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THE PRIVATE LETTER DISCOVERED IN NIKONION*

ABSTRAKT Celem artykułu jest prezentacja ostrakonów znalezionych w dwóch częściach na terenie antycznej greckiej polis Nikonion, na północnym wybrzeżu Morza Czarnego. Poszczególne części znalezione zostały w 2007 i 2010 roku. Jest to prywatny list mieszkańca polis. Obie części opublikowane zostały w *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*. Prezentowana praca jest kontynuacją i rozwinięciem studiów na temat treści ostrakonów. Wzbogacono je o interpretację warunków społecznych oraz gospodarczych, ze szczególną uwagą skierowaną na rolniczą działalność greckich polis rozwijających się na północy Morza Czarnego. List zawiera bowiem informacje odnoszące się do handlu, jak i lokalnego obiegu pieniężnego w Nikonion. Podjęto dyskusję nad związkami nikonijjskiej polis z osadami na terenie chora. Odnoszą się one do IV w. p.n.e., kiedy Nikonion była jedyną polis na zachodnim brzegu Dniestru (antycznego Tyras), odgrywając istotną rolę w społecznym i gospodarczym systemie greckich kolonii nad Morzem Czarnym.

Słowa kluczowe: północne wybrzeże Morza Czarnego, Nikonion, archeologia, ostrakon

ABSTRACT The aim of this article is to present the two ostraca found in Greek polis of Nikonion on the northern shore of the Black Sea. The ostraca were found in 2007 and 2010 and they are the remains of a private letter which was sent by one of the inhabitants of the polis to his relatives. Both fragments were translated and published in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*. This article presents further interpretation in the context of the social, economic and agricultural conditions of the Greek poleis of the northern Black Sea coast. The letter has preserved some information about the system and conditions of the trade, and also delivered some figures about monetary system in use at Nikonion. Special attention has been paid to all information from the text which highlight the problem of the connections of the polis with smaller Greek settlements which constituted the chora of the city. The text of the letter shows how intensive and complex the economy of that polis was during the 4th century BC, especially bearing in mind that Nikonion was the only Greek centre on the western bank of the liman of the Dniester river, because of its location and size it is considered of secondary importance in the social and economic system of the Greek colonies in the Black Sea.

Key words: Northern Black Sea region, Nikonion, archaeology, ostrakon

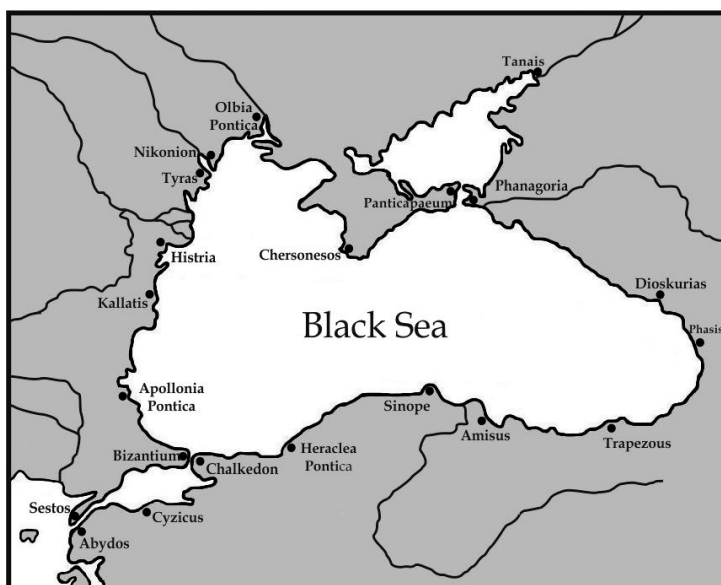


Fig. 1. Greek colonies on Black Sea littoral.
Nikonion localisation
(drawing by I. Głuszek)

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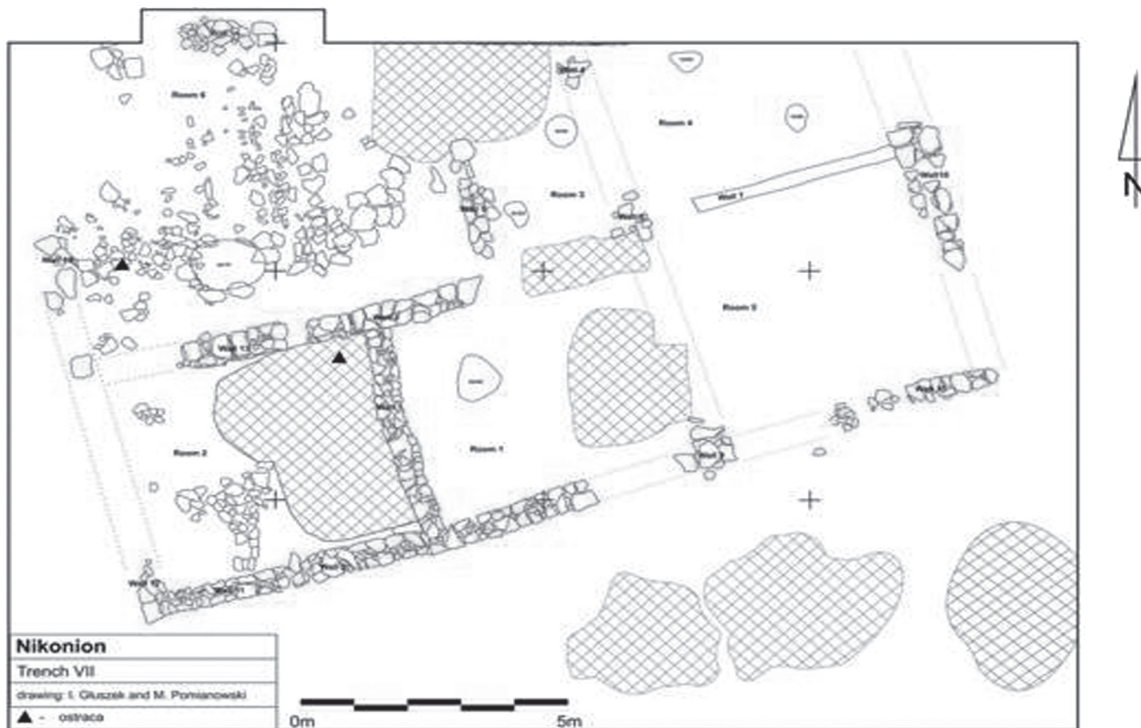


