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A NOTE ON THE DEDICATION *N.I.OLYMPIA* 33B

MIKA KAJAVA

The following article briefly discusses a Late Archaic bronze disc (figs. 1–3) that was found south of the western baths of Olympia in 1941, though not properly published until some ten years ago. The object (diam. 19.7 cm), inscribed on the rim, has a flat reverse and a rectangular hole at its centre and is decorated with twenty-four incised crescents (whirligig motif).¹

Inscribed in the Aeginetan script of the latter half of the sixth century BC, the artefact has been identified as a discus once held by a now lost *diskobolos* statue measuring c. 1.20 m in height.² The text, first published by András Patay-Horváth in 2007 ([above n. 1] = *SEG* LVII 398), is here given as in *N.I.Olympia* 33B:

* I wish to thank Prof. Klaus Hallof for providing me excellent quality photographs of the inscription, and the two anonymous readers for their useful comments. – A slightly modified version of this article is included in M. Kajava – E. M. Salminen, Greek Inscribed Discs: "Athletes, Dedications and Tombstones", in A. Kavoulaki (ed.), *'Reading' Greek Religion: Literary, Historical and Artistic Perspectives. A Conference in Memory of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, Rethymnon, Crete, 22–24 September 2012* (Ariadne Suppl., University of Crete), Rethymnon, forthcoming.

¹ A. Patay-Horváth, "Eine beschriftete Bronzescheibe aus Olympia", *Tyche* 22 (2007) 124: "Gefunden südlich der Westthermen 19.6.1941 Raum in der NO Ecke". See also "The Disc of Hermesios – Reconstruction of a Bronze Statue", presented at the XVII Congress of Classical Archaeology, Rome, 22–26 September 2008: *Bollettino di archeologia online* (MBAC), vol. speciale: http://www.bollettinodiarcheologiaonline.beniculturali.it/documenti/generale/1_PATAY-HORVATH.pdf.

² Patay-Horváth 2007 (above n. 1). In an earlier publication, Patay-Horváth identified the object as a miniature shield ("A Laconian Bronze Disc from Olympia", *Peloponnesiaka* 27 [2006] 283–302, cf. Dubois, *BE* 2009, 231). The whirligig motif is well-attested on shields.

ἡερμέσιος : μ' ἐποίησε : Λακεδαίμ[ό]νι[ο]ς : Αἰγινᾶι-[ca. 4-5]
 →
 οἱ ἀνέθεσαν [ca. 10] vac.
 ←

The inscription seems to mention the artisan, Hermesios of Sparta, who may well have been of Ionian origin,³ and the Aeginetans (but see below), who made the dedication; any possible information regarding the winner and his success would have been recorded on the statue base. This interpretation was recently challenged on morphological grounds in favour of the hypothesis that the object might instead be the wheel of a miniature four-horse chariot dedicated by the Aeginetans who commemorated their victory with the inscription.⁴ According to this reconstruction, the necessary mention of the winner would have been made by recording 'the (victorious) Aeginetans' collectively as its dedicators. In principle, this seems possible, and, if the technical arguments concerning the type of the central hole and the decoration of the object are tenable (see n. 4), then the wheel hypothesis may well prove true.

However, the context of the dedication needs reconsideration, as the standard reading of the inscription is problematic. There seem to be several letters intervening between ΑΙΓΙΝΑΙ and ΟΙ, and many more letters following what has otherwise been identified as the final word. The former set of letters has been dismissed as nonsensical "Vorzeichnungen für die Buchstaben",⁵ which can hardly be right. Moreover, recent analysis correctly points out that one would not only expect Αἰγινάται in place of "Αἰγινᾶι/[vacat]οι", but that

³ Thus, plausibly, R. V. W. Catling, "ΕΡΜΗΣΙΟΣ ΛΑΚΕΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΟΣ – A Spartan Craftsman of Ionian Origin?", in N. Sekunda (ed.), *Ergasteria: Works Presented to John Ellis Jones on his 80th Birthday*, Gdańsk 2010, 44–53, discussing the name *Hermesios*, which probably points to East Greece, and the mixture of Doric and Attic-Ionic elements (accepted by Dubois, *BE* 2011, 279, cf. also *SEG* LXI 315).

⁴ P. Siewert, "Eine rätselhafte Bronzescheibe aus Olympia", *Tyche* 25 (2010) 234, points out that neither squared central holes nor sickle-shaped radii are otherwise attested for discuses. See now also at *N.I. Olympia* 33B.

