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ON SOME GRAFFITI FROM AIANI

In the volume *La Civilisation Grecque; Macédoine, Royaume d'Alexandre le Grand* (Athens, 1993) 71–81 Dr. Julia Vokotopoulou gives a welcome, early account of some graffiti found on ceramic material from the excavations at Aiani in southern Macedonia. My purpose here is to comment on just one of these pieces, though without, I hope, overlooking the significance of the as yet limited corpus as a whole.

The tile fragment, no. 3, dated by Vokotopoulou around the middle of the fifth century seems to have been inscribed as an ostrakon. It is transcribed there as "Ἀρκαπος Ἐρία (or Ἀρκαπο Σερία) 350 28". What I believe to be the true reading leads us into less personal, but nonetheless interesting areas:

ἀρκὰ ποσέρια 278 (or 378?).

The key to the interpretation must lie in the numerals; they are surely governed by what comes before. While it is quite plausible that such numerals may be introduced by, e. g., a trader's name,¹ I cannot do other than point out the fact that ποσέρια would be an acceptable version of ποτήρια, and is an eminently suitable noun from which the numeral, cut on the ostrakon, might depend. The τ/σ shift in the word is a little unexpected, though explicable enough in philological terms.² The first word of the text is, perforce, ἀρκά, a form which I would assume to reflect a consonant shift better attested in N. Greek, γ/κ, ἀργά.³ The sense of the word here might well be "plain", contrasted with either ποικίλα or μέλανα, although "plain" in another sense is a further possible meaning, i. e. "flat" or "shallow".⁴ The numeral is large; whether it is three H run together or two with an accidentally long crossbar I would not like to decide. Lack of a sign for 50 can be paralleled on Corfu slightly earlier, but evidence for the period is extremely thin in any case.⁵

¹ For some rare examples see my *Trademarks on Greek Vases* 3.

² The root ποσ- appears regularly before ι; we may compare the versions of Ποτ/σειδών, though noting that τ is regular in W. Greek (Buck, *The Greek Dialects*, §61,1) and the month name Daisios (J. N. Kallérís, *Les anciens Macédoniens; Etude linguistique et historique* 143). I would not care to comment here on the possibility of a similar shift in Θερμαῖοι to Σερμαῖοι (ATL i 546; Zahrnt, *Olynth und die Chalkidier* 223–5).

³ The form ἀρκόν is cited as a Macedonian usage in Hesychius; see J. N. Kallérís, *op. cit.* 109–110. The shift (though here before a back vowel) has recently been attested on the epitaph of c. 500 BC from Arta, in ἀλκινόνεα; A. Matthaiou, *Horos* 8–9 (1990–1) 274 and 304.

⁴ ἀργός is not to my knowledge attested as yet for plain pottery; for ποικίλος and μέλας see *Trademarks* type 8F and type 25F,4.

⁵ On the lead "bottomry" tablets, L. H. Jeffery, *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*² (Oxford, 1991) 452, no. 14a.

The alphabet of the graffito is of some interest. The form of *delta* in the numeral and *rho* points south, to Thessaly, although the four-bar *sigma* is less at home there.⁶ The rest of the Aiani graffiti known to date scarcely confirm that view, since they offer a variety of letter forms. An earlier fifth century glazed kantharos (Vokotopoulou no. 2) combines three-bar *sigma*, equilateral *delta* and H for ē,⁷ while the later fifth century skyphos foot (no. 4) has full Ionic script as far as can be discerned. There is no unity of script visible in this sample as a whole, though the apparently North Greek dialect of no. 3 encourages one to view it as more "typical" of the area. We await further evidence keenly.

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⁶ *Ibid.* 96.

⁷ Scripts where three-bar *sigma* and *eta* are regularly used together are indeed rare; see *Trademarks* 208, type 1E; among the few possibilities none has any *prima facie* close connexion with the area of Aiani.