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THE DEVOTIO OF XANTHIPPOS. MAGIC AND MYSTERY CULTS IN OLBIA

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1. The Xanthippos Graffito

On the foot of a black-glazed kylix of the fifth century B.C., found near the supposed sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at the Western temenos of Olbia,¹ now in the Archeological Institute of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, Kiev, the graffito reads as follows:

Ξάνθιππος (sic) Δημήτρι Περσεφόνη Ἰάκχῳι, then διδημητριο.



Fig. 1. Ostrakon from Olbia
Drawing by A.S. Rusyayewa,
Zemledelčeskie kul'ty v Ol'vii (Kiev 1979) 46

This text is followed by unintelligible signs. Under Ξάνθιππος there appear the letters ΞΑΔΑΝΘΙΕΑΔ, or with resolution of the first monogram ΞΑΝΔΑΝ-ΘΙΕΑΔ. According to Rusyayeva and Vinogradov, Xanthippos is the name of the person who dedicated the kylix for the Eleusinian triad "to the temple of Demeter": Δημήτριον with ἐξ omitted or understood.² But there is more than the Eleusinian triad: δι (omitted by Rusyayeva without comments) stands for Δι<ί> or Δι<ονύκωι>. There are good reasons to believe that this graffito is not an ordinary dedication, but a magical *defixio* (in broad modern sense of the word) or, to be more precise, a *devotio*: (1) note the circular script with magical signs after δημητριον.³ (2) the letters ΞΑΝΔΑΝ-ΘΙΕΑΔ represent a scrambling of Xanthippos' name

with insertion of the magical monogram Δ,⁴ framed by the letters *delta* and *epsilon* which are attested in other magical graffiti from Olbia: the combination of the letters of the name of the cursed with initials of chthonic deities presumably reinforces the *devotio*. (3) such long lists of chthonic deities are typical for magical spells, not for ordinary votives. (4) the graffito was found in one of the small pits (apparently near a chthonic sanctuary) which contained unbroken pots (a well known magical practice); thus the kylix was not intended as a *temple* dedication. There are two possibilities of construing the text: (1) Ξάνθιππος (scil. ἀνιεροῖ) Δημήτριον (m. acc.) Δημήτρι etc., in which case Xanthippos is a cursor and Demetrios is his victim; (2) Xanthippos is the victim consecrated to Demeter etc. by an anonymous enemy/magician. (2) is almost certainly correct: the scrambling of Xanthippos' name proves that he is the victim. The name of the cursed is written in the beginning as usually in *defixiones*. Once it is accepted that the graffito is a magical *devotio* of Xanthippos himself rather than a dedication of the kylix by Xanthippos, the reading Δημήτριον becomes unlikely. I propose Δημητρίο(ις) (sc. θεοῖς) where Deme-

¹ Editio princeps: A.S. Rusyayeva, "Kul't Kori-Persefoni v Ol'vii", *Arkheologia* (Kiev) 1971, Nr. 4, 28-40; cf. eadem, *Zemledel'cheskie kul'ty v Ol'vii dogetsogo vremeni* (Kiev 1979), 46, fig. 27, Nr. 1. — N. Ehrhardt, *Milet und seine Kolonien* (Frankfurt 1983) 169; J.G. Vinogradov, *Politicheskaiia istoriia Ol'viiskogo polisa* (Moscow 1989), 130. Description of the Hermes and Aphrodite complex in: J.G. Vinogradov and A.S. Rusyayeva, "Kalendar' i kul't Apollona v Ol'vii", in: *Issledovaniia po antichnoi arkheologii Severnogo Prichernomoria* (Kiev 1980) 20ff.; summary in A.V. Lebedev, "Pharnabazos, the Diviner of Hermes", above pp. 269-278.

² Vinogradov and Rusyayeva, "Kul't Apollona i kalendar'", 51, n. 15.

³ For circular script in magical graffiti from Olbia see, e.g. I. Tolstoi, *Grecheskie graffiti drevnich gorodov Severnogo Prichernomoria* (Moscow-Leningrad 1953) Nr. 63; 2); see also above (n. 1) on the Pharnabazos' and Aristoteles' curse letters.

