

ARCHAEOLOGY ACROSS FRONTIERS
AND BORDERLANDS

FRAGMENTATION AND CONNECTIVITY
IN THE NORTH AEGEAN AND THE CENTRAL BALKANS
FROM THE BRONZE AGE TO THE IRON AGE

STEFANOS GIMATZIDIS
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SONDERDRUCK

Stefanos Gimatzidis – Magda Pieniążek – Sila Mangaloğlu-Votruba (Eds.)
Archaeology Across Frontiers and Borderlands
Fragmentation and Connectivity in the North Aegean and the Central Balkans
from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age

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Archaeology Across Frontiers and Borderlands

**Fragmentation and Connectivity
in the North Aegean and the Central Balkans
from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age**

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Strangers in a Strange Land: Two Soldiers' Graffiti from Ancient Thermi

*Eurydice Kefalidou*¹ – *Ioannis Xydopoulos*²

*To the memory of Tassos Christidis (1946–2004),
who was the first to study the two graffiti*

Abstract: This paper discusses two interesting unpublished terracotta fragments from a vase and a roof-tile, respectively. They were both found in the settlement of ancient Thermi (modern Toumba in Thessaloniki) during the 1980s. Both show incised male figures in oriental dress and/or headdress and bear incised inscriptions. The inscriptions are clear-cut, written in an as yet unknown script/language (or, perhaps, languages); the letters include Phoenician/Greek, Carian, Aramaic, and Lycian characters, together with some curious signs or symbols which have not yet been identified.

We present the excavation data and the possible chronology of both fragments, one of which has been found in a dug-out structure, typical of the Archaic period in the areas around the Thermaic Gulf. The oriental figures are compared to the ones shown in the reliefs from Persepolis and Susa, as well as on other similar works of Achaemenid art. Moreover, an effort is made to identify the ethnicity of the people who wrote these inscriptions, focusing mainly on the various nations who followed Xerxes' army during his march in Greece (480 BC). According to Herodotus, the vast army had camped at Thermi, a fact that can probably explain the creation and presence of the two finds examined here.

Keywords: Macedonia, Toumba, Thermi, graffiti, Persian army, Achaemenid art, Herodotus

Findspot and Date

Two ceramic objects triggered this study: a sherd and a roof-tile, both found at the ancient settlement of Toumba, in the northeast part of the modern city of Thessaloniki. During the Archaic period, to which our objects belong, as we will see later, the important city of Thermi (at the heart of the Thermaic Gulf) was flourishing in this area. Several ancient authors mention Thermi³ while the archaeological research of the last 30 years has shown that it was originally comprised of several small habitation nuclei (*komai*), the most important being the modern sites of Karabournaki and Toumba Thessaloniki.⁴

Toumba Thessaloniki is a tell-based settlement consisting of a hill (*toumba*, max. height 66m asl), a 'table' (*trapeza*, 46–50m asl), and the cemeteries that lie around them. Systematic excavations –conducted since 1984 by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on the Toumba hill – revealed an important Bronze Age site.⁵ Only rescue excavations have been carried out on

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³ See, e.g. HecataeusFGHist 1a, F 146; Herodotus 7.122–123; 127.4; 179; 183; 8.127; [Aristotle], Ath. Pol. 15.2; Ps-Scylax, Periplous, 66; Strabo 7a.1, 20; 22; 25; 8. 1. 3; Stephanus Byzantius, Ethnika p. 309, l. 19; 310, ll. 1–2; 679, l. 4.

⁴ The distance between the two sites is c. 4.5 km, while the distance between the settlement of Toumba and the sea is c. 1.5km. On ancient Thermi see (with bibliography): Tiverios 1995–2000, 314–320; Tiverios 2009, 394; Soueref 2011, 206–210, 344–349, 359–363; <http://karabournaki.ipet.gr>.

⁵ See (with further bibl.): Andreou – Kotsakis 1996; Chavela 2007, 288–290; Andreou et al. 2010; Vliora et al. 2014.



Fig. 1 Excavation in 4, Ortansias Str. 1986 – General view
(© Thessaloniki Ephoreia of Antiquities, photo: T. Savvopoulou)

the *trapeza* (by the Thessaloniki Ephorate of Antiquities since 1985) due to the construction of modern apartment buildings.⁶ The *trapeza* was inhabited mainly from the Early Iron Age until the late 4th century BC, when it was abandoned after the foundation of the city of Thessaloniki.⁷

A plot in the west part of the *trapeza*, in 4 Ortansias Street, was one of the first to be excavated in 1986 by Thomi Savvopoulou (Fig. 1). The excavation revealed different phases of rectangular houses with foundations built with meticulous stonework and a mudbrick superstructure as well as open-air spaces – dating from the 6th to the late 4th century BC, lying above Early Iron Age *strata*. There are two main building phases during the 6th century BC that can be dated to the first and

⁶ For overviews of the first results of the rescue excavations see (with further bibl.): Soueref 1989; Chavela 2007, 276–288; Soueref 2009; Soueref 2011, 78–81 (no. AK 25).

⁷ For the general stratigraphy of the Toumba settlement: Soueref 1996, 392–393; Chavela 2007, 292–296. During the Archaic and Classical periods, the size of the settlement is estimated to c. 95.000m²: Soueref 2009, 345.



