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AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF TRADERS IN LATE 8TH-7TH C. B.C.
KOMMOS IN SOUTHERN CRETE

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 88 (1991) 211–216

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An International Community of Traders in Late 8th-7th c. B.C. Kommos in Southern Crete

Kommos,¹ one of the few usable harbours on the south coast of Crete, was a major port town, perhaps *the* major port town of southern Crete, during the Late Minoan period, especially LM III, when the site shows extensive trade connections with Cyprus, the Levant and Italy.² By the end of LM IIIB, the site was completely abandoned, but its natural advantage again attracted merchants as early as the late 10th c. B.C. These first Iron Age merchants, very probably Phoenicians, made only a very restricted use of the site: the limited remains would characterize it as a regular "pit-stop" rather than a "trading post;" there is certainly no evidence of permanent settlement.³ They built a temple which enclosed a tripillar shrine (of a familiar Phoenician type) and left behind over 200 fragments of Phoenician pottery, mainly "torpedo" jars and (possibly) one inscription. This "Phoenician presence" is strongest in the 9th c. B.C., a time of intense Phoenician activity in the West and the Tyrian colonization of North Africa. The tripillar shrine continued to be worshipped until about 650 B.C., possibly long after Phoenician activity ceased in the area. The use of the harbour and temple site was never exclusively Phoenician. Local Greeks seem to have frequented the site from the time of its first use as a sanctuary. The late 8th and 7th century B.C. yield ample evidence of an increase in Greek mercantile activity, culminating in the construction of a number of buildings in the sanctuary around 630 B.C. (one of which was almost certainly a depot for merchandise passing through the area). Though this activity generally coincides with the period of Greek expansion to the Southern Mediterranean, Naucratis and Cyrenaica, Kommos' trade connections are characterized chiefly by East Greek, Peloponnesian and some Central Greek imports. By 600 B.C., quite suddenly, the Kommos site fell once more into disuse (though it would be partially revived by the later 6th century B.C.).

It would help throw a little light on this dark period of Greek history if we were able to identify the nationalities of the Greek merchants who superseded the Phoenicians and perhaps for a time even shared the use of the Kommos site with them. However specific and unam-

¹ The following abbreviations are used:

Gallavotti 1979-80 C. Gallavotti, "La firma di Aristonothos e alcuni problemi di fonetica greca," in *Φιλία Χάρτιν: Miscellanea di Studi Classici in Onore di Eugenio Manni* (Rome 1979-80) vol. 3, 1013-1031

Guarducci 1967 M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia Greca I* (Rome 1967)

Jeffery 1990 L.H. Jeffery, *The Local Script of Archaic Greece*, 2nd ed. with supplement by A.W. Johnston (Oxford 1990)

I wish to thank P. Callaghan, A.W. Johnston, G. Schwendner and J.W. Shaw for advice in their respective areas of expertise (the responsibility for opinions expressed here is, of course, my own) and to the SSHRC and Gilbert Norwood Foundation for financial assistance at the time I began to study the graffiti at Kommos. The drawings of the inscriptions are by J.P. Clarke, with modifications in Figures 4 and 5 by G. Bianco.

² See L.V. Watrous, "Late Bronze Age Kommos: Imported Pottery as Evidence for Foreign Contact," *Scripta Mediterranea* 6 (1985) 7-11.

³ J.W. Shaw, "Phoenicians in Southern Crete," *AJA* 93 (1989) 165-183.

biguous its regional expression, no artifact is of any value for this purpose unless we can say it was produced, not simply carried, by the merchants themselves. Fortunately we do have a few scraps of evidence of this sort. Of the 41 bits of graffiti which have been recovered from the late 8th - 7th c. B.C. sanctuary, most are written on imports, and several incised before firing in the place of origin. But a small group, nine in all, appear on cups of a local South Cretan fabric and hence were acquired and inscribed at Kommos.