⁴ Also attested in Tolstoi, Nr. 66 and the Pharnabazos' graffito, see above, "Pharnabazos, the Diviner of Hermes", pp. 269-278, especially p. 270.

trioi corresponds to τοῖς παρὰ Δήμητρι (θεοῖς πᾶσι) in *defixiones*.⁵ Iakchos is very rare in *defixiones*: Audollent, *DT*, Nr. 76 καταγρά(φω) Εἰάχχῳ τε ἤ[ρ]ωσί τε κτλ. (from Attica). Since Zeus is virtually unknown in magical spells (Audollent, *DT*, 7.12 is uncertain), the supplement Δι(ονύκωι) is preferable. The resulting text reads as follows:

Ξάνθιππος (sic) Δήμητρι, Περσεφόνηι, Ἰάκχῳ, Δι(ονύκωι), Δημητρίοι(ς) (sc. θεοῖς πᾶσι ἀνάκειται vel ἱερὸς ἔστω).⁶

The lettering can hardly be earlier than fourth century B.C. The name Xanthippos is elsewhere attested only once in Olbia and the North Black Sea area: in *Nadpisi Ol'vii* Nr. 5 in which an Athenian Ξάνθιππος Ἀριστοφῶντος Ἐρχιεύς is granted προξενία, πολιτεία, ἀτέλεια πάντων χρημάτων by the demos of Olbiopolites. The proxeny is dated by the editors to the first half of the fourth century B.C. Given the exceptional rarity of the name in this area and the proximity of dates, the identity of our Xanthippos with the Athenian of *NO* 5 seems possible, though not demonstrable.⁷ Xanthippos, the son of Aristophon, may have been an Athenian merchant (e.g. involved in grain trade with Olbia). Presumably, his commercial and social success in Olbia provoked φθόνος of a business rival who "devoted" him to chthonic deities to get rid of a too successful and well known competitor.⁸ It is conceivable that the black kylix with the fatal spell buried at the Western temenos was a direct "response" to the honorary stele *leukolithos* erected at the official Eastern temenos near the temple of Apollo Delphinios.⁹ The form Ξάνθιππος in the spell may be explained on the assumption that the name of the cursed was copied by an illiterate person from the stele where it appears in dative Ξανθίππωι, but on the other hand, it may indicate an early confusion between long and short vowels.

2. The Kabeiroi Graffito

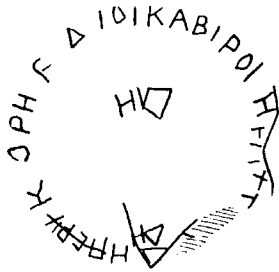


Fig. 2. Ostrakon from Olbia O-72/252: recto and verso.

Photograph by A.S. Rusyayeva, *Zemledel'cheskie kul'ty v Ol'vii* (Kiev 1979) 120.

This graffito appears on the foot of a black-glazed kylix of the first half of the 4th century B.C., found at the same location and now in the Archeological Institute of Ukraine, Kiev.¹⁰ The first editor takes it as a dedication of the kylix to the listed deities. But the formal similarity with the preceding graffito leads to the conclusion that this is a magical *devotio*, too. The name of the victim was probably written in the damaged area before ΔΗ. Rusyayeva correctly supplements datives Δή(μητρι), Περ<σεφόνη), Κόρη (dative), but then, surprisingly, takes ΔΙ and οἱ κάβιροι as invocation of Zeus and the Kabeiroi in nominative (*Zemled. Kul'ty*, 48). There are two serious possibilities:

- (a) Δίῳ Καβίρωι (Atticism for Δίῳι Καβίρωι)¹¹ or
- (b) Διῶ{ι} (νύκωι), Καβίρωι (or Καβίρωι(ς)).

⁵ Audollent, *DT*, 1-12; Sometimes οἱ παρὰ Δάματρι are the deceased (κολαζόμενοι, *DT* 3 A, 12-13). Δημήτριοι, "the dead" Plut. *Mor.* 943 b.

⁶ To account for the final *nu* one might try to read Δημητρίοι(ς) Ὀν(νηι). Onnes and Tonnes were the names of the Kabeiroi in the Milesian cult.

