

FRAGMENTS OF LEAD LETTERS FROM NYMPHAION

In 1984, a resident of the village of Geroyevskoye near Kerch presented several fragments of small lead tablets found near the ancient Greek townsite of Nymphaion (State Hermitage, Inv. НФ.84.430, Fig. 1) to Nonna L. Grach, the Director of the Nymphaion Archaeological Expedition of the State Hermitage. These included two fragments without inscriptions, two joining fragments with a six line text on one side and a fragment of an opisthograph (six lines on one side, five on the other). The tablets which had text had the following dimensions: fragment I (comprised of two conjoined parts) – length 1.1–2.7 cm, height 1.1–1.7 cm, with letter-height 0.1–0.3 cm; fragment II (opisthograph) – length 0.7–1.4 cm, height 0.5–1.8 cm, letter-height 0.1–0.2 cm. Until now these inscriptions have not been published, although all reviews of Black-Sea lead and ceramic letters mention them.¹

Yuriy G. Vinogradov, who first reported the discovery of the unpublished letter from Nymphaion, believed that all of these tablets were fragments of a single letter.² However, careful examination shows that the upper and lower edges of the opisthograph are accurately cut while on fragment I the corresponding edges are broken, and signs that the tablet was folded into a pipe are discernible along the lines of letters. It appears, therefore, that these are fragments of two lead letters. Considering the circumstances of their discovery, it is only possible to date them through palaeographic features accepting as *terminus post quem* the founding of Nymphaion, that is ca. 580–570 BC.³ The shapes of the letters generally

¹ See, e.g., Dana 2007, 85 no. 9; Eidinow–Taylor 2010, 56 no. E 8; Ceccarelli 2013, 346 no. 22.

² Vinogradov 1998, 154 n. 4 no. 9.

³ Koshelenko–Kuznetsov 1990 [Г. А. Кошеленко, В. Д. Кузнецов, “Греческая колонизация Боспора”, in: *Причерноморье в VII–V вв. до н. э. Письменные источники и археология*], 35; Kuznetsov 1991 [В. Д. Кузнецов, “Ранние апойки Северного Причерноморья”, in: *КСИА* 204], 33; Molev 1998 [Е. А. Молев, *Политическая история Боспора 6–4 вв. до н. э.*], 5; Sokolova 2003, 765.

coincide, but on fragment I the intervals between the letters are broader and the letters themselves are larger than on fragment II. The general character of the type is dated approximately to the same period. The shapes of the letters on fragment I (Fig. 2) and fragment II (Fig. 3) are generally identical: *alpha*, *delta*, *lambda* and *mu* mostly have hastae set widely apart, hastae of *epsilon* are the same length, hastae of *mu* are inclined and set at the same level, *theta* and *omicron* have irregular shape and are smaller than the height of the line, *sigma* has a horizontal lower and opened upper hastae, while *nu* has a slightly raised right leg. The *omega* has an identical form with an out-turned left leg positioned lower than the right one.

An *upsilon* with a slightly curved hastae shaped like the Latin letter V on the first fragment has parallels found in the Phanagorian letter about the slave Phaulos (ca. 530–510 BC),⁴ as well as in letters from Hermonassa found in 2001 (first half of the 5th century BC)⁵ and in 2011 (450–440 BC).⁶ This allows us to date the first fragment's *upsilon* to an era no later than the mid-5th century BC. This appears consistent with available examples in Nymphaion graffiti. The same *upsilon* and *omega* are found in the graffito [- - -]εω κύλιξ ἐ[μί] found on a fragment of a black-figured skyphos from Nymphaion (State Hermitage, Inv. НФ.49.114).⁷ This vessel dates to 510–500 BC (Fig. 4).⁸ A similar form of *upsilon*

⁴ Vinogradov 1998, 176.

