



A Graffito from Vassallaggi

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A GRAFFITO FROM VASSALLAGGI

The inscription discussed here is incised round the edge of the broad underside of a small Attic red-figured pelike, dating to about 420 B.C., found at Vassallaggi, near Caltanissetta, in Sicily, in 1956. The vase itself is a slight piece and has attracted little attention.¹⁾

The inscription is well cut and preserved, and its reading cannot be doubted at any point.

The dialect of the graffito is clearly Sicilian Doric, as evidenced by the alphas in AAKYΘIA and TPITAMOPA, and by further features which we shall discover. The script includes few diagnostic letters and is unexceptional for the later fifth century in Gela or Akragas; we may merely note the tailless rho and the considerable slope of the cross-bar of the alphas.²⁾ Therefore, the graffito was incised somewhere in the locality.

The vocabulary is of interest throughout. Στάμνον is attested elsewhere (see Philippaki, *The Attic Stamnos* xviii-xix), though στάμνος is far more frequent. We find ΣΤΑΜΝΟΙ written in full in one other vase graffito, also on a pelike, but one twice the size of ours, the vase in Naples mentioned in note 6, while the abbreviation ΣΤΑ also occurs among mercantile vase graffiti, appearing exclusively on pelikae and amphorae.³⁾ The evidence of all these graffiti is enough to show that in the fifth century

1) Gela 9240, ht. 19 cm., from Vassallaggi tomb 35. Trendall, *Arch. Rep.* 1957 30-1 has photographs of both vase and graffito. It is also briefly mentioned by Devine, *JHS* xci (1971) 171 and Webster, *Potter and Patron in Classical Athens*, 273. For observations on the excavations at Vassallaggi see De Miro, *ΚΩΚΑΛΟΣ* viii (1962) 143-4. I am grateful to him for allowing me to study this and other vases in Gela, and for information and assistance from I. McPhee, P. Pelagatti and J. Szilágyi. Prof. A. Morpurgo-Davies and Dr. L.H. Jeffery have kindly read versions of this paper and saved me from numerous pitfalls.

2) For the script of this period see Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* 273. The lack of inscriptions of the later fifth century from Agrigento is noted by Waele, *Acragas Graeca* (*Archaeologische Studien van het Nederlands Historisch Instituut te Rome*, deel III) 31ff. Tailed rho would be the expected form, but there are exceptions at both Gela and Akragas earlier in the fifth century (LSAG 278, 55 and 62).

3) ΣΤΑ appears on the following vases. Black-figure: Munich 1464, Panathenaic type amphora, of the group of Vatican G 23 (Hackl, *Merkantile Inschriften auf Attischen Vasen*, in *Münchener Archäologische Studien dem Andenken Adolf Furtwänglers gewidmet*,

at least the term *στάμνος*, or *στάμνιον* where appropriate, was used to describe containers such as the pelike, and in the diminutive, the Nolan amphora. This usage was probably imported into Sicily along with the vases. The plural used on Gela 9240 indicates that it was only one of a batch of similar pieces.

The interpretation of the complex which precedes ΣΤΑΜΝΙΑ is not easy, but I suggest that there is only one basis for such an interpretation, although it is one which admits of a number of variations. This basis is to take as a punctuation mark the sign >; this seems clear enough for the first instance, and it is preferable to see the same meaning in its two appearances at the end of this section.

The first punctuation mark would then separate the pi from ΤΕΤΟΡΕΣ, the Doric form of τέσσαρες. The isolated pi is most naturally taken as a numeral, five, while the final strokes could be interpreted as a single unit stroke between punctuation marks, however otiose the last punctuation mark may appear.

How are we to explain 'five: four: one'? The non-neuter form τέτορες cannot agree with στάμνια, but the spacing of the marks on the foot, especially in view of the third punctuation mark, suggests that we should take these two parts together. It is very unlikely that τέτορες refers to a further, unexpressed, vase name; much more probably it should be taken as an expression of price, either in obols or drachmae. I know of no parallel for the omission of the noun, whether obols or drachmae, together with the spelling out in full of the numeral, but we shall see a price written out in full in the other part of this graffito. As that price is expressed in obols, I would accept the same basis here, giving us 'five: four (obols): one: stamnia', which is best interpreted as 'five stamnia, four obols for one'.

There are no doubt other combinations which would yield other prices, but I consider this one the most likely.⁴⁾ However, I am not so confident as to put it forward as an assured price for a pelike in Sicily in the late fifth century. Four obols is a relatively high

no. 575); Chicago University, pelike, by the Eucharides painter (AJA xlvii (1943) 394). Red-figure: Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek 2659, pelike, by the Tyszkiewicz painter (unpublished); Leningrad St. 1672, Nolan amphora, by Hermonax (Hackl no. 574); a variant on Syracuse 22177, pelike, by the Villa Giulia painter, from Gela (ML XVII 455-6)?

4) Possibly 'five stamnia for four drachmae, one obol', i.e. five obols each. Or one might take the initial pi as an abbreviation of πολυλός (cf. Beazley, *Antike Kunst* x (1967) 143).

price for a modest vase like this, even if decorated; it is within the bounds of possibility and relates well enough with the second price on the foot.

It may be worth rehearsing the difficulties of this interpretation: the sequence of thought is tortuous (whatever form of interpretation we accept), a numeral is spelled out in full without any noun to accompany it, a rare form of punctuation is used rather excessively,⁵⁾ and the gap between the two parts is surprisingly large if the whole is a single unit (and there is nothing to suggest other than that the whole was incised all at once).