Fig. 2 Excavation in 4, Ortansias Str. 1986 – the beehive-shaped pit
(© Thessaloniki Ephoreia of Antiquities, photo: T. Savvopoulou)

the second half of the century, respectively. A fire destruction layer separates the second Archaic phase from the later habitation layers of the early 5th and the late 4th century BC.⁸

Among the house walls, various pits of different sizes have been discovered – one of which was beehive-shaped,⁹ dug into the virgin red soil of the *trapeza*, beneath the late Archaic fire-destruction layer mentioned above, and another layer of brown-grayish soil was lying directly above the pit; therefore, the pit must have been constructed during the earlier phase of habitation in this particular area (Fig. 2).¹⁰ Similar pits, either beehive or rectangular, have been found in the following years not only at the Toumba settlement but also at the Karabournaki settlement (almost 30 found so far) and elsewhere (e.g. at the site of Nea Kallikrateia).¹¹ In all cases, it seems that

⁸ Savvopoulou 1990; cf. Soueref 1987, 235, who excavated a plot next to this one (6, Ortansias Str.). A second (complementary) excavation was conducted in our plot in 1988, by K. Soueref (Soueref 1988, 246–249), who re-examines the different building phases and suggests some probable dates. For an overview of the building phases of this area: Chavela 2007, 277–279, figs. 2, 4, 6, Ortansias Str. Notice that the fire destruction layer is not attested everywhere in the settlement, but is probably a local incident.

⁹ Dimensions: Upper diameter 1.44m, diameter at bottom 2.24m, depth 1.20m (all dug in the virgin soil). Apparently, it was part of a ‘double’ beehive-shaped pit, since one of its walls was built with stones in order to separate it from an adjacent pit: for similar double constructions in the Toumba settlement: Chavela 2007, 305–306.

¹⁰ Constructed during Settlement Phase V or IV (9th–late 7th century BC) and abandoned after Phase III (6th–early 5th century BC): Chavela 2007, 293–295.

¹¹ On these pits (and also on smaller cylindrical ones) see, with further references and comparisons: Toumba: Soueref 1996, 394; Soueref 1999, 180; Chavela 2007, 304–311. Karabournaki: Panti 2009; Tiverios 2009, 387–388; Tsi-fakis 2010, 384–386. Nea Kallikrateia: Bilouka – Graikos 2002, 379–380; Bilouka – Graikos 2009, 240. The suggestion made by M. Tiverios that some of these pits may also have been used for habitation seems to have been recently revised, except perhaps in the case of the very large rectangular dug-outs at Karabournaki.



Fig. 3 Excavation in 4, Ortansias Str. 1986 – pottery from the pit
(© Thessaloniki Ephoreia of Antiquities, photo: E. Kefalidou)

these structures were built in the 7th or even the late 8th century BC and their initial use must have been multiple (household activities, storage, small workshops – depending on their size and on the finds from their fills).¹² These dug-outs were eventually put out of use – filled with stones, broken pots, animal bones, shells and other waste – and closed. According to the pottery from their fills, it seems that in most cases, at least at the settlements around the Thermaic Gulf, they were abandoned in the Late Archaic period, as it is also the case of the Toumba pit that interests us here.

Our pit was filled with soft brown soil, large and small stones,¹³ a grinding stone, a pithos base, many pottery fragments, a biconical spindle whorl, as well as some shells and animal bones. The sherds belong to both handmade and wheel-made vases, mostly plain but with a fair number of decorated pieces, and of various shapes and fabrics: open and closed vessels, fine and coarse wares (almost all of them micaceous), for table, cooking and storage use (the latter include mostly coarse pithos fragments). Some of them were burned either during use (cooking) or secondarily, which we can probably connect with the fire destruction layer mentioned above. They mainly date to the Archaic period (7th–6th century BC), although there are several Early Iron Age sherds (Fig. 3).¹⁴ The pit was filled in the course of a single event, since both earlier (Iron Age) and later (Archaic) fragments were found mixed in all depths. The later fragments include a black-figure

¹² Cf. Bozhinova in this volume.

¹³ The stones were apparently used to make it more stable in order to create an earth floor over it: cf. Soueref 1988, 247; Soueref 1999, 180, who notices that many similar pits were filled with earth and stones, and sometimes new walls were built over them. The Excavation Diary (p. 45) mentions some carbonised material near the rim of the pit.

¹⁴ The Archaic pottery is mainly wheel-made, including gray wares (some of them plain, some burnished and a few *bucchero*) and fragments with painted red, brown or black bands or with more elaborate curvilinear patterns. Of special interest are three 7th century BC pieces: a fragment decorated with concentric circles (probably a local imitation of Euboean ware); part of a mug with red horizontal bands; and a vertical handle from a kantharoid vase decorated with a black fishbone pattern. Most of the archaic pottery is local; imported pieces include some of the fragments already mentioned above (among them East Greek *bucchero*, black-figure and black-glazed sherds) as well as a fragment of a Late Corinthian kotyle, decorated with horizontal red bands on the black surface of the vase. The Early Iron Age pottery is mostly handmade and includes gray plain and polished wares (e.g. wishbone handles

sherd of late 6th to early 5th century BC depicting part of a nude dancing (?) man with a white band around his chest, and five black-glazed sherds (some with impressed palmettes) of the late 5th century or even 4th century BC – but these are probably intrusions.

Among the sherds, there was a fragment of a local closed vase, decorated with a buff brownish-red band with leaves, and with an incised drawing and inscription (Fig. 4);¹⁵ this was certainly not a later intrusion because it was found stuck on the wall of the pit, c. 30cm below its mouth.