⁵ Tokhtas'ev 2010 [С. Р. Тохтас'ев, "Контакты Борисфена и Ольвии с Боспором в архаический период в свете археологических источников", in: *Археологический сборник Государственного Эрмитажа*], 55 n. 15.

⁶ Pavlichenko–Kashaev 2012, 228 Fig. 1. 2. In the Hermonassa letter found in 2011 it is also possible to find analogies to the *sigma* and *omega*, but the *upsilon* in the V form is found together with the Y-shaped one.

⁷ Tolstoy 1953 [И. И. Толстой, *Греческие граффити древних городов Северного Причерноморья*], 83 no. 129.

⁸ We are thankful to Anna Ye. Petrakova, Senior Scientific Assistant of the Department of the Ancient World, State Hermitage, for her consultations and help in dating of the vessels. As regards the character of its painting, fragment НФ.49.141 is similar to skyphoi from the Chariot Courting Group. This group comprises objects that are inhomogeneous in terms of the quality of the drawing and extent of the detailed elaboration of the engravings. They are dated to 510–500 BC for the more carefully executed paintings and to 500–490 BC for poorer ones. The Nymphaion fragment bears engravings which are reasonably carefully executed and detailed which draw parallels with items such as a skyphos in the collection of the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Inv. 76 (*CVA Mainz* 1, 42, Pl. [733] 40.3), dated to the period leading up to 500 BC. Cf. also engravings of the manes and details of the horse muzzles on bowl Inv. 2083 from Antikensammlung in Munich (*CVA München* 13, 83, Pl. 52, 1–6), which is dated to the last quarter of the 6th century BC.

is encountered in Nymphaion graffiti on the black-glossed cup-skyphos (State Hermitage, Inv. НФ.62.136)⁹ – Ἑρμῆω κύλιξ (Fig. 5)¹⁰ and the kylix (State Hermitage, Inv. ГК/Н.74)¹¹ – Εὐθυμίας ἐμὶ κύλιξ (Fig. 6).¹²

Thus both letters can be dated to a broad time span ranging from the late 6th to the mid-5th century BC, or perhaps, even to a period ending not later than 475 BC.

The size of the fragments under study is so small that no word has survived in completion and the separation of the words is a complicated task, so we can only guess as to their contents or where their authors and correspondents might be found.

Letter I consists of two conjoined fragments. On the right side a vertical line marking the margin of the letter is discernible. It runs along the edge of the tablet following its contour or else, perhaps, the upper right corner of the tablet was purposefully ‘pinched out’ in order to form a kind of *tabula ansata*.¹³

[- -]ΣΤΟΝΥ
 [- -]θαλαμ -
 [- -] ὄστ[ε] γ -
 [- -]ΑΤ[- - -]
 5 [- ἔ]μεο ?[- - -]
 [- -]Α[- - -]

⁹ Cf. Sparkes–Talcott 1970, 276 no. 576–578, Pl. 25, dated to ca. 480 BC.

¹⁰ Gorskaya 2002 [О. В. Горская, “Культы Нимфея по материалам граффити”, in: *Боспорский феномен: погребальные памятники и святилища*], 117 no. 35.

¹¹ Cf. Sparkes–Talcott 1970, 268 no. 471, Fig. 5, dated to ca. 470–450 BC. The authors are thankful to Dmitriy E. Chistov, Senior Scientific Assistant of the Department of the Ancient World of the State Hermitage, for his kind permission to examine this kylix and to take a photograph of it.

¹² Tolstoy 1953, 73–74 no. 108; Silant’jeva 1959 [П. Ф. Силантьева, “Некрополь Нимфея”, in: *МИА* 69], 43 Fig. 20; Namoуlik 2004 [А. С. Намойлик, “Граффити из раскопок Нимфея (1939–1991 гг.) в собрании Государственного Эрмитажа”, in: *Причерноморье, Крым, Русь в истории и культуре. Материалы II Судакской международной научной конференции (12–16 сентября 2004 г.)*], 90.

