



HAL
open science

Opisthographic lead letter from Myrmekion.

Anastassia Bekhter, Madalina Dana, Alexander Butyagin

► **To cite this version:**

Anastassia Bekhter, Madalina Dana, Alexander Butyagin. Opisthographic lead letter from Myrmekion.. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 2019, 212, pp.161-171. hal-03996150

HAL Id: hal-03996150

<https://hal.science/hal-03996150>

Submitted on 22 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

ANASTASSIA P. BEKHTER – MADALINA DANA – ALEXANDER M. BUTYAGIN

OPISTHOGRAPHIC LEAD LETTER FROM MYRMEKION

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 212 (2019) 161–171

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

OPISTHOGRAPHIC LEAD LETTER FROM MYRMEKION

Over the 2017 season the Myrmekion archaeological expedition discovered a most rare object: a well-preserved lead letter. The ancient site of the Myrmekion settlement is located on the northern coast of the Kerch Bay, near Cape Karantinny, which has been inhabited since the Late Bronze Age. The Greek settlement was established there in the first quarter of the 6th century and lasted until the 3rd–4th centuries CE.¹ The site has been investigated since the 1820s, but regular excavations only began to take place in 1934.

Between 2015 and 2017 continuous excavations were carried out in an area near the acropolis rock of the settlement, attesting to the existence of two consecutive villas from the first to the third centuries.² Because the surface of the area was almost entirely levelled down during the construction of the early villa, all the buildings that preceded it have been destroyed. This area, formerly a Bronze Age necropolis, had been developed since the 6th century. In the course of the 2009 excavations, when the southern part of the villa was discovered, the layers of the 6th and 5th centuries were supposed to have been well-preserved, but it is now clear that they had mainly been destroyed across this area, although findings dated to the period from the 6th to the 1st centuries BCE appear everywhere in small amounts.

In the north-western corner of the area the stratigraphy seemed especially complex because of the damage it incurred in an air raid during WWII. The eastern wall (no. 64) of “building no. 6” was severely damaged. Fortunately, the southern wall was not affected by the explosion. In the 2017 season, excavations were conducted below the wall level of “room no. 4”. An undisturbed layer was discovered in the cleaning of the surface below the southern wall (no. 69A). This layer, formed before the construction of the villa (fig. 1, 2), contained some ceramic materials, fragments of animal bones and antlers of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), and a small lead plate covered with a thin white layer of corrosion.³

Preliminary inspection revealed that an unwrapped lead letter inscribed on both sides had been found, with a well-preserved internal side. This layer has been observed particularly carefully. Because of the nearby late Bronze Age burial site discovered below the wall, some of the stones were removed and early layers were attentively studied. This area is most likely part of a large pit that was destroyed during the construction of the Roman villa. Unfortunately, study of this deposit was limited to a surface of only 1.5 m². Numerous ceramics have been found there, however, including a collapsed amphora with a pointed bottom. The discovery of a Thasian amphora’s base has made it possible to date the layer back to the 30s and 20s of the 4th century (according to S. Monahov, type II-B-3).⁴ Over the next season we will continue excavations of the nearby layers and attempt to make an account of the situation.

¹ For the detailed survey of the excavations and the archaeological description of the site see A. M. Butjagin, Ju. A. Vinogradov, *Istorija i arheologija drevnego Mirmekija* [*History and Archaeology of the Ancient Myrmekion*], in: *Mirmekij v svete novyh arheologičeskikh issledovanij*, Saint Petersburg 2018, p. 4–51; A. M. Butjagin, M. Yu. Vahtina, Yu. A. Vinogradov, Myrmekion-Porthmeus. Two “Small” Towns of Ancient Bosphorus, in: D. V. Grammenos, E. K. Petropoulos (eds.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea*, II, Thessaloniki 2003, p. 803–818. Unless stated otherwise, all dates are BCE. The following abbreviations are used:

 Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*: P. Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing: A Cultural History (650 BC–150 BC)*, Oxford 2013.

 CIRB: V. V. Struve *et alii*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosphorani. Korpus bosporskih nadpisej*, Moscow–Leningrad 1965.

 DTA: R. Wuensch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae* (IG III.3. Appendix), Berlin 1897.

 IGDOP: L. Dubois, *Inscriptions grecques dialectales d’Olbia du Pont*, Geneva 1996.

 IOLb: T. N. Knipovič, E. I. Levi, *Nadpisi Olv’ij (1917–1965)* [*Inscriptions of Olbia (1917–1965)*], Leningrad 1968.

 IOSPE: V. Latsyshev, *Inscriptiones Antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, I–II, IV, Saint Petersburg, 1885–1901 (IOSPE P, 1916).

² A. M. Butjagin, A. A. Ereemeeva, V. P. Kolosov, Raboty Mirmekijskoj ekspedicii v 2015 godu [*Investigations of the Myrmekion Expedition in 2015*], *Arheologičeskij Sbornik Gosudarstvennogo Ėrmitaža* 41, 2017, p. 224–227.

³ The lead table is kept in the Eastern-Crimean Historical and Cultural Museum-Preserve (KM 191604, inv. 8706).

⁴ S. Ju. Monahov, *Grečeskie amfory v Pričernomor’e* [*Greek Amphorae in the Black Sea Region*], Moscow–Saratov 2003, p. 70–71.

