



# JOURNAL OF ANCIENT HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Institute of Archeology and Art History of  
Romanian Academy Cluj-Napoca  
Technical University Of Cluj-Napoca



**JAHA**  
JOURNAL OF ANCIENT HISTORY  
AND ARCHAEOLOGY

# Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14795/j.v8i4>

ISSN 2360 266x

ISSN-L 2360 266x



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**No. 8.4 /2021**

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NO. 267, CULTURAL HERITAGE AGENCY,  
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Design & layout:  
Petru Ureche

# Studies

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## ANCIENT HISTORY

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### ON THE DATE OF THE OLBIAN CALENDAR GRAFFITO SEG 30: 977

**Abstract:** The inscription *SEG 30: 977*, known as the calendar graffito, is one of the most interesting documents from Olbia and attracts scholarly attention for more than forty years. It contains a dedication to the god Apollo with several epicleseis, and a list of the twelve months, identical to the calendar of the Olbian metropolis Miletos, but for the spelling of several months' names. The list of Apollo's epicleseis, as well as such a list of the months, are unique in Greek epigraphy. Calendar inscriptions are common since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but the Olbian inscription is traditionally dated to the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and therefore considered as the earliest calendar inscription in the Greek world. This date is however incorrect and should be moved to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis of the script and spelling of the graffito, as well as the form of vessel.

**Keywords:** *Greek inscriptions, dating, Olbia, calendar, Apollo.*

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DOI: 10.14795/j.v8i4.675

ISSN 2360 – 266X

ISSN–L 2360 – 266X

#### INTRODUCTION

One of the most famous and lengthiest graffiti from Olbia is the calendar graffito *SEG 30: 977* on a fragment of a black-glazed Attic skyphos from the Western temenos, which contains a list of all the twelve months of the year and a dedication to Apollo. It was originally published in 1980 by Yu. Vinogradov and A. Rusyaeva with a detailed commentary.<sup>1</sup> The graffito attracts much interest because it is believed to be one of the earliest, or even the earliest Greek calendar inscription. N. Ehrhardt,<sup>2</sup> V. Yaylenko,<sup>3</sup> L. Onyschkevych,<sup>4</sup> M. Feraru<sup>5</sup> studied this document; it became a part of new *corpora inscriptionum* and got plentiful commentaries.<sup>6</sup> Most scholars focus on the epicleseis of Apollo, the name of the dedicator, and the months' list; the date however needs to be revised.

#### TEXT AND TRANSLATION

The graffito consists of three texts: the dedication of Andokidos to Apollo and an abbreviation round the rim, and 12 months of the year, arranged spiral-wise in the middle of the skyphos base:

<sup>1</sup> VINOGRADOV/RUSYAEVA 1980, 19-64.

<sup>2</sup> EHRHARDT 1983, 118, 120-121, 413, n. 247.

<sup>3</sup> YAYLENKO 2017, 37-40, with refs. to his previous studies.

<sup>4</sup> ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 4-6, 11-69.

<sup>5</sup> FERARU 2015, 13-45.

<sup>6</sup> *IGDOLBIA* no. 99; *GOP* 49-51, no. 13.

- a. Απόλλ(ωνι) Δηλφινί(ωι), Ίατροϊ, Θαργηλί(ωι), Λυκεί(ωι) Ανδόκιδος
- b. AZMΘ
- c. Ταυρεών, Θαρ{ο}γηλιών, Καλαμαίων, Πάνημος, Μεταγεινιών, Βοηδρομ(ιών), Κυανεπιών; Απατουρι(ών), Ποσειδι(ών), Ληγεών, Ανθεστηριών, Αρτεμισιόν
- a. To Apollo Delphinios, Iatros, Thargelios, Lykeios Andokidos
- b. Abbreviation, *non liquet*
- c. Taureon, Thargelion, Kalamaion, Panemos, Metageitnion, Boedromion, Kyanepion, Apatourion, Poseidion, Leneon, Anthesterion, Artemision.

### THE ARCHEOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND THE VESSEL

The first editors date the graffito to the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Their dating is based on the archeologic layer and the form of the vessel. They notice that the script of the graffito contradicts such an early date, but argue it the individual style of the dedicator, who did not scratch the letters carefully.<sup>7</sup>

The archeological context however cannot help the dating, because the inscription was discovered in a displaced layer, among other finds datable to the 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, and it is impossible to associate it with a clearly defined layer.<sup>8</sup> Among the published materials which were discovered in the site there are several graffiti dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, but not earlier.<sup>9</sup>