¹³ Cf. the frame drawn around the text of the Olbian letter of 2010 (1st quarter of the 5th century BC) and the frame in the graffito of the 5th century BC from Kerkititis: Nazarchuk 2011 [В. В. Назарчук, “Новый фрагмент надписи на свинцовой пластине из Ольвии”, in: *Боспорский феномен: население, языки, контакты*], 472 Fig. 1; Saprykin 2015 [С. Ю. Сапрыкин, “Греческие моряки в Северо-Западном Крыму”, in: *Scripta antiqua. Вопросы древней истории, филологии, искусства и материальной культуры* 4], 138.

I. 1. If a *nu* is reconstructed between the *omicron* and *upsilon* (over the *alpha* of the second line, a short hasta with a slight incline to the right is discernible) and if we consider that the horizontal trait in front of *sigma* is the result of accidental damage, then it would be possible to read the word [Ἄρι]στόνυ[μος].¹⁴ The trait might also have been the horizontal hasta of a *tau* or perhaps the right leg of an *omega*. Should that be the case we can assume ΣΤΟ to be the last part of a noun, adjective or numeral in the genitive case and ΝΥ the first syllable of the next word: [---]στώ [ν]υ[---]. Along with the obvious variants of reconstruction νυ[---] (for instance, νῦν or νύξ), one might also see the word νύμφη and derivatives, e.g. Νύμφαῖον.¹⁵

I. 2. The θαλαμ[---] can be reconstructed, firstly, as a personal name Θάλαμος]. This has been seen before in Bosporos (Tanais, dedication to the Highest God of 220 BC),¹⁶ however all examples of its use date to the 1st–3rd century AD.¹⁷

Life in the Black Sea poleis was inextricably interlinked with the sea. Naturally, this was reflected in contemporary writing,¹⁸ and in the numerous depictions of ships,¹⁹ including those found during excavations in Nymphaion although they are dated to a later period. For instance, we see a representation of an entire flotilla of war and trade ships on

¹⁴ Currently, this name has only been reported in the northern Black Sea littoral at Berezan – Ἄριστόνυμος (Dubois 1996, 85 no. 43, epitaph, ca. 550 BC; *SEG* 32. 723) and Patraeus (Patrasys) – Ἄρι[σ]τόνυμε (Zavoykina–Pavlichenko 2016 [H. B. Завойкина, Н. А. Павличенко, “Письмо на свинцовой пластине из Патрея”, in: *Фанагория. Результаты археологических исследований* 4], 230–249: letter on a lead plate of ca. 425–400 BC). Attic examples of similar spelling of this personal name are *IG* I³ 1190₃₁ (ca. 411 BC), 1184₃ (423 BC), 1192₁₂₈ (450–400 BC); *SEG* 34. 54₇ (late 6th century BC).

¹⁵ The toponym Νύμφαῖον is mentioned in a letter from Hermonassa found in 2001. One of the present authors was able to examine this letter at the exhibition “Новые находки Гермонасской археологической экспедиции” (“New finds of the Hermonassa archaeological expedition”), at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow, 15.10–18.11.2012).

¹⁶ *CIRB* 1278. 9.

¹⁷ *LGPN*, Vol. I–Va, s.v. The reconstruction as Θα[λά]μο[ν] in *CIRB* 1003₄ is doubtful, cf. *CIRB*-album 1003.

¹⁸ Cf., Dem. 35. 14–36; Polyæn. *Strateg.* 5. 23; 6. 9, 3, 4. In Olbian letters ναύαγιον (‘letter of the priest’ – Ceccarelli 2013, 339 no. 6₉) and [τ]οῖς ναοκλήροις] (Ceccarelli 2013, 343 no. 15₁) appear, while in a letter from Nikonion we find μονόξυλον (Ceccarelli 2013, 345 no. 20₃). For a review of the north Black Sea sources see Peters 1982 [Б. Г. Петерс, *Морское дело в античных государствах Северного Причерноморья*], 13–24, 145–190 and Saprykin 2016, 290–304.

