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WOOL OR POTS AT AIANI?

The interpretation of a graffito from the excavations at Aiani in the nome of Kozani has thrown up a disagreement. I attempt here to suggest that the balance of evidence supports a view which, while not fully explicable under normal philological laws, seems highly probable in other respects; i.e. we have a clash of disciplines.

Bibliography is brief and little need be said on it, other than that full excavation details have not been published, and could possibly be relevant.¹

The graffito text (Fig. 1) is cut on a tile fragment as an ostrakon, of a date somewhere in the period 500–450 and in a script that can be called Thessalian; the transliteration is undisputed, save possibly as to



Fig. 1

whether the numerical notation at the end includes two or three hetas; that ambiguity cannot, I feel, affect any views on the short preceding text, which runs αρκαποσερια.

I assume *ab initio* that this can only be read in three ways, with a break after: a) the second alpha, as I have argued; b) after the omicron; or c) after the sigma.²

This gives the possible interpretations: a) αρκα (adj.) ποσερια (noun) + tally/price; b) Αρκαπο (PN, gen.) σερια (noun) + tally/price; c) Αρκαπος (PN, nom.) ερια (noun) + tally/price.

My main concern with this trio of possibilities was, and remains, to reconcile the note on the ostrakon with the numeral, be it 278 or, less likely, 378. I assume that the text is a form of docket, ticket or label accompanying in some way the objects mentioned; an alternative would be to take it as a personal aide-mémoire for the inscriber,

but I would regard this as unlikely, since at this chronological period local powers of remembrance as against reliance on writing of any personal memos were presumably in vogue. Taking c) first, “wools” is not an easy concept in the plural (“fleeces”, “fillets”?) and so it is difficult to see how they could be enumerated, and docketed, in such large numbers; in addition, the association with a PN in the nominative is difficult.³ b) does have the merit of making the first word a genitive – an indication of ownership, a constant feature of short graffiti –, but it creates σερια, which could probably only be taken as σείρια (see LSJ), “summer frocks?”, or, not inconceivably, a dialect form of θήρια “wild things/animals”. Panayotou, perhaps for this reason, suggests that the numerals represent not a total or tally but a price or weight of some kind.

In that respect, an initial remark that should be made is that on all comparative evidence such a large number could only stand alone, without any qualification of value, if the bare numeral refers to a well recognised basic unit; any small monetary demoniation such as obols would surely have been converted into higher units, of whatever size. So if we take 278, or 378, as monetary units, we have to hazard what standard unit of price might have been current at Aiani at the time, compared for example with the drachma used at Athens and elsewhere. We could perhaps suggest the denomination of the Macedonian “tetrobol”, being minted increasingly frequently under Alexander I and later, in which case we would have a note here

¹ My knowledge of the piece comes from the Museum display, as well as from the first publication by Julia Vokotopoulou in *La Civilisation Grecque. Macédoine, royaume d’Alexandre le Grand* (Athens, 1993) 74, no. 3. I commented on it in *ZPE* 104 (1994) 81 (= *ZPE* below), and Anna Panayotou has dealt with the piece, and my interpretation, in I. Hajnal (ed.), *Die altgriechischen Dialekte – Wesen und Werden. Akten des Kolloquiums Freie Universität Berlin 19.–22. September 2001* (Innsbruck, 2007) 385–392, esp. notes 3 and 4; I repeat here some of the points which I made earlier, but expand on a number of them.

² ἀρ’ or ἄρ would seem a dead end, therefore ruling out the epigraphically plausible κα and πώς.

³ The uniqueness of Arkapos as a PN should not *prima facie* be taken as a further argument against the interpretation, even if it is difficult to elucidate; see Panayotou.

equivalent to some 150–200 Attic drachmas, not impossible, but implausible for such an apparently casual citation.⁴ Under b), neither a set of 278/378 pieces of cloth nor such a price seems a plausible interpretation.

It was this improbability of other explanations that led me to consider the solution that I offered in 1994 – 278/378 plain pots. One can point to near contemporary parallels for such a batch of pots noted by graffito, even if not quite such a high number;⁵ *a fortiori*, I therefore suggest, “fillets/fleeces” (solution c) are far less likely to be listed here, by price or number (not forgetting for this alternative the syntactical problem of the preceding nominative). We are of course ignorant of the extent of local large scale sheep-ranching and any ensuing labelling of wollen by-products for sale, but I have the greatest difficulty in connecting this tile fragment with what would have been substantial amounts of ovine products; even if the notation is of price, this would amount to perhaps some 70 fleeces (and very many more fillets).⁶

After such considerations, I suggested that the text should be taken as a “Thessalo-Macedonian” version of ἀργὰ ποτήρια; but this is unacceptable to Panayotou. I merely add two philological remarks to her comments:

1) if ἀργός is not clearly attested as “plain”, it certainly is used as, and indeed denotes, the opposite of “fancy”, “wrought”, *vel sim*. I have in mind here oppositions derived from more or less contemporary vase graffiti on Attic pots – λεῖα/ῥαβδωτά, μέλανα/ποικίλα.⁷ I do not know what ἀργά might have been opposed to by speakers at Aiiani, but it seems to me to be a technologically acceptable interpretation.

2) ποσε- as local variant of ποτε-. Panayotou states that my analogy Pot/seidon is a result of assibilation; implicitly she presumably would maintain that such assibilation cannot be Macedonian. While this was the closest phonological parallel that came to mind, lexically the existence of the form πόσις is perhaps more pertinent, demonstrating at least a generic propensity for assibilation in this particular root, ποτ-. Beyond that, there is indeed less that can said geographically and chronologically; regarding the former, I merely assume, rightly or wrongly, that Aiiani can be taken to be in an area of Macedonian dialect, even if influenced by Thessaly in its alphabet; Thessalian dialect certainly offers little evidence for any shift of dentals to sibilants. Secondly, I know of no other first-hand evidence for the treatment of consonants s/t in the ‘Macedonian’ area in this early period; as I noted, the more remote equation, Σερμάῳι/Θερμάῳι, which would give a parallel of sorts, is not accepted by all, though persuasive.⁸

I trust this clarifies my approach to the text and look forward to further contributions. Kallérís has insisted on the use of fully authenticated local evidence on which to reconstruct the Macedonian dialect, and I hope to have followed this guideline.⁹ It is a matter of a balance of probabilities, and I have tried to tease out the various strands involved.

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⁴ For an overview see C. M. Kraay, *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins* (London, 1976) 142–4; I use a weight of 2.1 gr. for the normal light tetrobol. Even on this hypothesis however we might have expected the citation to be in a larger denomination, e.g. staters, whatever their local weight.

⁵ We may note a batch of similar size, 285, cut on a lamp in Reggio (D. Gill, *OxJA* 6 (1987) 22–5), even if the circumstances of marking were surely different.

⁶ Fleeces are of course of high social importance in Greek religion, though are regularly called δέρματα elsewhere. Prices are estimated by V. Rosivach, *The System of Public Sacrifice in Fourth Century Athens* (Atlanta, 1994) 62–3, at between 1.5 and 3 drachmas each.

⁷ *ZPE*, n. 4. One might of course ponder whether we might expect an uncontracted form, ἀεργός or ἀφεργός, at this date.

⁸ *ZPE*, n. 2.

⁹ J. N. Kallérís, *Les anciens Macédoniens. Étude linguistique et historique* (Athens, 1988) 458–60, for example.