The vessel with the calendar graffiti is a black-glazed Attic *skyphos*; its dimensions are 7.3x4.5x0.5 cm. While the inscription was scratched on the base of the *skyphos*, and only this part was important for the dedicator, the rest of the sides help to restore the profile of the vessel. Such *skyphoi* were frequent in the Greek world, and can be dated widely, from 520-s to 340-s BCE.<sup>10</sup> Yu. Vinogradov and A. Rusyaeva prefer to date the inscription as early as possible, and associate the vessel from Olbia with the examples from Athenian Agora,<sup>11</sup> which are dated to the earlier period.<sup>12</sup> L. Onyshkevich disagrees with the first editors and suggests comparing the *skyphos* with vessels which are closer in size and shape and dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE;<sup>13</sup> in her opinion, the earlier examples are closer to the Olbian *skyphos*.<sup>14</sup> There is however no reason against bracketing the Olbian vessel with the later examples, which are dated to 400-375 years BCE.<sup>15</sup> According to all the experts, the Olbian vessel was not used for a long time, and the date of the inscription should be close to the date of the *skyphos*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>7</sup> VINOGRADOV/RUSYAEVA 1980, 20-22, 24.

<sup>8</sup> VINOGRADOV/RUSYAEVA 1980, 20 f.; ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 14, nn. 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> GOP 72-73, nos. 135, 136, 137; famous inscription of Pharnabazos SEG 51: 979 and several others.

<sup>10</sup> AA 84 ff.

<sup>11</sup> A significant part of the ceramics from the North-Western Black Sea area is dated by means of comparison with the materials from Athenian Agora. See GOP passim.

<sup>12</sup> AA nos. 340, 342, 343.

<sup>13</sup> In accordance with the angle and degree of the lower curve of the sherd, its dimensions and ring foot's interior angle (ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 15 ff.).

<sup>14</sup> AA nos. 345 and 349.

<sup>15</sup> L. Onyshkevich notes that the *skyphos* from Olbia can be also compared with AA nos. 345 and 349 (1998, 16-18).

<sup>16</sup> ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 15; VINOGRADOV/RUSYAEVA 1980, 24, n. 20;

In summary, neither the archeological layer, nor the form of the vessel confirm the dating of the graffito to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

### THE SCRIPT

The second argument in favour of the later dating of the Olbian calendar is its script, which is uncommon, does not correspond to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, but rather to the late 5<sup>th</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

The peculiarities of the script are typical of this timespan: *alpha* has a slightly diagonal hasta; *epsilon* and *zeta* feature three bars; the horizontal bars of *epsilon* are not slanted in most cases; *mu* is sometimes cursive; *kappa* has normal (non-shortened) hastas; the side hastas of *pi* are equal in most cases; *sigma* has four bars; *upsilon* is cursive; *theta* has a short horizontal line instead of a cross.<sup>17</sup> Several letters of either archaic or unusual form, like stretched *omega* and lopsided *nu* with reclined right hasta, may belong to individual style of the engraver. All these features are typical of the late 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, but not of the earlier period.<sup>18</sup>

### THE SPELLING

Not only the script, but also the abbreviations and spelling of the inscription are unusual and have to be re-examined. Among the spelling peculiarities two are related to the date of the inscription and one is a subject of an intense discussion.

### Abbreviations

The abbreviation AZMΘ one letter for word – is very rare in pre-Roman inscriptions.<sup>19</sup> Yu. Vinogradov and A. Rusyaeva interpret the abbreviation as (έν τη) α' (και) ζ' μ(ηνός) Θ(αργηλιώνος) (on the first and seventh days of the month Thargelion).<sup>20</sup> V. Yaylenko suggests reading the first letter as the name of Apollo: Α(πόλλωνι) (έν τη) ζ' μ(ηνός) Θ(αργηλιώνος) (to Apollo on the seventh day of the month Thargelion).<sup>21</sup> ζ', the seventh day, was strongly associated with the cult of Apollo,<sup>22</sup> μ is possible for μήν (month)<sup>23</sup> and thus θ for Θαργηλιών (Thargelion); but this reading is also hypothetical and does not have any analogies. I prefer not to decipher the abbreviation AZMΘ and adopt the position of L. Dubois, who chose to state: *non liquet*.

Other abbreviations of the inscription (Απόλλ(ωνι), Δηλφινί(ωι), Θαργηλί(ωι), Λυκεί(ωι), Βοηδρομ(ιών),

GOP 50.

<sup>17</sup> L. Onyshkevich notes the letter *theta* and reconsiders it as to an early example (1998: 19). Such *thetas* are not typical of inscriptions of the Ionian Black Sea cities in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE but are very frequent since the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. For the scripts see the next footnote.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. LARFELD 1902, tables of scripts in Addenda; KNIPOVICH 1966: 9, table 11; LSAG 63-65; VINOGRADOV 2001: 6-12; BELOUSOV 2021, XXVII-XXVIII.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. AVI-YONAH 1940, 12-14; 20.