⁷ Rusyayeva admits that Xanthippos was an Athenian visitor without identifying him with Xanthippos *NO* 5. Vinogradov's objections to this (*ibid.*) are based on the assumption that the graffito was written by Xanthippos himself, and so are invalid.

⁸ For parallels see Chr. Faraone, in *Magica Hiera* ed. by Chr. Faraone and O. Obink (New York-Oxford 1991), 3-32; J.G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford 1992) 151ff.

⁹ The Xanthippos stele was found east of Delphinion, *Nadpisi Ol'vii*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Editio princeps: A.S. Rusyayeva, "Kul't Kori-Persefoni v Ol'vii", *Arkheologia* (Kiev), 1971 Nr. 4, 28-40; cf. eadem, *Zemledel'cheskie kul'ty v Ol'vii* (Kiev 1979) 47, fig. 28, Nr. 12.

¹¹ Less probably Δίῳι(ς) Καβίρωι(ς). Dual Δίῳιν Καβίρωιν might be considered only as Atticism. Supplement Δι<ο-σκούρωι> would be too hazardous (cf. Διόσκουροι Κόβειροι in Delos, S.G. Cole, *Theoi Megaloi: the Cult of the Great Gods at Samothrace* (Leiden 1984) 78ff. and Appendix I, Nr. 25ff.).

(a) Δῖος Κάβριος can mean either the same as Διὸς Κάβριος, i.e. Pais, or "The Divine Kabeiros", i.e. the elder Kabeiros. (b) In favour of this possibility speaks the parallelism with the Xanthippos graffito. In the Theban Kabirion the pair was distinguished as Kabeiros and his Pais (Paus. 9.25,5), i.e. Kabeiros alone stands for Kabeiros-Father. Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 1,917 gives their names of the Theban pair as Zeus and Dionysos.¹² What follows after καβίροι is uncertain, the comparison with the Xanthippos graffito suggests [Δ]ημητρ[ίους]. The text, then, can be established as follows:

(ὁ δεινά) Δή(μητρι), Περ(σεφόνη), Κόρη, Διο(ι)(νύκοι), Καβίρωι, [Δ]ημητρ[ίους] (scil. θεοῖς
πᾶσι ἀνάκειται vel ἱερὸς ἔστω).

The meaning of the magical letters ιη (?) in the middle calls for *ars nesciendi*. However, the isolated letter after Κόρη, if epsilon, may be interpreted as Ἐ(κότηι) or Ἐ(ρμηῖ). The lettering is similar to that of the curse against Pharnabazos which I attribute to the magician Aristoteles and date to c. 400 B.C.¹³ The occurrence of Atticisms makes the similarity even more striking.

It was a common practice of the ancient magic to bury magical spells near chthonic sanctuaries, particularly near temples of Demeter and Kore.¹⁴ This text suggests that the Xanthippos graffito was found near the chthonic sanctuary of Demeter and Kore-Persephone, the *Demetreion* of Olbia. Hence Iakchos and Kabeiroi of our texts were worshipped in the same sanctuary at the time of Xanthippos. Although much has been written on the cult of Dionysos in Olbia, the question of the localization of his sanctuary has not been sufficiently clarified. If our restoration of the name of Dionysos in the two graffiti is correct, the answer lies at hand: at least from the late fifth century B.C. Dionysos was worshipped in the Demetreion at the Western temenos.

