

THE KJOLMEN STONE INSCRIPTION¹

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There is a series of publications on the inscription.² Relevant archaeological sources as well as other indications coming out from the linguistic analysis make it clear that a number of problems arose ever since its first appearance in print. This state of affairs has been summarized in the last major account on the Thracian language made by Claude Brixhe and Anna Panayotou.³ The authors are concerned with the idea of the identification of the signs used, and with the reading of some characters.⁴ It is not clear whether they suggest deciphering the inscription as a whole or reading and interpreting it. No one so far did both decipher and interpret the text successfully, nor did anyone consider the entire evidence.⁵



1. The Inscription.

1.1. The tombstone-shaped sandstone stele consists of two parts. The large piece measures 148x68x7-11,5 cm. A tractor broke off the two smaller pieces during agricultural activities in the fields of the near-by village of Kjolmen that consequently led to rescue excavations. The

¹ The inscription is dated to the 6th century BC (Archeological Museum of Sofia, Inv. No. 6558).

² See Woudhuizen 2000-2001 for an extensive list of almost all publications until now.

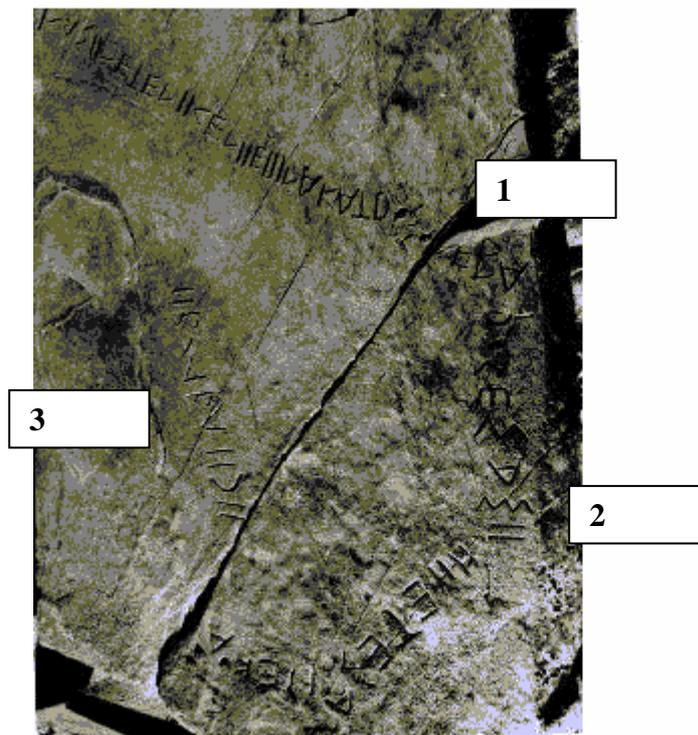
³ Brixhe and Panayotou 1994. (This publication for some reason is unknown to F. Woudhuizen.) While they are not providing any interpretation of this particular inscription, they are of the opinion that the previous publications on the inscription failed to produce reliable facts and decisive evidence to solve the many problems arising from the very nature of the find.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 187.

⁵ See e.g. Georgiev 1966; Schmitt-Brandt 1967; Woudhuizen 2000-2001; Ancillotti 1986; Schmid 1987; Theodossiev 1997, for approaches which Brixhe referred to as 'intepretation parfois délirante' or 'étymologies plus "acrobatiques"' (Brixhe and Panayotou, 187, 193).

actual length of the two sections of the inscription is as follows: (1) 71cm; (2) 103 cm; (3) 34 cm.

1.2. The above mentioned three sections of the inscription go from left to right, if we consider the position of the cutter, (referred to hereafter as (1), (2), and (3), see Figures 1 and 2 below); if facing the stone, (2) is situated on the left-hand side along the edge of the stone reaching its upper edge, and then turning to the right, i.e. horizontally where several more letters are carved; (1) starts from the right-hand side of the stele passing through the center and joining (2); and finally (3), being a little off the center goes vertically down, where nine signs are carved from the centre and down: ΝΒΛΑΒΑΗΓΝ.



Ex autopsias, as I saw it in the Museum of Sofia, starting up from the right side, the inscription reads as follows:

(1) ΙΛΑΣΝΛΕΤΕΔΝΛΕΔΝΕΝΙΔΑΚΑΤΡΟΣΟ

(2) ΕΒΑ:ΡΟΖΕΣΑΣΝΗΝΕΤΕΣΑΙΓΕΚΟΑ

(3) ΝΒΛΑΒΑΗΓΝ.

