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A SPARTAN AT ABAI?

The inscription on the upper surface of the base of a bronze statuette recently on the market is of high interest despite the regrettable lack of provenance.¹ The piece (Fig. 1) is a kouros figure of very good quality, once holding objects in each hand. The stylistic date given in the catalogue of the mid-sixth century BC is indicated by many individual details of hairstyle and anatomy, and the attribution to a Lakonian workshop seems convincing;² it stands between a kouros in Vienna and a hydria handle in the Louvre from the Lakonian sanctuary of Apollo Hyperteleatas (Stibbe 2006, 276, figs 8–9 and 289, fig. 46). No doubt there will be debate regarding the objects held, but the inscription makes some items more likely than others; bow and phiale would seem apposite.

There are two texts on top of the small base, not an unusual place for them at this period; one is very clear (Fig. 2), ΑΙΙΕΑΟΝ, with high archaic epsilon and a square omicron, an early example of a common ‘metallic’ form for the letter. The other (Fig. 3) is also clear save at the end, ΗΥΑΜΙΛ., the last sign being a very uncertain vertical; it includes closed heta, alpha with horizontal cross-bar and V-shaped upsilon.³

If we add letter-forms and dialect to style, a Lakonian origin seems almost necessary. The disturbing feature is of course *Hyamp*, which can only refer to the Phokian polis Hyampolis, with its Apollon (*not* Doric Apellon) sanctuary. A probable explanation must be that this is a Lakonian dedication at that sanctuary – ‘eines der bedeutendsten griechischen Heiligtümer’ to quote Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier (2016, subtitle).

Yet some material questions arise. As ever in the case of market objects, one matter is the authenticity of the piece. I can personally see nothing untoward in either statuette or text; the latter would be an extremely odd construct for a forger before the more recent excavations at the site from 1970 and the subsequent debate on the owner of the sanctuary at Kalapodi. Without provenance this bronze cannot contribute to that discussion, but it is a matter that other excavated texts have helped solve in favour of Apollo.

The second question is why the abbreviated text(s)? There was certainly room to complete the name of Apellon in the genitive or dative as normal in dedications, and some space to extend *Hyamp*, where the remains after the pi do not appear to be an unfinished omicron. I offer four explanations, by no means mutually exclusive, and none fully convincing, and subject to modification in the light of comparanda discussed below: 1, the chisel broke; 2, the Lakonian was laconic; 3, the text was an aide-memoire cut in or near the workshop in Sparta (or nearby) to apprise the patron of his request; 4, the inscription is a title not a dedication. If 1, the first word would be complete, pointing to 4 as a probability. 2 cannot be judged; at any rate Lakonian Archaic texts show no signs of excessive brevity. 3 may appeal most (combined perhaps with 1), while 4 is plausible, the statuette being a representation of Apollo. 3 does not of course necessitate that the patron was a Lakonian, but entails that a Lakonian workshop could work to specific orders from outside the Peloponnese.

With respect to the position of the texts, ΑΙΙΕΑΟΝ is wrapped around the leading left foot of the figure, while one might have rather expected a dedication to begin flush with an edge of the inscribed surface. The probabilities are balanced, but I would argue on this evidence that either 3 or 4 above is preferable. What is historically at stake is whether in the mid-6th century a Lakonian was present at the site of Hyampolis, had something dedicated there, or merely marked an order for a ξένοϛ.

¹ *Sotheby's, Ancient Sculpture and Works of Art*, London, 3rd December 2019, lot 6 (with an extraneous E in the text), known from 1960, when commented on by Ernst Langlotz to the then owner, Leo Mildenburg. Ht 18.3 cm. I thank Florent Heinz for showing me the correspondence.

² ‘Lakonian’ is a broad church, and Paul Cartledge, *per litteras*, reminds me that some related bronzes are from Messenia, and perhaps from a perioecic workshop.

³ It is strange that Langlotz, in his note to Mildenburg, did not read the mu; it is not clear in some lights and so perhaps he did not actually handle the piece. The pi has no bottom line; it is not an omicron.

However, there are comparanda that would seem to point *against* 3 or 4. The use of the nominative of the deity in dedicatory texts is markedly more common in Lakonia than elsewhere,⁴ and of the list in Lazzarini 1976, 238–241, five are Lakonian dedications to Apollo on bronze objects, one a rather unusual, definitely non-Apolline, statuette in the Benaki Museum, of a seated, clad figure, with a pot between his legs. The concentration on Lakonia is all the more marked if we note some errors in her list: her 444 is not from Athens but Kynouria; 445 (*IG IV*² 1005) from Aegina does not have the ends of the words preserved; 454, from Megara, is probably a genitive not nominative, and, as she remarks, the rock-cut inscriptions 455 and 457 are more likely invocations than dedications (Inglese 2008, 386–388 for some other thoughts, noting their dating to the 8th–7th century). There remains little extra-Peloponnesian except the Hera cups from Naukratis which are a clearly different set (and only two are assuredly nominatives); their overall poor calligraphy suggests that the grammatical grasp of the inscribers was not of the best.