The cups are ordinary tableware, very commonly found in 8th-7th c. Kommos, most decorated only by black glaze, with which eight were probably fully covered (the ninth, I 17 may have been rim-dipped). One had an added band of white paint on the interior rim (I 22). I 17 came from a sounding between the third (ca. 650 B.C.) and second floor (ca. 760 B.C.) of Temple B. Most of the group came from a single dark lens of earth containing ash and the remnants of meals within the Temple B dump (I 22, I 23, I 25, I 26, I 33) and datable to the 7th c. B.C. The context of the seventh (I 32) also from the temple dump may have contained some 6th c. B.C. material. The eighth and ninth (I 68, I 70) appeared in the fill on the upper floor of the late 7th-century B.C. storage depot (Building Q) mentioned above.

All but two (I 68, I 70) of the inscriptions are alphabetic, though one (I 32) also contains some apparently decorative elipsoid marks. All but one (I 17) were inscribed after firing. There is no preferred writing surface: one inscription appears on the bottom of the base (I 17), five on the strap handles of the cups (I 23, I 25, I 33, I 68, I 70), one on the exterior of the rim (I 22), two on body fragments (I 26, I 32). Two of the fragments contain single letters, though one may originally have been accompanied by one or two additional letters, now lost; whether heta or a het-shaped eta (I 33), phi or qoppa (I 17) can not longer be determined. Two retain two letters in sequence (I 23 and I 32—the latter may well have had more). Two have four letters (I 25, I 26) and one has five letters preserved in sequence (I 22). As the Kommos inscriptions as a whole will be published elsewhere (forthcoming in *Kommos* IV). I will concentrate only on those few pieces which may give some indication of the alphabet used by the inscribers.

I 22 (pl. VI 2a; figure 1) was inscribed by a steady practiced hand in large carefully drawn letters on the body of a cup, broken in antiquity, and now restored from two fragments. The text is clear, reading dextrograde:

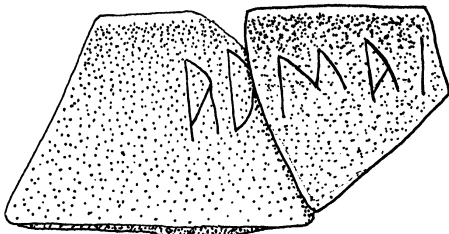


Figure 1(I 22; scale 1/1)

ADMAI[

There are enough diagnostic letters that the alphabet can be identified with reasonable confidence as Central Greek, probably Boiotian, possibly Euboian. The form of the alphas ("curved alpha") is particularly characteristic of the Boiotian alphabet, though it occasionally appears also in Thessaly, and more rarely in Euboea. The alpha of Phokis and Achaean colonies is close in type but more angular. This letter form usually curves on the side of the direction of writing (as here), but unlike these examples normally, but not invariably, with the cross bar descending from the vertical to the curve. Rounded delta has a larger geograph-

ical range, found not only in Central Greece but also in many Peloponnesian alphabets. Rounded delta is normal in Boiotia and Chalkis, but the Eretrian delta is angular (Guarducci 1967, 216, n. 1; Jeffery 1990, 79). Four stroke mu with a shortened fourth stroke is found in very early inscriptions of Thera, Corinth, Athena, and Boiotia (Guarducci 1967, 95). This form again favours Boiotia over other candidates since the mu of Chalkis is usually symmetrical while Eretria uses the five stroke mu.⁴ Boiotia is clearly preferred over other Central Greek alphabets by the combination of curved alpha, rounded delta and four stroke mu with a short final stroke, all of which appear in the earliest Boiotian inscription, the dedication of a statue to Apollo by Mantiklos (late 8th - early 7th c. B.C. (Jeffery 1990, 94, no. 1, pl. 7).

Though there is no doubt about the reading of I 22, its meaning is elusive. By its context the graffito would appear to be an owner's inscription, but no known Greek name begins with these letters. Indeed the only Greek word known to begin with this sequence is ἄδμαίνειν, a gloss preserved by Hesychius, who equates it with ὑγιαίνειν and ζῆν.⁵ Perhaps ADMAI begins some as yet unattested name, conceivably Ἄδμαίων (cf. the name Ἰγυαίων). Alternatively we may suppose that the inscriber's name was the familiar Ἄδματος, but that for some reason he failed to cross his tau. Given the difficulties of the manifest reading, I propose⁶

ADMAT[O] or ADMAT(O).