2. Archeology related considerations

2.1. The inscription was found in grave No. 1 in the center of tumulus No.1.⁶ The description of the grave construction and the grave offerings match the archaeological situation described by Filov for the Kukova and Bashova tumuli in Duvanlij.⁷

⁶ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1972, 207-208: The construction of the tomb was made in the following way: a rectangular pit, one meter deep, was dug into hardpan, lined up with flat pieces of sandstone, partly cracked. Cremated bones covered with a clay bowl were found in the middle of the tomb. There were also 45 fragments of scale armor, parts of spears, a bronze clasp broken into three pieces, several iron rings from a harness, and most importantly, a handle of a black-figured lekythos and amphorae handles and body sherds.

2.2. The four burial mounds,⁸ situated at a distance from one another, seem not to belong to one and the same necropolis.⁹ One or more slabs, placed across or along the long side, covered the tombs.¹⁰

2.3. Dremsizova-Nelchinova is of the opinion that the two graves belong to members of the Thracian aristocracy, as the offerings found in situ (precious and imported rare objects of art and luxury were placed in) indicate. The dates of the grave offerings range between the 5th and 3rd century BC. However, the burial in tumulus No. 2, being the oldest, is dated to the end of the 6th century B.C. Based on this fact, she assumed that the existence of a necropolis from as early as the 6th century B.C. accounts for the use of the inscribed stone.¹¹

2.4. The rock bearing the inscription is gray-yellowish sandstone that is composed of thin easily separable layers. Totev is of a slightly different opinion in describing the grave. At least four stones were used to cover the grave.¹² The longer side of the inscribed rock (being 148 cm. long and 68-74 cm. in width by either ends) falls short by at least 50 cm, and therefore could not have served as a cover slab.

2.5. There is sufficient archaeological evidence produced by Totev,¹³ and Dremsizova-Nelchinova,¹⁴ that the stele in question was found face down on the top of the tomb. Most recent publications follow Dremsizova-Nelchinova's opinion that the inscribed stone had been worked on and then re-used.¹⁵

3. Reading the inscription.

3.1. The letters used in this inscriptions are A, B, Γ, Δ, E, H, Z, I, K, Λ, N, O, P, T, Σ (three variants). In the Greek inscriptions from Bulgaria, different signs for Greek letters have been found. The same is true for those written in the Thracian language. In this inscription we have a few S-like characters. We consider them graphemic variants in spite of what has been adopted in previous publications. It goes without saying that the signs, besides their usual identification as belonging to the Greek alphabet, are also identified according to the sense

⁷ Duvanlij is a 5th century BC Thracian tumular necropolis: Filow 1934, 62 and 187.

⁸ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1972, 217.

⁹ The first two tumuli were part of the necropolis of the settlement, now in the place called Unji, five-six hundred meters away from it. The tombs found in three of the tumuli (no tombs in the second tumulus) are of the same kind: rectangular tombs oriented north-south, dug out in the rock 0.8-1 m deep, whose walls were reveted with sandstone slabs. Analogous tombs can be seen elsewhere in the villages of Kuylevcha, Ravna, Yankovo, and in the districts of Lovech and Teteven. The Kjolmen tombs sit outstanding by their more elaborate construction. The burials are performed either through cremation (tumuli 1, 2 or 4) or through resting the bodies in the ground (inhumation).

¹⁰ In grave No. 1 a middle-aged man was buried (two of his teeth were found in the tomb) together with his armor and some weapons. Grave No. 2 (from that same tumulus No. 1) belonged to a woman judging on the ornaments (a gold button and a lekythos). An assumption is made that this is the beloved one, buried together with her dead husband, a well-known rite of the Getae. See Dremsizova-Nelcinova 1972, 218.

¹¹ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1972, 218-28, see especially the French summary: p. 228-29.

¹² Totev 1965, 10: the grave measures 1.94 ÷ 1.84 x 1.18 ÷ 1.07 m., 1 m deep. The slabs were placed across over the longer sides, thus oriented east to west, while the grave itself was north south oriented.

¹³ *Idem*, 9-11.

¹⁴ Dremsizova-Nelcinova 1972, 207-29.

