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NICHOLAS SEKUNDA

## A Late Archaic Inscription from Phalasarna, Crete

In the summer of 2006, in the course of checking measurements of the Northern Fortifications at Phalasarna together with Dr. Sławomir Jędraszek, a broken stone was found between the second and third towers of this stretch of fortifications. The block had been reused in the emergency re-building of the fortifications, on top of the original fourth-century walls, which probably took place in preparation for the Roman attack on the city in 68/7 BC. It is therefore out of its original location and archaeological context. The stone is now in Kastelli Museum. I would like to thank Dr. Elpida Hadjidaki, the director of excavations at Phalasarna, for permission to publish this inscription.

Corner of an architectural construction block of local limestone, broken on all sides. It preserves part of the “front” and the “left” side (figs. 1–3).

Maximum length of the block 34cm and maximum width 32cm: both sides preserving an inscription. Thickness of block 14cm.

Maximum height of letters 12 cm.

Circa 500 BC.

A |Δ|Θι

B |ἄνακ

### Commentary

The surface to the right side of the corner (30cm long) is clearly inscribed, while that to the left (29cm long) is less clearly so, for the surface has been badly eroded. Any attempted reading and restoration of the inscription is hampered by the extremely poor state of preservation of the second surface.

It was a persistent Cretan tradition, lasting into the fifth century, that in-

scriptions should be read from right to left<sup>1</sup>. As this inscription is at least as early as the fifth century, I propose to read it from right to left. We shall therefore look first at the field lying to the right of the corner.

#### **A. The Right-Hand Field**

Character 1: Only the bottom fragment of a vertical stroke is preserved from the first letter, not permitting any certain restoration. Restoration as a word-separator is possible.

Character 2: The second letter must surely be restored as a *delta*.

Character 3: The third letter is a simple vertical line. This symbol was used as a word-separator in the Archaic Cretan epichoric alphabet<sup>2</sup>.

Character 4: The fourth letter is clearly a *theta*.

Character 5: In Cretan epichoric alphabet the normal Greek alphabetic sign for a *sigma* had the value of an *iota*. In the sixth century the *sigma* shape at first is fully curved<sup>3</sup>, like a modern letter S in reverse. Around 525 BC the letter becomes angular in shape, taking on the shape of a three-barred *sigma*. Then later on, in the fifth century, the letter reverts to the fully curved shape once again. So this sign should most probably be read as a reversed *iota*. Early examples of the three-barred *iota* from Axos (*ICret* II v 1–2) can face either way, even though the bars at the end go different ways to the Phalasarna inscription. Therefore this inscription is most probably to be dated to the last quarter of the sixth century, or early fifth.

The third and fourth characters of the Right-Hand Field, separated before and after by punctuation marks, give us the letters  $\theta\iota$ . This is very difficult to interpret as a self-standing word. It is possible that the block we have constitutes the remains of a single level of the corner of a stone-built temple wall. In this case the Left-Hand Field and Right-Hand Field might be fragments of two separate inscriptions, or two sections of the same inscription, separated by the corner, and the letters  $\theta\iota$  may have been completed by further letters carved on the next level of stone blocks of the temple wall. In such case we might consider restoring a dative form such as  $\theta\iota\omicron\iota$ , ‘to the god’, which is attested in an early inscription in Doric dialect from Lebena (*ICret* I xvii 22 p. 171), or its female

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1. L.H. Jeffery, *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (2nd Edition with Supplement by A.W. Johnston, Oxford 1990) p. 310.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Op. cit.* p. 309.



equivalent, or less probably some form of  $\theta\eta\tilde{\iota}\alpha$  ‘sacred’, which is also attested in Archaic Crete<sup>4</sup>.