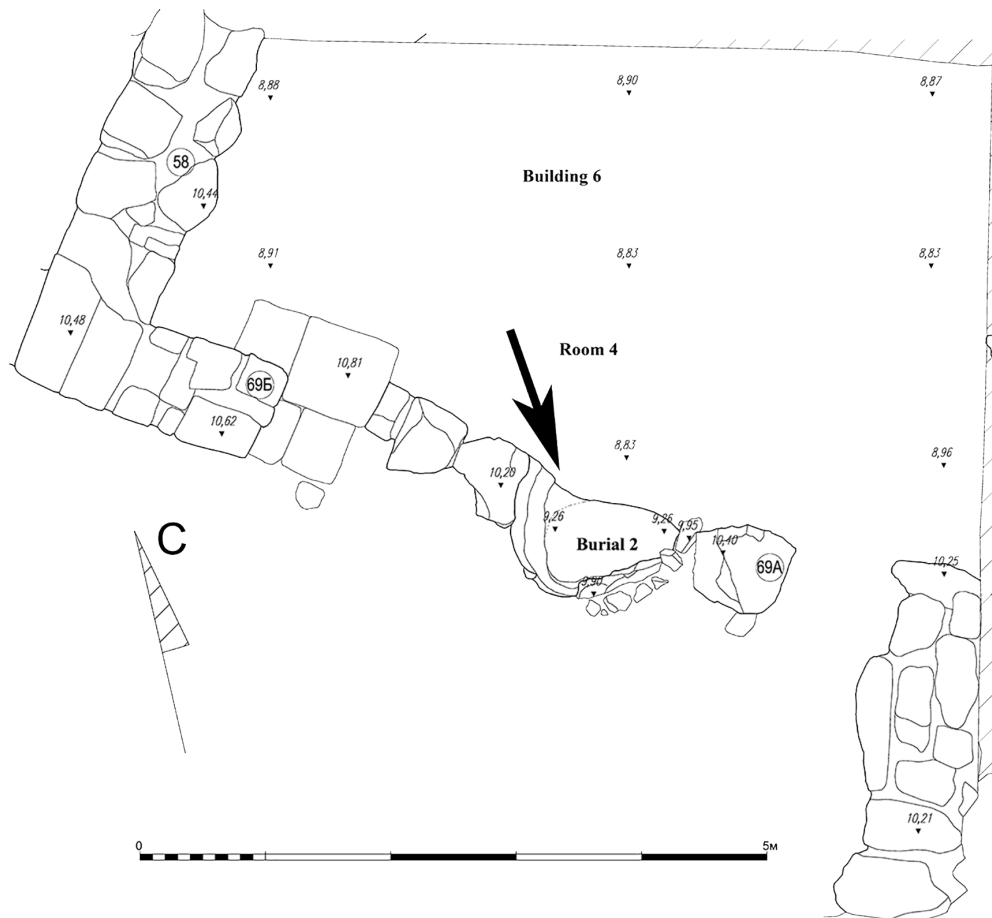


Fig. 1. Myrmekion, section "TS", excavation 2017. Room 4 of the Building 6 from the Roman villa of I–II CE (the find-spot is marked by a black arrow)

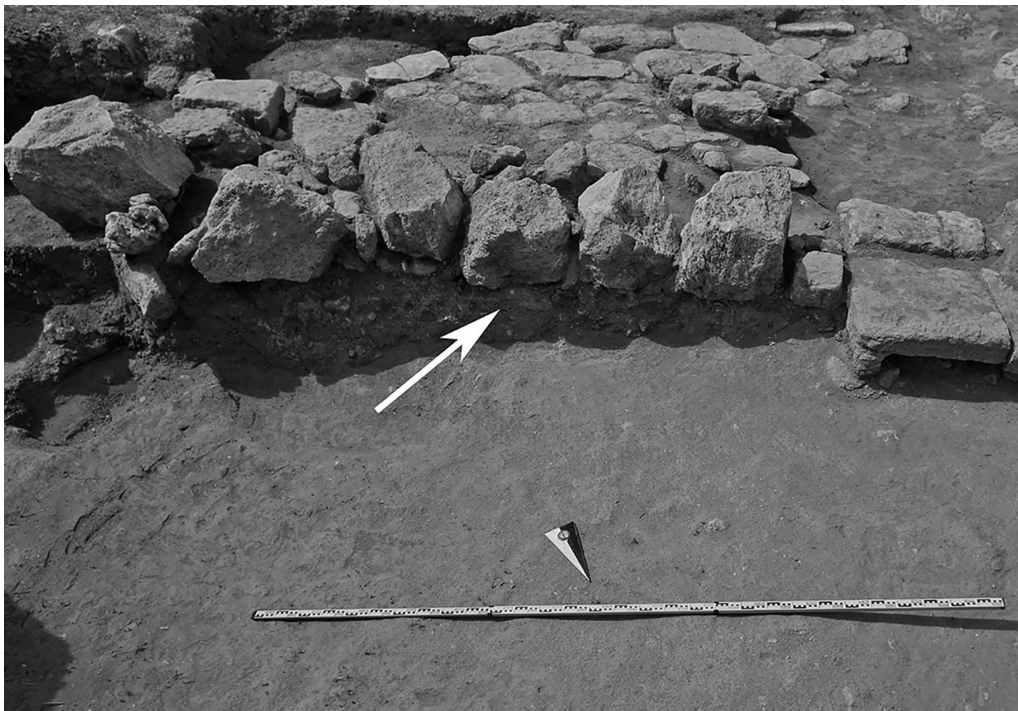


Fig. 2. Myrmekion, section "TS", excavation 2017. Early layers under the wall 69A from the North (the find-spot is marked by a white arrow)

A pile of carved bone fragments, found with the lead letter, are of particular interest. There were a total of 17 different bone artifacts with traces of handiwork. For now, it is the largest set of bone-carving wastes ever recovered in Myrmekion. Two of the items are finished ware: a round $\pi\upsilon\zeta\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ lid and a small square object with flat openwork. The rest is represented by different fragments of antlers and bones with traces of carving, sawing, and lathing, which was known to Greeks since archaic times. In this case we can conclude with confidence that a bone-carving workshop existed somewhere nearby. The fact that the lead letter and the bone-carving wastes were stored together may suggest that the letter was received by someone in connection with the workshop, but the text itself gives no evidence to support this speculation.

Outwardly the document looks like a rectangular lead plate with rounded edges and measuring 2.8–3.8 cm × 10.8 cm × 0.2–0.3 cm. As the letter was found open (unrolled), the text was certainly read by the addressee(s). Judging by the clearly visible crease line in the center of the plate it was initially folded in half. The letter is opisthographic: the text on the recto (face A, fig. 3a and 4a) contains 7 lines and is almost intact; the text on the verso (face B, fig. 3b and 4b) contains 5 lines, partly lost or badly damaged. According to the vertical trace of the fold down the middle of face A, it appears that the sheet had been folded in half with face A on the inside, which was inscribed first: however, because the succession of the sentences is clear, the order of folding is not determinant. Still, face B may have been the external layer: face A is much better preserved, very likely because it was less exposed to corrosion.

The manner of writing is not very neat, probably due to the fact that the scribe was in a hurry, as the script itself is fairly elegant. The letters vary in size (face A: 0.2–0.4 cm; face B: 0.2–0.45 cm); their forms also vary frequently. In several cases, traces of error correction are visible, where the author has scratched the right letter just over the erroneously written one. The errors made by the scribe, in most cases corrected by the author himself, are mechanical in their nature: on three occasions dittography is evidenced (A 3, A 5–6, B 3), twice we find omission of a letter and preemptive writing of the next one (A 4, B 3), once inversion of two letters (B 3). The handwriting becomes messier and more sprawling, when it comes nearer to the lower edge of the plate. This effect is observed on both sides of the table and seems to be due to the lack of a support for the scribe's hand.

In most cases the vertical lines of the letters are slightly curved. *Alpha* bears a horizontal crossbar. *Epsilon* has horizontal strokes of varying length; on several occasions the horizontal lines are not joined with the vertical lines. The lateral lines of *mu* are inclined. The right angle of *nu* is raised over the line. *Omicron* is notably smaller than the other letters, though it varies in size and form; dotted *theta* is also smaller than other letters. *Pi* has the right stroke much shorter than the left one. *Sigma* has a traditional form, displaying in some cases elements of cursive. *Upsilon* is of two different types: in most cases the letter consists of two separate components, a vertical line and a V-shaped upper part, but in several cases the letter has the form of a slightly curved vertical line, from which a short lateral line branches off to the right. *Chi* is cruciform.

According to the palaeography alone, the text could be dated to the very end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd century. Moreover, the curved vertical lines and small *omicron* and *theta* indicate the beginning of the 3rd century rather than the end of the 4th.

But orthographic features, such as the way in which the non-inherited diphthongs are written, suggest an earlier date. The long *e*-vowel occurs as a simple *epsilon* in four words: Ὀρῆος (A 1, B 3, B 5), ἐς (A 4), λαβῆν (A 5–6), ἀπόστῆλον (A 7), and the digraph is present only in χαίρειν (A 1, B 3, B 5). According to Thraette's observations the most recent examples of the use of a simple ϵ to represent the long *e*-vowel in Attic inscriptions are dated to the 330s and 320s, after which the $\epsilon\iota$ spelling was finally established. The latest sporadic examples of ϵ spelling are due to careless omission (in our situation the latter should be excluded because of the numerous examples of the use of ϵ for $\bar{\epsilon}$ in different words).⁵ The spelling δῶναι is also very significant. Thraette indicates the year 325 to mark the end of the common use of a simple *omicron* for the long *o*-vowel in Attic inscriptions, though some sporadic examples are known from the last

⁵ L. Thraette, *The Grammar of Attic Inscriptions*, I (Phonology), Berlin–New York 1980, § 9.013.

quarter of the 4th century (none in the 3rd century, however).⁶ In the Bosphoran lapidary documents ον finally displaced ὀ at the end of Pairsades I's reign (344/3 to 311/10). All the facts listed above compel us to move the document's date closer to the last quarter of the 4th century. The letter was most likely written in the late Classical era, at the onset of the Hellenistic period. Thus, the orthographical features demonstrate the transition from the Ionic dialect to the κοινή.

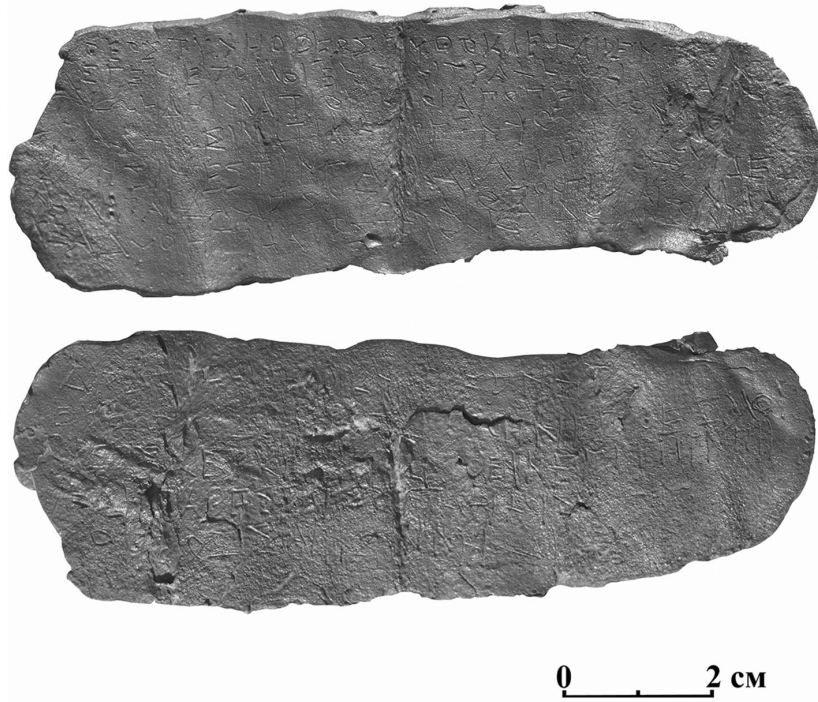


Fig. 3 a and b. Lead letter, face A and B

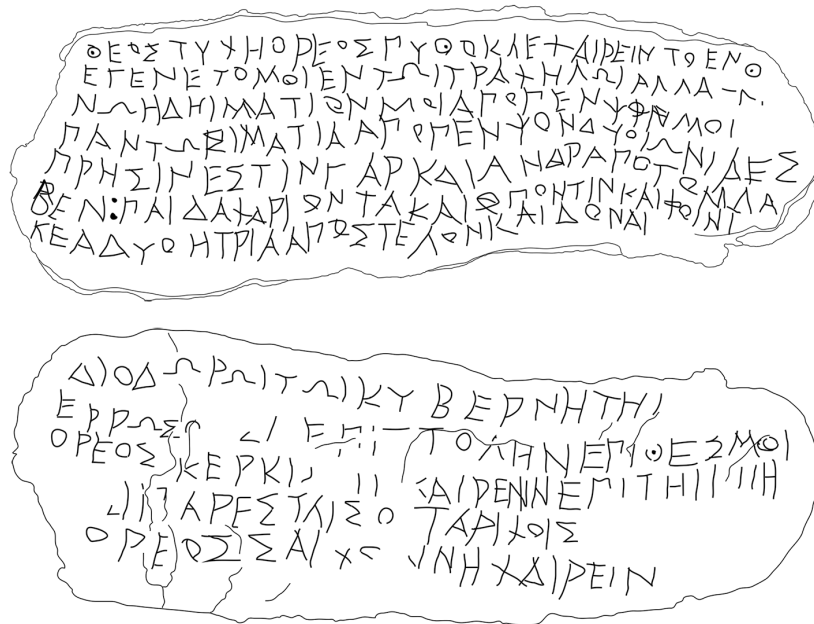


Fig. 4 a and b. Lead letter, face A and B

⁶ *Ibid.*, §13.02–13.03.

A

Θεός· Τύχη· Ὀρεός Πυθοκλῆ χαίρειν· ΤΟΕΝΘ
 ἐγένετό μοι ἐν τῶι τραχήλωι, ἀλλὰ ΧΑΙ-
 ΝΩ ἤδη· ἱμάτιόν μοι ἀπόπενψόν μοι, vac.
 πάντως ἱμάτια ἀπόπενψον δύο ἰώνια ἐς
 5 πρήσιν· ἔστιν γάρ καὶ ἀνδράποτον λα-
 βῆν : παῖδα Χαρίοντα· καὶ ΟΠΙΟΝΤΙΝ καὶ φοινί-
 κεα δύο ἢ τρία ἀπόστῆλον καὶ δῶναι vac.

B

Διοδώρωι τῶι κυβερνήτηι vac.
 Ἐρρωσφ· +ΣΑ(+)
 Ὀρεός Κερκίωνι χαίρειν· ἐπὶ τῆι γ(ῆί{ι})
 [-¹⁻²]+Ι παρέσται σο[ι] ταρίχοις vac.
 5 Ὀρεός ΣΑΙΧΟ+ΙΝΗ χαίρειν vac.

A – 3 ΑΠΙΟΠΙΕΝΨ{I+}ΟΝ plumbum || 4 ΠΑΝΤΩ{I(+)}ΣΙΜΑΤΙΑ plumb. || 6 {Α}ΒΕΝ plumb.

B – 3 ΧΑΙΠΕ{N}ΙΝ plumb. || ΕΠΙΘΙΝΙΗΗΗ plumb.