¹⁵ Idem, 228.

they might make in the course of the reading. Sometimes the text itself solves many such problems. We will follow this path in exploring the reading.

3.2. With the carrying out of the inscription showing many turning points and hesitations, we can read and separate the words. However, a few points of clarification are necessary. Following the general discussion, which is at times and places very laconic, we will establish the points scholars agree upon:

(1) As the evidence shows, the letters are of different size, between 2.5 and 6 cm high, and feature early 6th to the beginning of the 5th century BC usage in Greek letters. Scholars differ in their opinions as regards the epichoric alphabets used from that of Euboia to that of Megara. For example, the second sign in the inscription is interpreted either as Λ or as Y. There is however one such sign in the short inscription which reminds us of the Greek word ΒΛΑΒΗ, where the sign > is to be read Λ.

2) Yet another problem poses the combination of two identical vertical signs || that are read differently by some¹⁶ but mostly N by Schmitt-Brandt, Georgiev.¹⁷

3) With all those difficulties mentioned, there is no doubt that we are dealing with a local Thracian inscription, which was written by a Thracian in the Thracian language. Despite all differences, there is no other more plausible assumption but to say that Greek alphabet was used to write Thracian, at least as early as the 6th century B.C. in the proper Thracian inland.¹⁸ For example, the six-stroke sigma, seen in ΔΑΚΑΤΡΟΣΟ has been found for the first time used in an inscription from “the valley of the Thracian kings” near Kazanlak that was dated to the late 6th century BC.¹⁹ Following common logic alone, it seems that it was easier to adopt a variant of the Greek alphabet that was in circulation in the Thracian lands, rather than making the difficult assumption that the engraver had used diverse Greek-based characters that belonged to epichoric scripts.

3.3. Suffice it to say that some of the earliest Greek inscriptions yet known come from Euboia, and the Euboians, who were Ionians, used sigma instead of san (M), and that the same is true of the Boeotians and some people from central Greece and Peloponnese including eastern Argolid, Arcadia and Elis as well as Sparta, Rhodes, and some Greek colonies in Italy; or Achaea and Epirus.²⁰ After examining the stone it seems that the engraver had had tremendous difficulties in carving the characters. Therefore, his hesitating in orienting the inscription and its characters appear as a major technical difficulty coming from the texture of the stone; for limestone is soft but also fragile. Perhaps this is the reason why he avoided carving the joining hasta of the sign || and making different Σ.

¹⁶ Woudhuizen 2000-2001, *passim*.

¹⁷ Schmitt-Brandt 1967; Georgiev 1966; 1983, 1161-63.

¹⁸ Tsetskhladze 2002, 86-87, in his comments about the spread of the Greek among the ‘local elites’ is relying not on facts, but on interpretations. The alleged *ars/art* as ‘common prefix in Thracian names’ simply does not exist. There are two epithets applied to Thracian deities that contain *ars-* or *art-* in compound names. However, they are not prefixes. (see Part One. The Evidence and Part Two, Chapter 2: ‘The Components’). Besides, his assumption that the Ionians influenced the Thracians, is based on contradictory evidence: the inscription from Kjolmen is not in Greek, is dated in the 6th BC, and was written with letters that do not seem to be necessarily of Ionian origin.

¹⁹ Dimitrov 1995, 23-25.

²⁰ See Cook 1987, 9-10.

3.4. The identification of this sign || as word-divider, although preferred by Besevliev, followed by Woudhuizen and Ancillotti, does not solve the problem.²¹ On several occasions, and especially in the case with the sequence of ΑΣΝ ΗΝ there is clear indication that the cutter was capable of distinguishing between H and N (rendered by ||)²² since he painstakingly carved a horizontal hasta in H. His attempt at writing the H resulted in carving a rather wide chunk off the soft limestone rock. On the other hand, he was consistent not to make the connecting diagonal hasta in any N sign, as it was technically impossible. There is one more instance where he successfully wrote an H, precisely in the short nine-letter inscription ΝΒΛΑΒΑΗΓΝ.

3.5. Besides that identification there is also difficulty with the sign <, which occurs four times where three of the letters are oriented right to left, and one in the opposite direction. In this case, if we decided to read ΒΛΑΒΑ with the rest of the scholars as a Greek loan-word, we have a solid ground to consider the other two characters being of the same nature, i.e. signs for Λ. Rests alone the left-to-right orientated one which, having absolutely the same shape, should be read as Λ, based on the fact that the cutter consistently shifted the position of the letters. One more observation: There are three equal signs in the sequence ΕΝΙΔΑΚΑΤΡΟΣΟ that would make sense only as N and I letters.