The Doric form of the name would give further preference for Boiotia over Euboia.

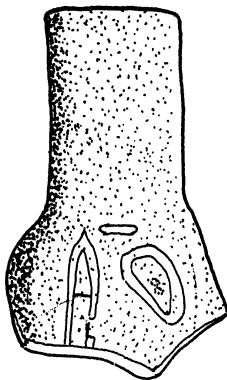


Figure 2 (I 23; scale 1/1)

One other graffito, I 23, may perhaps be compared with I 22. Unfortunately I 23 is very difficult to make out clearly due to the flaking of the glaze around the lines of the incision (figure 2). The first letter, alpha, though slightly curved at the apex, is quite different in form from the alphas of I 22. The second letter looks most like a slightly tilted lunate delta, though it may be a misshapen O. It is unlikely to be dotted theta, since, apart from the Mantiklos dedication mentioned above, this form is not attested anywhere until the mid 6th c. BC. (the marks in the centre appear to be independent flaking, as does the horizontal line above and between the two letters). The alpha

⁴ Note, however, that five-stroke mu appears with lunate delta and "Boiotian" curved alpha in a graffito on an imported bowl found in Eretria, datable to 735-725 B.C. See A.W. Johnston and A. Andriomenou, *BSA* 84 (1989) 217-220 and Johnston's supplement, Jeffery 1990, 434, pl. 73. The graffito, almost certainly Euboian, demonstrates the danger that attends the formation of overfine distinctions between Euboian alphabets made despite the lack of inscriptions from Chalkis before the late 6th c. B.C. Cf. Johnston's supplement "B" in Jeffery 1990, 434.

⁵ A variation on this root (or perhaps a corruption of the gloss) appears as ἄδμεύειν in the *Etymologicum Magnum* (18, 31, equated to ὑγιαίνειν). Is the root Indo-European (cf. Sanskrit *ātmán* = "breath, soul, life" and the related Germanic roots, e.g. Old High German *ātum* (*Atem*)? It does not appear to be Greek.

⁶ To accuse the inscriber of misspelling his own name seems a counsel of despair and not certainly preferable to receiving ADMAI as evidence of a gap in our knowledge of the Greek onomasticon. It is not easy to account for the lapse except as a misspelling: the hand does not suggest unfamiliarity with the alphabet, while reasons of method discourage the correction of other special scenarios (sudden indolence or distraction of the writer between strokes).

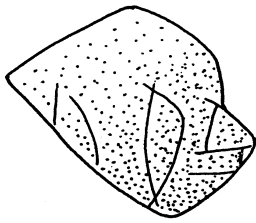


Figure 3 (I 32; scale 1/1)

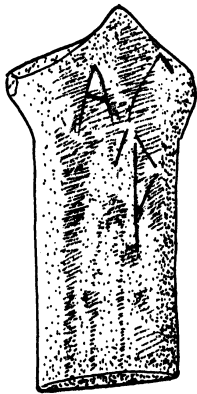


Figure 4 (I 25; scale 1/1)



Figure 5 (I 26; scale 1/1)

on a third cup, **I 32** (figure 3), broken at the top and left, is broader with a lower cross-bar than on either of the inscriptions mentioned above. The preserved left end of a cross-bar shows the following letter to be tau.

A complete four-letter inscription in very thin but distinct lines was written upside down on the handle of a third cup, **I 25** (figure 4). A nondescript alpha is followed by a tilted gamma or lambda. The last two letters are a little fainter but the shape of the lines, at least, is not in doubt: straight iota, followed by a rho. The gamma/lambda and the rho face right, suggesting that both lines are to be read dextrograde, rendering ΑΓΙΡ or ΑΛΙΡ. Unfortunately, this begins no known name or word in Greek usage apart from ἄλιρ, once again, attested only in a dialectal gloss preserved by the uncanny Hesychius, who equates it with ὀξύβαφον (cf. Hsch. s.v. ἄλιρ). The Kommotian cups do not seem to conform easily to descriptions of the small flat cups or bowls used as "sauce dippers" in antiquity. It is perhaps best to assume the beginning of a personal name, probably of non-Greek origin, or, as a last resort, to suppose that the rho has been turned around and to read boustrophedon ΑΓΠΙ().

