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THE GOD TYCHON IN A GRAFFITO FROM THE ISLAND OF BEREZAN

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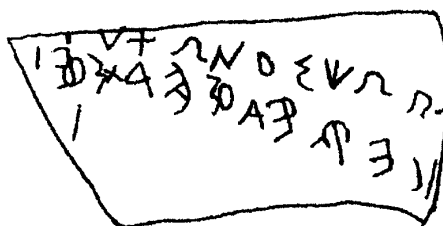
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From all the Greek colonies on the north sea-shore of the Black Sea in South Russia the settlement on the island of Berezan (on the mouth of the Dnjepr) offers a particular interest to archaeologists. It was there that the oldest traces of Greek penetrating were discovered, as one can judge from the analysis of ceramics, building remains and objects of applied arts. Some of them belong to the VII, most to the VI and V centuries B.C. One can suppose that the emporium on the island was founded in the middle of the VII century, but an apoikia, as some scholars think, arose only about the middle of the VI century B.C.¹

Particularly valuable are the remains of written language found on the island, among which the so-called graffiti occupy an important place. Despite their shortness and fragmentary condition, the graffiti lead us into the daily life of men who left us such inscriptions. They are living testimonies of the time to which their authors belonged. The academician I. I. Tolstoy has contributed a lot to the study of this kind of antique monuments.

In the book by V. Yailenko mentioned in n. 1, some graffiti were published with interpretation. For the most part they consist of a few letters, but some of them contain coherent texts, which at times, however, can be read with difficulty only. Most of them carried an “intimate” character and contained a consecration to a God or Goddess, or the names of owners (“I am Metrodoros’ cup”). One of the most interesting is the graffito under number 166². We find there two lines of text, but the reading is very difficult. The copy of this graffito given by V. Yailenko is not fully precise. I have got a more exact one through the kindness of Professor Yu. Vinogradov. I reproduce the more exact copy here:



The interpretation of this graffito given by Yailenko is, in my opinion, not completely right. He there finds a description of a homosexual act between a man, whose name is Tychon, and another man, with details belonging to the domain of sexopathology.

I will attempt here to give my reading of the graffito.

The first line begins with the name of Tychon in the gen. sing., but without doubt it was preceded by another word, which can be restored on the basis of the total context.

But the following word puts us before great difficulties. It begins with psi, omega and a letter that resembles Π.

In Greek two words begin with ΨΩ- ΨΩΡΟΣ and ΨΩΜΟΣ. The deciding criterion will be given by the total context.

The following line (retrograde) begins with the letters KE. The letter E is followed by a ligature, joining P and A. Thus we read here the noun KEPA – plural of KEPΑΣ, “horn; drinking-cup”. This word is followed by a ligature of P and E (epsilon written from right to left), and A. We can certainly read here the word PEA – nom. pl. of the adjective “light” (ῥᾶδιον = ῥᾶ, Alkman fr. 104 Page, thus ῥᾶδια >

¹ V. Yailenko, *Grečeskaja kolonizacija VII–III vv. do n.č.*, Moscow 1982, p. 266ff.

² V. Yailenko, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

*ροια > ρεῖα > ρέα, the last as adverb in the epic dialect – Il. V,304; XII,58)³. The subject are the “light drinking-cups”.

Further we meet two letters – omicron and sigma – the word ὄσα, apostrophied before the vowel of the next word. The psilosis (absence of the letter H [Hēta] before OΣA) is a characteristic feature of the Ionian dialect, spoken on the coast of Asia Minor.

The last word of our graffito begins with a sign which seems to be a ligature of San⁴ and alpha (the San arose as a result of assimilation with the sigma of the preceding word). We can read the last word APXΣEI, fut. sing. 2nd person of ἄρχομαι “overcome”. Thus the complete inscription runs as follows (with restoration of absent parts):

[ΣΥΝ] ΤΥΧΩΝΟΣ ΨΩΜ[ΩΙ] ΚΕΡΑ ΡΕΑ ΟΣ (3) ΑΡΧΣΕΙ
[σὺν] Τύχωνος ψωμ[ῶι] κέρα ρέα ὄσ' (3) ἄρχσει

“with the bit given by the (god) Tychon the cups will be light, how many of them you will overcome”. The author of the inscription, a kind of “paroimia”, was without any doubt a Ionian from the coast of Asia Minor and lived at the end of the VI or the beginning of the V century B.C. We often find inscriptions on cups expressing some wishes, such as χαῖρε καὶ πίει εὖ· πίε. μὴ δίψα. ζήσαις, and others.⁵

Last but not least a word about the god Tychon. He was the god of unforeseen cases, of good luck, a god distributor of all little things, as one can see from Anth. Pal. IX,334 (Perses):

κάμῃ τὸν ἐν σμικροῖς ὀλίγον θεὸν ἦν ἐπιβώσης
εὐκαίρως, τεύξῃ· μὴ μεγάλων δὲ γλίχου·
ὥς ὅ τι δημοτέρων δύναται θεὸς ἀνδρὶ πενέστη
δωρεῖσθαι, τούτων κύριός εἰμι Τύχων

His cult has been mixed with that of Priapos (that is why his other name was Ithypall), and had also to do with Aphrodite (Etym. M. 773,1 – δαίμων περὶ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην).⁶

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³ Liddell – Scott – Jones p. 1566 s. v. ρέα; in the Ionian dialect “(blieb) E vor folgendem A . . . im allgemeinen in der Schrift bestehen” (A. Thumb – A. Scherer, Handbuch der griech. Dialekte, Heidelberg 1959, II p. 257).

⁴ We find this San in the inscriptions on the altar of Pergamum (W. Larfeld, Griechische Epigraphik, München 1914, p. 225).

⁵ M. Guarducci, L'epigrafia greca dalle origini al tardo impero, Roma 1987, p. 363.

⁶ Cf. Hesych, s. v. Τύχων· ἔνιοι τὸν Ἑρμῆν, ἄλλοι δὲ τὸν περὶ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην.