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NYPHION


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In *Archeologia Classica* 17 (1965) p. 193, G. Manganaro published the text of an inscription found by P. Orsi in Monte Casale.¹ It is a limestone slab, 53 cm. long, 13 cm. high, 6 cm. deep, split down the middle. The letters are 1 cm. high, and their archaic form suggests a date not later than 6th century B.C. The editor reads the following text:

Kal(l)ikrãt*ew Kãlow ı to(Ë) [Kal(l)]¤p(p)ou nÒyow, A‡sa Mounf¤vn tokeÇw, hoi κ'έλαβον χόρε(ν) hoi, hós mè[λ]en ãmeino-ν καὶ hós ãµ' εἶµαι (= εἶναι [sic]).

He comments as follows: "Sembra trattarsi senz'altro di un documento – anche se metrico – di natura giuridica, relativo all'acquisto, da parte di due genitori, di un terreno per la sepoltura (χώρη!) del figlio Mounf¤vn – a mio avviso corruzione di Morf¤vn – e di sè stessi." This is a strange inscription ("in qualche punto lascia perplessi" says the editor);² it is also an interesting inscription. I want to emphasize the name A‰sa, up to the present not documented, and the funerary significance of χόρη, which is missing in dictionaries.³ In this paper, however, I am going to concentrate on the name Mounf¤vn.

The lettering of the inscription is like that of other archaic inscriptions of the Syracusan area: trident chi, rho caudata, close het etc. The most peculiar features are the my and the ny. The ny appears in three different forms: /\, /\ and /\ as it is seen in the infinitive EI/\AI.⁴ The my is indicated by the sign \/, as we see in VÆLEN, AVEION and A\VV/. This letter, created to avoid any confusion with the /\ (= /n/), has no parallels in Greek epigraphy. These considerations help to interpret correctly the name /\OUNFIONOS. It is rather difficult to assume that this comes from Morf¤vn, as the editor proposes,⁵ because this explanation supposes a phonetic evolution not known in Greek. We cannot even consider the Mounf’iata which Fr. Ribezzo read in an inscription of Mazara del Vallo since M. Segre showed that the correct reading was MIOUNFHLI, i.e. M(íarkov) 'Ioúν(τον) Φήλα(κα)⁶. As we have seen, in the alphabet of this inscription the phoneme /m/ is shown by the sign \/, while /\ indicates /n/. If we accept that

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¹ Today the identification of M. Casale with the ancient Κοσμέναι (a Syracusan military settlement founded in the second half of the 7th century) is accepted. See A. Di Vita "Un contributo all’urbanistica greca di Sicilia: Casmene", *Atti VII cong. int. arch. class.* (II), Rome 1961, pp. 69-77. The inscription today is in the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Siracusa, n. 50114. My thanks to Dott.ssa Concetta Ciurcina who allowed me to see it.


³ I have found it only in Athens, IG I suppl. 491, 32 (Φιλίππη. / Εμ(μι)ένο χώρα, "ita recte videtur haec legisse Koehler, χώρας de sepulturae loco dictum interpretatus", Kirchoff *ad loc.*) and in Catania, IG XIV 464.

⁴ The same letter is found in the inscription of a Sicilian caduceus (or weight) published by L. Robert (*Collection Froehner* n. 83), whose alphabet F. Bechtel studied (*KZ* 46 [1914] p. 294). In fact, in this object the ny has four strokes ("so dass man das Zeichen für ein My hält"), and it differs only from the my because of the shorter length of the fourth stroke.

⁵ A. Landi, *Antroponimia siciliotae*, Rome 1981 p. 82 ambiguously repeats this explanation: "Nome corrotto per Μορφίων? (Manganaro)".

EI\(\Lambda\)AI equals εινοι, we should accept that \(\Lambda\)ΟΥΝΦΙΟΝΟΣ equals Νυνφιονος. This name can be best explained as the Doric form of the name Νύνφιον (where \(\textsc{Y}\) = /u/), written thus by a speaker of Ionic dialect (where \(\textsc{Y}\) = /ü/) who used <OY> in order to show the u-pronunciation of the Doric form of the name.\(^7\) The fact that this inscription was written in a Ionic dialect (l. 2 χόρη, l. 3 είναι) and was found in a Syracusan place (and therefore of Doric dialect) supports this hypothesis.

This interpretation must be completed with two supplementary clarifications:

a) It is generally accepted that the Ionic of Euboea preserved the u-pronunciation of <Y>; given that all the Ionic colonies in Sicily were Euboeans, this phonetic datum seems to contradict my interpretation. Nevertheless, recently it has been recognized that the available documents imply only that <Y> had the value of /u/ when the Euboean colonization occurred (8th - 7th cent.), not that the shift /u/ > /ü/ did not take place later.\(^8\) In any case, we may assume that the later arrival of other Ionians brought the sound /ü/.

b) The ν of the word νύμφη was short (cf. the accentuation of Νύμφης). This fact could contradict the interpretation Νυνφιόν = Νυνφιον because it supposes the use of the digraph <OY>, normally used to indicate a diphthong or a long vowel, to demonstrate the short /u/. But the same phenomenon is found in a Corinthian vase of the 6th cent. B.C.: 'Αχιλλευός (Kretschmer Vaseninschr. p. 38), where <OY> denotes the second element (short) of the diphthong /eu/, and, in Boeotic, in Νομφόδορος (IG VII 3184).

Thus the mysterious Μουνφίων disappears. Νυνφίων is an ordinary name but only sparcey documented. The only examples that I know of are Σωκράτης Νυνφίωνος of Rhodes (IG XII 1, 49, 53 = Sylloge\(^3\) 619,53) and L. Argentarius Nymphio in a Latin inscription from Spain (CIL II 5493). The inscription from Casmenae provides the oldest example of this name and, at the same time, an early testimony of the cult of the nymphs in the Syracusan territory.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) The digraph <OY> in this inscription indicates /o!/, or even /a:/, as we see in the genitive -π(π)ου.


\(^9\) With regard to the rest of the inscription, I would propose a new reading:

\[\text{[K]ωλικρατές καλός, οιο[...]} \text{ισπ(π)ον νόθος, Αίσσα Νουνφι-}\]
\[\text{ος τοκες ήοι, κέλαβον χόρε(ν) ή(ο)ιμής με[λ]εινο-}\]
\[\text{ν και ήος άμε' είναι,}\]

i.e.: "The lovely Kalikrates. (...), the notus of (...),ippus, Aisa, the daughter of Nynphio, (were) his parents, and they took this plot of land to care better for him and to remain close to him", where Kalikrates is the deadman (not his father) and Nynphio his mother's father (not the deadman).