The potter's wheel-marks, visible at the inner side of the sherd, show that the painted pattern was shown almost vertically (with a tilt to the left) on the vase wall; therefore, the graffito, which is parallel to the band-and-leaves, was inscribed after the pot was broken. What survived to us today is a graffito showing a head facing right,¹⁶ with a tall, rounded hat decorated with diagonal lines and 10 or 11 signs in a peculiar script (below, S1–S10). A few months later, again in 1986, a fragment of a flat roof-tile was handed in to the Thessaloniki Museum by a resident of the Toumba area. It also shows a graffito: a man with a long robe and a high, rounded hat, facing right and holding out a stick-like object with both hands and an inscription of 16 signs (below, T1–T16) – again in a peculiar script (Fig. 5).¹⁷



Fig. 4 Pottery fragment with graffito (© Thessaloniki Ephoreia of Antiquities, photo: E. Kefalidou)



Fig. 5 Roof-tile fragment with graffito (© Thessaloniki Ephoreia of Antiquities, photo: O. Kourakis – D. Karolidis)

of bowls, handles, necks and bodies of amphorae and jugs with cut-away or plain necks), as well as a sherd of the local 'Silver-slipped' Ware, with a violet band on off-white ground.

¹⁵ Light brown clay, fairly fine, with small quantity of mica. Dimensions: 4.4 × 6.4cm; wall thickness 7.2mm.

¹⁶ The back of his head is missing; it looks like the graffito was executed on a larger fragment of the vase, which was broken again later; and this last piece is what survived down to us.

¹⁷ Local light brown clay, with small and medium micaceous and other inclusions. Dimensions: 28.5 × 23cm, wall thickness (except from the rim) 2.8cm.

It is obvious that we have:

- A) Two objects that were inscribed after they were broken and/or taken down from a roof. They both bear peculiar inscriptions and depict men with similar tall, rounded headdresses, one of which looks like a turban due to the diagonal lines. The more complete figure also has long hair, wears a long robe and holds a stick-like object.
- B) Although the artistic skills of the graffiti makers are –to say the least – mediocre (see e.g. the three-fingered hands on the tile!), it is important to note that their figures point to the oriental world, not only because of the hats and long robes, but also because of the gesture of the hands shown on the roof-tile, e.g. both hands are used to hold the stick-like object (to all of these issues we will return below).
- C) The people who made the drawings apparently also wrote the peculiar inscriptions, to which we will also return below.
- D) Based on the stratigraphy, the fabric of the sherd and the contents of the pit where it was found (all discussed above), we can securely date the small fragment to the Late Archaic period; therefore, we can probably assume a similar date for the roof-tile.
- E) The finding place of both objects lies within the area of the ancient city of Thermi.

The first scholar who studied these objects was the late philologist Tassos Christidis, who, unfortunately, did not finish his study. However, as Professor Michalis Tiverios informed us (and we warmly thank him), he and Tassos Christidis were discussing the idea that the finding place, the date, the inscriptions and the iconography of these graffiti may be connected with the Persian presence in Macedonia during the Late Archaic period. Following this initial idea, we scrutinised both the inscriptions and the iconography of these objects and some initial suggestions are presented as follows.

Inscriptions (Fig. 6)

Although lacking the special skills of Tassos Christidis, still an attempt will be made here to identify the scripts. *Prima vista*, some of the signs are easily recognisable, since they appear in the Phoenician, Carian, Aramaic, Lycian, and Greek alphabet (or to some of these). However, not all letters seem to belong to one specific alphabet and some of them may not even be letters but could be linear symbols. After examining the inscriptions, the following remarks emerged:

- A) The script is alphabetic in both inscriptions: 16 signs can be distinguished on the tile and 10 or 11 signs on the sherd.
- B) The orientation of the script seems to be from right to left in both inscriptions (cf. the *digamma*).
- C) The apparent use of diacritic marks on some letters is noteworthy in both inscriptions: note the letter *pi* (S8, with a stroke over the sign) or the *omicron* (S6 – provided that it is indeed an *omicron* and not a linear symbol);¹⁸ and the *delta* (S7–T2) or the *psi* (T6 – that appears with some added strokes).
- D) Influence of the Phoenician-Greek alphabetic tradition can be seen in some signs on the tile (*delta*?-T2, *alpha*-T7, *psi*?-T6, *ni*-T9, *sigma* with three segments-T10, *digamma*-T11, *theta*-T15, *psi*-T16); and in some on the sherd (*alpha*-S1, *iota*-S2, *rho*-S4, *theta*-S9, *epsilon* archaic-S10).

¹⁸ See e.g. in Boardman 1970, 23, the round symbol in the centre and the linear mark no. 8 on a stamp seal made in western Anatolia (Lydia) under Persian rule. As he wrote, these symbols “are based on circles with simple additions of straight lines or arcs. The forms invented for several of these devices may well have been suggested by other patterns. Thus, D2–D4 recall the winged sun disc with stylised tail, legs or wings. D5 and D6 look like simple *bucrania* or the so-called ‘taurine’ device. D8 and D9 suggest a floral”.

