Plate XI

15.6 x 11.8 cm.

ΑΘΙΝΕΙ  
ΔΙΜΟ  
Ζ

The word in line 1 may be an Ionic form of the name Ἄθηνᾶ, either (1) Ἄθηναίη, with ι written for η, and ε for αι, or (2) Ἄθηνηι (dative), with Old Attic ē in the place of η.

3

Inv.No.42

Plate XI

16.2 x 10 cm.

ΘΗΣ ΘΔΘΣΑΙΣ  
ΣΟΘ ΟΚΛΙΣ

On the left side of the rift it is possible to read at least three letters: ΟΗΣ.

To the right of the rift there is ΘΔΘΣΑΙΣ. Perhaps the writer intended to write Θήσφοδος = Θέσφ(ι)δος and Αίσχύλος ?

4

Inv.No.33

Plate XII

10.3 x 9.8 cm.

ΑΡΤΕΜΙΔΟ[

<sup>7</sup> See above, n.1, and further SEG 19, No.37; J.Travlos, Bildlexikon zur Topographie des antiken Athens, Tübingen 1971, p.43, Abb.64.

<sup>8</sup> In No.3 the first and sixth letter resemble a dotted theta; the latter is probably omicron.



10

Inv.No. 12                      Plate XIII                      3.6 x 3.6 + 3.1 x 3.8 cm.

ΕΟ[ ]⊕

A faint horizontal line in the middle of the first sign, parallel to the bottom stroke, and a still more uncertain upper stroke, would suggest that it is an epsilon.

11a

Inv.No.14                      Plate XIII                      6.4 x 5 cm.

ΣΟ⊕  
ΣΑΡ

As the six letters cannot be read as one word, they would be best interpreted as two unfinished words. In the first line the last letter may be intended to be phi, as in No.3, line 2, so that we would have here the same proper noun, Σοφοκλῆς. In the second line Σαρ(πηδών) might be possible.

11b

Inv.No.14                      Plate XIII                      6.4 x 5 cm.

Α 

This is the other side of the slate carrying inscription No.11a. Only one letter is certain. There appears to be no reasonable interpretation to the carvings to the right. Perhaps they are meaningless "decorative" scratchings.

12

Inv.No. 35                      Plate XIII                      12.4 x 9.7 cm.

] ⚡ ΑΛΑ

The first letter appears to be a three-stroke sigma. The fourth letter could also be a delta.

It is possible that the lost left part of the slate was inscribed, but no name or other word ending in -σαλα can be suggested.<sup>11</sup> As there is much room left on the tablet it would seem that the writer intended to write more but gave up.

13

Inv.No.16                      Plate XIV                      7.9 x 5 cm.

ΒΛΙ

The leftmost sign resembles a large beta; the extra loop at the bottom may have been carved by mistake, but perhaps this sign was only intended to be some kind of decoration.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Φάρσαλα would be quite improbable.

14

Inv.No. 7 Plate XIV 5.7 x 3.6 cm.

⊕LI

To the right of the second sign a faint short vertical stroke can be discerned which may be the upper half of an iota.

15

Inv.No. 13 Plate XIV 7.5 x 5.3 cm.

E

The single sign carved to the left of this tablet resembles a digamma, but it is more probably an unfinished epsilon. If the slate is turned on one end, the sign can also be read as pi. Cf. the next item.

16

Inv.No. 19 Plate XIV 3.2 x 2.7 cm.

E

The two identical signs LL in close succession may be interpreted as Old Attic lambdas. If, however, the slate is turned on one end, a sign of the shape F is read which could be a digamma but, as in No.15, it may be an unfinished epsilon.

#### *Interpretation and dating*

##### Ph.Stavropoulos' interpretation

Ph.Stavropoulos dated the inscriptions ca. 450 - early 4th c. B.C. He based this dating upon two pieces of evidence, (1) the ceramic and other archaeological finds discovered together with the inscriptions in the same stratum, and (2) the mixture of letter forms, Old Attic as well as post-Euclidean (Ionic) forms.

From the orthographic peculiarities appearing on the inscriptions and from the holes or inward bends at the edges of most slates Stavropoulos inferred that they had been written by schoolboys at an initial stage of learning to write. This assumption led him, it appears, to the conclusion that the construction where the documents were found was a public primary school, a *γραμματοδιδασκαλείον*.