A rim sherd (**I 26**, pl. VI 2b; figure 5) preserves a complete inscription consisting of four unusually small letters, this time written sinistrongrade, with long horizontal strokes creating an impression of speed and deliberation, not without a certain flair. The arms of the kappa are unusually low, standard lambda, epsilon, and an alpha with a very marked curve, rendering

ΚΛΕΑ *vacat*.

I 26 seems to give another example of the Central Greek curved alpha. Yet all that may safely be said is that I 26 seems to use a different alphabet from that of I 22: Archaic Boiotia and Euboea invariably use "Chalcidian lambda," which is hooked at the bottom rather than the top.⁷ ΚΛΕΑ may give either a complete (Doric) genitive form of Κλέαα,⁸ or an abbreviation of any one of a large number of personal names beginning with these letters.

⁷ "Chalcidian lambda" is normal in the earliest alphabets of Euboea, Attica, and Boiotia, but found also in Opuntian Lokris and North Central Crete (Dreos, Knossos, Eltynia and Praisos). See M. Guarducci, *Studi Etruschi* 14 (1940) 281-297, esp. 281-285.

⁸ Attested at least five times (see the onomastica of Pape and Fraser/Matthews). Against Doric Κλέαα, one may note that if this graffito were Central Greek, then the juxtaposition of curved alpha with this form of lambda, would, on the basis of our present knowledge, be most easily conceivable in Attica, where curved al-

To sum up, the very late 8th-7th c. B.C. inscribed cups at Kommos indicate the use of at least two different regional alphabets. Presumably this is evidence of the presence of traders of two or more (Greek) nationalities at the sanctuary. One group was certainly Central Greek and very probably Boiotian or possibly Chalcidian. The Kommos cups thus also attest to the extent and vigour of Euboian trade in the period of its greatest overseas expansion. They allow us a glimpse at the international character of even this tiny and remote port of call, where Cretans, Central Greeks, probably other Greeks, perhaps even Phoenicians lied to each other over wine and limpets at the seaside shrine and left their cups, possibly for reuse on the return journey.

One other inscription may be of some interest for this discussion, though this one (I 45) was inscribed after firing, not on a locally manufactured cup, but on the body fragment of an imported amphora, which may be East Greek in origin, and so need not necessarily have any direct connection with the actual merchants who visited Kommos. By context the amphora is dated to the 7th c. B.C. and probably to the latter half. Two letters and the beginning of a third

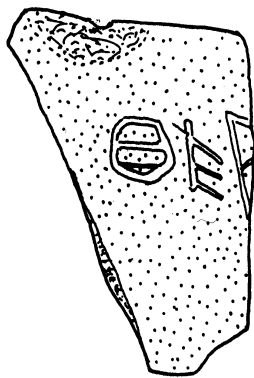


Figure 6 (I 45; scale 1/1)

are preserved (pl. VI 2c; figure 6). Like the graffiti on I 22 and probably I 25, this inscription is written dextrograde. The second letter is easily recognized as E. The beginning of a medial horizontal is visible before the break in the final letter which must be either rho or (less probably) beta. It is the first letter which is particularly interesting: a closed letter, with straight lines forming the left most vertical and the upper horizontal, while the corresponding lines on the right and bottom are curved, producing a form which is half square, half circle. Above the centre of the "circle" is a horizontal crossbar; lower down and close to the curving line forming the bottom of the "circle" is another horizontal parallel with the upper. Though the lower horizontal line is thinner, it is clear and deliberate. If this is a theta, then the letter form is without parallel:

the circle of archaic theta is crossed. Apparent exceptions in all cases but two take the form of a closed circle with a single vertical crossbar (listed by Gallavotti 1979-80). Guarducci argues for a circular theta with a horizontal crossbar in a dedication found at Poseidonia (c. 550-500 B.C.), though Jeffery argues that the letter occurs in a non-Greek sequence and may be phi, and Gallavotti that the sequence may be Greek and the letter phi.⁹ A circular theta with an oblique crossbar appears in a 6th c. B.C. stone inscription from Eretria (*IG XII*, 9, 285).¹⁰ All of these forms are probably to be explained as the substitution of phi for theta

pha appears on some early graffiti (Jeffery 1990, 76, nos. 2-4, pl. 1), and "Chalcidian lambda" appears on the Dipylon oinochoe and "very rarely" afterwards (Jeffery 1990, 66).