Fig. 2. The part of the site where two fragments of ostrakon were found (drawing by I. Głuszek and M. Pomianowski)

Introduction

The private letter presented in the article was found in Nikonion in 2007 and 2010 during archaeological work conducted by a joint expedition of the Odessa Archaeological Museum and the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń¹. It is preserved on two shards of pottery and it is the first such epigraphic finds from the *polis* area. Nikonion, situated on the north-western part of the Black Sea, was situated near Olbia Pontica – the main Greek *polis* in the area, and Tyras – the colony established at the same time or slightly later than Nikonion (Fig. 1). The site is placed near the present-day Roksolany village, Ovidiopol Oblast, close to Odessa in Ukraine. Nikonion was the only Greek polis on the eastern coast of the Dniester Liman. As one of the three poleis of the region, Nikonion was subjected to the same influence and transformation as the others; however the distinct location of the city was surely pivotal for its growth².

The archaeological context

The ostrakon consists of two pieces having a size of 17.4 cm x 10.6 cm in total. The text was placed on a shoulder fragment of a transport amphora from Heraclea Pontica. Both fragments put together constitute a substantial part of the text. The smooth surface of one of the fractures suggests it was reused after the letter had been destroyed (Pl. 1).

The fragments were found inside a house situated in the centre of the site, presently near the access road to the hill. For the first of the fragments, the stratigraphic context was impossible to establish due to the circumstances of the discovery, but an epigraphic analysis of the characters, however, enabled the find to be dated to the second half of the 4th century BC. The first part of the ostrakon was discovered in 2007 in a deposit which prevented the stratigraphic and contextual dating of the find. It was not until epigraphic studies that the object was dated to the 4th century BC³. In 2010 another fragment of the ostrakon was found with a text which exactly matched the one discovered

¹ The Project of the Ukrainian-Polish archaeological studies was begun in 1995. The Ukrainian-Polish studies commenced in 1995. From the Polish side they were initiated by prof. Mariusz Mielczarek from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. From the Ukrainian side responsible for the excavations are Natalia Michailovna Sekerskaya and Sergiej Borysevich Okhotnikov.

² Sekerskaya 1989; Mielczarek, Okhotnikov,

Sekunda 1997; Okhotnikov 1997; Samoiloa 2001: 71-114; Bruyako, Mielczarek, Sekerska 1999: 13-18; Kryzhyckij, Krapivina, Lejpunskaya, Nazarov 2003: 389-506.

³ Awianowicz, Rakoczy 2011: 1-5; Awianowicz, 2009: 196-198; Awianowicz 2011: 237-239.

earlier. The fragment of the ostrakon was placed on the stone flooring of a storage room of a house which had been excavated by Ukrainian-Polish team of archaeologists since 2008 (Fig. 2)⁴. Based on chronological data taken from an analysis of the stamps on the transport amphorae and the pottery imported from Athens, it was established that the house had been in use since the last decade of the 5th century BC until the end of the 4th century BC. Artefacts found together with the ostrakon can be dated to the last quarter of the 4th century BC. Apart from the ostrakon on the stone floor, diverse sets of black-glazed pottery were found, for example, drinking vessels like a kantharos, a cup-kantharos⁵ and *bolsals* which could be dated to the 4th century BC⁶, and bowls especially with incurving rim, as well as little bowls or salt-cellars, quite common in the 4th century BC⁷. Among the artefacts associated with the floor deposit, a large group of transport amphora stamps were found. The group contains two amphora-stamps from Sinope, dating to the third quarter of the 4th century BC or the beginning of the 3rd century BC⁸, as well as two amphora-stamps from Heraclea Pontica dating to the end of the 4th century BC or the first quarter of the 3rd century BC⁹. Similarly, the stamp on an amphora of Thasos can be dated to the end of the 4th century¹⁰.

The ostrakon presently under discussion is the first epigraphic monument to be discovered in Nikonion, and is therefore essential for the information it may contain about the city itself as well its inhabitants. Similar private letters from neighbouring Greek cities are known from Borysthene (Berezan') and Olbia. In most cases the artefacts which can be dated to the 6th century BC are well preserved¹¹, whereas finds from the 4th century BC occur less often and are in worse condition, which makes them significantly harder to identify¹².