The cult of Mother with Daughter (Demeter-Kore) is an exact counterpart of the cult of the Father with Son (Zeus-Kabeiros and Dionysos-Iakchos). This parallelism is reflected in the iconography; cf. the figurine of Demeter with small Kore on the shoulder with the similar figurine of the Kabeiroi pair.¹⁵ The elder Kabeiros may have been identified in Olbia with Zeus, while his Pais was identified with Iakchos in a kind of assimilation of the old Milesian worship of Kabeiroi to the new Eleusinian cult introduced from Athens in the last quarter of the fifth century B.C. The appearance of the name Persephone in the Xanthippos graffito (which may be more recent) possibly reflects Athenian influence.¹⁶ Θεοὶ Σαμόθρακες are attested in Olbian inscriptions only from the end of the fourth century B.C.¹⁷ The original old cult of Kabeiroi in Olbia attested by monuments from the sixth century B.C. almost certainly derives from the metropolis.¹⁸ It is remarkable that the devotion formula ἀνατίθημι Δάματρι καὶ Κόραι καὶ τοῖς παρὰ Δάματρι is found almost exclusively in the *defixiones* from Caria (Audollent, *DT*, 1-12). The rural population of the Milesian chora (Gergithes) was of Carian-Anatolian origin; its main gods were Demeter (with a sanctuary at Assessos) and Kabeiroi.¹⁹ It is reasonable to suppose that the magical formulae of *devotio* to Demeter, Kore and Kabeiroi were brought to Olbia by the colonists in the 6th

¹² Cf. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambr., Mass. 1985) 281.

¹³ Lebedev, "Pharnabazos, the Diviner of Hermes", above pp. 269-278.

¹⁴ A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris 1904) CXVI; for fourteen tablets with defixiones in the temple of Demeter and Kore on Akrocorinth see D.R. Jordan, *GRBS* 26 (1985) Nr. 55; N. Bookidis and R.S. Stroud, *Demeter and Persephone in Ancient Corinth* (Princeton 1987) 30 ff; J. Gager, *Curse tablets and Binding spells* (above, n. 8) 18 and n. 92.

¹⁵ Demeter with Kore on shoulder: E.I. Levi and L.M. Slavin, "Terrakoty iz Ol'vii. Terrakoty Severnogo Prichernomoria", *Svod arkeologicheskikh istochnikov*, 1970 vyp. Γ1-11, p. 33-54; Rusyayeva, *Zemledel'cheskie kul'ty* (above, n. 1), 45, fig. 26, Nr. 2.

¹⁶ Rusyayeva, *op. cit.* 47 fig. 28 collects 9 more graffiti with the name of Kore dated to the fifth or the first half of the fourth century B.C. some of which are magical; there is only one with Persephone (*ibid.* 46, fig. 27, Nr. 2) and its lettering is more recent. Iakchos appears on one fourth century graffito, Tolstoi Nr. 68.

¹⁷ IOSPE I² 191; *Nadpisi Ol'vii* Nr. 67; S. Guettel Cole, *Theoi Megaloi*, Appendix I, Nr. 1-2 (with references to outdated editions and imprecise dates).

¹⁸ Cult of Kabeiroi at Didyma: J. Fontenrose, *Didyma* (Berkeley 1988) 152ff.

¹⁹ Noel Robertson, "Government and Society at Miletus", 525 - 442 B.C., *Phoenix* XLI/4 (1987) 356-398.

century B.C.²⁰ And if so, they brought the cults of these deities, too. The mysterious chthonic sanctuary outside the walls of Olbia in Zayachya Balka (c. 525 - 450 B.C.) has been tentatively identified as Demetrium or Kabirion.²¹ The amazing quantity of animal and fish bones found here indicates that its main ritual consisted in eating and, by implication, drinking. Olbian terracotta figurines of the late sixth century B.C. probably represent Demeter Kabireiaia.²² The fusion of Demeter and Meter is well attested from the fifth century on,²³ and it is especially plausible in Olbia in view of the Anatolian origin of her Demeter cult. In a 4th century B.C. relief in limestone from Olbia Hermes Kadmilos appears as propolos of Kybele together with Hekate.²⁴