⁵ Patay-Horváth 2007 (above n. 1) 124 (referenced in *N.I. Olympia* 33B): "einige schwach eingeritzte Linien, ... die möglicherweise Vorzeichnungen für die Buchstaben gewesen sein dürften. Sie ergeben auf jeden Fall keinen Sinn und unterscheiden sich auch aus technischer Sicht so eindeutig von der eigentlichen Inschrift, daß sie bei der Lesung unbeachtet bleiben dürfen".

the reader would also expect to find a mention of Zeus Olympios as the recipient of the dedication, though, of course, the name of the deity could also have been omitted.⁶ The denomination Αἰγινᾶῖοι, while frequently referring to Aeginetan coinage or to goods, and occasionally to Aeginetan women (i.e. Αἰγινᾶία as a rare alternative to the common ethnic Αἰγινῆτις), seemingly never occurs as a collective term for the Aeginetans and their state, a male Aeginetan being usually termed Αἰγινῆτης/Αἰγινάτας.⁷

Since Αἰγινᾶῖοι is hardly acceptable in the present context and because what remains of the text does not allow reading the standard Αἰγινάται,⁸ the most likely solution, in my view, is the locative Αἰγίναι, the use of which in similar contexts is paralleled by other evidence.⁹ From a palaeographic perspective, one may observe that no interpunctuation is marked after the point at which the direction of the script changes. The first five words are inscribed from left to right, the remaining words from right to left; this is understandable given that inscribing along the edge of a circular object that has to be rotated during the writing process may affect the script direction. Here, the change of direction coincides with a natural break, i.e. with the transition from one sentence (ending in Αἰγίναι) to another (starting with the subject of the dedicatory verb).

Close inspection of the photographic evidence makes a long *vacat* between ΑΙΓΙΝΑΙ and ΟΙ rather unlikely, and indeed it should be here that the subject of ἀνέθεσαν, probably ending in -ῖοι, would be recorded. While -ῖοι is fairly well discernible, the other letters are much more difficult: after a possible *vacat*, there might just be a circular letter (O, Θ) followed by I (or Λ?) and E. One should stress, however, that the reading of this part of the text is problematic in that some curves and strokes that resemble letter traces may actually just be abrasions. The dedicatory verb is then followed by a series of some ten

⁶ Catling (above n. 3) 46, 49.

⁷ Evidence collected and discussed by Catling (above n. 3) 46. He records only one exception in a late text (*IG* IV² 2, 772, 3: ἡ ἱερὰ πόλις Αἰγινέων; AD 244–249).

⁸ Thus tentatively in Catling's drawing (p. 44), where the ending ΑΙ appears immediately after ΑΙΓΙΝΑΤ at the beginning of the alleged *vacat* (note, however, that the inscription reads ΑΙΓΙΝΑΙ).

⁹ Cf. *N.I.Olympia* 33A (statue commissioned and dedicated by Byzantines; late sixth century BC): Πελανίδας ἐποίησ' Αἰγίνα, etc., perhaps another early case of the weakening of the iota in -ῖαι (unless it is the stonemason's error); *FD* III 1, 500: [--- ἐ]ποίη : Αἰγίναι (early fifth century BC); and the discussion in K. Hallof – K. Herrmann – S. Prignitz, "Alte und neue Inschriften aus Olympia I", *Chiron* 42 (2012) 224–25.

further letters, many of which look either like I or O (the first letter following the verb has the shape of A, but might also be Λ, or even Δ; the second letter is probably O, less likely a Θ, in which case the letter would differ from the one in ἀνέθεσαν; the fifth letter seems to be an Aeginetan Φ, etc.). It is possible that one or more of the following items were recorded here: the dedicated object, perhaps either specified¹⁰ or simply labelled as ἄθλον, the deity receiving the *anathema*, and the context occasioning the dedication.

In sum, it seems to me that the text should be understood as follows (note, however, that many of the underdotted letters are more or less bold guesses):

ηερμέσιος : μ' ἐποίησε : Λακεδαιμόνιος : Αἰγίνα
 →
 vac.(?) +IE[c. 2]IOI ἀνέθεσαν ΑΟΙΟΦΙ+ΙΟΙ vac.
 ←

Thus, it would appear that the dedication at Olympia was not made by Aeginetans; in addition, a certain Hermesios, a seemingly itinerant craftsman of Ionian derivation and a naturalized citizen of the Lacedaemonian state, manufactured and inscribed the object on the island of Aegina. This would not conflict with the dialectical mixture of the inscription¹¹ nor with the observation that the script and the interpunctuations are of the Aeginetan type. If correct, this conclusion supports the notion that the object was dedicated at Olympia (most likely to Zeus Olympios) as a gift commemorating a victory, be it in chariot racing, in battle or something else, but it would still leave open the identity of the victorious dedicants.

University of Helsinki

¹⁰ In view of the present case, cf. the dedication of a bronze wheel on Rhodes: *Tit. Cam. Suppl.* 237, 115a (second half of the fifth century BC): τροφὸν ἄρματος.

¹¹ ηερμέσιος, ἀνέθεσαν instead of Dor. ηερμάσιος, ἀνέθεν, and the other way round, not quite unexpectedly, Αἰγίνα *pro* Att.-Ion. Αἰγίνη. The language may suggest, on one hand, that Hermesios was a first-generation immigrant in Doric-speaking territory, and on the other, that Ionicisms could be tolerated on Aegina. Cf. Catling (above n. 3) 49.



Fig. 1. From Patay-Horváth 2007 (above n. 1), Pl. 4. Courtesy András Patay-Horváth.



Figs. 2–3. Courtesy Archiv der IG, Photograph: K. Hallof (2011).