Here we should also consider the conclusions we can draw from the distributional analysis; no other scholar has resorted to make such analysis, although many seem to be much concerned with the linguistic aspect. Naturally, they try to contrast their views by gleaning details on the so-called archaic letters derived at times from too many epichoric Greek alphabets to make their argument agreeable. Following the oldest opinion, that of Vl. Georgiev, they try to read the Λ-sign as Y inconsistently either as Y or Λ, except for Besevliev.

3.6. The analysis of the inscription should start with identifying combinations of letters that make sense reasonably enough to get to understand it. The first striking detail is the sign that has been identified as N. We can say with some certainty now that this is a negation. For this sign occurs eight times on the whole in this inscription. Now, by identifying this sign as a negation from ně, nē and nei,²³ we come to the following several observations on its distribution: (1) before L twice; (2) before E twice; (3) before I once; (4) before H once; (5) before B, and (6) in end-of-word (Auslaut) position at the very end of the inscription.

3.7. Our distributional analysis shows (1) That the Λ-sign in the first place appears before A and E only; (2) That the N-sign appears before consonants (Λ, Ν, Β, Γ) and vowels (Ε, Ι, Η). Therefore, we can think of Λ as of a stable phoneme but not as of a morpheme, bearer of meaning. The N-sign on the contrary, exemplifies a universal and qualifies for an independent morpheme, most probably to be connected with the negative particle *ne. (Note 21) It is exemplified in the short separate part of the inscription where we most probably can read, based on the Greek ΒΛΑΒΗ, a formulaic “do not harm/destroy”. Most scholars are unanimous about it.²⁴ Some seem not to be.²⁵ On the other hand, although in our catalog²⁶ we

²¹ Beševliev 1965a; Woudhuizen 2000-2001; Ancillotti 1986.

²² See Tod 1985, 253-54 where in a 332 BC inscription from Eresus the sign is frequently used for H or N.

²³ See Pokorný 1994³, 756.

²⁴ Beševliev 1965a; Schmitt-Brandt 1967 and Georgiev 1966. Completely different reading in Woudhuizen 2000-2001, 294.

²⁵ Theodossiev 1997, 223: his “contribution” consists in trying to ‘make history’ by repeating statements already made by others or just offering firsthand reversed readings, e.g. ΓΗΑΒΑΛΒ for ΒΛΑΒΑΗΓ, etc.. See also his

don't have many examples with Thracian names starting with N, the distribution is the same as in that from the inscription. The inscription from Ezerovo offers the following distributions: N+E; N+H; N+T. The only missing examples are before L and before B. Based on this assumption we can divide the text in words that eventually will make sense. So, the first word we come up with is ΙΛΑΣ. However, another possible combination is to divide ΙΛΑΣ in ΙΛ and ΑΣ, as ΑΣΝ is already another combination that occurs twice here and once in the inscription on the gold ring from Ezerovo, where ΑΣΝ follows a personal name just like this is the case here. Along with the interpretation of the Kjolmen inscription, scholars became aware of the resemblance of some of its sequences with those on the inscription on a gold ring found in Ezerovo.²⁷ This has been a fruitful surmise that on several occasions we have the combination of ΑΣΝ or ΑΣΝΗ to be interpreted as a genuine Thracian word. It is a relative pronoun, which might also be an indefinite pronoun, from *ios, Old Indian yas, Greek hos and *ni, Prygian ios ni, Russian kto ni, etc. "whoever" see numerous examples in Pokorny and Haas.²⁸ ΑΣΝ in both inscriptions comes after a name (or at least this is our conviction that we should read ΠΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ and ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕ, the first being a compound name consisting of ΠΟΛΙ- and the Thracian version of Gr. σθενη/φ, while the second consists of the genuine Thracian ΕΒΑΡΟ contrasting with the Greek graphemic version known ever since The Iliad as ΕΒΡΟ- or ΕΒΡΥ- on the one hand, and ΖΕ(Η) to *dyaus, on the other).

3.7. The evidence is too scarce to ascertain that the final Σ in ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕΣ is for a nominative ending, for the two sigmas, here and at the end of ΔΑΚΑΤΡΟΣΟ are different in shape, if at all those graphemic variants display different relevant distribution. Were they to denote that one was a final ending and the other part of ΑΣΝ sequence, remains to be seen. However, we can assume that ΑΣΝ-/ΑΣΝΗ is inseparable.