⁴ Głuszek 2012: 497-500.

⁵ Agora XII no. 661; Agora XXIX no. 27-30.

⁶ Agora XII 107-108, no. 554, 539.

⁷ Agora XXIX no. 1080-82.

⁸ Kats 2007: appendix VII 434.

⁹ Kats 2007: appendix V 430.

¹⁰ Debidour 1986: 311-334.

¹¹ Vinogradov 1971: 64-76; Vinogradov 1971a: 74-100; Chadwick 1973: 35-37; Yailenko 1974: 133-152; Yailenko, 1975: 133-150; Vinogradov 1998: 153-178.

¹² Some of the epigraphic artefacts have divergent chronology; this pertains in particular to the so called *priest's letter* which was dated to the period of 550-530 BC in the first study, see Rusaeva, Vinogradov 1991: 201-202 whereas according to the interpretation of Laurent Dubois the artefact ought to be dated to approximately 400 BC, compare: Dubois 1996: 55-63 no. 24. The second latter dating back to 4th century BC also

Analysis of the text written on the ostrakon

The first ten lines of the text from both fragments of the ceramic fragments are for the most part preserved in full. The narrative nature of the text suggests the private nature of the correspondence.

The message on the ostrakon reads as follows:

Διονύσιος τοῖς ἐν οἴκῳ[ι] χαίρειν. ἔως τούτου
ἔρ(ρω)μαι καὶ
ὁ υἱός. ὑμεῖς δ' ἐμαλακία[ι] μηθὲν ἐνδῶτε, ἀλλὰ
ἀπόσ-
τειλόν τινα καὶ ἔντειλαι Μαρακάτη· τὸ μονόξ-
{.} υλο ἅμμου ἐνέπληρα. ἐξεράσας μετέωρον
αὐτὸ ἀνασπατάω, ὡς πλὴν ἐκείνου ἐλίπ
οὐδεμία ἐστίν. καὶ κριθῶν εἰσὶν παρὰ Ποσικρ[ά-]
τηι μέδιμνοι ἐννέα. ἔρρωται δὲ καὶ
Ποσικράτης. {ι} κ[ό]μικαι δὲ καὶ παρὰ τῶν
Θοαψῶν ἡμ[ι]κ[τ]άτηρον ἀποδοῦ-
τὸ εἰμάτ[ιον].

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Dionysios sends his greetings to the household. Until now I am in good health and so is the son. You should in no way give in to weakness, but dispatch someone and instruct Marakates, (that) I loaded the boat with sand. After emptying (the boat) he should haul it up high, since except for this there is no hope. And there are nine medimnoi of barley with Possikrates. Possikrates is in good health. Receive from the Thoapsoi (?) a half-stater after returning the cloth¹³.

The first words of the text suggest that Dionysios, remaining with his son out of the city, addressed his message to his family, most likely living in Nikonion. The subsequent lines of the letter reveal it was in part addressed to a woman, perhaps Dionysios's wife, whose name is not mentioned¹⁴.

The next verses bring numerous hints related to trade matters which Dionysios was involved in. First and foremost the information concerning the boat deserves our close attention as understanding this part of the letter determines its further interpretation. The fact that Dionysios devotes so much attention to the boat and related matters shows that they were of the utmost importance to him, and the reason for sending the message.

The *monoxylon* μονόξυλον boat, mentioned in the text, is a vessel carved from a tree-trunk, designed most likely for short distance voyages. Such boats have been known in ancient seafaring since

comes from Olbia: Minns 1913: 466.

¹³ Awianowicz 2011: 238.

¹⁴ Awianowicz 2011: 237.

the Bronze Age and were the primary means of aquatic transportation¹⁵. They were most reliable as river and near shore boats, but not fit for sailing on the open sea. They could also be used for navigating the waters of the Dniester *liman*, facilitating contacts between the nearest urban centres (e.g. between Nikonion and Tyras) or the farmsteads included in the *chora* of Nikonion. Based on the archaeological data it can be assumed that the economic infrastructure of Nikonion in the 4th century BC developed significantly¹⁶. Along the entire coast over a dozen of settlements were recorded, which attests for rural exploitation of land in accordance with spatial planning laid out as early as the 5th century BC¹⁷. The biggest rural centres on the eastern coast of the Dniester Liman were situated near to the present-day villages of Nadlimanskoje and Nikolajevka, as well the city of Ovidiopol¹⁸ (Fig. 3). Open settlements consisted of several small houses and were situated immediately on the bank of the *liman*, which surely facilitated access through the waterways and enabled a fast communications with the *polis*¹⁹. Also noteworthy are the village of Hermonax and the so called Tower of Neoptolemus mentioned by Strabo and other ancient writers²⁰. Both places are located on the bank of the *liman* opposite to Nikonion and probably due to that were economically linked to Tyras. In the text there is no information about the destination of the boat, so each of these settlements, and others like Pivdennoye can be considered as the place from where the letter was sent to Nikonion. Rural settlements recorded along the Dniester *liman*, neighbouring with Nikonion, developed throughout the entire 4th century BC. As has been just mentioned above the origins of

some of the settlements are dated as early as the first half of the 5th century BC. Therefore, it is probable that the inhabitants of Nikonion were economically and socially connected with their residents, which makes correspondence between them as being highly likely.

