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A NEW MAGICAL INSCRIPTION FROM PANTICAPAEUM'S NECROPOLIS

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A NEW MAGICAL INSCRIPTION FROM PANTICAPAEUM'S NECROPOLIS*

Today the problem of ancient magic is being addressed by researches not less (probably, even more) often than in the end of the 19th–early 20th centuries, when the study of the so-called “devious religious practices” was introduced to the problem-field of truly academic science by such outstanding specialists as Albrecht Dieterich, Richard Wünsch, Auguste Audollent, Karl Preisendanz, Evgeniy Kagarov and some others. It was the time of creation not only of the first *corpora* of magical epigraphic monuments, but also of some important monographs which preserve their high scientific significance till our days. However, no new resumptive collections of magical inscriptions have been published since the appearance of Wünsch and Audollent's *Corpus*. The work on the XVIth volume of *Inscriptiones Graecae*, conducted under the aegis of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, has been launched just recently. The first part of this volume containing Attic *defixionum tabellae* was supposed to appear last year, but, as it seems, it hasn't yet been published¹.

In the time when the first collections of magical inscriptions appeared, only a few monuments from the Northern Black Sea region were known. Today the number of these inscriptions increased considerably: there are some 40 published inscriptions from Olbia and more than 30 from Bosphorus². In addition, new monuments pertinent to our topic are being found on the territory of the ancient Bosphorus every year. Unfortunately, a lion's share of such findings is made by the so-called “black diggers” (i.e. those acting without an official permit), so the artifacts end up in private collections instead of state museums.

The inscription we would like to report about was found in 2011 in Kerch on the top of the Mithridates Mountain, the site of the ancient Panticapaeum's necropolis. The lead plate containing the inscription was found five-times folded (one can see four bends). There are some traces of damage made by a nail. The text of the inscription was scratched in straight lines by a relatively accurate handwriting on the surface of the lead plate (16 cm. long and from 2.5 to 6.5 cm. wide). The earliest date that could be suggested based on the inscription's palaeography is the 3rd c. BC. This conclusion seems to be supported by the presence of the lunar *sigma*, appearing in Bosporan inscriptions of this period³. The forms of other letters don't have any distinct peculiarities that could facilitate the dating.

For the most part the text of the inscription isn't difficult to decipher:

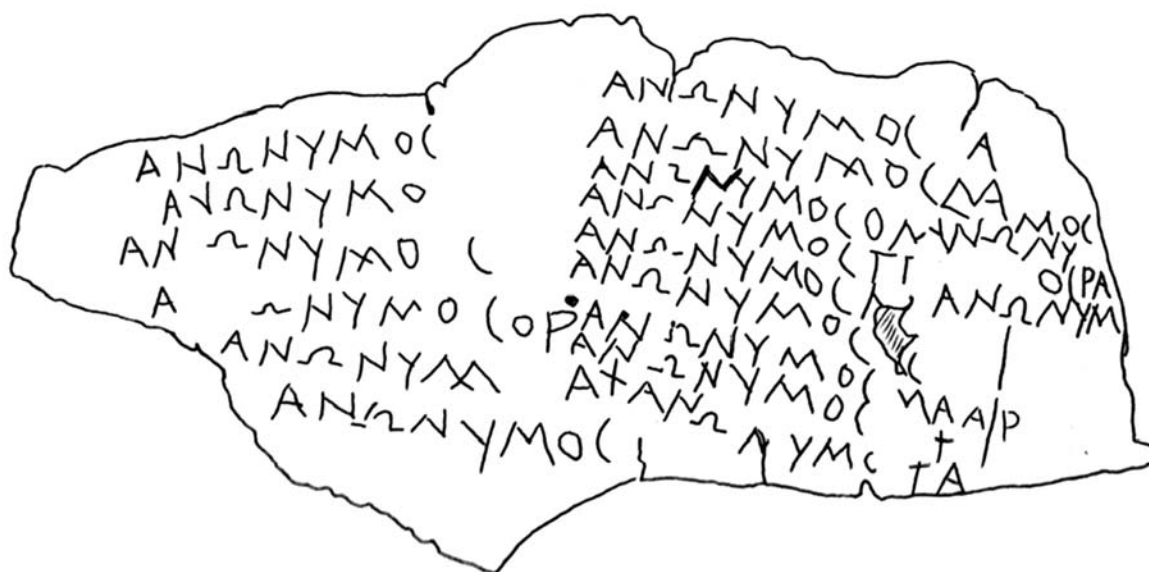
	¹ ἀνώνυμος Α
	² ἀνώνυμος ?
¹ ἀνώνυμος	³ ἀνώνυμος ΟΡ ἀνώνυμ ^{ος}
² ἀνώνυμο[ς]	⁴ ἀνώνυμος .. [ἀνώνυμ]ος PA
³ ἀνώνυμος	⁵ ἀνώνυμος .. ἀνώνυμ _[ος]
⁴ ἀ[ν]ώνυμος	⁶ ἀνώνυμος .. Σ
⁵ ἀνώνυμ[ος]	⁷ ἀνώνυμος ΜΑΑΡ
⁶ ἀνώνυμος	⁸ ΟΡ ἀνώνυμος +
	⁹ Ατ ἀνώνυμο[ς] ΡΑ