God! Fortune! Oreos sends his greetings to Pythokles. [---] happened to me on my neck [---], but already [---]. Send me a himation for my personal use, and above all send me two Ionian himatia for sale. There is also a slave, namely the young boy Charion, to take; send OPONTIN as well as two or three purple clothes and give them to Diodoros the helmsman. Farewell! Dispatch the (following) letter for me. Oreos sends his greetings to Kerkion. On the ship [---] you will have space for salted fish. Oreos sends his greetings to Saichof-Jine (?).

The A Face

L. 1. Θεός· Τύχη· Appealing to the God or Gods and Fortune at the beginning of the text is standard practice for very different kinds of epigraphical documents: honorary decrees, proxenies, votive inscriptions; such expressions could also precede questions to oracle or sales agreements. For trade contracts, testimonies etc., the similar introductory formula is almost obligatory.⁷ The formulation of such an introductory acclamation to the God or Gods could be different: the most common variant is ἀγαθῆι τύχηι, but θεοί, θεός τύχηι ἀγαθῆι, and θεός τύχηι are also possible. The argument for understanding this sequence as two separated words and not as an invocation of the Goddess Fortune is the presence of the formula θεοί τύχηι (or θεοί· τύχηι) in civic decrees (e.g. *IG* II² 2493, *FD* III.1 423, *Syll.*³ 276A). The word θεοί opens the lead letter from the Pnyx dated to the end of the 5th to the beginning of the 4th century.⁸ The address ὦ Ζῆν opens the opisthographic lead letter from Lattara dated to the first half of the 5th century, and the same appeal is

⁷ See, e.g., the detailed analysis of the Sicilian documents by M. P. De Hoz, Aspectos formales y tópicos de los contratos privados sicilianos, *Emerita* 62 (2), 1994, p. 325–351. For a peculiar kind of documents, see E. Eidinow, ΤΥΧΑ at the Oracle of Zeus, Dodona, *ZPE* 209, 2019, p. 91–102.

⁸ E. A. Raubitschek, Inscriptions, in: G. R. Davidson, D. B. Thomson (eds.), *Small Objects from the Pnyx*, I, Princeton 1943 (*Hesperia* Suppl. 7), p. 10–11, no. 17, fig. 11; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 352, App. I A, no. 40. Vinogradov's effort to read the addressee's name Θεογ[νότω] in line 1 could hardly be considered successful (Yu. Vinogradov, The Greek Colonization of the Black Sea Region in the Light of the Private Lead Letters, in: G. R. Tsetschladze (ed.), *The Greek Colonization of the Black Sea Area: Historical Interpretation of Archaeology*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 154 n. 4, no. 16). Firstly, all the letters in the drawing given in the *editio princeps* are clearly visible and the loss of over half the name does not fit the picture. Secondly, the reading proposed by Vinogradov suggests very short lines without taking into consideration the initial size of the document. As Madalina Dana has noted, after a personal autopsy of the lead plaque, the last should have been folded, but, since no trace of bending is visible, it begs the suggestion that the plate was folded in half after which, as is often the case, it broke off along the bend, i.e. nearly half of the text has been lost (M. Dana, Les lettres grecques sur plomb et sur tesson: pratiques épigraphiques et savoirs de l'écriture, in: A. Inglese (ed.), *Epigrammata 3. Saper scrivere nel Mediterraneo antico. Esiti di scrittura fra VI e IV sec. a.C. Atti del convegno di Roma, 7–8 novembre 2014*, Rome 2016 (*Themata* 17), p. 121). Finally, the first line of the Myrmekion letter where the acclamation to the God and Fortune is manifest clearly confirms the reading of Raubitschek also. In our opinion, the best reading for lines 1–2 is that proposed by J. and L. Robert: Θεοί. vac. | Χαίρῆν [καὶ ὑγιαίνῆν] (*BE*, 1944, 90).

repeated in line 5, though the document itself is not a proper letter, since it contains a list of instructions concerning the transport and sale of olive oil.⁹ The appeal to Zeus Patroos is present in l. 4 of a badly damaged letter from Thasos, dated to the late 6th to the early 5th century, which was inscribed on a clay tablet:¹⁰ τῷ Διὸς τῷ Πατρῴῳ (N. Trippé), or [πρὸς?] τῷ Διὸς τῷ Πατρῴῳ (M. Dana).¹¹ Thus there are up to now four similar examples in the Greek private correspondence, including the new published text.¹² An address to the Gods in all these documents seems to have been motivated by the scribe's desire for divine support in the endeavours described by the letters, but this request for godly protection is expressed in different ways. In the Myrmekion letter and in the lead plaque from the Pnyx, the appeal to the deity and to Fortune appears at the very beginning of the text and repeats the formula typical of official documents. The similar porosity between official and private formulae could be observed in several curses, since at least two of them begin with Θεοί. Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ.¹³ It is also worth mentioning the list of names on the fragment of a λεκονίς from the Athenian agora dated to the second quarter of the 5th century, where the word θεοί is twice written in a separate column parallel to the list of personal names.¹⁴ In the documents from Thasos and Lattara the acclamation to the God, unlike the previous texts, is not a mechanical repetition of the standard formula; it is of a more personal, intimate nature: the deities are named specifically, and in the document from Lattara the appeal is repeated twice, while in the letter from Thasos the acclamation is not placed in the beginning of the text. All the documents mentioned above, with the exception of the text published here, are more or less damaged, which leads some scholars to doubt their belonging to the epistolary genre. Conversely, our text stands as an almost intact business letter, which presents no reason to question its genre. As such, this text is conclusive evidence of the practice of invoking deities in private letters during the first centuries of the Greek private correspondence, before the papyrological evidence.

Ὅρῆος = Ὅρειος: The name of the sender Ὅρῆος, which opens the standard greeting formula ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν, is attested for the first time in the Bosphoros and widely across the Northern Black Sea shore. According to the *LGPN*, Ὅρειος is found 15 times in Western Lycia (*LGPN* V.B 330), and all these examples are highly concentrated (Idebessos 10, Korma 2, Rhodiapolis 3); it seems very likely to be the Greek adaptation of a local name. However, the name Ὅρειος is also known outside Lycia. In Priene and Ephesus it appears on ceramic stamps, and exclusively with the form Ὅρηου (*LGPN* V.A 348).¹⁵ To this must be added Κράτειρος Ὅρειου from a Thessalian agonistic inscription (*SEG* LIV 566, l. 24–25, 31).¹⁶

Πυθοκλῆ: The theophoric name Πυθοκλῆς is evidenced for the first time in the Northern Black Sea region, though other personal names containing the element Πυθο- are known there: Πυθαγόρης, Πυθίων, Πυθογείτων, Πυθόδοτος, Πυθόδωρος, Πυθόνικος, Πύθων (*LGPN* IV 295–296).

⁹ M. Bats, Une lettre sur plomb à Lattes (Hérault), *Lattara* 21, 2010, p. 749–756 (*SEG* LX 1055); Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 348–349, App. I A, no. 28.

¹⁰ N. Trippé, Une lettre d'époque classique à Thasos, *BCH* 139–140, 2015–2016, p. 43–65.