The size of the boat and its sailing capabilities allow us to assume that the place Dionysios was writing from could not be too far from Nikonion and the boat itself was used for transportation trade within a local range. The context of the message suggests that both Dionysios and Marakates were engaged in transportation and trade of good(s) not mentioned in the text.

Dionysios intended to fill the boat with sand and send it on its way back. The destination is unknown, though it can be assumed it was Nikonion. However, the instruction mentioned in the letter to send someone to Marakates with the news might as well suggest that Marakates was located somewhere outside the town and that the boat was going to be sent there.

The sand most likely acted as a dead weight and did not have any economic significance²¹. Bearing this in mind, it can be presumed there was another commodity transported in the boat which was not mentioned in the letter. But the second part of the letter indicates, however, that the efforts undertaken were somehow meant to minimise or prevent losses and that Dionysios in a way consoled ... *you should in no way give in to weakness ...*²² and proposed a solution to the difficult situation. Perhaps it was sending the empty boat, then unloading the ballast (the sand mentioned earlier) and pulling it up the shore since it could not serve any purpose at that time. It is presumed that the boat was supposed to be sent with a load. However, for unknown reasons, the planned transaction most likely did not take place. Apparently, Dionysios could not keep the boat in its current location, therefore he sent it unloaded and instructed to secure it on the shore.

The exact context of the incident is hard to envisage as Dionysios was addressing people who were well aware of the situation, and therefore did not give details which were obvious to the addressees.

¹⁵ From the Bronze Age period come representations on the rocks (e.g. of Naxos), images on pottery, terracotta and lead models (the lead model from Naxos kept in the Ashmolean Museum, bronze model of Kos and other finds from Massari, Orchomenus, Palekastro, Milos and Mycenae) as cited in: Wachsmann 2009: 69-76, 102-104. Researchers assume that similar vessels were used also in the later periods and were designed for short-haul journeys: Casson 1991: 1-3; Casson 1995: 30-40.

¹⁶ The agricultural infrastructure of Nikonion was described in detail by Okhotnikov 2006: 81-98.

¹⁷ Bruyako, Nazarova, Petrenko 1991: 38-40; Bruyako, Nazarova, Petrenko 1990.

¹⁸ Most settlements were located thanks to their surface finds. They have been located by surveys and rescue excavation. The group of settlements near Nadlimanskoje village have been best researched archaeologically. Results of the study were published in: Okhotnikov, 1983a: 101-122; Okhotnikov, 1983b: 123-131.

¹⁹ Okhotnikov 1995: 120-124.

²⁰ Strabo 7. 3. 16; Ptol. 3. 10. 7; Ps. – Arr. 89.

²¹ Transporting sand for construction purposes does not seem to have been necessary in case of the cities of the northern Pontus: Awianowicz 2011: 239. Similarly, the assumption it was used for glass production (Awianowicz 2011) is not entirely justified for Greece during the classical period as the number of sources on the subject matter is very limited: Filarska 1956: 4-10; Weinberg, McClellan 1992: 5-30. More probably, the sand was used in the boat as ballast; cf.: Rouge 1981: 69..

²² Awianowicz 2011.

The fact he did not reveal the motives for his actions suggests that the letter was part of a larger correspondence between Dionysios and his family pertaining to trading activities of Dionysios and the other people mentioned in the text (Marakates and Possikrates).

It must be noted that Dionysios did not send the information directly to Marakates. Perhaps he did not know where Marakates was at that time. From this perspective, Dionysios's household members appear as middlemen for exchanging information and instructions between the cooperating parties. This is supported if we regard the letter as a continuation of an earlier exchange of information, as the addressees were well aware of the situation. It must be remembered that the *chora* of Nikonion at the time consisted of open settlements located near the main centre, and the small distance between settlements and the city would be conducive to a relatively fast exchange of information²³.

The details contained in the letter, such as the quantity of barley owned by Possikrates, indicate the city dwellers could have used the neighbouring terrains to acquire rural goods which not only secured their own needs, but were produced in quantities which enabled them to trade off the surplus. The text of the ostrakon suggests that Dionysios, Marakates as well as Possikrates were all occupied with trade. There is no hint, however, that any of them produced the goods that were offered for sale (most of which remain unknown). Yet, it cannot be ruled out that the supposed inhabitant of Nikonion was located on a farm from which he directed the exchange of goods of his own production²⁴. It is not stated in the letter, but since he decided the course of action and the faith in the boat, he might as well have been its owner. From this perspective, Dionysios (probably as much as Marakates and perhaps Possikrates too) appears to have been a local merchant – *kapelos*, selling goods obtained from manufacturers on a local market, or a *metaboleus*²⁵ – a retailer offering his own products. Ancient sources indicate that a *kapelos*²⁶ was usually a local merchant who did not leave his place of residence (at least not for trade) and whose commercial activity was limited to a local market. When he bought goods directly from a manufacturer, he was literally a local salesman²⁷. If it was from another merchant or a middleman,



Fig. 3. Ancient settlements of 5th and 4th centuries BC in the Lower Dniester region (drawing by I. Głuszek)

he was then called a *palinkapelos*²⁸. In both cases, however, he was not the manufacturer of the goods being sold²⁹. A farmer or a craftsman selling the fruits of his own work, on the other hand, was typically referred to as *autopolos* – independently selling his own products directly to a customer³⁰.

