

THE BEREZAN LEAD LETTER

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## THE BEREZAN LEAD LETTER

Private letters written on lead sheets in antiquity are rare, but not unknown; the publication of a new example found on the island of Berezan near Olbia in the Black Sea is remarkable as offering an early specimen of the Ionic dialect.<sup>1</sup> Its Russian editor admitted that all its problems had not been solved, and the present article is an attempt to improve the readings and offer some suggestions for a better interpretation.

The document is completely preserved and legible without difficulty; it was found rolled up with the address written on the reverse. As Vinogradov suggests, it seems likely that it never reached its addressee. Vinogradov puts its date as the second half of the sixth century B.C. Dr L. H. Jeffery has kindly confirmed that on grounds of letter-forms the date would appear to be not far from 500 B.C.

The island of Berezan lies in the estuary of the River Bug, and formed an advanced harbour for, and may have been the original settlement of, the Milesian colony of Olbia; its ancient name is unknown.<sup>2</sup> The dialect is therefore Milesian, and it shows normal East Ionic features: H for original \**ē* and the product of \**ā*, E for the spurious diphthong; Ω for original \**ō*, O for the spurious diphthong; εο for ευ; ἐωυτόν for ἐαυτόν; psilosis. But there are some surprising features: E is used also for the genuine ει diphthong (ἐπιστέλλε, ἐχῆ), thus showing that it had already become a monophthong in this dialect; cf. ἔπε at Miletus;<sup>3</sup> and the long diphthong ηι loses its diphthongal element in final position (e.g. τῆ dative feminine of the article), but not in medial position (Ἄρβινάτησιν). These features, together with the numerous errors of writing, and the use of the third person, suggest that the letter may have been written for the sender, Akhillodoros, by another person who was not himself fully competent. If the corrections proposed are correct, it would almost seem as if this was a somewhat careless copy. The writer takes care not to run a word on from one line to the next (except in the address, where the lines are short), and when he runs out of space inserts the last three letters beneath the line in boustrophedon style (line 3).

The text as I read it runs as follows:

Ἦ Πρωταγόρη, ὁ πατήρ τοι ἐπιστέλλε. ἀδικεῖται  
 ὑπὸ Ματάσους, δολῶται γάρ μιγ και τῶ  
 φορτηγεσιῶ ἀππεστέρεσεν. ἐλθῶμ παρ' Ἄναξαγόρη  
 ἀπήγησαι, φησι γάρ αὐτόν Ἄναξαγόρεω  
 5 δῶλον ἔναι μυθεόμενος· “Τᾶμ' Ἄνα(ξα)γόρης ἐχῆ,  
 και δόλος και δόλας κοίκίας.” ὁ δὲ ἀναβῶι τε  
 και οὔ φησιν ἔναι οὐδὲν ἐωυτῶι τε και Ματάσ(υι)  
 και φησιν ἔναι ἐλεόθερος και οὐδὲν ἔναι ἐωυτ(ῶ)ι  
 και Ματά(συι. Μα)τάσυ(ι) δὲ τί αὐτῶι κᾶναξαγόρη αὐτοί  
 10 οἶδασι κατὰ σφᾶς αὐτός. ταῦτ' Ἄναξαγόρη λέγειν  
 και τῆ γυναικί. ἕτερα δὲ τοι ἐπιστέλλε. τῆμ μητέρα

<sup>1</sup> Y. G. Vinogradov, *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 1971, 4, pp. 74–100. A later specimen from Olbia has long been known; see Schwyzer, *Dial.* 736; also, E. H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks*, p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*, pp. 259–60. <sup>3</sup> Bechtel, *Griechische Dialekte*, III, 34.

καὶ τὸς ἀδε(λ)φεύς (ο)ἱ ἔσ(σ)ιν ἐν Ἄρβινάτησιον ἄγεν ἐς τὴν πόλιν,  
αὐτὸς δὲ Ἐξνεορος ἐλθῶμι παρὰ μιν (ι)θύωρα καταβήσεται.

Reverse:

Ἄχιλλοδώρῳ τὸ μολί-  
βδιον παρὰ τὸν παῖδα  
κἀναξαγόρην

2 δολῶται Vinogradov 3 ἀπεστέρεσεν V ANAZAGO|PHN plumbum, ultimis tribus  
litteris bistrophedon subscriptis 5 ANAGOPHS pl., corr. V 7 ΜΑΤΑΣΙΝ pl., corr. V  
9 ΜΑΤΑΤΑΣΥΕΔΕΤΙ pl., Ματά(τ)α(σ)υ(ι). τί δὲ V 12 ΑΔΕΦΕΥΣ pl., corr. V ΙΕΣΣΙΝΕ-  
ΝΑΡΒΙΝΑΤΗΣΙΝ pl., ἴεσσιν ἐν ἄρ(τ)᾽ ἵνα τῆσιον V 13 ΜΙΝΘΥΩΡΑ pl., μιν θυωρά V

In line 2 δολῶται is obviously ambiguous; but the subsequent claim by someone that he is a free man makes it clear that status is at risk, and how is a man more fundamentally wronged (ἀδικῆται) than by an unjust attempt to reduce him (and consequently his family) to slavery? There is thus a good case for reading δολῶται (= δουλοῦται).

Vinogradov argues in favour of a form ἀπεστέρεσεν in line 3 on the model of ἔστώρεσεν, etc. This seems unnecessary, since ε can quite well denote the lengthened vowel of the stem found in the aorist of contract-type verbs. It may be simply a confusion, but I would prefer to suppose a confusion of ε̄ with η rather than of ε̄ with η.