##### J.P.Lynch's objections

The interpretation and dating of the tablets made by the excavators have received wide acceptance. This is somewhat remarkable considering the fact that they were "a unique epigraphic find"<sup>12</sup> and have not been published all together and evaluated comprehensively.

---

<sup>12</sup> This was how Stavropoulos described the find in the excavation reports, *Praktika* 1958, p.12, and *Ergon* 1958, p.12.

Not until 1983 did anyone take pains to investigate more closely into the nature of the evidence and the validity of the arguments used by the excavators, especially Stavropoulos, for the conclusion that the tablets are school texts from the 5th c. B.C. In an article published that year<sup>13</sup> J.P.Lynch vigorously disputes this position. He bases his criticism upon the following arguments:

(1) The alphabetical order of the names of the deities on inscription No.1 is unattested until the 3rd c. B.C. and is first exemplified in the schools of Graeco-Roman Egypt rather than Athens.

(2) The place where the inscriptions were found cannot be related with certainty to any period in the history of the Academy, although they were found together with ceramics and other archaeological objects of the archaic and classical periods in the same stratum, because the stratigraphy of the place raises questions; Lynch's suspicions are particularly strong as regards the identification of the so-called enclosure wall with the proverbial "wall of Hipparchos".<sup>14</sup>

(3) The interpretation of the place where the tablets were found as a γραμματοδιδασκαλεῖον is liable to doubt, seeing that there is no literary evidence to suggest that the Academy was used for teaching, especially not for elementary teaching, in the 5th century B.C.

(4) The mixture of letter forms may be explained as a failed attempt at historical verisimilitude made in a later period.

(5) The "Demosthenes" written on No.1 may not be the writer but the famous orator, imagined by a writer in a later period to have undersigned with his name when he had completed his writing exercise.

(6) Besides this, Lynch takes a rather sceptical attitude to the change of pronunciation [ε:] > [e:] > [i:] as going on as early as the 5th century B.C.

#### Considerations and conclusions

The criticism offered by Lynch is a welcome and useful scrutiny of the conclusions drawn by Stavropoulos regarding the nature, origin and date of the inscriptions. A thorough investigation is the more important as the research in the area of the Academy cannot yet be

<sup>13</sup> J.P.Lynch, "The 'Academy Tablets' (SEG XIX, No.37)", ZPE 52,1983, pp. 115-121.

<sup>14</sup> In a subsequent article, "Hipparchos' wall in the Academy at Athens: A closer look at the tradition" in: Studies Presented to Sterling Dow (Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Monograph 10), Durham, N.C. 1984, pp.173-179, Lynch points out that the paroemiographical tradition concerning the so-called "wall of Hipparchos" is divided in two variants, one stating that the tyrant caused the construction of a wall περὶ τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν, the other that he had the wall built παρὰ τὴν Πυθίαν. In both variants the point is that he collected much money for the project but delayed construction and failed to complete it. Lynch convincingly shows that the second version is the original one. He also observes that no literary source implies that the Academy was an enclosed area and points out that the archaic boundary stone with the inscription ἵοπος τῆς ἡκαδεμείας which has been found in situ at the northern outskirts of the area indicates that the Academy, like the Agora, was an open area in the 6th c. B.C.

said to have arrived at a state of clarity and agreement. The excavations that have been carried through so far have been comparatively limited and tentative considering the probably large extent of the area. We still lack a general view of the Academy, both its extent and its contents. Lynch is right in emphasizing that further clarification of the topography of the region is highly called for and necessary for more precise conclusions concerning the find treated here as well as other problems regarding this renowned area. Thus much said, I will now examine Lynch's arguments and decide upon their validity.

(1) The observation concerning the alphabetical order of the gods on inscription No.1 is not conclusive. Firstly, it is only natural and to be expected that we should find this order - which has hitherto only been evidenced in the Greek schools of Egypt - exactly in Athens from where the Macedonian -Ptolemaic school system had its origin. Secondly, we cannot be certain that the alphabetical order was really intended by the writer. The three deities may well have been ordered according to importance, with Athena in the first place, followed by Ares who was naturally regarded as more important than Artemis. Thirdly, the apparent alphabetical order may be accidental when the words are only three.