It remains unknown who Dionysios traded with, although the size of the boat suggests his activity focused on the immediate neighbourhood. However, it cannot be ruled out (nor confirmed) that, as one of

²³ Okhotnikov 1983:102-106; Zubar, Son 2007: 116-119.

²⁴ Isager, Skydsgaard 1992: 201.

²⁵ Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 1155; Dem. 25. 46; Poll. 1. 50.

²⁶ Pl. *Soph.* 223d, 231d, 224e, Dem. 25. 46.

²⁷ Pl. *Resp.* 371 C.

²⁸ Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 1155; Pl. *Dem.* 25. 46.

²⁹ The *metaboleus* was a man selling his products for small sums – a dealer, “man of small sums” (Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 1155; Dem. 25. 46; Poll. 1. 50). It does not mean, however, that the *kapelos* engaged only in the exchange of larger amounts of goods, i.e. in wholesale. When necessary, he could practice a unit sale and present the goods obtained on the market, since the term meant „a person who sells goods”. However, the name was reserved for local merchants (Pl. *Resp.* 371c, *Soph.* 223d), distinguishing them from the foreign *emporos* and *naukleros* (Dem. 34. 5. 8-9, 10; 35. 49; Lys. 6. 19. 49). Still, the term does not differentiate between retailers and wholesalers: Hasebroek 1933: 1-2; Michell 1940: 230-232; Hopper 1979: 61-70.

³⁰ Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 1156; Pl. *Soph.* 223c; 231d; *Resp.* 260d; , Dem. 25. 46; Poll. 8. 2; Phot. *Bibl.*

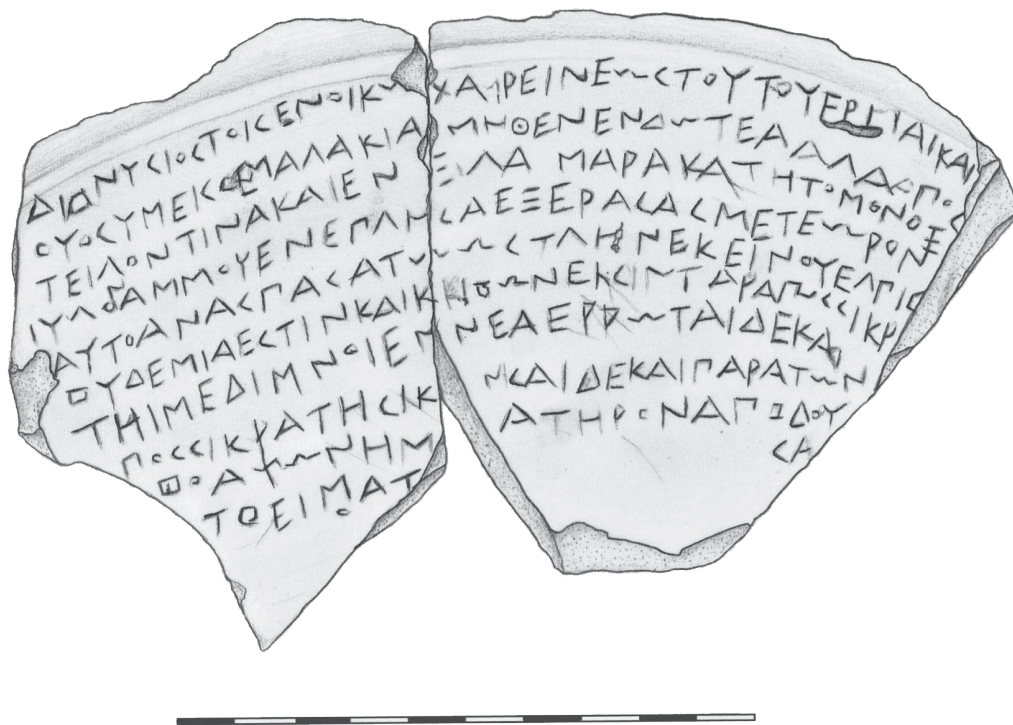
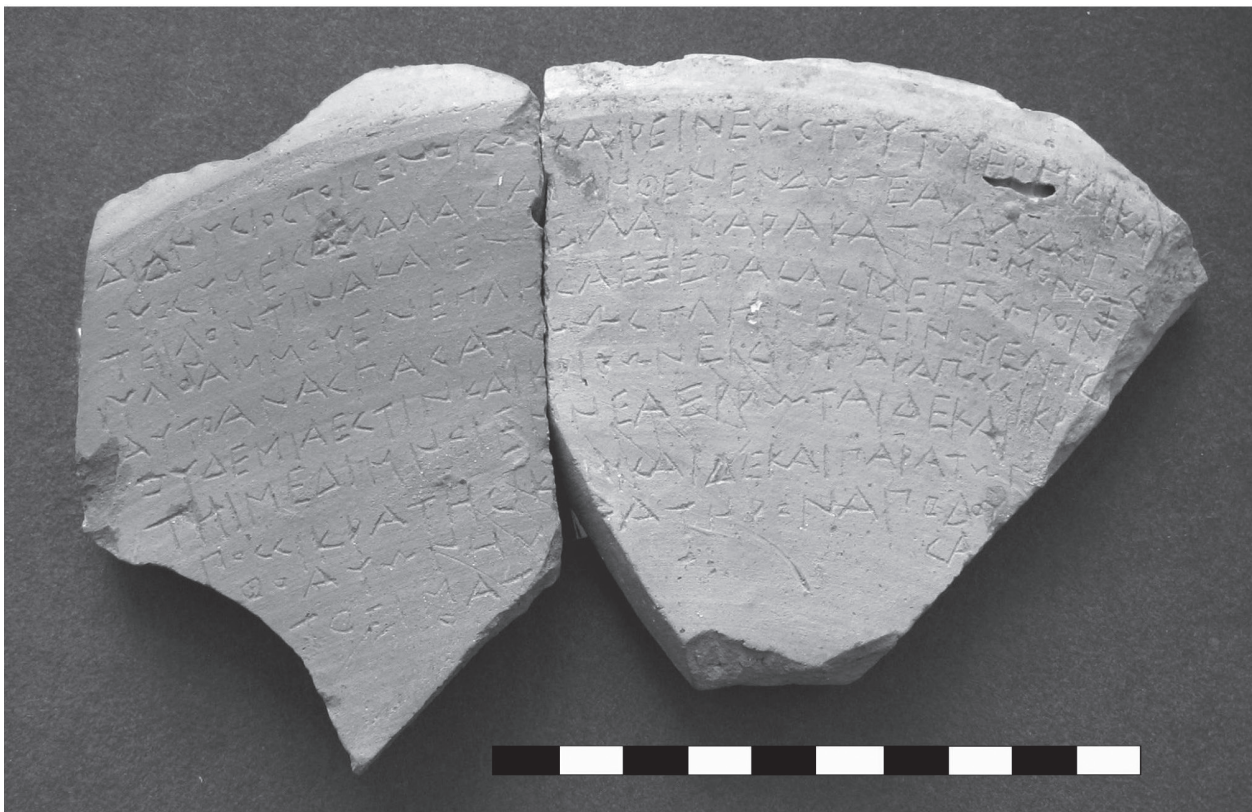