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¹ See: <http://www.topoi.org/group/b-defixiones-topoi-1>.

² An attempt to collect all Bosporan magical inscriptions was undertaken by V. P. Yaylenko in 2005. He published 31 monuments in his article. Five of these monuments are ceramic amulets, two lead amulets, six lead *tabellae defixionum* and two ceramic *tabellae defixionum*. The author classifies three artifacts as ‘gnostic-christian amulets’ (this term is introduced by the author himself), eight inscriptions are made on amulet rings, two on ‘cylindrical golden amulets’, and one artifact was a ‘Sarmatian amulet with a dedicatory inscription to the god of wind Vata’ (Vatafarn). However, it should be noted that some readings and comments made by Yaylenko could be disputed and all the material published by him should be subjected to a thorough examination. In addition, Yaylenko's publication contains no photos, only drafts. See V. P. Yaylenko, *Magical Inscriptions from Bosphorus*. In: *Drevnosti Bospora* 8, 2005, pp. 465–514 (in Russian with English summary). This publication wasn't reviewed by *SEG* or *Bulletin épigraphique*.

³ See A. I. Boltunova, T. N. Knipovich, *A Historical Survey of Greek Lapidary Writing on Bosphorus*. In: *Numizmatika i Epigrafika* 3, 1962, p. 9, tab. II (in Russian).



Up until now no such text written on a lead plate has ever been found. There are no direct parallels to this inscription not only in the Northern Black Sea region but, as far as we can tell, in the whole body of Greek inscriptions.

The word ἀνώνυμος (or ἀνώνυμῶς?) written by the author of the inscription 18 times, can be read without any doubt. Other symbols present on the plate are not that easy to understand. Perhaps, they are some abbreviations or *voces magicae*.

So what does this ἀνώνυμος mean? It seems obvious that this is not a personal name. Could it be an invocation of some deity or a demon?

The history of religion knows a lot of 'nameless' gods, however, strange as it may sound, there are no articles on Greek or Roman nameless gods (not even a brief one) in any of our professional compendiums⁴. In these circumstances we are forced to examine the issue almost 'blindfolded'.

Our knowledge on the subject is scanty. For example, Strabo, while citing Posidonius, writes that the Celtiberians used to make sacrifices to "some nameless deity" (ἄνωνύμῳ τινὶ θεῷ 3.4.16) at the nights of full moon, however, he gives us no more information about this deity. In another passage Strabo says that the Ethiopians believe, that their god is "one immortal being (which is the reason of all things according to them) and one mortal, somewhat nameless and indeterminate" (θεὸν δὲ νομίζουσι τὸν μὲν ἀθάνατον (τοῦτον δ' εἶναι τὸν αἴτιον τῶν πάντων) τὸν δὲ θνητὸν ἀνώνυμόν τινα καὶ οὐ σαφῇ 17.2.3).