¹¹ M. Dana, *La correspondance grecque privée sur plomb et sur tesson: corpus épigraphique et commentaire historique*, Munich, no. 15 (forthcoming).

¹² In the controversy concerning the graffito on the black glazed σκύφος from Panskoe I, namely the sequence Ἀγαθῆι τύχῃ on line 2, we rejoin Ju. G. Vinogradov, who interpreted the text as an excerpt from the Olbian proxeny decree *IOlb* 5 (Die Olbiopoliten in der Nordwest-Tauris, in: *idem, Pontische Studien: Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte und Epigraphik des Schwarzmeerraumes*, Mayence 1997, p. 484–492); see also A. Chaniotis' remarks in *SEG* LI 984. V. P. Jajlenko's effort to treat this text as a business letter is not convincing (Über den Umgang mit pontischen Inschriften, *Altertum* 46, 2001, p. 228).

¹³ D. R. Jordan, A Survey of Greek *Defixiones* not Included in Special Corpora, *GRBS* 26 (2), 1985, p. 158, no. 18 (θεοί ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ); *DTA* 158 ([---]ος τύχῃ ἀγαθῇ, most probably [θε]ός: τύχῃ ἀγαθῇ). We may add one curse tablet from Gela and two others from Selinous, with the Doric form τύχα: *IGDS* 134; G. Rocca, *Nuove iscrizioni da Selinunte*, Alessandria 2009, p. 23–30 (nos. 6 and 7). See also E. Eidinow, C. Taylor, Lead-Letter Days: Writing, Communication and Crisis in the Ancient Greek World, *CQ* 60, 2010, p. 44–45; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 44–45.

¹⁴ M. Lang, *Graffiti and Dipinti*, Princeton (NJ) 1976 (Athenian Agora 21), p. 14, C21.

¹⁵ We may even explain this anthroponym as a theophoric name, cf. the epithet of Μήτηρ Ὅρεία (see G. Petzl, Zwei bronzene Weihegaben, *ZPE* 169, 2009, p. 92–94).

¹⁶ The editors suggest the nominative Ὅρείας.

L. 1–2. The phrase ἐγένετό μοι ἐν τῷ τραχήλῳ should be taken as a reference to some medical issue. We may attempt to interpret Τράχηλος as a toponym (cf., e.g., Κεφαλή, Τραχεῖα). However, this passage remains obscure.

L. 2–3. The letter following the clearly visible ΑΛΛΑ was damaged by the scratch that destroyed its central part, but the horizontal line belonging to *chi*, *psi* or, less probably, *tau* (the horizontal stroke is placed too low for this one) is intact. The next letter seems to be *alpha* slightly inclined to the left (the similar writing of *alpha* is attested in the word καί in A 7), the following dash could be both a damaged *iota* and an occasional scratch. In the beginning of L. 3 ΝΩ is clearly readable, which may only be the final part of a verb because the dative of the noun or adjective requires an *iota adscriptum*.

L. 3. The personal pronoun μοι is used twice, most likely by mistake, but this iteration looks like an emphasis, stressing the urgency of the plea. A similar request, namely to have warm clothing and shoes (κατύματα) sent over from home, is demonstrated by the letter of Mnesiergos from Attica, dated to the beginning of the 4th century.¹⁷

ἀπόπενψον (for ἀπόπεμψον): failure to assimilate internal nasal before a labial. The assimilation ν > μ before β, π, φ, ψ is the rule of normative grammar, but contrary examples similar to the document published here occur sporadically throughout the Classical and Hellenistic periods in all types of texts.¹⁸

L. 4. The basic meaning of the word ἱμάτιον is “a cloak, outer clothing, worn over a χιτῶν”; sometimes ἱμάτιον could be used in the more comprehensive sense of “clothes”.¹⁹ ἱμάτιον is also mentioned in the letter on ostrakon of Dionysios from Nikonion, where it serves as a deposit for the money loan: κ[ό]μισα δὲ καὶ παρὰ τῶν Ἰθαίων ἡμ[ιστ]άτηρον ἀποδοῦσα ἢ τὸ εἰμάτ[ιον].²⁰

In our situation it is significant that the author should request one ἱμάτιον for his own use and two others that are destined for sale. Since the letter was found unrolled, there is no doubt that it was delivered to the recipient, which suggests that the addressee was staying, or, most probably, was permanently living in the territory of Myrmekion. The request to send two ἱμάτια for sale could be considered as the evidence of textile manufacturing, not limited to the internal needs of the οἶκος but sale-oriented. However, the archaeological data do not confirm this suggestion. Despite the numerous studies about Myrmekion, no traces of any significant textile production have been discovered there, though pyramid-shaped fishing sinkers are very common findings in the antique layers until the Roman period.²¹ The possibility that Oreos was selling the surplus of the textile made in Pythokles’ house or in his own οἶκος could not be totally excluded, but the clothes in question are much more likely to have been manufactured somewhere else. The last suggestion seems to be evidenced by the fact that ἱμάτια are described in the text as “Ionian” (ἰώνια could be interpreted merely as the adjective attributed to the noun ἱμάτιον). There is no way to determine whether ἰώνια means fashion (cf. the opposition Dorian/Ionian χιτῶν), the place of clothes’ production, or

¹⁷ *Editio princeps*: A. Wilhelm, Der älteste griechische Brief, *JÖAI* 7, 1904, p. 94–105 (= *Kleine Schriften* II.1, p. 186–197); for the rest of the bibliography, see Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 352, App. I A, no. 39.

¹⁸ For details see L. Threatte, *Grammar* ..., § 48.0411.

¹⁹ Articles of dress are mentioned in a few more letters. In the lead letter dated to the last quarter of the 6th century (or, most likely, the beginning of the 5th) that was found in the Olbian agora (Yu. Vinogradov, *The Greek Colonization* ..., p. 157–160, no. 2 (*SEG* XLVIII 1011); M. Dana, *Lettres grecques dialectales nord-pontiques* (sauf *IGDOP* 23–26), *REA* 109, 2007, p. 72–75, no. 2; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 336–337, App. I A, no. 3): κἀνδῶλος ? (supposedly black clothes), σίσυρνα (sheepskin), related to ἰσάτις (blue vegetable dye). In another lead letter from Olbia dated to the first half of the 5th century, [χλ]ανίδ[α?] in L. 1 is very likely to be restored (V. V. Mitina, *Pis'mo najdennoe v Ol'vii v 2010 godu* [*Letter Found in Olbia in 2010*], *Hyperboreus* 23 (2), 2017, p. 244–265; see also the edition prepared by M. Dana: [χλ]ανίδε[ς]). In both cases the context is unclear because of the considerable damage to the documents.