Plate 1. Two fragments of ostraca (photography by I. Głuszek, drawing by A. Dzwonek)

many small traders in the area³¹, he could be part of a larger group of merchants³², conducting business in the region.

Dionysios stated that Possikrates had nine *medimnoi* of barley. The load, with which the boat was to sail out, is unknown. However, considering the economic references in the first part of the letter, a similar character of the information regarding the grain can be presumed. It is hard to determine how Possikrates obtained the barley – whether he produced it himself or bought it from local farmers. The mention suggests, however, that the barley could be a subject of trade between the dwellers of *poleis* and have various applications. Grain formed the principle component of the diet of the Greeks inhabiting the areas of both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea³³. Growing barley is evidenced by sources dealing with the Black Sea centres³⁴. It is also believed that apart from wheat it was the chief grain grown by the Greeks³⁵. As the grain of a lower quality it is considered by some of the researchers to have been used solely for consumption by the producer, which would rule out barley as the subject of long-distance trade³⁶. However, barley undeniably served as a commercial entity that was traded on local markets. The text of the ostrakon confirms that barley growing was popular among the Black Sea cities and to some extent shows that grain could be used in trade between the Greek *poleis* and those of the Black Sea. If the text, in fact, refers to a local transaction, it seemingly refers to grain obtained from the *chora* of Nikonion or alternatively from a different urban centre placed near the *polis* (Tyras or Olbia). Assuming the grain was exchanged commercially, it would have to have been a surplus produced on a farm. It must be stressed that the information contained in the letter is scarce and pertains only to Possikrates's assets, therefore it might as well be barley obtained for his own needs from

one or several suppliers. It remains unclear whether Possikrates was a farmer and whether the grain was of his own growing or purchased from several producers.

There are no estimates as to the size and scale of grain production from the areas of the northern Pontus. However, taking calculations for other Mediterranean regions as a point of reference, nine *medimnoi* of barley covered the annual calorific requirements of an adult male living in Greece during the classical period³⁷. Similarly, it is difficult to assess how big of the significance of barley was in the regions of the northern Pontus and what its quantitative and qualitative relationship to wheat crops was³⁸.

The second product mentioned in the letter is wool³⁹. Interpretation of this part of the text is quite difficult as Dionysios informs us that Possikrates had received the sum of half a stater in exchange for returning a fabric/robe of the said wool⁴⁰.

³⁷ The most comprehensive analysis of the consumption of grain in ancient times (which may be assumed for Athens) was conducted by Foxhall and Forbes 1982: 41-90. The subject is discussed also by: Jardé 1925; Garnsey 1988; Garnsey 1999; Osborne 1987; Sallares 1991; Moreno 2007.

³⁸ Again, by comparing the situation to the data from the Mediterranean region, mainly the Attic sources, it is assumed that the majority of the population of Attica lived outside the city, but the distribution and density of the population is unknown. Moreover, considering climate fluctuations in different years and regions, the most probable (reasonable and cost-effective) option would have been mixed crops (polyculture) or the cultivation of relatively small sections of land scattered over a large area: Moreno 2007: 24; Isager, Skydsgaard 1992: 8. The proportion between the two main cereal crops is not known, nor is the extent of mixing of these with other crops. However, according to Alfonso Moreno the text of the Grain Tax Law from 374/3 BC indicates barley as the main crop (Moreno 2007: 24 and further literature). Other occasional references in ancient literature suggest a larger significance for wheat in the religious and everyday life of the Athenians: Sallares 1991: 314, Dem. 40. 20; Paus. 1.38.6; Dem. 55. 24; Scholl. Pind. *Ol.* 9. 150, Hymn. Hom. *Cer.* 309.452.