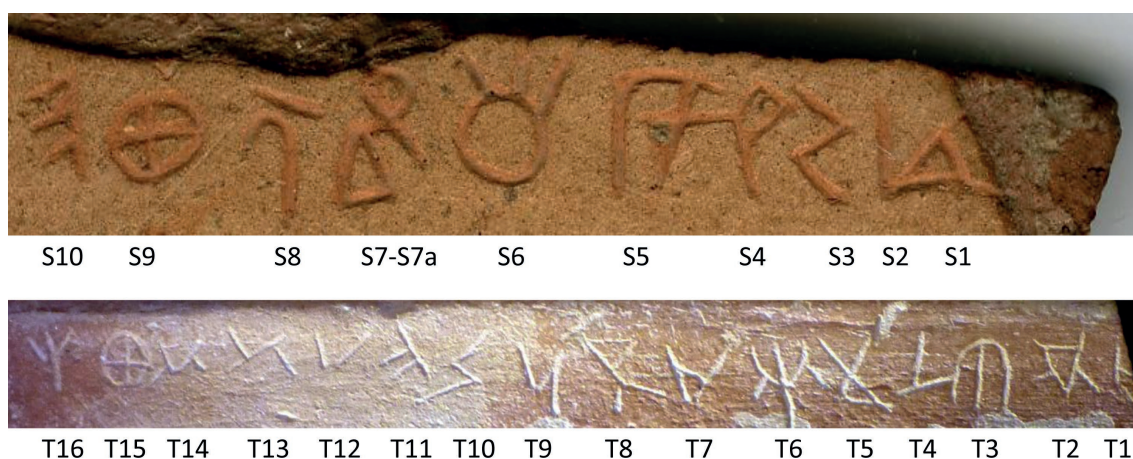


Fig. 6 Graffiti on the pottery fragment (above) and the roof-tile (below) (© Thessaloniki Ephoreia of Antiquities, photos: E. Kefalidou; O. Kourakis – D. Karolidis)

- E) Only what seem to be an *alpha*, a *theta*, and a *sigma* are in common on the two documents. However, both objects show signs that are not Phoenician/Greek, also those on the tile are different from those on the sherd.
- F) On the roof-tile, some symbols appear twice (T13 and T14 seem to be the same); on the sherd, every sign is different.

An important question for understanding these inscriptions arises immediately: Do both inscriptions belong to the same epigraphic corpus? We believe that this is not the case. The origin of these documents is a determining factor in answering this very important question for the possible identification of the language(s). The roof-tile was probably made locally in the Toumba area, while the sherd belongs to a local vase, i.e. made either in the Toumba area or, generally, in the wider region of Macedonia/North Aegean. However, both objects were inscribed after they were broken, therefore anyone who came to the area could have made these graffiti. If the scripts are in some form of Greek, the possible candidates who have inscribed these words (if these are indeed words) on the two different objects could be: a) the indigenous populations of Chalkidike, either colonists from the south or local Chalkidians; b) Greeks in the Persian army (see below, Historical Context; c) local Macedonians, trying to exercise their ability in the writing of the Greek language.

If the scripts are not Greek, as we believe is the case, then one should consider the possibility of non-Greek soldiers in the Persian army, especially Thracians, living in the Chalkidike (e.g. at Akte)¹⁹ since we know that in Xerxes' time at least the Thracians at Zone and Samothrace made use of the Greek alphabet, albeit in a different form than in our inscriptions.²⁰ Moreover, if we take for granted that we are dealing with two different alphabets, are we then also dealing with two different languages?

The nature of these documents is impossible to define in the present stage of our research. We can imagine people scratching on the tile and the sherd the figures of soldiers or royal guards or high-ranking officials/generals, or perhaps even the Great King (see below, Iconography), and then writing these puzzling (to us) words (?). Were they trying to leave something memorable behind, as was – and still is – the habit of many soldiers doing their duty abroad? Was it some kind

¹⁹ Thucydides 4.109.1; Xydopoulos 2007, 8.

²⁰ Thracian inscriptions from Zone and Samothrace: Brixhe 2006; Brixhe et al. 2015. We must also mention another non-Greek script incised on a small terracotta plaque found in a late 7th/early 6th c. BC pithos burial at Abdera, Thrace: Skarlatidou 2010, 155, no. K161, fig. 225.

of game between comrades? Could these perhaps be messages of a somewhat formal character (if so, from whom to whom?), or even orders to the soldiers, having the ‘formal’ figure as a ‘stamp’? This latter hypothesis could also be an explanation for the use of two different scripts/languages. In any case, it seems that, regardless of the nature of these objects, there are two possibilities: either those who wrote them apparently knew the form of the letters (perhaps by just seeing them), but could not master the script, i.e. they were semi-illiterate; or what we are dealing here is an as-yet unidentified alphabet.

As for the tile inscription, we did wonder if this could be a kind of an *abecedarium*, but this does not seem possible since at least two letters are repeated.²¹ Also, if we are correct in assuming that the direction of the writing on the roof-tile is from right to left and if the script were Greek, then the two final letters of the inscription would be *theta* and *psi*. It would be interesting to conceive of an end of a Greek word consisting of ‘th-ps’ and if this would make sense. Therefore, we must probably reject the possibility of a Greek script. Another thought was that what we have here is just the initial letters of the soldiers’ names (belonging to the same platoon/unit?) together with the ‘official’ figure with the long robe. Again, problems arise: all these letters (?) do not seem to belong to the same alphabet/s, or at least to the alphabets known to us so far; as we already mentioned, Phoenician, Greek, and perhaps Carian letters are seen, thus making the whole issue a striving puzzle. Also, some of the letters in the sherd inscription could belong (or, at least in our opinion, look similar) to the Aramaic alphabet: *a* (S1), *p?* (S8), *t* (S9), *h* (S10); while others to the Lycian one: *i* (S2), *r* (S4), *r* again (S7a), and *d* (S7).