Let us draw some conclusions. The two graffiti discussed above are of exceptional importance both for the history of magic and mystery cults in Olbia. They indicate that by the first half of the fourth century B.C. at the location of or near the 1975 altar complex a chthonic sanctuary must have existed where the Eleusinian triad Demeter, Persephone, Iakkhos was worshipped together with Dionysos and the Kabeiroi. All these deities were grouped as Demetrioι, and so the sanctuary may have been known to Olbiopolites as Demetreion. Bacchic initiations were performed here, as the clay phalli make it clear. This is in line with our hypothesis that Pharnabazos (who worked at the same location) was not only a magician, but also an Orpheotelestes. The temenos of the Demeter and Kore temple was widely used as a place for depositing *defixiones*. It has not been made clear by the excavators that the distribution of magical spells and other magical objects in this area can be used for a more precise localisation of the Demetreion of Olbia. The solution of this question should be left to archeologists. I will confine myself to some tentative remarks to stimulate further discussion. The identification of the 1975 altar complex as a temple of Hermes and Aphrodite proposed by Rusyayeva and Vinogradov does not seem to be the only possible or the most plausible one.²⁵ We should distinguish at least two successive stages. The 1975 altar originally belonged to Apollo, as the Andokides graffito with dedication to Apollo Delphinios, Iatros etc. proves, that was found right under the altar. Hermes and Aphrodite were worshipped here as *theoi symbomoi* of Apollo. This complex flourished during the first half of the fifth century and had no relation to either mystery cults or magic. Sometime in the second half of the fifth century, most probably in the last quarter, the altar of Apollo was demolished and the site was converted into the chthonic sanctuary described above. The demolition of a vertical altar can be easily explained by its incompatibility with the new chthonic cult. The central position of the Eleusinian triad in the new sanctuary indicates that its organization was based on Athenian model. It is in the last quarter of the fifth century that Olbia certainly becomes a member of the First Delian League. The introduction of the Eleusinian cult in the cities of *symmachoi* was an important issue in the Athenian religious-political propaganda. It seems therefore very likely that the reorganization of the Olbian Demetreion was a direct result of the *Aparche* decree (416/415 B.C.).²⁶ And it is in the last decade of the fifth century B.C. that

²⁰ I am suggesting elsewhere that Gergithes may have been among the colonists who came to Low Bug region c. 550-525 B.C. A.V. Lebedev, "The Oracle of Apollo Didymeus and the Democratic Revolution in Borysthene-Olbia after 494 B.C.", in preparation.

²¹ J.I. Kozub, "Drevneishii kul'tovyi kompleks Ol'vii", *Khudozhestvennaia kul'tura i arkhologia antichnogo mira* (Moscow 1976) 124-130; the excavator hesitates between Kabirion, Demetrium (similar to the one in Nymphaion) or a sanctuary of Aphrodite.

²² Rusyayeva, *Zemledel'cheskie kul'ty* (above, n. 1) 95 and p. 98 fig. 46

²³ G. Sfameni Gasparro, "Demetra nel coro dell 'Elena", in: *Hommages a Maarten J. Vermaseren*, vol. III (Leiden 1978), 1148-1187; on Hermes 1168ff.

²⁴ Vermaseren, *CCCA*, VI, Nr. 520-521; Rusyayeva, *Zemled. kul'ty* (above, n. 1), 112 identifies the triad as Kybele, Kore-Persephone and Hermes Kadmilos. On the type see M.J. Vermaseren, "Kybele und Merkur", in: *Festschrift Dörner* (Leiden 1978) 956-966.

²⁵ J.G. Vinogradov and A.S. Rusyayeva, "Kul't Apollona i kalendar' v Ol'vii" (above, n. 1) 20ff. The authors seem to hesitate themselves about their identification when they acknowledge that the temple of Demeter must have been situated "not far" from the 1975 complex, *ibid.* p. 51, n. 16.

²⁶ *IG* I3 78, cf. Isocr. 4,31; B. Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen zur Religionspolitik und politischen Propaganda Athens im Delisch-Attischen Seebund*, (München 1990), 167 ff (on the date 224ff.), argues for 416/5.

Bacchic symbols appear on Olbian coins.²⁷ It is natural to conclude that this unprecedented political promotion of the Dionysos cult in Olbia at c. 410 B.C. was also inspired from Athens and accompanied by the introduction of the Eleusinian cult. The association of Dionysos with Kore and Eleusinia in the Olbian Demetreion has transparent "Orphic" (or rather Athenian) overtones and thus provides a historical-religious context for the roughly contemporary "Orphic" bone plates. But this is a subject of a special investigation.

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²⁷ V.A. Anokhin, *Monety antichnykh gorodov Severo-Zapadnogo Prichernomor'ia* (Kiev 1989), 22; Plate III, Nr. 24-25.