The *theta* is preceded by a word-separator, and then by a *delta* (and then probably by another word separator. It is difficult to think of any word coming before a *theta* that could end in a *delta*, which Character 2 should clearly be read as. Therefore it seems most plausible to explain the *delta* as an acrophonic numeral standing for ‘ten’, although, as suggested to me by Alan Johnston, it could possibly be read as a paragraph heading, as in the famous Gortyn Law Code.

Acrophonic numerals are probably of Attic origin, and may perhaps have been invented as early as the seventh century, for according to Herodian numerals of this kind appeared in the written version of Solon’s legislation. Nevertheless they first appear in Attic inscriptions only in the middle of the fifth century. Outside Attica the earliest examples are found on architectural terracottas from Caulonia in Magna Graecia dating to the end of the sixth century BC.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise acrophonic numerals are securely attested on Crete in a treaty dating to the late fourth century BC (SEG XXVII 621). If an acrophonic numeral, the *delta* must be preceded by a word-separator.

Perhaps, therefore, the left-hand field deals with the payment of a fine of ten staters to be paid to a god or goddess as a fine.

#### **B. The Left-Hand Field**

Character 6: The first character to the left of the corner of the block is most probably to be read as another word-separator.

Character 7: The second character to the left is probably to be read as an *alpha*. The two side strokes joining at the top can just be made out, that on the right being carved at a slightly steeper angle than that on the left. The crossbar runs diagonally top left to bottom right.

Character 8: The surface of the block has been eroded most at this point. The sidestroke of a letter *nu* can most plausibly be made out to the left of the space, running at a slight angle bottom right to top left. The downward stroke running

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4. Monique Bile, *Le dialecte crétois ancien. Étude de la langue des inscriptions recueil des inscriptions postérieures aux IC, Études crétoises 27*, Paris 1988, 38.

5. Margherita Guarducci, *Epigrafia Greca I*, Rome 1967, 418; see also A.W. Johnston, *Trademarks on Greek Vases*, Warminster 1979, 27-28 for other possible late sixth century examples of the delta used as an acrophonic numeral on other materials.

back down towards the right is also just visible, but it is uncertain at what point the stroke ceases and turns to run upwards.

Character 9: This character is probably to be read as an *alpha* too. The side-strokes converging at top are reasonably visible. Once again the right-hand leg is carved at a steeper angle than the left-hand one. The crossbar is hardly visible

Character 10: The last character is only partially preserved. The outside ring of a circular letter can just be made out in two places. It could conceivably be a *koppa*<sup>6</sup>.

If these readings are correct, although their tentative nature is obvious, the left-hand field might contain some word derived from the verb ἀνάκειμαι ‘to be dedicated’, although, of course, there are many other possibilities. So this field too might have dealt with a penalty to be paid to a god.

More precise interpretation of this inscription eludes us. Nevertheless the inscription is of some importance as it is certainly earlier than the earliest previously known inscription from Phalasarna (*ICret* II xix 1).

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6. On the shape of this letter in Crete *circa* 500 BC see L.H. Jeffery – Anna Morpurgo-Davies, *Ποινιζαστάς and ποινιζάζεν: BM 1969.4-2.1, A new Archaic Inscription from Crete*, *Kadmos* 118-54 at 121-122.



Fig. 1. A. The Right-Hand Field



Fig. 2. B. The Left-Hand Field

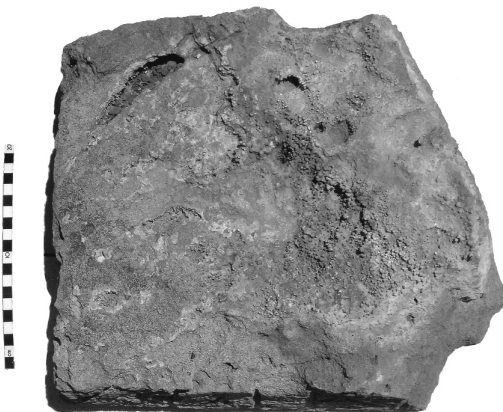


Fig. 3. The upper surface of the block