The name of the dedicatee in the nominative (ΑΛΦΙΟΣ) was briefly discussed by K. Rhomaïos in two articles (1904 and 1911 [not 1912 as in *REG* 1941 234], 254–276). He had no explanation of the phenomenon, using it in 1904 to support his case for seeing a cult of the river Alph(e)ios in the bronze miniature bowl he was publishing, found near the source of the Sarandapotamos river. But the fact that at least five of this fairly restricted group are Lakonian dedications to Apollo is striking. Even so, they are in other respects hardly a unitary set, being disparate bronze objects, dedicated to several cults of Apollo, though admittedly all in the same time period.

How does this impinge on the new addition to the group? Clearly it follows a local habit, noting the deity and his epithet in the nominative.⁵ While the placing of ΑΙΙΕΛΟΝ points strongly to 3 or 4 above, that argument cannot easily be used for the more obtrusive similar texts, especially on the bull cited in n. 5.⁶

One could posit that the nominative is in a sense laconic, in abbreviating the thought ‘may the deity give me a return for this dedication’, or merely the subject of a word of possession ‘x has this (now)’.⁷ I have reservations about whether this can apply to the new statuette, with a text cut in a particular way and, if inscribed at Kalapodi, cut in a particularly Lakonian manner.

With respect to the possible find-spot of the kouros, Soteriadis (1906, 144) noted the constant pillaging of tombs in the area of Hyampolis. On the other hand a good amount of material from the Apollo Hypereteleatas sanctuary in Lakonia did leave Greece in the 1880s (Stibbe 2006, 18–19), and one might consider that the kouros, intentionally or by accident, went to the ‘wrong’ Apollo. Yet one would have expected such a striking piece, if found in the 1880s, to have been mentioned previously. Arguments are finely balanced.

The sixth century was a period when Lakonian bronzes were spread wide across northern Greece and points north and west, most noticeably in the form of kraters and related vase shapes. Indeed the handle of a large volute-krater has been excavated at Kalapodi (Niemeier 2016, 21 with n. 338; Felsch 2007, 379, no. 2201, pl. 12, 61). It dates probably earlier than the kouros, though both belong to a period of probable Thessalian control of the sanctuary.⁸ The kouros dates around the time when the sanctuary was said by Herodotus to have been consulted by Kroisos in the early 540s, regarding his plan to attack his eastern neighbours, in which process he had bought the alliance of Sparta and consulted a range of Greek oracles including Abai (Hdt 1 46 and 69). One may wonder whether Spartan knowledge of and interest in Abai originated in membership of the Amphictyony and protection of the ‘traditional’ Dorian stock in central

⁴ These comparanda rule out the possibility of the vocative being used.

⁵ Rhomaïos (1911 264) felt that the KPE (almost necessarily abbreviated for lack of space) after ΑΙΙΕΛΟΝ on a bronze bull figurine from the Tyros sanctuary might be a topographic epithet, even if statistically a personal name is more likely – non liquet. On the other hand one of the dedications there was not obviously by a Lakonian, possibly by an Aeginetan, using ΑΙΠΟΛΟΝΟΣ (the sigma seemingly three-bar; Rhomaïos 1911, 264–266, fig. 7).

⁶ A possibility could be that the inscriber wrote *Hyam* in error for another of the Lakonian Apollo sanctuaries, *Hyperteleatas* or *Hyakinthios*, and then stopped writing. This would of course indicate substantial knowledge of the Abai sanctuary at least in this particular workshop.

⁷ The use of the genitive of the deity is concurrent in Lakonia, and would need to be put into any overall consideration of the intentions of the dedicators.

⁸ The dating of these events in central Greece from Herodotus’ account is a disputed topic, which I do not pursue here.

Greece, north of Phokis. Be that as it may, the routes north through central Greece would surely have been well known, whether visited or not, to many inhabitants of Lakonia, not least at the time of their expansionist forays in the second half of the sixth century. Of relevance to a bigger picture is a further bronze, a lion fibula of perhaps early in the sixth century, which a Spartiate, Eumnastos, dedicated (or had dedicated?) to Hera on Samos, rather nearer Lydia (LSAG 446, 16a; Stibbe 2006, 42–44).

With respect to ceramics, using Lakonian pottery to track Lakonians is a risky business; to my knowledge extremely little has been found in Boeotia and Phokis,⁹ while its heavy presence on Samos is now counterbalanced by large numbers also at Miletus. This should not however undermine the observation, put forward notably by Maria Pipili (2006), that Lakonian potters *could* produce material tailored for local needs in external markets. In bronzework I would regard the dedication of Eumnastos on Samos as personal, but I do raise a query about the occasion of the inscription on the kouros statuette; was that bronze also cast for a specific foreign patron? But at the very least it demonstrates a link between Sparta and Abai at the period when both were involved, according to Herodotos, in Croesus' attempts to enlist mainland Greeks to his cause.

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⁹ McInerney 2013, 190 mistakenly takes signed Lakonian tiles from the site to have been made in Lakonia, rather than Boiotia.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3