³⁹ The context of the information does not allow to state with certainty whether it was a fabric (wool?) or part of a garment (himation), cf.: Awianowicz 2011: 239.

⁴⁰ In relation to the woven products, it is assumed that most of them were made in household workshops using their own wool, or wool purchased in the city: Osborne 1987: 94-97; Hodgkinson 1988: 35-74; Thompson 1993: 10; Scheidel, Morris, Saller 2007: 366; a large number of loom weights, discovered in residential buildings in Nikonion dated both to the 5th and 4th century BC, indicate the local processing of wool, see: Sekerskaya 1989:

³¹ Reed 2003: 9-10, 14.

³² Isager, Skydsgaard 1992: 200.

³³ Various types of grain, wine and olive oil are assumed to have been the main components of the Mediterranean diet: Garnsey 1999: 12-21; Scheidel, Morris, Saller 2007: 390.

³⁴ Data regarding cultivation of grain and other crops based on the analysis of results of paleobotanical studies were presented by G. A. Pashkevich during a symposium organised on the occasion of the 60th birthday of Niels Hannestad and Lise Hannestad, Aarhus 2005: Pashkevich (<http://www.pontos.dk/publications/papers-presented-orally/oral-presentations-k-r/> Pashkevich, G.A., 16.07.2013).

³⁵ Garnsey 1988: 102-104.

³⁶ Tsetskhladze 2008: 47-62.

The information concerning the value of wool seems more straightforward, which may suggest it was subject to commercial exchange. That the wool trade was practised on the northern Black Sea coast has been confirmed by another epigraphic source, a letter on a lead plaque discovered in Olbia, dated to approximately the middle of the 4th century BC. From the fragmentarily preserved text of the letter it transpires that the information concerned, among other things, the trade of wool. The letter was found in Olbia and it can be assumed it talks about the people of this city. The text itself does not reveal whether the information refers to the local market or to trade on a larger scale. The context of the information does suggest, however, the exchange of this product was well developed in that city⁴¹.

The question remains which city minted the coin mentioned in the text. It is possible that the information concerned coinage from one of a number of the nearby cities but during the 4th century BC the emission of bullion coins has been confirmed only for Olbia. Silver coins bearing a representation of Demeter's head and an eagle standing on a dolphin appeared in Olbia in the second half of the 4th century BC, but the emissions of that city are very infrequent⁴². It can be assumed that local silver coins were rare, and therefore they could not have been popular in commodity exchange. On the other hand, numerous finds of coins from Cyzicus prove that they were commonly used in other cities, and as such were the only silver coins that served both in local trade, and, as the value was guaranteed, in the long-distance exchange too. A decree of Kanobos, presenting a conversion rate for the local silver and bronze coins in relation to Cyzicene issues, confirms the favourable market value of the Cyzicene coins which made them superior to the issues from the Black Sea region⁴³. The text of the ostrakon from Nikonion confirms that coins were used in everyday small transactions and, as bullion coins, constituted a guarantee of financial dealings. For the same reasons they also played the role of a supra-regional

63-70. A large group of this type of finds come also from the house where the ostrakon was discovered.

⁴¹ Minns 1913: 466; Dubois 1996: 63 no. 25.

⁴² Karyshkovskij 1988: 49-50, 59; Karyshkovskij 1956: 69-77; Karyshkovskij 1957: 45-69.

⁴³ Karyshkovskij 1988: 28-29; Karyshkovskij 1960: 3-13; about the importance of Kizykos' coins at the Black Sea *poleis* see: , cf.: Mielczarek 1999: 7-20; Bulatovich 1976: 100 -108; Bulatovich 1979: 95-98; Bulatovich 1970: 222-224; Bulatovich 1990: 18; Dimitriu 1957: 103-112; Preda, Nubar 1973: 49-50, 138; Karyshkovskij 1960; Karyshkovskij 1988: 28-30; Alekseev, Loboda 2002: 4-8, no. 6..

currency⁴⁴ in sea trade, the principal object of which was also grain⁴⁵.

The mention of wool, fabric or part of a wardrobe does not necessarily relate to a commercial exchange. The message is unclear as Dionysios informs us that he had received half a stater from the *Thoapsoi* for its return. It is difficult to explain the meaning of the *Thoapsoi* and the circumstances of the exchange. It has been suggested it might be the name of an unknown and unspecified *ethnos*⁴⁶. This is one of the possible interpretations, however puzzling in the context of the half a stater which to an extent the determined value of the textile. It could be a Scythian or a Thracian tribe; still the nomads did not accept money as an equivalent for exchanged goods. Other monetary transactions with the barbarians are also unconfirmed. However, the often highlighted the Greco-Barbarian character of the *chora* of Olbia and Nikonion has often been highlighted, where, apart from artefacts of Greek manufacture, artefacts of Scythian and Thracian origins have been found, cannot be ignored⁴⁷.