(2) The objections which Lynch presents concerning the conditions at the place where the tablets were found, concerning the other finds discovered together with them and generally the stratigraphy of the place belong to the questions which would be less difficult to assess if the archaeological evidence were more conclusive and extensive. Nevertheless I believe that the description given by Stavropoulos<sup>15</sup> is a clear enough indication that the tablets do not belong to a late period. The objects found together with them are of different date and of various kind but, to judge from the information given, no objects belonging to post-classical periods were found among these at the depth of 1.80-2 m., nor in the strata above this level. Lynch's<sup>16</sup> suggestion that the place inside the buttressed wall was a dumping ground of mixed archaeological context is quite plausible, but only to a certain extent. The absence of objects of later periods in the upper strata shows that the place was not used for the purpose over a long time. It appears that our find, together with the archaic and classical objects found with it, was dumped on this place at some later point of time when discarded matter of architecture, ceramics, handicraft and other things were removed to make room for new constructions. It may be supposed that this happened in connection with the construction of the gymnasium which is situated in the southern part of the Academy area. When it was built in the late Hellenistic or early Roman period, much architectural materials from classical buildings were used in the construction of its walls.<sup>17</sup>

Lynch makes a great cause of Stavropoulos' unfortunate identification of the buttressed wall with "the wall of Hipparchos". In *Praktika* 1959, pp.9-10, Stavropoulos maintains and

---

<sup>15</sup> *Praktika* 1958, p.12, and 1959, p.8.

<sup>16</sup> *ZPE* 52, 1983, p.120.

<sup>17</sup> See Travlos, o.c. (above, n.7) p.43.

confirms his conclusion made in 1958. It is obvious, however, that no part of this wall can be shown to be archaic. This fact is generally recognized.<sup>18</sup> Lynch shows<sup>19</sup> that, if that proverbial wall was real, it was not built around the Academy. However, this mistaken identification on the part of the excavator is not as such fatal to the early dating of the tablets, as these are connected with the early objects in the same stratum, not with the wall. The deposition beside the wall may have happened earlier or later in post-classical times; the matter deposited belonged to pre-classical and classical times.

(3) Lynch rightly doubts that the architectural construction - actually only a wall of 3.30 m. length - at which the tablets were discovered, was a γραμματοδιδασκαλείον. This was certainly a second hasty conclusion drawn by the excavator. There is no other evidence to indicate this than the tablets themselves. We have no literary indications of elementary schools in the Academy area. However, the dating of the tablets is of course not dependent on the existence of such a school at the spot where they were found; they were brought there from another, perhaps rather distant, place, probably from the city, where the elementary schooling normally took place in privately owned διδασκαλεία. Besides, there is also the possibility that the inscriptions are not school documents at all, see below, n.25.

(4) Lynch's suggestion that the mixture of letter forms might be explained as an attempt at historical verisimilitude made at a later time, and his intimated suspicion even of modern forgery,<sup>20</sup> can be dismissed as entirely unfounded. To scratch signs that might be read as Latin letters (L, F) would be a too foolish and clumsy attempt for an ancient imitator to do, if he wanted to feign an earlier stage of Greek writing (Old Attic),<sup>21</sup> and it would be a quite unconceivable awkwardness for a modern falsifier.

(5) Stavropoulos<sup>22</sup> interpreted the name Demosthenes read on No.1 (and perhaps he also read it on No.2) as well as Sophocles (No.3), and also Aristeides on No.6, as undersigned by the writers, young schoolboys in Stavropoulos' view. Lynch accepts this interpretation and bases his objection on it: he suggests that a late archaizing writer imagined that Athenian schoolboys in the classical period undersigned their writing exercises with their own names. To my knowledge, we have no parallel that would show that such a practice ever existed. In Athens there are no parallels, and school documents from Egypt offer no indication of it. It seems, then, that the excavator drew a third<sup>23</sup> unfounded conclusion on this point. School documents from Egypt show that it was customary that the pupils listed names of many different categories in their writing exercises: gods, heroes and other mythological

---

<sup>18</sup> Travlos, o.c. (above, n.7), p. 42; R.E. Wycherley, *The Stones of Athens*, Princeton 1978, p.224.

<sup>19</sup> See above, n.14.

<sup>20</sup> ZPE 52, 1983, p.120.

<sup>21</sup> Only a person of some education and knowledge of archaic and classical scripts may be credited with having ventured such an imaginative imitation.

<sup>22</sup> *Praktika* 1958, pp.12-13, and *Ergon* 1958, pp.13-14.