²⁰ The editors disagree on the construction of the quoted phrase. B. Awianowicz, and, following him, P. Ceccarelli (B. Awianowicz, *A New Hellenistic Ostrakon from Nikonion*, *ZPE* 178, 2011, p. 237–239; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 345, App. I A, no. 20) suppose that τὸ εἰμάτ[ιον] depends on ἀποδοῦσα, i.e. “get a hemistater by returning the ἱμάτιον”, while M. Oller Guzmán proposes to treat τὸ εἰμάτ[ιον] as an object to κ[ό]μισα, i.e. “get a ἱμάτιον by returning the hemistater” (*La carta de Dionisio. Un nuevo testimonio del comercio griego norpóntico*, *ZPE* 192, 2014, p. 173). For us, regardless of any interpretation, an important point is that the textile product is placed into the context of commodity- and money-based relations.

²¹ A. M. Butjagin, *Kompleks keramičeskikh gruzil iz usad'by na akropole Mirmekija* [*Set of Loom-Weights from the Roman Time Building Near the Myrmekion Acropolis*], *Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Ėrmitaža* 41, 2008, p. 108–123.

the origin of textile (the famous Milesian wool?), but it is clear that this is not the usual, everyday dress; see also the commentary to A 6–7.

L. 5. ἐς = εἶς; Most likely similar to the other cases, using a simple *epsilon* for the long *e*-vowel, but this example could also be interpreted as *ionismos*.

ἀνδράποτον (for ἀνδράποδον): the confusion of δ and τ is extremely rare.²² On the Bosphoros the temporally closest analogies are the graffiti from the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Nymphaeum (mid-3rd century): κινάιτου, Δειοσκορίτης, and Παιρισάτου.²³ All the other examples are dated to Roman times.²⁴

Slaves and slave-trade are frequently mentioned in private letters found on the Northern Black Sea shore. The commonest words for this subject are δοῦλος and the derivative verbs; ὀή παῖς and its cognate words occur several times (see below); σῶμα occurs once; lastly ἀνδράποδον, in addition to the Myrmekeion letter, is also evidenced in a lead letter from Patraeus (fourth quarter of the 5th century).²⁵

L. 5–6. Interpunction: the word λαβῆν is followed by the punctuation mark in the form of a colon, which is quite unexpected in an early Hellenistic document. Similar interpunction is typical for the 6th and 5th centuries, though interpunction in the form of a colon sporadically occurs in documents dated to the 4th century, so our example is one of the most recent (if not the latest). Until now, in the Bosporan Kingdom, interpunction in the form of a colon has not been evidenced in a period later than the 5th century.²⁶

L. 6. Χαρίων is attested several times,²⁷ yet in accordance with normative grammar the accusative of Χαρίων is Χαρίωνα, not Χαρίοντα. We may suggest a confusion with -ων and -οντ stems, even if in the Bosphoros only one similar example is known: Ἡρακλέωντος instead of Ἡρακλέωνος in *CIRB* 504 (Panticapaeum, 1st century CE). The alternative reading Χάριος is a very rare name; the sole example is evidenced in *LGPN* I 482 (Scyros, in 183/2).

The word παῖς has two main meanings: “child” and “young slave”. Although the latter was prevalent in the Hellenistic period, that did not cancel the basic meaning of “child”. In epistolary documents of the Northern Black Sea region ὀή παῖς and cognate words (ἡ παιδίσκη, τὸ παιδίον) are evidenced several times: in the famous Achillodoros letter from Berezan’ dated to the second half of the 6th century it means “son” (παῖς is an addressee);²⁸ in the severely damaged lead letter from Berezan’ dated to the third quarter of the 6th century παῖς means “slave girl”;²⁹ in the lead letter from Phanagoria from around the same date, the word is used with the meaning of “slave”;³⁰ in a letter from the Gorgippean χώρα scratched on an amphora fragment, from the second half of the 6th century, for which Vinogradov gives an editorial prefer-

²² For the confusion of δ/τ in Attic words, see L. Threatte, *Grammar* ..., § 35.03.

²³ S. R. Tokhtasiev, De nouvelles données sur l’histoire des formes les plus anciennes de la koinè dans le nord de la Mer Noire, in: G. Vottéro (ed.), *Le grec du monde colonial antique. I. Le N. et le N.-O. de la Mer Noire. Actes de la Table Ronde de Nancy, 28–29 septembre 2007*, Nancy 2009 (Études Anciennes 42), p. 36–37, n. 8; p. 37, n. 11; p. 40–41.

²⁴ A. I. Dovatur, Kratkij očerk grammatiki bosporskikh nadpisej [*Short Outline of the Grammar of the Bosporan Inscriptions*], in: *CIRB*, p. 808, I B § 3, 2.

²⁵ N. V. Zavojkina, N. A. Pavličenko, Pis’mo na svincovoj plastine iz Patreja [*The Lead Letter from Patraeus*], in: *Fanagorija. Rezul’taty arheologičeskikh issledovanij*, Moscow 2016, p. 230–249.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230–231.

²⁷ Only 8 examples in *LGPN* I–V.C (especially islands, Attica).

²⁸ *Editio princeps*: Ju. G. Vinogradov, Drevnejščee grečeskoe pis’mo s ostrova Berezan’ [*The Earliest Greek Letter from the Island of Berezan’*], *VDI* 118, 1971, p. 74–99; *IGDOP* 23; for a bibliography and a survey of interpretations see V. P. Yajlenko, Čelovek v antičnoj Ol’vii (očerki social’noj istorii Ol’vii) [*The Person in Antique Olbia (Essays on the Social History of Olbia)*], in: L. P. Marinovič (ed.), *Čelovek i obščestvo v antičnom mire*, Moscow 1998, p. 91–110, and also Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 335–336, App. I A, no. 1.

²⁹ A. S. Rusjaeva, Ėpigrafičeskije pamjatniki [*Epigraphical Sources*], in: S. D. Kryžickij et al. (eds.), *Kul’tura naselenija antičnoj Ol’vii i ee okruži v arhaičeskoe vremja*, Kiev 1987, p. 152; Yu. Vinogradov, *The Greek Colonization* ..., p. 154–157, no. 1; M. Dana, *Lettres grecques dialectales* ..., p. 70–72, no. 1.

³⁰ Yu. Vinogradov, *The Greek Colonization* ..., p. 160–163, no. 3 (*SEG* XLVIII 1024); M. Dana, *Lettres grecques dialectales* ..., p. 87–88, no. 12; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 337–338, App. I A, no. 4.

ence for the interpretation τῶι πα(ι)δί[ωι] as “young slave”, but does not exclude the variant of “son”.³¹ In the first half of the 4th century lead letter from Nikonion Καλλιστράτῳ παῖς Ποσίδηος should very likely be interpreted as “Posideos, son of Kallistratos”, though the interpretation as “Posideos, slave of Kallistratos” could not be ruled out entirely.³² Ὁ παῖς is also present in a text of unknown genre on a tile fragment from the χώρα of Chersonesos dated to the 3rd century, and the editor considers both variants possible.³³ Since παῖς could be unambiguously interpreted as “son” only in Achillodoros’ letter, and our document is dated to the early Hellenistic period when the meaning “slave” was prevalent, we prefer to translate here παῖς as “a young slave”. The interpunction in such case functions as a modern colon or a dash: “a slave, namely the young Charion”. Regarding the term in question, a heavily fragmentary message dated to the early 5th century from the Athenian agora should be mentioned; this ostrakon begins with the address παῖ,³⁴ which all editors interpret as “slave”.