More often the Greeks called the Erinyes and the Eumenides 'nameless' (see, for example: Eur. *IT* 944; PBerl. 9772 (= TrGF 5,1,45 A 494), col. 4.8 (fragment from *Melanippe the Prisoner*)), whose very 'names' are euphemisms and their use depends on whether these creatures are benevolent to humans or not⁵. The problem of the 'namelessness' of Erinyes and Eumenides was examined in detail by Albert Henrichs⁶, so we won't address it here. However, one aspect is worth to be highlighted: the very fact that these deities lack their own unified theonym and, at the same time, are called by a great number of different names (Erinyes, Eumenides, σεμναὶ θεαί and many others, the complete list can be found in Henrichs' work). This very combination of anonymity and 'polynymity' brings forward their unspeakable and frightening essence⁷.

It is interesting to point out that the Derveni papyrus *de facto* associates Erinyes and Eumenides with the souls of the dead (col. ii. 5–10), as the same sacrifices are made to these creatures and the dead. It doesn't seem to be a mere coincidence as both groups of spirits are called θεοὶ καταχθόνιοι. And of course it's not by accident that there is a special group of the dead called ἀνώνυμοι, a group that includes the souls of people who died prematurely, usually in a violent manner. These souls have another special name – ἄωροι⁸. These ἄωροι, the dead hunting the living in search for revenge, are identified with the Erinyes by Erwin Rohde, and Albert Henrichs supports this conclusion⁹. According to Rohde, ἄωροι are the type of dead souls who are not yet mature, who don't yet possess individuality and self-awareness, and that is why they are – ἀνώνυμοι, the 'warriors of Hecate', always craving for the blood of the living. "Not" is the inalienable morphological attribute of their aliases: they are ἀνάρθρωτοι, ἄψυχοι, ἄωροι, etc.

This is exactly the type of creatures (which are also called νεκροδαίμονες), to whom (or, more precisely, to whose graves) those seeking revenge or love should commit their messages, at least according to the creators of the magical papyri (e.g. PGM V.304–369). The papyri mention these ἄωροι about twenty times¹⁰.

Addresses to ἀνώνυμοι in particular are not common for epigraphic monuments: in fact, we have only the batch of judicial spells from Courion on Cyprus¹¹.

⁴ The following two papers remain the only resumptive works on nameless gods: J. A. MacCulloch, Nameless Gods. In: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, IX, 1917, pp. 178–181 and E. Bickerman, Anonymous Gods. In: *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, III, Leiden, 1986, pp. 270–281 (= *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, 1938, pp. 187–196).

⁵ See: H. Lloyd-Jones, Erinyes, Semnai Theai, Eumenides. In: E. M. Craik (ed.), *"Owls to Athens": Essays on Classical Subjects Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover*, Oxford, 1990, pp. 203–211.

⁶ A. Henrichs, Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: Zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama. In: H. Hofmann, A. Harder (ed.), *Fragmenta dramatica: Beiträge zur Interpretation der griechischen Tragikerfragmente und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*, Göttingen, 1991, pp. 161–201; id., Anonymity and Polarity: Unknown Gods and Nameless Altars at the Areopagos. In: *Illinois Classical Studies* 19, 1994, pp. 27–58.

⁷ See: G. Bader, Gott nennen: Von Götternamen zu göttlichen Namen. In: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 86, 1989, pp. 306–354; Henrichs, Anonymity (n. 6) p. 50, n. 110.

⁸ For more details on ἄωροι see S. I. Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 127–150; R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd ed., Bristol, 2001, pp. 77–88.

⁹ E. Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen*, 2nd ed., Freiburg i.B., Leipzig, Tübingen, 1898, vol. II, pp. 411–413, 424; Henrichs, Anonymity (n. 6) pp. 54–58.

¹⁰ L. Muñoz Delgado, *Léxico de magia y religión en los papiros mágicos griegos. Diccionario Griego-Español*, Anejos V, Madrid, 2001, p. 19.