¹⁹ Peters 1982, 134–144; Langner 2001, 67–70 Pl. 119–121.

the Nymphaion fresco,²⁰ or on a fragment of a black-glossed plate with graffiti.²¹ This fact could suggest that θάλαμ[ος] in the present letter is a certain ‘sea’ term meaning the ‘lower part of a ship’ (Poll. 1. 87). If however we are dealing with a warship, then θάλαμ[ίτης] or θάλαμ[ιος] (Thuc. 4. 32. 2. 3) could be reconstructed as ‘*thalamites*’, i.e. an oarsman of the lower row, or as terms connected with oarsmen’s functions (e.g. θάλαμιά – oar: Aristoph. *Ach.* 553; *IG* II² 1604–1608, Athenian decrees 373/2–358/7 BC), or an oar-port (Hdt. 5. 33. 11).

Furthermore, words with the stem θάλαμ- can mean ‘a room situated near or amongst other rooms’ (Hdt. 3. 78. 18), ‘storeroom’ (Hom. *Od.* 21. 8, 9; Xen. *Oec.* 9. 4. 2; Hdt. 1. 34. 15), the female part of the house (Hom. *Od.* 23. 41 ff.; Aristoph. *Lys.* 593), ‘bedroom’, in particular that of the mistress of the house (Xen. *Hell.* 3. 3. 2), or a nuptial room (Xen. *Symp.* 9. 2. 3). Θάλαμος was used to mean the latter in verse epitaphs from Pantikapaion in the 1st century AD.²²

Θάλαμος was also used metaphorically to refer to a grave ([ἐκ γαίης χω]σθεὶς εἶς γέγονεν θάλαμος – epitaph in verse, Pantikapaion, 1st century AD).²³ In some cases, θάλαμος means an internal hall in a temple: Luc. *Syr. D.* 31; *IG* XI 2 145₂₄ (Delos, ‘accounts of hieropoioi’, 302 BC cf. also Plin. *NH* 8. 185).

Although the reconstruction of θάλαμ- as a seafaring term does not seem impossible, the most likely meaning of the word in this particular letter is ‘an internal hall’ / ‘room’ / ‘bedroom’.²⁴

Thalamoi are used in the same sense in the accounts of the Delian *hieropoioi* of the 3rd century BC.²⁵ In the enumeration of economic buildings, θάλαμος ἄθυρος or τεθυρωμένος are mentioned immediately

²⁰ Grach 1984 [Н. Л. Грач, “Открытие нового исторического источника в Нимфее (предварительное сообщение)”, *ВДИ*], 81–98; Grac 1987, 46–65; Höckmann 1999, 303–356; Murray 2001, 250–256.

²¹ *Parusa Ellady* 2010, 253 no. 171.

²² *CIRB* 125₉, 130₂₁.

²³ *CIRB* 127₁₂.

²⁴ Along with banal οἶκος (letter of Apatourios from Kerkinitis – Ceccarelli 2013, 341 no. 8₂; letter from Gorgippia – Ceccarelli 2013, 343 no. 13₅; Olbian letter of 2010 – Ceccarelli 2013, 343 no. 14₃) and οἰκία (letter of Achillodoros – Dubois 1996, 50 no. 23₆) in the Black Sea letters we encounter the term οἴκημα only once: in his letter to his domestics (Olbia, ca. 350 BC, *Syll.*³ 1260) Artikon advises, that if Myllion were to throw them out of the house (ἐκ τῆς οἰκίης), then they should ask permission of Atakos to move into some of his ‘rooms’ ([εἰ]ς τὸ οἴκημα). Another term designating a room in a house, viz. στέγη derives from the Hermonassa letter of 2011 (Pavlichenko–Kashaev 2012, 230; cf. Bravo 2014/2015, 13).