If we are to point out some closer connections, we could say that many of the 10 or 11 letters of the sherd graffito may be Phoenician; one could read: an *'aleph* (S1), a sixth century *zayin?* (S2),²² a *tsade?* (S5), a *daleth?* (S7), a *pe* (S8), a *teth* (S9) and a *he* (S10). Furthermore, the tile inscription seems to have close connections with the Carian scripts, although not all letters match; still, one could read: *w* (T3), *^k?* (T5), *n?* (with strokes-T6), *m* (T9), *u* (T12), *u* (with strokes-T13, T14), *q* (T15), and *n* (T16).²³ Some of the letters on the roof-tile are strikingly similar to the Carian ones seen on the sherds of an ‘orientalising’ vase from the Karabournaki site.²⁴ Even more, Carians were known for their early contacts with the Thermaic Gulf and it was the Carian fleet that was under the command of Xerxes’ son, Ariabignes, during the campaign of 480 BC. Carians were imitating the Greek way of life and knew the Greek language.²⁵ They were also renowned soldiers, masters of the sailing art, had a long tradition of practising piracy.²⁶ Of interest for both our inscribed objects is that Thucydides links the Carians with the Phoenicians.²⁷ Maybe this is just a mistake on the historian’s side, since we do not hear about the Phoenicians being together with the Carians in his work again, but perhaps it is an implication of the Phoenician presence in the north Aegean, already noticed by Herodotus, regarding the foundation of Thasos.²⁸

²¹ For a 6th century BC *abecedarium* (in Parian-Thasian alphabet) inscribed on a cup sherd found in northern Greece and on another *abecedarium* from Chalkidike (on an early 5th century *skyphos* from the sanctuary of Poseidon at Poseidi, in Ionic alphabet): Tiverios 2011 (with an interesting general discussion on *abecedaria*, most of them on pottery and most of them Archaic). To these we may also add an unpublished *abecedarium* from Nea Kallikrateia, near Thessaloniki, dated in the first half of the 4th century BC, exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. Cf. also a 5th century BC *abecedarium* written on a roof-tile from Halieis (in Argive alphabet): Jameson 1969, 319, n. 21, pl. 80h.

²² Naveh 2005, 94, no. 4.

²³ For the Carian alphabet, see Adiego 2007, 508. For Carian inscriptions in central Macedonia, with the excellent comments of the late Tassos Christidis, see Tzanavari – Christidis 1995, 13–16; Adiego et al. 2012, 195–202.

²⁴ Tiverios 1999, 1175–1181. The sherds are on p. 1181.

²⁵ Herodotus 7.97 (see also 7.93 and 8.19 and 22 for Carians in Xerxes’ army); Tiverios 1999, 1178 and 1179 n. 22 for bilingual inscriptions on Carian and Greek.

²⁶ Herodotus 1.171.4 (Carians as fine soldiers); 1.171.3 and 2.152; Thucydides 1.8.1 (Carians as pirates).

²⁷ Thucydides 1.8.1; Tiverios 1999, 1180.

²⁸ Thucydides 1.8.1; Hornblower 1991, 29–30; Tiverios 1999, 1180. See also Herodotus 6.47.

Iconography

If we cannot (yet) understand what they wrote, can we possibly understand what they depicted? Both alphabets (or whatever we can make out of them) and the iconography of our objects (dress, headdresses, etc.) point to the Persian world and Achaemenid art. Of course, it goes without saying that our graffiti are crude and rudimentary – to say the least – compared to the formal royal art of the Persian Empire. However, our figures instantly bring to mind the soldiers/palace guards shown in the palaces of Persepolis (stone reliefs) and Susa (glazed brick reliefs),²⁹ as well as other similar figures depicted in Achaemenid minor arts. To be more specific:

The hats shown on both our fragments have the same raised rounded outline (J. Boardman calls them 'busby headdresses'³⁰), which reminds us of the similar headdresses of the 'cavalry costume' (formerly called 'Median-type' dress) worn by various courtiers and royal attendants, like the palace guards (Fig. 7) and the royal grooms on the Persepolis reliefs.³¹ Moreover, the hat on the small sherd has diagonal stripes, thus perhaps suggesting an oriental turban, which reminds us of the headdresses worn by the members of the so-called Lydian or Syrian delegation again in the Persepolis reliefs.³²

The long robe shown on our roof-tile graffiti reminds us of the Persian court robe, a rather typical garment worn by the Great King himself and by Persian soldiers, guards, various courtiers, royal attendants and ushers, as well as by some delegation members, like the Assyrians or Lydians (again in the Persepolis reliefs).³³ We may thus suggest that our figures have headdresses that remind us mostly of the 'Lydian/Syrian' turbans and/or the cavalry costume hats, while one of them wears a long robe comparable to the Persian court robe.³⁴ Moreover, the roof-tile graffiti shows that the figure wears not only a robe, but also perhaps an overgarment, indicated by the vertical lines scratched at his lower back and exceeding below the hem. Overgarments of various types are common in Achaemenid art but the lines of our graffiti are too crude to help us make any further suggestions about the type of this mantle (?).

What seems very important is the position of the hands holding the stick-like object, already mentioned above. If we interpret it as a spear there is a striking similarity with Achaemenid soldiers/guards shown on different media who also hold their spears in the same way, sometimes called 'brickfist pattern'. Unless of course they carry another weapon, such as a shield (Fig. 7: royal soldiers/guards with court robes and oval shields), which cannot be hung from their shoulders, like a

²⁹ Generally on Achaemenid monumental sculpture and its influences: Farkas 1974 (Susa: 38–45; Persepolis: 46–76). Esp. on the palace of Susa: Perrot 2010. Esp. on the palace of Persepolis: Kokh 2006. Generally on the royal Achaemenid iconography: Garrison 2013.