<sup>20</sup> VINOGRADOV/RUSYAEVA 1980, 33.

<sup>21</sup> YAYLENKO 2017, 39-40.

<sup>22</sup> The epiclesis of Apollo Έβδόμιος, Έβδομαγενής, Έβδομαγέτης show the association of Apollo with the number seven. The 7<sup>th</sup> day of any month was consecrated to Apollo, see BURKERT 1994, 50 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. AVI-YONAH 1940, 85.

Ἀπατουρι(ών), Ποσειδι(ών)) consist of several letters and are quite clear. These are not abbreviations in the proper sense, but rather unfinished words, typical of Greek epigraphy from the Archaic to late Roman period.<sup>24</sup>

#### Ἀνδόκιδος, Ἀνδοκίδης

The name Ἀνδοκίδης is attested to since the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE,<sup>25</sup> but the spelling Ἀνδόκιδος occurs only in this inscription. L. Dubois and V. Yaylenko argue that this name is in the Genitive case, either it is female Ἀνδοκίς,<sup>26</sup> or male Ἀνδοκίδης (-ος pro -ους).<sup>27</sup> The combination of a dedicator's name in the Genitive and a name of a deity in the Dative is unusual in Greek epigraphy, and probably does not exist.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, two or more spellings of the same personal name are common in the Greek world, for instance such popular names as Εὐείδης, Πολυείδης have parallel forms Εὐείδος, Πολύιδος.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the form of Nominative Ἀνδόκιδος is possible and not unique, even if this name is not known in this form exactly.

#### Δηλφινί(ωι), Δελφινίωι

The cult of Apollo Delphinios in Olbia is attested to by multiple inscriptions and other evidence; all the inscriptions, both lapidary and graffiti, either containing full epiclesis or its part, feature the correct spelling Δελφι-.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the calendar graffito, only one Olbian inscription features the spelling Δηλφι- for Δελφι-, a dedication to Artemis Delphinia Ἄρτ(εμι) Δηλφι(νίη), dated to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE by the form of the vessel.<sup>31</sup> The script of the dedication is similar to the calendar graffito, and it is probable that both were written by the same person.<sup>32</sup> The confusion of long and short vowels in Greek inscriptions of the North-Western Black Sea region became common only in the Roman times.<sup>33</sup> *Eta* for *epsilon* in the root of the word seems to be an exclusion.<sup>34</sup> The analogies are attested to in Attica, where the confusion of η and ε was relatively frequent since

<sup>24</sup> R. Wachter suggests calling such abbreviations 'semi-mistakes' (WACHER 1991, 74); M. Avi-Yonah puts forward two criteria of abbreviations: the save space and labour; their meaning is clear (AVI-YONAH 1940, 9). L. Threatte calls this way of writing 'shortening or curtailment' (THREATTE 1980, 99). For Olbia see GOP 29, nos. 15-18; 34, nos. 29-31 and many others.

<sup>25</sup> LGPN, s.v.

<sup>26</sup> IGDOLBIA 99. For a different position see: TOKHTASIEV 1999, 191.

<sup>27</sup> YAYLENKO 2017, 37-38.

<sup>28</sup> I did not find such a formula of Greek inscriptions, of any date. V. Yaylenko (YAYLENKO 2017, 37-40) considers this inscription as an oracle which was engraved by two different persons and brought to Olbia from Athens, but he does not substantiate his suggestion. Both the script and the spelling contradict his idea. Cf. LAZZARINI 1976; VINOGRADOV 1979, 188.

<sup>29</sup> LGPN, s.v.

<sup>30</sup> GOP 25-27, nos. 1-6; IO 58 + IOSPE I<sup>2</sup> 307; SEG 34: 768 (= IO 56), etc. For the cult of Apollo Delphinios in the Greek world and origin of the epiclesis see: GRAF 1979, 2-22.

<sup>31</sup> GOP 107, no. 5, see also IGDOLBIA 99. The date of the inscription is approximate, according to the script it is not earlier than late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The graffito is unfortunately lost. For details see ONYSHKEVYCH 1998, 47, esp. n. 113.

<sup>32</sup> On the basis of the spelling Δηλφι- for Δελφι- in this inscription, L. Dubois suggests that the calendar graffito is dedicated not only to Apollo, but also to Artemis: he reads Δηλφινί, the epiclesis of the goddess Artemis without her name in an asyndetic form of dedication (IGDOLBIA 99). His reconstruction of the formula is not convincing and has no analogies in Greek epigraphy.

