

ST. SPYRIDAKIS

NOTES ON A FUNERARY STELE FROM ITANOS

The upper part of a fragmented grave stele from Crete was recently discovered and published by N. Papadakis, the *epimeletes* of antiquities of the Seteia eparchy of Lasiathi, on the easternmost region of the island¹.

The stele which bears the inscription

ΜΝΑΣΤΗΡΑΣ
ΑΡΙΣΣΤΟΦΩ
ΧΑΙΡΕ

was found in the northern area of the archaeological site of Itanos (modern Erēmoupolis), the well-known Ptolemaic protectorate in Hellenistic Crete, among the ruins of a Byzantine church which had been built on the debris of a pagan temple, perhaps of Athena², on the acropolis of the city. This fortuitous discovery is interesting in view of the fact that the stele had not been detected during the systematic French excavations of 1950 and had been overlooked by previous archaeological investigators of the site³. Subsequently, the inscription of the epitaph was cursorily examined by Masson and has been finally published, without comments, by Pleket and Stroud in the *SEG*⁴.

Based on the form of the letters, Papadakis dated the stele in the second century B.C. without denying the possibility of a first century chronology and his suggestion has been tacitly accepted by Masson and the editors of the *SEG*. However, the dating of inscriptions of the Hellenistic and Roman periods solely on the basis of lettering is not certain especially in cases where large corpora of dated material for comparison do not exist. Thus, it is highly likely that the date of this badly damaged stele could be inaccurate by as much as a century or more, which would place it as late as the first century of the Christian era. Ostensibly, the epitaph conforms to a common pattern of the Hellenistic and Roman periods in which the name of the deceased in the nominative is fol-

1. Nikos Papadakis, «Ἐπιτύμβια ἐνεπίγραφοι-στήλη ἀπό τήν Ἴτανον», *Amaltheia* 31 (1977) 139-142 (with *addenda et corrigenda*).

2. Evidence for the worship of Athena Polias in Itanos may be seen in *Inscriptiones Creticae* III, iv, 3; 8; 12. For coin representations see N. Svoronos, *Numismatique de la Crète ancienne* (Macon 1980) 201 f., and tables XVIII 12-XIX 27.

3. For the French excavations of 1950 see «Chronique de fouilles en 1950. Itanos et environs (Crète Orientale)», *BCH* 75 (1951) 190-198. For French archaeological activities in Crete since 1857-1858 see Claire Tiré et H. van Effenterre, *Guide des fouilles françaises en Crète* (Paris, 1966). See also A.J. Reinach, «Inscriptions d'Itanos», *REG* 24 (1911) 337-425.

4. O. Masson, *BCH* 103 (1979) 73-4 and *SEG* XXXVII, 628.

lowed by his patronymic in the genitive and the invocation χαῖρε, and has no intrinsic epigraphic value; yet, a closer examination of the two names suggests that the inscription may well be an important document for the study of Greek onomastics.

Morphologically, Μναστήρας clearly derives from Μναστήρ, the Cretan Doric form of the name Μνηστήρ, which was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world, as various Greek and Latin sources attest, e.g. Dio Cassius⁵, Tacitus⁶ and Suetonius. In Roman times it occurs also as a surname: A pantomime actor and favorite of the Emperor Caligula is identified by Suetonius as M. Lepidus Mnester⁷. Epigraphically, the name appears also as a patronymic⁸ in the remote Cnidian colony of Corcyra Nigra on the Dalmatian island of Curzola (Croatian Korčula and Kařkar), and as a Messenian month⁹. Finally, it is mentioned in Hesychios¹⁰.

As a name of an individual, the derivative from Μναστήρας, which is recognized by Masson as a probable *hapax*, occurs for the first time in the Greek world in the Itanian stele although the original form Μναστήρ naturally remained in use elsewhere. Thus, it is evident that Crete provides us with one of the earliest examples of the formation of a nominative from an accusative singular which characterizes the vast majority of Greek masculine and feminine nouns since the early middle ages¹¹. More specifically, the change from Μναστήρ to Μναστήρας represents a fundamental step in the morphological evolution of Greek whereby third declension masculine nouns in -ρ (both agent nouns and members of families) have added -s to the accusative singular and entered the masculine -as declension: πατήρ > πατέρας, Σωτήρ > Σωτήρας.