²⁵ *IG* XI 2 158A₆₄, 161A₁₁₀, 287 passim etc.

after κλείσιον (a common room where the labourers of the farmhouse took meals and slept, cf. Hom. *Od.* 24. 208–210) and before any indication of other buildings, such as stalls and enclosures for large and small cattle, kitchens and mills. Sometimes *thalamos* means an internal room inside some larger building – κλείσιον τεθυρωμένον καὶ θάλαμον ἔχον τεθυρωμένον, or ὑπερῶιον τεθυρωμένον θάλαμον ἔχον, or ἀνδρώνιον θάλαμον ἔχον ἄθυρον,²⁶ however in certain cases *thalamos* possibly meant a separate structure. J. Kent believes that *thalamoi* could have been used as bedrooms for some of the labourers.²⁷ M. Hellmann, on the other hand, maintains that *thalamoi* can be only an internal part of another building; nevertheless, he acknowledges that the meaning of this word does not always differ from the ordinary οἶκος.²⁸

This interpretation does not contradict what we know of house-building in Nymphaion during the 6th–5th century BC. Sadly, the lack of preservation of the architectural remains of that period is such that it is almost impossible to discuss the functional purpose of any particular room in dwelling houses. In the 6th century BC, dwelling houses of Nymphaion consisted of two or three small rooms with a paved courtyard usually situated to the south.²⁹ The walls were mudbrick, resting on foundations constructed out of flat slabs of yellow limestone; the floors of the rooms were made of hard beaten clay.³⁰ In the 5th century BC, the number of rooms grouped to the north and west of the court may have been increased due to reconstructions.

Letter II, side A:

[---ο]δωρος [---]
 [---] ὄστινα[ς---]
 [- - -]ος σπ[- - -]
 [---]NON[---]
 5 [---]Α[---]
 [---]ΜΗ[---]

²⁶ *IG XI 2 287A*_{146, 152, 171} (250 BC).

²⁷ Kent 1948, 297.

²⁸ Hellmann 1992, 150–152.

²⁹ Khudyak 1962 [М. М. Худяк, *Из истории Нимфея VI–III вв. до н. э.*], 18, 30–31; Chistov [Д. Е. Чистов, “Урбанизация архаического Нимфея”, in: *Нимфей и античные города Северного Причерноморья. Новые исследования и материалы. Материалы научной конференции, посвященной 75-летию Нимфейской археологической экспедиции и 85-летию со дня рождения Н. Л. Грач (Санкт-Петербург, 27–28 ноября 2014 г.)*, ТГЭ], in print. Cf. also Lang 2007, 187–190.

³⁰ Khudyak 1962, 30–31.

II. A. 1. That there is a personal name in the nominative case in the first line suggests that this is the beginning of the letter.³¹ In Bosphoros personal names in *-δωρος* were known to exist in settlements of the 4th century BC – early 3rd century AD. These were predominantly theophoric names.³² We know of the name *Διόδωρος*³³ in Nymphaion; this type of name also appears in the dedication to Athena (?) on the bottom of a black-glossed kylix (State Hermitage, Inv. ΗΦ.85.113) dated to the third quarter of the 5th century BC,³⁴ viz. [---]όδωρος Ἀθ[ηνᾶι].³⁵

II. A. 2. This is likely an accusative plural from ὄστις with a long closed *o* written as O.³⁶

II. A. 5. In this line only an *alpha* is discernible with a blank space before it and two inclined traits after it. The *alpha* is approximately twice as small as the other letters; it would appear that the author first omitted it, before later inscribing it above.³⁷

Letter II, side B:

[---]ΟΜΟ[---]
 [---]ΕΝΘ[---]
 [---]ΙΟ[---]
 [---]ιθεν[---]
 5 [---]μάλια[---]

II. B. 4. If the letters ΙΘΕΝ are a part of the same word it could be, for instance, a word form of τίθημι, or the aor. pass. of a verb whose stem ends in *-ι*.