<sup>23</sup> The other two being the interpretations of the buttressed wall and of the architectural construction (wall) where the tablets were discovered.

personages, together with names of historical persons, politicians, generals, authors, poets.<sup>24</sup> If our tablets are school documents, which is not certain though rather probable,<sup>25</sup> we should not expect that the personal names read on them are the names of the young writers. They certainly designate famous men, contemporary or earlier. Consequently, the occurrences of "Demosthenes" should be expected to designate a renowned personage, presumably an Athenian, but not necessarily the orator. Considering that there is no decisive evidence in favour of a late dating, the person meant is most probably the renowned Athenian general who died in 413.<sup>26</sup> On inscription No.3 "Sophocles" is certainly the tragedian, appearing together with the names of two more poets - presupposed that the interpretation of the first line is correct, which is uncertain. On No.6 we presumably read the name of the famous Athenian conservative politician and general Aristeides (ca. 540-468).<sup>27</sup> On No.4 the most probable reading is Ἀρτέμιδο[ς], as there is no sufficiently renowned personage of the name Artemidoros in any period.

#### *Concluding remarks*

The most important feature of these inscriptions is the orthographic mistakes. We find no less than 7 certain instances of ι written instead of η (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5), and 4 less certain ones (Nos. 1, 2, 6, 7); 1 instance of ι for ει (No. 6); 1 possible instance of ε for αι (No. 2); and 1 possible instance of υ for η (No. 7).

The interpretation of these orthographic mistakes by Ph.Stavropoulos as being made by pupils while training orthography appears reasonable. The pupils spelled according to their pronunciation, because they were still ignorant of the orthography. This is certainly the most natural explanation.

These documents are of great importance for the history of the Attic dialect and thus for the development of the Greek language in general. Certainly, the predominant opinion up till now has been that such changes of pronunciation as are evidenced here did not begin until the Hellenistic period and that they developed slowly, to be completed much later. This opinion is now changing.

Clearly, the value and importance of these documents are entirely dependent of the dating. I hope to have shown through the above examination that there is little or no evidence for a post-classical dating. In any case, the itacistic spelling cannot be used any more as a reason for doubt on an early date. There now exists the evidence for early changes of pronunciation

---

<sup>24</sup> See O.Guéraud & P.Jouguet, *Un livre d'écolier du III<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.C.* Publ. de la Soc. Roy. ég. de Papyrol., Textes et Documents II, Le Caire 1938, 1.67-70, 72-83, 86-92, 95-103; W.Clarysse & A.Wouters, "A schoolboy's exercise in the Chester Beatty Library", *Ancient Society* 1, 1970, 1, p.217; P.Bouriant ed. P.Collart, Paris 1926, 1. I-V; PUG II 53.

<sup>25</sup> Considering the lack of parallels, the question should perhaps be left open; these documents may also be graffiti of some other kind. Anyhow, this is not decisive for the dating.

<sup>26</sup> J.Kirchner, *Prosopographia Attica* I. Berlin 1901, No.3585; RE s.v., No.5.

<sup>27</sup> J.Kirchner, o.c. (n.39), No.1695; RE s.v., No.1.

which has been presented comprehensively lately by S.-T.Teodorsson.<sup>28</sup> There is broad orthographic evidence from the classical period - and even earlier - which shows that the changes in pronunciation began very early. This means that we should not be very surprised to find the orthographic confusion appearing on these inscriptions as early as the 5th century B.C. The dating to that time is thus acceptable also as far as pronunciation is concerned. A date by the end of the 5th century appears most probable.

Göteborg

Panagiotis Balatsos

---

<sup>28</sup> In *The Phonemic System of the Attic Dialect 400-340 B.C.*, Göteborg 1974, pp.90-91 Teodorsson lists 19 examples from the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. - among these those of our inscription No. 1 - and 17 from the 4th century, in which ι was written instead of η. Besides there are 9 examples of the reversed spelling from these centuries. See also *ibid.* pp.75-111 where other kinds of orthographic mistakes from pre-classical and classical times are collected, which are related to vowel change. L.Threatte, *The Grammar of Attic Inscriptions*, Berlin 1980, p.165, accepts the early date of our inscriptions, but nevertheless he maintains that confusion of η and ι in inscriptions on stone is extremely rare before ca. 150 A.D.



Nr. 1



Nr. 2



Nr. 3

Inschriften aus Athen



Nr. 4



Nr. 5



Nr. 6



Nr. 7



Nr. 8



Nr. 9



Nr. 10



Nr. 11a



Nr. 11b



Nr. 12



Nr. 13



Nr. 14



Nr. 15



Nr. 16



Inschriften aus Athen