³⁰ Boardman 1970, 27, no. 18 (Achaemenid stamp seal, depicting a man in sleeved tunic and leggings).

³¹ Palace guards: see e.g. Farkas 1974, fig. 54. Royal grooms: see e.g. Farkas 1974, fig. 18.

³² See Farkas 1974, fig. 53 ("probably reign of Xerxes", 486–465/464 BC).

³³ See e.g. Farkas 1974, figs. 16, 17, 24 (kings); figs. 54, 66, 67 (royal guards); figs. 45, 47, 52, 55, 56 (ushers); figs. 52, 53 (Lydians or Syrians). Generally on the two distinctive forms of Persian dress (the long loose court robe and the 'cavalry costume' with the sleeved coat, leggings and rounded headdress) see with bibl.: Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 61–66. Llewellyn-Jones 2015, 235–240.

³⁴ This mixture of motifs and styles is also attested in other forms of Achaemenid minor arts: see e.g. the stamp seal in Boardman 1970, 37–39. On similar mixtures of dress and other iconographical patterns in depictions of Persians, Medes and other Orientals produced by various Asia Minor artists or craftsmen see (with bibl.): Paspalas 2000, *passim*. See also Miller 1997, 156, who notices that the Athenians do not seem to depict Persians wearing this type of dress in their art but they prefer to show them in the cavalry/'Median' costume. Generally on the mixture of motifs and patterns and the cultural and artistic interaction between Persia and Greece, especially in the 4th century BC: Llewellyn-Jones 2012 (esp. 337–340 and n. 60 with further bibliography); Cf. also Paspalas 2000 and 2008, esp. on the 4th century BC art of Macedonia.



Fig. 7 Persepolis – Soldiers/guards with ‘Persian’ and ‘Median’ dress (http://www.new-worldencyclopedia.org/entry/File:Persépolis._La_Garde.jpg [last accessed 30. Apr. 2018])

quiver or a sword.³⁵ The fact that our figure has no other weapon except for the spear may seem strange, but it is not uncommon in Achaemenid art, as we can see in the case of the soldiers/palace guards in Persepolis (Fig. 7) and on similar figures shown on golden plaques from the Oxus Treasure.³⁶ In any case, it is probably quite safe to suggest that this special gesture shows that the maker of our roof-tile graffito was at least rather familiar with Achaemenid iconography.

And finally, one more comment regarding the hair of our figures: the more complete figure on the roof-tile has rather long hair (reaching below his shoulders), which is normal in Achaemenid iconography; however, both of them do not seem to have a beard as it is normally expected.³⁷ Nonetheless, the small fragment is broken off at the area of the chin and it is not certain whether the beard is missing; additionally, the roof-tile graffito shows a curving line which starts behind the eye and continues below the jaw. Could this be an indication of a beard? Possibly yes because, as we can see on some of the Oxus plaques, which are rather simple engravings and therefore close *comparanda* to our graffiti, the beard is also indicated as a curving projection below the jaw.

³⁵ Generally on the ‘brick-fist pattern’: Davis-Kimball 1989, 110–111 (“Code 2: Hands in Brickfist Aspect”). For depictions of this specific gesture see e.g.: Farkas 1974, 46–59, figs. 17, 54, 66, 67 (Persepolis) and figs. 38–45, pl. XVII (Susa); See also a stamp seal showing a ‘royal guard’: Boardman 1970, 36, no. 171. Similar figures shown on non-Achaemenid Near Eastern art normally hold their spears and sticks with one hand: see e.g. the *stelai* in Börker-Klähn 1982, nos. 263–266 (depicting a Babylonian king, 6th–5th century BC); And cf. also the motif on much older *stelai* from Ugarit, 2nd millennium BC (Börker-Klähn 1982, nos. 285, 286, 289), as well as the *stelai* op. cit. nos. 309, 311, 314, 315 (most of them Hittite). Notice also the absence of the ‘brickfist’ pattern on the sculptures of the Assyrian palaces at Nimrud and Nineveh (9th–7th century BC): Barnett – Falkner 1962, *passim*; Barnett et al. 1998, *passim*. On neo-Assyrian iconography see also: Czichon 1992 (notice e.g. the depictions of king Sargon II [722/721–705 BC], standing with long robe and high hat, holding his sceptre in his right hand: 182, pl. 74, 1–2). Lastly, in Greek art soldiers very rarely hold their spear with both hands and this happens only when they are resting – never when they are on guard: see e.g. the third from the right soldier on the painted frieze of the Macedonian tomb in Aghios Athanasios near Thessaloniki: Tsimpidou-Auloniti 2005, 133, pls. 31, 35b.

³⁶ On the Oxus Treasure (most of the objects date to the 5th–4th century BC) see generally: Pitschikjan 1992. Curtis 2012. Esp. on the 51 Oxus golden plaques: Curtis et al. 2003. Notice that some plaques seem to have been more ‘professionally’ executed while others are just crude scratches, much like the Toumba graffiti.

³⁷ For the full long well set hair and beard in Achaemenid iconography: Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 58–60; Llewellyn-Jones 2015, 235–240. It is interesting to notice that in the Persepolis’ reliefs all men, regardless of their style of dress and their other accessories, have beards, except some men from Africa and Arabia, who do not have any other common iconographical elements with our graffiti (e.g. headdresses, garments or ‘brickfist pattern’).