³¹ E.g. one of the following constructions is possible: ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι, τῷ δεῖνι ὁ δεῖνα, ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι ἐπιστέλλει, ᾧ δεῖνα, ἐπιστέλλει τῷ δεῖνι ὁ δεῖνα.

³² *CIRB*, passim.

³³ *CIRB* 912. 2₁₁, list of names of the 3rd century BC.

³⁴ Sparkes–Talcott 1970, 483–517 Fig. 5, Pl. 22–23.

³⁵ Gorskaya 2002, 118.

³⁶ Cf. Ποσειδεωνῖο τῷ Θεομνήστο and Μολποθέμιος τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ, Nymphaion, first half of the 5th century BC (Sokolova–Pavlichenko–Kasparov 1999 [O. Ю. Соколова, Н. А. Павличенко, А. К. Каспаров, “Новые находки на территории нимфейского некрополя”], 327, 330); [Δη]μητρίῳ on the bottom of a black-glossed kylix of the 5th century BC, State Hermitage, Inv. ΗΦ.73.480 (Gorskaya 2002, 117 no. 10). Cf. also [---h]όστινας ἄν βόλε[ται ---], Attica, ca. 417–413 BC, *IG I³* 89₁₇. See: Collitz–Hoffmann 1914, 906–909; Threatte 1980, 323 note 27.

³⁷ This can also be found in the letter of Kledikos from Hermonassa dated to 450–440 BC (Pavlichenko–Kashaev 2012, 228 Fig. 1, 2) and in a note from Gorgippia dated sometime from the middle to third quarter of the 4th century BC (Vinogradov 1997 [Ю. Г. Виноградов, “Письмо с горгиппийских наделов”, in: Е. М. Алексеева (ed.), *Античный город Горгиппия*], 544–545 Fig. 1).

II. B. 5. The first assumption is that we are dealing here with the personal name Μολίας encountered in legends of ceramic stamps of Herakleia Pontike³⁸ or, for instance, [ὠ]μολία[- - -].

To resume, notwithstanding the poor state of preservation of the text, the fragments published here yield some new information, for instance, they provide another example of a personal name ending with -δωρος in Nymphaion, as well as, perhaps, demonstrating for the first time the existence of the personal name Μολία[ς] in Nymphaion onomasticon. We also note with interest the use of the term θάλαμ[ος], relating both to seafaring and architectural lexica.

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Abbreviations

KSIA (КСИА) – Краткие сообщения Института археологии

TGE (ТГЭ) – Труды Государственного Эрмитажа

MIA (МИА) – Материалы и исследования по истории СССР

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³⁸ See e.g. *IOSPE* III (Herakleia) no. 946–960, 390–380 BC.

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In 1984, a few fragments of lead letters were found near the ancient Greek townsite of Nymphaion. These tablets included two fragments without inscriptions, two conjoined fragments with a six line text on one side and a fragment of an opisthograph (six lines on one side, five on the other). The state of preservation and treatment of the edges of these tablets suggest that we are dealing with fragments of two letters dating from approximately the same period. The palaeographical peculiarities, in particular the *upsilon* in the form of the Latin letter V on the first fragment as well as parallels among Nymphaion graffiti on black-glossed vessels as well as a painted one allow us to date all of these fragments to within the broad time span of the late 6th – mid-5th BC, and perhaps, even to a period stretching no later than 475 BC.

The fragments are so small that no word written upon them has survived in its entirety and the separation of the words is a complicated task, such that we can only guess of their contents or where their authors and correspondents might be found. However their texts are informative, for instance, they provide yet another example of the use of a personal name that ends with -δωρος in Nymphaion as well as, perhaps, the personal name Μαλία[ς], until now not seen in Nymphaion onomasticon. The term θάλαμ[ος] which relates both to seafaring and architectural lexica is also of interest.