In line 9 the name Ματάσσυι is obviously wrongly spelt. Apart from the ending, where Vinogradov has rightly seen -σσε is to be corrected to -συι, we appear to have a dittography τατα. But the following δέ poses a problem, which Vinogradov solves by transposing δὲ τί into τί δέ. This seems an unlikely kind of error, and I therefore propose a haplography instead of a dittography; if it is a conflation of the same name repeated, δέ will follow naturally.

In line 12 Vinogradov's reading τὸς ἀδε(λ)φεύς (= τοὺς ἀδελφεοὺς) is obviously right. But ἴεσσιν for ἴησιον is peculiar, ἐν ἄρτι is very strange for ἐν τῷ ἄρτι, and ἵνα with the infinitive is a monstrosity. I suggest inserting an ο to give the relative οἱ; ἴεσσιν is perhaps not quite impossible as 3rd plural present indicative of εἶμι, but it is easier to correct to ἔσ(σ)ιν with a doubling of σ which occurs often in inscriptions, though usually in preconsonantal position. The original then has ἐναρβινάτησιον, which yields no known Greek word, but must surely be ἐν followed by a place name; cf. Ἄρπινάτης, the name of a river near the town of Ἄρπινά in Elis, Pausanias 6. 21. 8. Since the name of the Berezan settlement is unknown, it is tempting to speculate that it occurs here; but the name of another minor Greek settlement in the vicinity would suit the sense. The construction of the infinitive ἄγεν is then exactly parallel to λέγειν (line 10).

In line 13 Vinogradov took θυωρά as from θυωρός, but any mention of religious offerings seems foreign to the context. Εὐθύωρον is frequently used as an adverb to mean 'straight', 'directly'; we need to suppose here a plural form of the expected Ionic variant ἰθύωρος which requires only the addition of an omitted ι.<sup>1</sup>

We are now in a position to translate the whole document, but a further difficulty arises from the author's inability to express himself clearly; in particular he fails to

<sup>1</sup> In view of its etymology (cf. εὐθυορῆσαν in Arcadian, Schwyzer, *Dial.* 664. 14) we might expect the word to be spelt here ἰθύωρα. The difference is minimal, and this spelling is supported by ἰθυωρήν Hippocrates, *Off.* 15 *et al.* M. Lejeune has a note in the press on the subject.

indicate change of subject, and one must conjecture the background of the document, which I reconstruct as follows. Akhillodoros writes to his son, Protagoras, giving him two instructions: (1) to go and inform Anaxagoras (obviously an important person) that he, Akhillodoros, is being wronged by a certain Matasys; (2) to see that the writer's family are removed to a place of safety. The wrong inflicted by Matasys is an attempt to claim Akhillodoros as a slave of Anaxagoras on the grounds that he was previously a slave of Matasys, and Matasys has ceded all his property, including slaves, to Anaxagoras. This information is to be reported to Anaxagoras and τῆ γυναίκαί, and although the natural interpretation of the Greek is to understand this as meaning the wife of Anaxagoras, it is difficult to see why she should be told these facts, since she does not appear to be otherwise involved in the transaction. It is much clearer if τῆ γυναίκαί means the writer's wife, that is, the same woman who is referred to in the next sentence as the mother of Protagoras. For if Akhillodoros is enslaved, his wife and family may suffer the same fate. The new name Euneuros occurring in line 13 will probably be another son of the writer, who is excluded from the brothers at Arbinatai because he is elsewhere; the writer has presumably sent him a message to come to him and proceed straight to the coast. This would be intelligible if Euneuros were further up the river than Akhillodoros, but his family were the other side of Olbia, which is presumably the city referred to. The writer is seeking to place his family in safety in the city, where they can appeal to the magistrates against an attempt to enslave them.

A minor point concerns the second wrong done to Akhillodoros by Matasys, who has deprived him τῷ φορτηγείῳ. Vinogradov argues in favour of regarding this as a masculine, and interprets the word as meaning some sort of 'commercial agent'. But it is more naturally taken as neuter (cf. κωνηγέσιον), and will mean the position of \*φορτηγέτης, a man in charge of cargoes; possibly a charge-hand in the docks, or even a head muleteer or the like. In any case it is not vital to the interpretation of the document.

#### Translation:

O Protagoras, your father [Akhilodoros] sends you this command. He is being wronged by Matasys, for he [Matasys] is enslaving him and has deprived him of his position as carrier. Go to Anaxagoras and tell him the story, for he [Matasys] asserts that he [Akhilodoros] is the slave of Anaxagoras, claiming 'Anaxagoras has my property, slaves both male and female and houses.' But he [Akhilodoros] disputes it and denies that there is anything between him and Matasys, and asserts that he is a free man, and there is nothing between him and Matasys. But as for Matasys, what there is between him and Anaxagoras, they alone know. Tell this to Anaxagoras and his [Akhilodoros'] wife. A second command for you: take your mother and your brothers who are at Arbinatai to the city. But Euneuros by himself will come to him [Akhilodoros] and go straight down.

On the reverse:

The lead of Akhillodoros addressed to his son and Anaxagoras.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to all with whom I have discussed this inscription, especially Professor W. S. Allen, Dr L. H. Jeffery, Dr J. T. Killen, Professor M. Lejeune, and Mr A. G. Woodhead.