The word ΟΠΙΟΝΤΙΝ, which appears in a list of direct objects to the verb ἀπόστειλον, is unknown. A version that provides a meaningful reading without serious emendation would be Ὀπόντι(ο)ν = Ὀπούντιον,³⁵ representing the non-inherited diphthong ου by ο (cf. δῶναι in A 7) and presenting perhaps an early example of the well-known (Imperial) contraction -ιο- > -ι-. He had to be also a slave, while he has to be sent and given to the helmsman, together with other objects.

L. 6–7. Clothing colored with purple is probably the object here; more likely the word ἱμάτια is implied by the adjective φοινίκεα, *i.e.* “ἱμάτια colored with purple”, but we still prefer to use the neutral translation “clothes colored with purple” in the main text. In any case, the purple clothes were also destined for sale. It is highly unlikely that the dyeing and the production of ceremonial clothing took place directly in Myrmekion: the garments were probably made elsewhere and sold as transit trade. Combining with the mention of Ionian ἱμάτια intended for sale in L. 4, we have every reason to assume that Oreos specialized in the small-batch import and export of high-end ceremonial clothes.

L. 7. A rather unexpected change in grammatical construction: the imperatives ἀπόπενψον and ἀπόστειλον are followed by the infinitive δῶναι.

The B Face

L. 1. The mention of a helmsman shows that the trade and the messaging between the sender and the addressee was done by sea, the most common shipping route in the Northern Black Sea region. In addition to ours, there are a few references to κυβερνήται on the Bosphoros. A helmsman’s name appears in a lengthy curse tablet: Νευμήνιον τὸν κυβερνήτην (Panticapaeum, 4th century).³⁶ A κυβερνήτης, whose name is lost, was the author of the dedication from Tendra (Southeast of Olbia): κυβερνήτη(ς) (*IOSPE* I² 331). Another

³¹ Yu. G. Vinogradov, *A Letter from Gorgippean Rural Estates*, *ACSS* 4, 1998, p. 232–234. It is worth noting that the following editors of the letter translate παῖς exclusively as “slave”: E. Eidinow, *C. Taylor, Lead-Letter Days ...*, p. 61, E14; M. Dana, *Lettres grecques dialectales ...*, p. 89–90, no. 13; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 343, App. I A, no. 13.

³² M. Dana, I. V. Brujako, N. M. Sekerskaja, *Lettre sur plomb d’Artemidôros au forgeron Dionysios (Nikonion, estuaire du Tyras)*, *ZPE* 206, 2018, p. 116.

³³ S. Ju. Saprykin, *Dva graffiti na čerepice usad’by hory Hersonesa [Two graffiti on Tile from a Farm of Chersonesus’ Chora]*, in: L. A. Gindin (ed.), *Antičnaja balkanistika*, Moscow 1987, p. 96 (*SEG* XXXVII 662).

³⁴ M. Lang, *Graffiti and Dipinti*, p. 8, B2; A. N. Oikonomides, *Graffiti and Dipinti. Greek Inscriptions from the Excavations of the Athenian Agora at Kerameikos*, *Horos* 4, 1988, p. 51–52, no. 9 (*SEG* XXXVI 124); Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 351, App. I A, no. 36. The variants of restoration of the message are significantly various, but the overall structure of the text is understood by all publishers unequivocally: address, followed by the household orders and instructions. Ju. G. Vinogradov also proposed to read παῖ[ς] in L. 3 of the aforementioned lead letter from the Pnyx (*The Greek Colonization ...*, p. 154 n. 4, no. 16). For criticism on his restoration see above, in note 8 of this article.

³⁵ I. A. Makarov proposed to read it as an ethnonim. The name Ὀπόντιος is attested by Aristophanes (*Av.* 152 and 1294) and on an ostrakon from Kerameikos; see Fr. Bechtel, *Die historischen Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit*, Halle 1917, p. 541, and O. Masson, *Nouvelles notes d’anthroponymie grecque*, *ZPE* 91, 1992, p. 117: “Je ne trouve pas ce nom ailleurs, mais il est particulièrement clair, comme tiré de l’ethnique d’Oponte, en Locride” (= *OGS*, III, p. 136).

³⁶ B. Pharmakowski, *Archäologische Funde im Jahre 1906: Südrussland*, *AA* 1907, p. 126–128; D. R. Jordan, *A Survey ...*, p. 195, n. 170; V. P. Jajlenko, *Magičeskie nadpisi Bospora [The Magic Inscriptions of Bosphorus]*, *Drevnosti Bospora* 8, 2005, p. 472–476.

dedication, found in the North-Western Crimea, was made on behalf of the crew led by a κυβερνήτης: οἱ περὶ Ἰ Θεότιμον κυβερνήτην (Kara-Tobe, 2nd–1st centuries).³⁷ Finally, a κυβερνήτης from Amisos was awarded the honorary decree for his heroic acts during the expeditions of Mithridates in the Northern Black Sea: [ὁ δεῖνα] Φιλοκράτο[υ] Ἀμισηνὸς κυβερ[νήτης] (Olbia, *IOSPE I* 35, l. 5–6).

L. 2. In the beginning of the line the standard *formula valedicendi* ἔρρωσο³⁸ is legible, after which several damaged letters are visible; we can make out only ΣΑ. Since this group of letters is followed by quite a meaningful phrase (“ἐπιστολὴν ἐπίθεσ μοι”) the letters were probably written by mistake.

Ἐπιστολὴν ἐπίθεσ μοι could be translated in two ways: “dispatch the (following) letter for me” or “send me a letter”. Both variants are quite acceptable, though we prefer the first one as it fits a little better into the context: after the end of the first letter, before the other one (see below).

L. 3. The standard greeting formula opens the next, shorter letter. Such examples, where several letters intended for different addressees appear on the same medium, are very rare. The closest analogue is the opisthographic lead plate from the south of France, unfortunately badly damaged. The second letter, as in our case, is placed on side B, starting at L. 6 with the words [---] Χαίρει χαίρειν καὶ ὀ[γ]γαίνειν.³⁹

The name of the second addressee should apparently be restored as Κερκίων. It has not been previously attested in the Northern Black sea region, but it appears in other regions.⁴⁰ Kerkion, apparently a relative or a business partner of the scribe (perhaps both at the same time), lived either near Pythokles or directly within the οἶκος of Oreos.

The correction *nu* to *iota* in χαίρειν in combination with the same spelling of the verb in A 1 and B 5 demonstrates that the author clearly intended to write χαίρειν, and the error in this case is purely mechanical. It is remarkable because in all other cases the non-inherited diphthong εἰ is represented by a simple *epsilon*.

The reading of the sequence τῆι γ(ῆι{ι}) is quite problematic. As the lead plaque is damaged, we can see only the left vertical stroke of *nu*. In addition, the scribe has reversed the order of *eta* and *iota*, and the latter was noted twice. It is the only way to understand this sequence, although even that supposes two mistakes.