¹¹ See T. B. Mitford, *The Inscriptions of Kourion* (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 83), Philadelphia, 1971: 127³⁶, 129²¹, 131²⁵, 134²⁴, 135²⁹, 136²³, 137²⁴, 138²⁸, 139²⁷, 140²³, 142²⁵: οἱ ὧδε κάτω κείμενοι ἄωροι κὲ ἀνώνυμοι.

It is also possible to add the *defixio* from Olbia, first published by V. Shkorpil in 1908¹², to this type:

- [ὦ]σπερ σε ἡμεῖς οὐ γεινώσκομε-
 ν, οὕτως Εὐπο[λ]ις καὶ Διονύσιος,
 Μακαρέυς, Ἀρι[σ]τοκράτης
 κα(ῖ) Δημόπολις, [Κ]ωμάιος,
 5 Ἑραγόρης ἐπὶ [όκο]ιον πρᾶγμα παρα-
 γείνονται, κ[α]ὶ Λεπτίνας,
 Ἐπικράτης, Ἐστιάσις·
 ἐπ' ὅ τι πρᾶγμα [παρα]γείνονται, ἐπ' ὅ τι-
 να μαρτυρίην ο[ὖ]τοι ἠώησαν (= ἐνόησαν).
 10 {ὦ[σπερ] ἡμεῖς σε·} [ῆ]ν δέ μοι αὐτοὺς
 κατάσχης καὶ κ[ατα]λάβης ἐ(γ)ὼ δέ σε
 τειμήσω καὶ σο[ι] ἄριστον δ[ω]ρ-
 ρον παρασκε[υω].

⁵ ἐπὶ [κα]ινόν *Shkorpil*, ἐπὶ [δ]ινόν *Bravo*, ἐπὶ [όκο]ιον *Jordan*; ⁸ ἐπ' ὅτι *Shkorpil*; [π]αρ(α)γείνονται *Shkorpil*, [π]αρ(α)γείνονται *Bravo*, [παρα]γείνονται *Jordan*; ἐπ' ὅ(ν)τι/να *Shkorpil*, ἐπ' ὅτι/να *Bravo*, ἐπ' ὅ τι/να *Jordan*; ⁹ ἐκοι(ν)ω(ν)ησαν *Bravo*, [ἀγ]ωνησάν(των)? *Jordan*; ¹⁰ ὦ[δ]ε *Shkorpil*, ὦ[σπερ] *Bravo*, {ὦ[σπερ] ἡμεῖς σε·} *Jordan*; [ῆ]ν δέ μοι *Shkorpil*, [ῆ]ν δέ μοι *Bravo*; ¹¹ μ[ατα]λάβης *Shkorpil*, κ[ατα]λάβης (vel π[αρα]λάβης) *Bravo*; ἐπ' ὧδε *Shkorpil*, ἐ(γ)ὼ δέ *Bravo*, δέ i.e. δή *Jordan*; ¹³ παρασκε[υάσω] *Shkorpil*, παρασκε[υω] *Bravo*.

Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that the addressee of the lead plate in question was the spirit of an untimely deceased person (or a number of such souls). The fact that the closest analogies to our inscription are the *tabellae iudiciariae* (in Auguste Audollent's terminology) could indicate that the text in question should be classified as the same type of monuments. Despite the fact that the text has only one word in it, we shouldn't underestimate its historical meaning: this is indeed the first epigraphic monument containing the discussed formula not only on the Bosporean territory or in the Northern Black Sea region, but in the whole ancient oikumene.

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¹² V. V. Shkorpil, Three Lead Tablets with Inscriptions from Olbia. In: *Izvestiya Imperatorskoy Arkheologicheskoy Komis-sii* 27, 1908, pp. 71–72 (in Russian); L. Dubois, *Inscriptions grecques dialectales d'Olbia du Pont*, Genève, 1996, pp. 176–178; D. R. Jordan, An Address to a Ghost at Olbia. In: *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., 50, 1997, pp. 212–219.