There are only three parallels among mercantile graffiti for the spelling out in full of ληκύθια; all have eta instead of the Doric alpha, but they all belong to the same period.⁶⁾ It is tempting to associate the diminutive form of the word with the squat lekythos, a type which was becoming very popular throughout the Mediterranean at this time. In view of this very wide distribution it is plausible to assume that the same vase shape is referred to in all four inscriptions.

The spacing of the words on the foot indicates that TPITAMOPA is to be taken in association with ΛΑΚΥΘΙΑ. This word, used as a noun, is attested elsewhere only in the singular, appearing twice in the fragments of the early third century comic poet, Philemo of Syracuse (Kock fr. 63 and 74); τριτήμορον is assured by the metre in the first passage, while the MSS have the more common form in -ιον in the second. On both occasions the reference is to sums of money, the sum in question being, as Pollux says in quoting the passages, six chalkoi, or three-quarters of an obol.

The fact that Philemo was a Sicilian is an added incentive to our accepting a monetary interpretation in the graffito. Possibly three-quarters of something other than obols may be meant, but I see no reason to depart from the sole attested usage. More difficult to explain is its usage as a noun; what we have here is the equivalent of 'pots:

5) We know little of the forms of punctuation used in this part of Sicily, but a glance through the table of letter forms in LSAG will reveal that this is a rare type, scarcely attested at all in the West. In mercantile graffiti punctuation is used solely to separate off numerals; however, most forms of such punctuation consist of two or three dots or dashes, not a single element such as here (see Hackl pll. 2-3 and Amyx, *Hesperia* xxvii (1958) pll. 52-4).

6) Vienna 892, bell-krater, by the Telos painter (Hackl no. 600 and pl.3), and two unpublished graffiti: Budapest 50.154, hydria, of the class of London E 195, and Naples 151600, pelike, by the Nikias painter (Johannowsky, *BdA* 1960, 202), from Naples, which has an extensive graffito brought to my notice by Mr. Ian McPhee.

sixpences', not 'pots: sixpence' or 'six-penny pots'. We must assume either that the word was used in an adjectival manner by this date, or, more conservatively, that the apposition involved fell more easily on Greek than English ears.

Therefore, we may add this price of three-quarters of an obol, asked in Sicily, perhaps for a squat lekythos, to that of one obol quoted by Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1236, for a fine out- (or up-?) standing lekythos in Athens.⁷⁾ To my knowledge there are only two further pieces of evidence for the price of lekythoi (of whatever type) in the fifth century: on a black-figured lekythos presumably from Sicily, Gela, Navarra 197, of 490-80 B.C., a ligature probably of kappa and rho is followed closely by a drachma sign and a pi with four unit strokes; this could be interpreted as denoting a batch of nine lekythoi for one drachma, two thirds of an obol each. Second, a slightly later red-figured lekythos from Gela, Syracuse 20966 (ML XVII 174) has a graffito consisting of a ligature, perhaps of kappa and alpha, followed by a simple drachma sign; it should be stressed that it is a large and carefully produced vase, 40 cm. high, and so an interpretation of the graffito as giving a price of one drachma for it alone should be considered an acceptable possibility.⁸⁾

The ENO attached to ΛΑΚΥΘΙΑ remains; it is certainly not an integral part of that word, but is presumably closely dependent on it. The use of ἔννο as an equivalent of ἐνεστ is treated by Solmsen, *Rh. Mus.* lxii (1907) 320-1; its one secure literary usage is again in a Doric passage, the trochaic tetrameters attributed to Axiopistus, by report a Locrian or Sicyonian (Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina* 219-221, Axiopistus 1,5). Our graffito adds weight to this usage, and is probably over one hundred years earlier.

Nor can it be pure chance that the single verb to be found among all mercantile marks on Greek vases is ἐνεστ, in the lengthy graffito under a late fifth century column-krater, Naples 116116 (Beazley, *AJA* xxxi (1927) 350); we now have a pair for it and may adopt the same explanation. The precise meaning is elusive; it cannot be literal since the Naples krater is small and it would be virtually impossible to store any lekythoi, of whatever kind, in the small pelike Gela 9240. Rather, the meaning should be 'included (in the batch or set)'. On neither vase are precise details given about the 'included' vases; in the Naples graffito the kraters are the 'master' vases, while the rest tagged along, not as part

7) See in the latest instance, Amyx, l.c. 296.

of a true set, since they were all mixed, even kothons (as the inscriber was literate enough to include a verb, I do him the honour of translating his καὶ in this way).

The final publication of the finds at Vassallaggi may perhaps tell us more about the exact nature of the λαύθια. Using the Naples graffito as an analogy, we may suspect that they were exported along with the pelikae from Athens and that those pelikae were exported empty, as the kraters must have been.

Transactions such as this one (at Akragas?) seem to have been but rarely recorded. Some other price graffiti may have been cut in Sicily rather than Athens (see note 8), but they cannot compare with this singularly long advertisement. We may assume that lots were sold off in this manner regularly without the need of any inscription, and indeed an inscription would not easily be found under the foot. We may wonder whether the curiosity of any potential customer would have been sufficiently rewarded by the discovery of such a cryptic message in the market place. Yet, to be fair, what would he have made of the arcana of Billingsgate?⁹⁾

ΕΤΕΤΟΡΕΖΩ
ΣΤΑΜΝΙΑ
ΤΡΙΑΜΟΡΑ
ΛΑΚΥΟΙΛΕΝΔ

London

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8) For thoughts on vase prices see the article by Amyx, and Greece and Rome 1974, where I add some further material from Sicily.

9) Note for non-English readers: The London fish market where rhyming slang prevails.