L. 3–4. The beginning of the line is irreparably damaged, but the general sense is arguably quite clear: Oreos offers Kerkion a space for the transport of goods on the helmsman Diodoros’ ship. Only the letter *iota* is legible before the verb παρέσται. Salted fish (τάριχος), which played a significant role in the diet of the ancient Greeks and was an important part of the economy of the Northern Black Sea region, is also mentioned in letter from Kerkinitis, sent to Apatourios and dated to the late 5th to early 4th centuries.⁴¹ It is difficult to give an unambiguous answer to the question whether the fish was prepared directly in Myrmekion or was the object of transit trade, but a number of facts suggest the former. Although Black Sea salted fish is mentioned in various ancient sources from the 5th century, all archaeological complexes known today that could be connected with its preparation are dated to the Roman period.⁴² In Myrmekion in particular,

³⁷ S. Ju. Saprykin, S. Ju. Vnukov, Grečeskie nadpisi iz Kara-Tobe (Severo-Zapadnyj Krym) [*Greek Inscriptions from Kara-Tobe (North-Western Crimea)*], *VDI* 293, 2015, p. 102–112, fig. 2, 3.

³⁸ In the Northern Black Sea region, excepting the text published here, this formula is evidenced only once: S. Ju. Saprykin, A. V. Kulikov, Novye épigrafičeskie nahodki i Pantikapee [*New Epigraphic Finds in Panticapaeum*], in: A. V. Podosinov (ed.), *Drevnejšie gosudarstva Vostočnoj Evropi 1996–1997 gg. Severnoe Pričernomor’e v antičnosti. Voprosy istočnikovedenija*, Moscow 1999, p. 201–206, no. I (*SEG* L 704); see also M. Dana, *Lettres grecques dialectales ...*, p. 86, no. 10; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 341–342, App. I A, no. 10.

³⁹ M. Dana, La lettre grecque sur plomb d’Agathè (Agde, Hérault): édition et commentaire, *ZPE* 201, 2017, p. 123–138 (face B, 5–6, p. 135).

⁴⁰ In the Black Sea area, the name and the family are attested (*LGPN* IV 190); for the names on Κερκ-, see L. Robert, *Noms indigènes dans l’Asie Mineure gréco-romaine*, Paris 1963, p. 187–191.

⁴¹ The main publications: E. I. Solomonik, Dva antičnyh pis’ma iz Kryma [*Two Antique Letters from Crimea*], *VDI* 182, 1987, p. 114–131 (*SEG* XXXVII 665); M. Dana, *Lettres grecques dialectales ...*, p. 83–84, no. 8; Ceccarelli, *Letter Writing*, p. 340–341, App. I A, no. 8. For a strange interpretation (τὸς τ’ ἀρίχως instead of τὸς τάριχος), see V. A. Anohin, Ešče raz ob antičnom pis’me iz Kerkinitidy [*Once Again about the Antique Letter from Kerkinitis*], *Arheologija (Kiev)* 1, 1998, p. 136–142 (*SEG* XLVIII 1004).

⁴² V. F. Gajdukevič, *Das Bosporanische Reich*, Berlin–Amsterdam 1971, p. 124–125.

such a complex was opened in the period preceding even the WWII in the “Z” section.⁴³ In addition, traces of fish salting were discovered recently in the building 7, which belongs to the early Roman villa. This area was used and partially rebuilt for fish salting during the existence of the late estate in the 3rd century CE. Nothing like this was found for Hellenistic and pre-Hellenistic times: perhaps the lack of archaeological evidence for a salt fishery in earlier periods could be explained by a different method of fish salting not involving the use of large salting vats.⁴⁴ However, a large number of fish bones indicate that Myrmekion was an important location for docking fishing vessels and preparing fish. The number of fish bones in the layers of the 6th to the 1st centuries is 13.2% above the total number of bones found (without taking into account human remains, falling in layers from the tumbled necropolises). This share is much higher than that in the other Bosporean cities.⁴⁵ These facts, along with the text of the lead letter, seem to allow us to discuss the salt fishery in Hellenistic Myrmekion quite definitively.

L. 5. At the very end of the letter Oreos seems to start a new letter: in the beginning of the last line we can clearly read the name of the sender, and at the end of the line we can just barely make out the very damaged word *χαίρειν*, but there is no place for the body of the third letter below these two words. According to the standard greeting formula, the name of the sender must be followed by the name of the addressee, so it remains to assume that in this case Oreos is just sending greetings to someone from his household. The damaged name of this person, apparently an unknown barbarian, remains enigmatic.

To summarize, the published document (which as a well-preserved opisthographic letter is in itself quite a rare find) also provides a wealth of very diverse philological and historical information. The extremely rare features of our text (the acclamation to the God and Fortune at the beginning of the letter and the presence of several letters addressed to different recipients on one medium) correct and expand our understanding of the Greek epistolary genre in the Classical and Hellenistic period. The orthographic features seem to demonstrate the type of writing transitive from the Ionic dialect to κοινή. It is very likely that the published text illustrates the introduction of the orthographic innovations that took place during the life of the sender. We can assume that our author acquired basic writing skills during the period when writing $\bar{\epsilon}$ for ϵ was a rule (the way he writes his own name is especially revealing). Also taking into account the writing $\delta\omicron\nu\alpha$ and the outdated mark of interpunction, we can suggest that the sender was by nature very conservative and reproduced the old-fashioned manner of writing to which he was accustomed, using a more progressive orthography only in the case of the standard greeting formula, which was already universally written with ϵ .

This new lead letter also supplements archaeological data. Only a few scattered buildings from the second half of the 4th century are currently known in Myrmekion, and so we lack the overall picture of life in the settlement at that period. Only a few findings serve as evidence for extensive construction and trade. This letter illustrates a scene from the active economic life of a Pontic city, which had fully recovered from the destruction that had taken place around the middle of the 4th century.

Anastassia P. Bekhter, Saint Petersburg State University
tiger119@yandex.ru

Madalina Dana, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne/ANHIMA
Madalina-Claudia.Dana@univ-paris1.fr

Alexander M. Butyagin, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg
butyagin@gmail.com

⁴³ V. F. Gajdukevič, Raskopki Mirmekija v 1935–1938 gg. [Excavation of the Myrmekion Site in 1935–1938], in: *Bosporskie goroda. Čast' I. Itogi arheologičeskikh issledovanij Tiritaki i Mirmekija v 1935–1940 gg. Materialy i issledovanija po arheologii SSSR*, Moscow–Leningrad 1952, p. 194–195, 204–211.

⁴⁴ For more details see E. Lytle, The Economics of Salt-Fish Production in the Aegean during the Classical and Hellenistic Periods, *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 13, 2018, p. 409–411.

⁴⁵ According to A. K. Kasparov; the data is summarized in A. M. Butyagin, Essay on the Economy of Myrmekion in Pre-Roman Times, in: *3rd International Conference 'The Black Sea in Antiquity and Tekkekoy: An Ancient Settlement on the Southern Black Sea Coast'*, Samsun, Turkey, 27–29 October 2017, Tekkekoy 2017, p. 70–71.