The interpretation of this part of the message is quite problematic as the term has not been confirmed in any other epigraphic or historical source. The word *Thoapsoi* suggests Thoas, the mythical king of the Tauri. He was the son of Dionysus and Ariadne, resided in Chersonesus and ruled the local people who were of Scythian origin⁴⁸. Thoas, like his older brother Oinopion, is sometimes considered the son of Ariadne and Theseus⁴⁹. In a different version of the myth, before he became the king of the Tauri, Thoas was the ruler of the island of Lemnos which he inherited from his uncle Rhadamanthus⁵⁰. Oinopion, on the other hand, supposedly inherited the island of Chios. On both these islands the heroes were honoured by a cult⁵¹. The *poleis* of Chios and Lemnos were politically and economically tied with Athens while actively conducting trade with

⁴⁴ Mildenberg 1993-1994: 1-12; Laloux 1971: 31-69; Preda 1974: 139-146; Zaginajlo 1976: 74-77; Vinogradov, Karyshkovskij 1976: 28-30; Schönert-Geiss 1971: 25-35.

⁴⁵ Issager, Hanssen 1975: 47, 165, Hopper 1979: 72-76; Whitby 1998: 102-128; Scheglov 1987: 99-122; Scheglov 1990: 375-376; Kryzhytskij, Scheglov 1991: 54-57; Vinogradov 1988: 375-376; Garnsey 1985: 67-74; Garnsey 2000: 63-73; Mattingly 1996: 151-157; Noonan 1973: 231-242.

⁴⁶ Awianowicz 2011: 239.

⁴⁷ Dzis-Rajko 1971: 39-53; Kryzhytskij, Krapivina 2003: 525.

⁴⁸ Apollod. *Epit.* 6. 26; Eur. *IT.* 32. 77. 970.

⁴⁹ Paus. 1. 20. 2; Plut. *Thes.* 20.

⁵⁰ Scholl. *Ap. Rhod.* 3. 997; Diod. *Sic.* 5.79.1-2.

⁵¹ Graves 1961: 320, 98.12.

the cities from the Black Sea region⁵². These trade activities date back to the Archaic Period, but flourished during the Classical Period. This economic connection may explain the development of the myth connecting the north Pontic area with a mythological king from one of the islands of the Aegean Sea. None of the mythical events mentioned explain the term used in the text. They do show, however, that the existence offices, e.g. of a priest or religious association, among the inhabitants of the Greek cities on the Black Sea coast, had its own mythological justification.

The used word *Thoaspoi* may refer to a group of Greek citizens, an association, institution or officers, who borrowed from Dionysios half a stater or a greater, unknown sum, giving in return a robe or the said wool as collateral. In this perspective, it is more likely it was the wool that was pawned to secure the loan.

The loans granted by the citizens of the Greek *poleis* constitute a complex issue posing many problems due to limited number of sources which, in addition, often present the matter in an unclear way. But among the types of Greek societies groups called *koinonai* are confirmed, which, apart from their social, political or religious function, could provide financial aid for their members, including loans⁵³. Perhaps the information conveyed by Dionysios referred to such a situation. Among Greek societies it was also popular to give loans secured on property⁵⁴.

In the text three persons are mentioned: Dionysios, Marakates and Possikrates. It is uncertain whether they were related, although the mention of Possikrates's health is of a private nature. It indicates that Dionysios and Possikrates may have shared family ties (perhaps he was Dionysios's son, who is mentioned earlier in the letter), though there is no direct information on that in the text. With all certainty, however, they all worked together in the name of common interest. Hence the assumption they constituted a type of trade union funded - in line with the ancient sources - on a *philia*⁵⁵ which bound them.

Conclusions

Based on the information in the text it can be inferred that the cooperation between the men related to small-scale trade which was one of the sources of income for the inhabitants of Nikonion and the neighbouring areas. Such exchange of goods on a small scale was typical for the economies of the Greek *poleis*, whose economic system was a mix of exploitation of land suitable for cultivation and a local trade⁵⁶. The preserved correspondence between the dwellers of the neighbouring cities confirms an increased commercial activity which, apart from agriculture, accounted for the main part of the economy of the cities from the Black Sea region. The text of the ostrakon found in Nikonion clearly proves that the inhabitants of the city were part of its economic system, actively participating in the regional trade. Furthermore, it confirms that despite the fact that Nikonion was the smallest of the *poleis* of the region, its agricultural potential was large enough for it to produce a sufficient amount of surplus which could be used for local trade and perhaps for a long-distance trade as well.

Abbreviations

Agora XII – Sparkes, B. A. and Tallcott, L. (1970) *Black and Plain Pottery of the 6th, 5th and 4th Centuries B.C.*, The Athenian Agora: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, vol. 12 (Princeton)

AJP – American Journal of Philology

AJN – American Journal of Numismatics

BCH Suppl. – Suppléments au Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique

KSIA – Kratkie Soobshcheniya Instituta Archeologii AN SSSR

MASP – Materialy po Arkheologii Severnogo Pritchernomor'ya

MIA – Materialy i Issledovaniya po Arkheologii SSSR

NE – Numizmatika i Epigrafika

SA – Sovetskaya Archeologiya

SCIV – Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie

VDI – Vestnik Drevnei Istorii

⁵² Lejpunskaya 1981: tabl. 31.

⁵³ Connor 1971: 150; Humphreys 1977/78: 97-104.

⁵⁴ Finley 1952; Fine 1951: 28.

⁵⁵ Herman 1987: 118-128; Konstan 1997: 53-60.

⁵⁶ Austin P. Vidal-Naquet 1977: 114.

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