В 1984 г. на территории античного городища Нимфей были найдены обломки свинцовых пластин: два фрагмента без надписей, два стыкующихся фрагмента с текстом на одной стороне (шесть строк) и фрагмент опистографа (на одной стороне шесть строк, на другой пять). Сохранность и обработка краев этих пластинок позволяет нам говорить о том, что это фрагменты двух писем, относящихся примерно к одному и тому же периоду. Палеографические особенности, в частности, *ипсилон* в виде латинской буквы V первого фрагмента и аналогии среди нимфейских граффити на чернолаковых и расписном сосудах, позволяют датировать все фрагменты в широких пределах – с конца VI до середины V в. до н. э., возможно, даже временем не позднее 475 г.

Размеры публикуемых фрагментов столь невелики, что на них не сохранилось целиком ни одного слова, разбивка букв на слова затруднительна, поэтому и о содержании этих писем, и о том, откуда происходили их авторы и корреспонденты, можно только догадываться. Тем не менее, публикуемые фрагменты предоставляют нам некоторую новую информацию: еще один случай употребления в Нимфее личного имени на -δωρος и, возможно, новое для нимфейского ономастикона ЛИ Μαλία[ς]. Вызывает интерес и термин θάλαμ[ος], который использовался и в морской, и в архитектурной лексике.

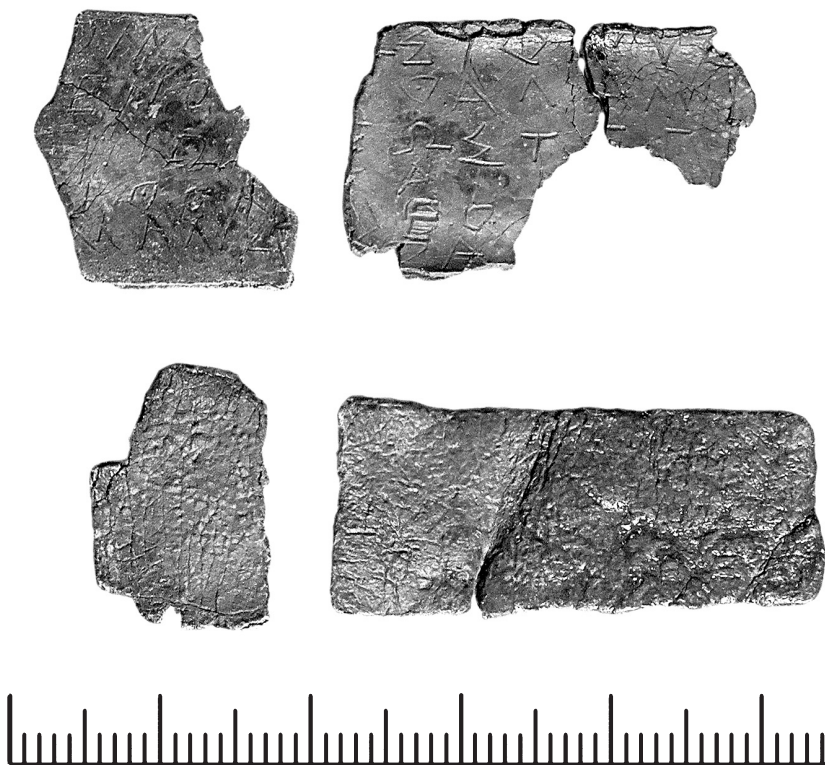


Fig. 1. Fragments of lead letters
(State Hermitage, Inv. HΦ.84.430).



Fig. 2. Letter I.

A



B



Fig. 3. Letter II. Side A and side B.



Fig. 4. Fragment of a black-figured skyphos with graffito
(State Hermitage, Inv. НФ.49.114).



Fig. 5. Black-glazed cup-skyphos with graffito
(State Hermitage, Inv. НФ.62.136).



Fig. 6. Black-glazed kylix with graffito
(State Hermitage, Inv. ГК/Н.74).

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