Still, there are also a few other probable interpretations, as far as the identification of the figures is concerned. We could, for example, interpret the stick-like object as a scepter, thus identifying him as a king; in Achaemenid iconography the king can be shown standing or seated but he commonly wears a crenelated crown and usually holds the scepter in his right hand.³⁸ Or we can take the stick-like object as a stick and therefore recognise a court official, like the ones on the Persepolis reliefs (Fig. 7, top right and bottom right: court official, like the ones leading the delegation members on the Persepolis reliefs); this is also a possibility, although the sticks held by these courtiers are normally shorter.³⁹

Be that as it may, the main issue that our two graffiti raise is connected with the presence of the vast Persian army in Greece, which, interestingly enough, has hardly left any archaeological traces in Thrace, Macedonia, and central and south Greece.⁴⁰ If our two artefacts are indeed connected to the Persian factor, as we suggest below, we gain new and intriguing information, thus urging us to find their most probable historical context.

Historical Context

All this implies, in our opinion, a more or less permanent Persian military presence in the area of Macedonia. The two graffiti under examination, dated to the late 6th or early 5th century BC, could be linked with three different phases of the local history. In our effort to attach the finds to a possible historical context, we came up with the following:

Case 1: The offer of the Anthemous region to the expelled Athenian tyrant Hippias by the then-king of Macedon (Amyntas I) illuminates aspects of the latter's policy in the last decade of the 6th century BC with Persia. Macedon was a client kingdom to Persia since 513–512 BC and by this offer Amyntas was clearly showing his loyalty to Persia, hoping to get the maximum benefit for his kingdom. At first, there must not have been a strict Persian occupation in Macedon but rather subordination on quite loose terms.⁴¹ One concludes that Macedon was under a loose client status, if one takes into account specific parameters, such as: a) the absence of any evidence concerning a Macedonian revolt from the Persian yoke, an action which would have been certainly emphasised by Herodotus in his attempt to highlight the philhellenic feelings and actions of Amyntas' son and successor, Alexander I, against the Persians;⁴² and b) the fact that Xerxes rewarded Alexander I generously, by allowing him to rule the region between Mt. Olympus and Mt. Haemus.⁴³ Macedon must have fulfilled the conditions of servitude to Darius, in exchange for its dynastic stability and Persian military protection, so there was no reason for an uprising. But, conditions changed, and after the outbreak of the Ionian Revolt the Persians wanted to strengthen their position in the northern part of the Aegean. All that was needed was a campaign, after which the Persian general

³⁸ On the various ways of depicting the king in Achaemenid iconography: Garrison 2013, 577–584; Llewellyn-Jones 2015 (esp. for the crown see his n. 35). On the royal crown see also Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 60–61.

³⁹ See e.g. Farkas 1974, figs. 45, 47, 52, 55, 56.

⁴⁰ The spoils from the Persian Wars must have been plentiful and precious; however excavations so far revealed only a few pieces such as a bronze helmet from Olympia, a bronze bit from the Athenian Acropolis, a bronze phiale from Delphi and (perhaps) some pieces of jewellery and small artefacts from other sanctuaries; Moreover, only a few items which can be otherwise connected with this vast army have been found, mostly *trilobate* arrowheads: on these issues see Miller 1997, 29–62. For an interesting case of a group of graffiti connected with the Persian presence in Greece, although in a very different context than the Toumba examples see: Ivantchik 2006, 249; this is an Attic *ostrakon*, probably used for an ostracism in 485 BC, with a scratched depiction of an archer in 'Skythian' costume and the inscription, in Greek: KALLIAS, SON OF KRATIOS, A MEDE (an accusation of *medismos*, i.e. ties with Persia; the same inscription is found on ten other *ostraca*).

⁴¹ On the whole story and for comments: Xydopoulos 2012, 28, n. 41.

⁴² For details: Xydopoulos 2012, 29, n. 47.

⁴³ Justin *Epit.* 7.4.1. Also: Hammond 1989, 43.

Mardonius managed to include the Macedonians into “the Persian slaves”.⁴⁴ Herodotus clearly states that the Persian infantry occupied Macedonia. Amyntas I appears as Darius’ *hyparchos* (a man ruling over the Macedonians),⁴⁵ an indication perhaps of a more intense Persian military presence in Macedon, something implied by Herodotus.⁴⁶ However, we do not know any details about the location of the Persian camps, due to lack of archaeological evidence. The two inscribed artefacts may present a hint for the stationing of the Persian army somewhere around Thermi, but for the moment this is pure speculation.

Case 2: When in 480 BC the Persian army reached Macedonia, Xerxes treated the Macedonian king (by then, Alexander I) as a local subjected ruler. The lack of evidence is once again our major difficulty in reconstructing this second possible context. Herodotus is our major source but, as the main objective of his narrative was Xerxes’ invasion to mainland Greece, his information is limited to the Persian moves rather than the very presence of the Persians in the coasts of Bottiaia, Mygdonia, Anthemous and Chalkidike. After all, Macedonia was a vassal state and there was nothing of interest for the historian to comment upon. This fact allows only for some general remarks regarding the relations between Xerxes and Alexander: It has been suggested that Alexander and his Macedonians “were forced to lend their aid to the king”,⁴⁷ although (as already mentioned) there is no specific information about Alexander’s actions. We think that such a hypothesis is problematic, if not wrong, since: a) the status of Macedonia was the one described above in Case 1; and b) in Herodotus’ narrative of later events, Alexander I is presented as a loyal vassal on Xerxes’ side.⁴⁸ To return to the context related to Xerxes’ presence in Macedonia, and Thermi in particular, Herodotus is explicit when describing that Xerxes ordered his fleet to be stationed at the Thermaic Gulf.⁴⁹ We are informed that the fleet’s ships (*ναυτικὸς στρατός*) were covering the whole area ranging from Thermi to the east, up to Sindos and Chalastra to the west.⁵⁰ Eventually, Xerxes, with the rest of his army, followed the route from Acanthus through the Chalkidike mainland⁵¹ to Thermi. Apparently, the army had its camps set alongside the Gulf’s coast, up to the river Haliacmon.⁵²