Although in morphology the changes of Greek through the centuries cannot be dated with precision, the inscription of the Itanian stele suggests that this important noun formation had evolved in Crete long before the early middle ages (sixth to eleventh centuries A.D.), i.e. the chronologic period in which its use was well-established¹². Thus, besides Egypt, Crete may also supply us with a surprisingly early, albeit isolated and enigmatic, manifestation of one of the important ways in which the Greek language was destined to evolve in later years¹³. Although this unique usage may well

5. Dio Cassius, 60.24.

6. Tacitus, *Annales*, 11.36.

7. Suetonius, *Caligula*, 36.1; 55.1; 57.4. These references are in Papadakis, *op. cit.*

8. The individual is Ἰαγλοτροφῆς Μναστήρος. Its appearance in this remote and obscure Greek colony, known as ἡ μέλαινα Κόρκυρα proves that the name was not uncommon. See J. Brunsmid, *Die Inschriften und Münzen der griechischen Städte Dalmatiens* (Wien 1898) 8 v. 48 as cited in the *addenda et corrigenda* of Papadakis.

9. *IG*, VI, 1447.

10. Hesychios, *Lexicon*, s.v.

11. See e.g. Robert Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek* (London 1969) 64.

12. Browning, *ibid.* Cf. common ancient Boeotian personal names in -ώνδας, -όνδας, occasionally found also in Thessalian, Phocian and Megarian, and nominative singular masculine in -α gen. -ας. See Carl D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects* (Chicago 1955) 131, 156 and E. Schwyzer, *Dialectorum Graecarum exempla epigraphica potiora*, (Leipzig 1923), 143, 430.

13. The transference from the third declension to a type in -as, gen. -a occurred long before the sixth century A.D. However, there is meagre epigraphic evidence for this phenomenon before the fourth century A.D., a fact which makes the Itanian stele of Mnasteras an epigraphic document of

reflect the common speech of Itanos in a manner recalling the non-literary papyri of its mistress, Egypt, and did not replace the older forms even in Crete for centuries (new and old habits may, in fact, coexist for a long time in the speech patterns of a community), it does provide us, nevertheless, with new evidence from the old Greek world of the Aegean that, morphologically speaking, many modern Greek names could trace their origin not in Byzantine times, but in the Roman or even late Hellenistic periods.

The paronymic of the inscription, ΑΡΙΣΣΤΟΦΩ, is equally interesting since it appears frequently in Cretan inscriptions and is not found in the rest of Greece, as far as I know. However, the feminine name Ἀριστοφῶσα attested in an Attic epigraphic document¹⁴ may be related to it. The masculine nominative form of the name appears as Ἀριστόφοος in Phaestus and its genitive Ἀριστόφω is also found in Phaestus¹⁵ as well as in Gortyn¹⁶. The genitive form Ἀριστοφῶ occurs in Pylorus¹⁷, Aptaera¹⁸ (although it refers to a Sybritian) and Gortyn¹⁹, while the accusative Ἀριστόφωv is preserved in an inscription from Elyros²⁰ in the western region of the island.

The name is clearly Ἀριστόφοος, Ἀριστόφωv (in fact, both forms were preserved in a Phaestian inscription²¹) and not Ἀρίστοφος acc. Ἀρίστοφ(ο)v suggested by Blass for the Elyrian inscription²². Unfortunately, the error persists and resurfaces once again in the recent edition of the epitaph of Mnastēras in the *SEG* where Pleket and Stroud uncritically cite the name as Ἀρίσσοτος in their index of names of men and women, p. 331.