<sup>33</sup> For the Milesian colonies of Bosphorus see CIRB 800.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. SLAVOVA 2004, 45.

the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>35</sup> Either the author of the inscription had connections with Attica, or the process of replacement of the short vowels by the long ones and *vice versa* arrived in Olbia from Attica; in any case, it could not happen before the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

#### Ἴατρο-, Ἴητρο-

The main spelling peculiarity, with implications on the dating of the calendar graffito is Apollo's epiclesis Ietros (Iatros). In the north-western Black Sea Milesian colonies the cult of Apollo Ietros is attested to by multiple graffiti, lapidary inscriptions, coins, statues and archeologic remains of the sanctuaries. Most of the written evidence before the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE is from Olbia; beyond Olbia, the cult of Apollo Ietros is known in Apollonia, Histria, Tyras, Panticapeum, Myrmekion, Nymphaion, Phanagoria, Hermonassa, Gorgippia. All the early inscriptions feature the form Ἴητρος;<sup>36</sup> this spelling persists even in the Roman time.<sup>37</sup> The Classical Greek form Ἴατρος was spelt as Ἴητρος in the Ionic dialect, both in the noun meaning 'healer', or an epiclesis.<sup>38</sup> The earliest examples of the spelling Ἴατρος as an epiclesis of Apollo appeared in the 4<sup>th</sup> BCE,<sup>39</sup> most probably under the influence of the literary tradition.<sup>40</sup> The cult of Apollo Ietros is not attested to in the Greek world beyond the North-Western Black Sea region before the Hellenistic period.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the spelling of the calendar inscription allows its dating to the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>42</sup>

### CALENDAR INSCRIPTIONS

Calendar inscriptions are not rare in the Greek epigraphy, most of them however differ from Olbian graffito. Months are usually indicated in connection with festivals, dedications to gods, or special occasions. Inscriptions containing a full list of months are rare in Greek epigraphy. The Olbian graffito is the only complete list of the months of the Milesian calendar.<sup>43</sup> The earliest calendar inscription in Greek epigraphy is from Attica, and it is dated to 430-s BCE or slightly later. Several others are dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>35</sup> THREATTE 1980, 159 ff.

<sup>36</sup> YAYLENKO 2017, 16, nos. 1, 2, 3; GOP 44, no. 2, 45; nos. 3-5; 46, nos. 6-8; 47, no. 9, etc.

<sup>37</sup> IGBR I<sup>2</sup>, 399 and 400; ISM I, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. ἴστημι pro ἴσταμι, μήτηρ pro μάτηρ, even if there is *α purum* χώρα, Δημητρίη pro Δημητρία (more examples see BUCK 1955, 21; CIRB 798).

<sup>39</sup> CIRB 974 (Phanagoria, late 4<sup>th</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE); GG 174 (Pantikapaion, early 4<sup>th</sup> BCE); SEG 55: 1477 (4<sup>th</sup> BCE); SEG 37: 664e (Gorgippia, 4<sup>th</sup> BCE); IGBR I<sup>2</sup> 388 (3<sup>rd</sup> – early 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE); ISM I 1; 34; 64 (Histria, 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE).

<sup>40</sup> For the cult of Apollo Ietros see USTINOVA 2009, 245-298; for the peculiarities of this cult in Olbia and origin of the epiclesis see Andreeva (in print).

<sup>41</sup> The assumptions on the existence of the cult of Apollo Ietros in Miletos as early as in the Archaic period are erroneous; for details see USTINOVA 2009, 261 ff.

<sup>42</sup> Neither the names of the months, nor the other epiclesis of Apollo are indicative of the date. Among two other epiclesis of Apollo in this inscription *Lykeios* occurs in many places of the Greek world at least since early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (BURKERT 1985, 61, 144-145), and *Thargelios* is unique, although the festival of Thargelia was celebrated in many Greek cities since the Archaic period (BREMNER 2000, 273 ff.).

<sup>43</sup> On the calendars of the Milesian colonies see EHRHARDT 1983, 113-126; FERRARO 2015, 13-45.

BCE, and this type of inscriptions becomes common only in the Roman period.<sup>44</sup>

Most scholars maintain that the Olbian graffito predates all the calendar inscriptions. It is however highly improbable that the inscription from the faraway city of Olbia predated the Milesian and even Athenian materials, rather than *vice versa*.

## CONCLUSION

The Olbian calendar graffito SEG 30: 977 is not the oldest calendar inscription in the Greek world. Its date is the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE according to its script and spelling, as well as the date of the *skyphos*. The later date does not diminish the importance of the graffito, which features a distinct script and spelling, and contains the only full list of the months of the Milesian calendar and a unique set of Apollo's epicleses.

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