It is well known that Xerxes’ army was vast. Its contingents were multi-national, coming from all parts of the Persian Empire, and it is Herodotus again who gives us a full account of all the nations crossing the Hellespont.⁵³ All these troops finally made it to Macedonia, where they spent some time in their military camps preparing themselves for the invasion of southern Greece while Xerxes was inspecting the surrounding areas up to Pieria to the west and Thessaly to the southwest.⁵⁴ Among these soldiers dwelling around the Thermaic Gulf, Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, and Cypriots were included, as well as Greeks from Ionia and the cities of the Chalkidike peninsula.⁵⁵ Troops from the eastern part of the empire intermingled with those of the western. Besides the navy of the Persians, there were also other fleets belonging to nations such as Sidonians, Tyrians, Aradians, Carians, Cypriots, Lycians, Cilicians, Lydians.⁵⁶ Also, as Balcer put it, “[m]ilitary garrisons commanded by Persians from Sardis to Abydos, Sestos to Kardia, Leuke Akte, Tyrodiza, and westward to Doriskos, Eion, and Thermi aided significantly the movement of Xerxes’ invading forces as garrisons throughout the empire quartered soldiers from the many imperial satrapies”.⁵⁷

⁴⁴ Herodotus 6.44.1.

⁴⁵ Herodotus 5.20.4. The discussion in Xydopoulos 2012, 30, n. 52.

⁴⁶ Herodotus 6.44; 7.108.1. See Bichler – Rollinger 2000, 75.

⁴⁷ Sprawski 2010, 138.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Herodotus 7.173.3; 8.34.

⁴⁹ Herodotus 7.121.1.

⁵⁰ Herodotus 7.123.3.

⁵¹ Herodotus 7.124.1.

⁵² Herodotus 7.127.1.

⁵³ Herodotus 7.61–80.

⁵⁴ Herodotus 7.128–131.

⁵⁵ Herodotus 7.123.1–2.

⁵⁶ Herodotus 7.98.

⁵⁷ Balcer 1995, 241.

These garrisons must have dwelled at camps or built barracks during the winter. Once again, our evidence is scarce. This seems logical enough, since these constructions must have had a temporary character, therefore they would have been built out of perishable materials (wood and wattle and daub). On the other hand, there could have been installations with more permanent features, which might have been used (or even destroyed) by the Macedonians after the Persian withdrawal from Macedonia, thus leaving no archaeologically visible traces behind.

Case 3: Finally, there is a third possibility: After the Persian defeat at Salamis in 480 BC and Xerxes' flight from mainland Greece, the Persian army spent the winter in Thessaly and Macedonia, at the same time crushing a rebellion in the city of Olynthus.⁵⁸ We cannot know the exact role Alexander I played in these events; however, it must be taken for granted that he remained a faithful ally to the Persians. As for the issue we have raised with the two inscribed artefacts, the destruction of Olynthus (as well as the siege of Poteidaia) in the Chalkidike peninsula implies perhaps that the bulk of the remaining Persians who had survived the campaign in south Greece were residing in the same camps where they had spent the previous winter.

As the above three possible contexts show, whatever the case may be, one can easily trace a strong Persian presence in Macedonia from 492 to 479 BC – and perhaps a more discrete one from 513 to 492 BC. As for the individuals who incised the drawings and the inscriptions on the artefacts studied here, it seems probable that they could belong to one of the Persian expeditionary armies that reached Macedonia in this specific period(s). Whether Persians, Medians, Lycians, Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, Ionians, Cypriotes, or locals, they have left their eternal marks – and an as-yet unsolved problem – in what could perhaps be just a writing exercise on broken waste ceramics. In any case, we believe that these graffiti clearly show another face of the war – that these soldiers had full awareness of the place they were at and they understood their role in a tough and cruel environment.

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⁵⁸ Herodotus 8.127.

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The objective of this volume is a theoretical debate on the archaeology at the crossroads of the Balkans, the Aegean and Anatolia and its interrelation with social and political life in this historically turbulent region. Modern political borders still divide European archaeology and intercept research. This is particularly evident in southeastern Europe, where archaeological interaction among neighbouring countries such as Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, the FYR of Macedonia and Albania is practically inactive.

Reception of the past within the local perspectives of modern nation states and changing identities are some of our focal points: Can breaks or continuities in the material culture be perceived as evidence for ethnic (dis-)continuities, migrations, ethnogeneses, etc. and what is the socio-political background of such approaches? What is the potential of material culture towards the definition of modern and past identities?

Interaction among different societies and cultures as well as the exchange of goods and ideas are another topic of this book. The area encompassing the north Aegean and the Balkans was, during the later prehistoric and early historic periods, the showplace of fascinating cultural entanglements. Domestic, cultic and public architecture, artefact groups and burial rites have always been employed in the archaeological process of defining identities. However, these identities were not static but rather underwent constant transformations. The question addressed is: How did people and objects interact and how did objects and ideas change their function and meaning in time and space?

Colleagues representing different scholarly traditions and cultural backgrounds, working in Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, FYR of Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, took part in this debate, and a total of 19 papers are now presented in this book.