The use of a double Σ in the ΑΡΙΣΣΤΟΦΩ of the Itanian grave stele, which does not appear in the other Cretan documents bearing that name, was originally explained by Papadakis as an error on the part of the stone mason or of the relative of the deceased

unusual interest. On the other hand we should note that, although there is abundant papyrological evidence from Egypt, only few examples of the transference of similar third-declension nouns can be found in papyri as early as the second century A.D. Similarly, the New Testament which was written down long before the early middle ages provides some evidence for this linguistic feature. For some examples see Dietrich's *Untersuchungen der Geschichte der griechischen Sprache von der hellenistischen Zeit bis zum 10ten Jahrhundert nach Chr.* (Leipzig, 1898) 159; Edwin Mayser's *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit* 1.2 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1938) 46 and Ludwig Radermacher's *Neutestamentliche Grammatik* (Tübingen, 1911) 46, 53.

14. *IG* II, 3503 and Papadakis, *op. cit.*

15. *Inscriptiones Creticae* I, xxiii, 16.

16. *Inscriptiones Creticae* IV, 195b.

17. *Inscriptiones Creticae* I, xxv, 4.

18. *Inscriptiones Creticae* II, iii, 5B.

19. *Inscriptiones Creticae* IV, 259.

20. *Inscriptiones Creticae* II, xiii, 2.

21. *Inscriptiones Creticae* I, xiii, 16.

22. F. Blass, *Die Kretischen Inschriften* in Collitz-Bechtel, *Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften* III, 4960; see also Guarducci's comments on *Inscriptiones Creticae* II, xiii, 2. Cf. also the parallel case of the name Ἀγησίφοος, Ἀγησίφωv appearing in several Cretan inscriptions. For western Crete see *Inscriptiones Creticae* II, iii, 14, cl; vi, 6, 4; xiii, 4, 1; xiii, 2, 3; xv, 9, B (Ἀγησίφοος) and *Inscriptiones Creticae* II, xiii, 3, 3; xiii, 5, 1 and xiii, 10, 1 (Ἀγησίφωv). The name is not Ἀγησίφος as De Sanctis had suggested in *Mon. Ant.* XI (1901), 507 n.44.

who inscribed it. However, the doubling of the consonant is simply the phenomenon of syllabic division by which Σ was heard at the end of one syllable and the beginning of the next. In fact, such spellings were rather common throughout the Greek world and not limited to a particular Greek dialect²³. This double Σ form has been also retained, without comment or explanation, by the editors of the *SEG*, although it is clear from the other inscriptions of the island that the standard Cretan spelling of the name was Ἀριστόφοος, Ἀριστόφως.

These onomastic peculiarities of the Itanian grave stele are not totally surprising, however. Itanos was a well-known, strategically located maritime city-state that enjoyed extensive contacts with the outside, non Cretan world and Egypt in particular²⁴, which gave it a rather cosmopolitan character reflected in its language²⁵, foreign relations and even religious practices²⁶. In such an environment, free of the inhibiting influences of traditional Cretan cultural conservatism, the evolution of new language forms would not have been out of place.

23. C.D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects*, 75; for Crete see e.g. K. Davaras, «Ἐπιγραφαὶ ἐκ Κρήτης», *Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον* 18 (1963) 159 and Papadakis, *addenda et corrigenda*.

24. See S. Spyridakis, *Ptolemaic Itanos and Hellenistic Crete* (Berkeley 1970).

25. For the language of Itanos, which is not typically Cretan, see especially Collitz-Bechtel, *Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften* III, pp. 228 and 323, discussion of inscription no. 5057. Linguistic evidence suggests contacts with Doric Cyclades, the Dodecanesian islands and influence of the Attic *koine*. Also, R.F. Willetts, *Aristocratic Society in Ancient Crete* (London 1955) 231.

26. Note, *inter alia*, the service of Ptolemaic mercenaries in the city's garrison which included a motley group of Greeks, Egyptians, Illyrians and Latins; also the worship of the unique, syncretistic cult of Isis Tyche Protogeneia αἰένωος which combines Greek, Egyptian and Latin religious elements. See S. Spyridakis, «The Itanian Cult of Tyche Protogeneia», *Historia* 18 (1969) 42 f.