⁹ M. Guarducci, *Archeologia Classica* 4 (1952) 145-152, esp. pp. 147-148; L.H. Jeffery, *BSA* 1 (1955) 67-84, p. 78; Gallavotti 1979-80, 1022.

¹⁰ Circular tet with a nearly horizontal crossbar is known from Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions of the 8th-7th c. B.C.: H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften I-III* (Wiesbaden 1962-64) nos. 214-216 and J.C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions II* (Oxford 1975) 60-93 (cf. Gallavotti 1979-80, 1015). The same form appears in the Carian and Pamphylian alphabets: V.V. Ševoroškin,

either through a spelling error or catachrestic pronunciation (see Gallavotti 1979-80). A unique rectangular theta with a single horizontal bar appears on the rim of a bronze vessel dedicated at Olympia.¹¹

The closest parallel to the first letter of I 45 is not theta, but the rectangular heta with two internal cross bars found on a Theban bronze lebes (Jeffery 1990, 91, 94, no. 2, pl. 7), on an oinochoe from Eretria, but convincingly argued by Jeffery to be Boiotian (*ibid.* p. 85, 95, no. 22, pl. 10), and on an inscribed dedication at Delphi, thought by Jeffery to be Laconian (*ibid.* 190, 199, no. 11, pl. 35), but by Guarducci and Lazzarini to be Boiotian.¹² The appearance of the same form of heta in the abecedarium of Marsiliana d'Albegna leads Guarducci to hypothesize the presence of Boiotians in the Chalcidian foundation of Kyme.¹³

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Kadmos 3 (1964) 72-87, p. 82, and V. Gardthausen, *RE* XI (1922) cols. 601-612, 605, possibly with value $\acute{\epsilon}$ (J.D. Ray, *Kadmos* 20 [1981] 150-162, pp. 160-162.)

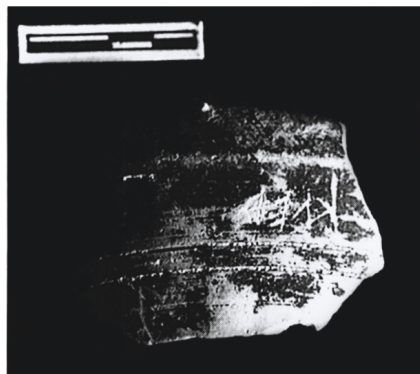
¹¹ W. Dittenberger und K. Purgold, *Die Inschriften von Olympia* (Berlin 1896) no. 258.

¹² Guarducci 1967, 144; M.L. Lazzarini, "Una singolare variante del segno di spirito aspro nella Beozia arcaica," *RendLincei* 23 (1968) 153-156.

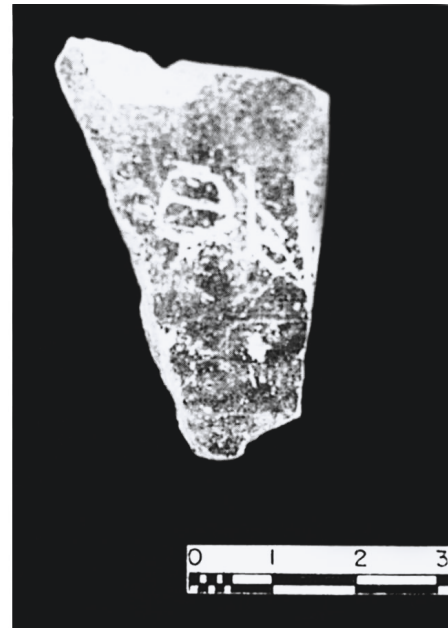
¹³ M. Guarducci, *RendLincei* 19 (1964) 6-10, 9; Guarducci 1967, 217f.



2a)



2b)



2c)

2a-c) Inscribed pottery from Kommos in Crete