3.8. And again, we should separate ΙΛ from ΑΣΝ at least for the sake of following the already adopted logic of separation of words. ΙΛ might well be a pronominal stem "der, er" (for the L part see Pokorny 24-25 under al- ol- and compare to old Bulgarian and Bulgarian 'lani' (last summer, or last year; from Bulgarian 'leto' 'summer' and 'year'). Latin 'ille' and Umbrian 'ulo, ulu') So, we can say with some certainty that this first portion of the inscription reads as follows: ΙΛ ΑΣΝ ΑΕΤΕΔ Ν-ΛΕΔ, ΝΕ ΝΙ ΔΑΚΑΤΡΟΣΟ ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕ. Another detail is the segment ΕΤΕΣΑ, Greek for "years"?

3.9. A third detail is the beginning of the second half of the inscription where we can read ΕΒ(Α)ΡΟΖΕ(Σ), well known from later Greek inscriptions found in Thrace, e.g.

reports on Thracian inscriptions, composed in the same fashion with many mistakes and incorrect statements in Teodosiev 1991.

²⁶ See Part One. Chapter 4. Compare the following names: Νισκατουρμη, IGBulg. III 1222, 3rd A.D, a personal name. Not in Dečev; Νηναφ Δουλεο[φ, IGBulg. IV 2286, 159 AD; according to Mihailov this is a female name; Νεινηων ο(δη=μοφ, IGBulg. V, 5883, 77 AD.; *Νεινη, IGBulg. V, 5883, 77 AD, a place name. Μανιμαζοφ, IGBulg. I 77, 78, epithet of the Heros, 1st century B.C. Γονιμασηζη in an inscription from Shumen, a female name. Ρανισκεληνοφ, epithet of Apollo, IGBulg. IV 1928, 2nd - 3rd century AD; Σικινυστυρηνοφ, inhabitants of Σικινυστυρα, IGBulg. III 1771, 2nd - 3rd century A.D.; Σονκητηνη, IV 2142, 2nd - 3rd century AD, epithet of Hera; Σπινδεηνοφ, an epithet of Apollo, IGBulg. III 1832, 1st -3rd century AD; Spinopara, εν κω/μΞ Σπινοπαροιφ, a place name, IGBulg. IV 2192; Υκονοηφ, Πειστοφ Υκονοηφ, IGBulg.III 1817, 1st - 3rd century AD.

²⁷ Consider the inscriptions from Rogozen, as well as other inscriptions written on metalwork in formulaic Greek, which gives us ground to say that the genuine Thracian inscriptions are following the same pattern. See Mihailov 1987.

²⁸ See Pokorny 1994³, 283 and Haas, 75 with more reference.

Εβρουζελμιφ, son of Seuthes III and Berenike, Εβρουζενιφ;²⁹ Since this is an inscription in Thracian, we cannot expect to have the Greek form as in ΕΒΡΥ,(the stem (known since Homer) being ΕΒΡΟ to the river name ΕΒΡΟΣ)), but rather ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕ without syncope.³⁰

3.10. Judging on the very consistent consonant-vowel frequency in both inscriptions, we can also assume that this was the Thracian language pattern whose one feature is characterized by open syllables.³¹ Further on, we believe that the assumption that the inscription should start to be interpreted from ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕ is correct.

There are three considerations to be made at this point:

(1) In a number of inscriptions the E-ending in a name indicates a genitive form, e.g.

ΔΑΔΑΛΕΜΕ on four silver phialae from Duvanlij;

(2) This idea is corroborated by the fact that ΑΣΝ-/ΑΣΝΗ is inseparable being one word, and therefore there is no reason to read ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕΑΣ.

(3) if these considerations are correct, then we have one clear part of the inscription starting with ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕ (Σ)ΑΣΝΗ and ending by ΝΕΤΕΣΑΙΓΕΚΟΑ.

From here we have to figure out the word divisions keeping in mind that we now know the end of this first part. Several considerations come to my mind:

(1) Deduced from tombstone inscriptions in Greek and Latin, ΕΤΕΣΑ seems like another Greek loan-word for 'years', though still uncertain.

(2) If this is correct, we probably have to cut the first word after Α, as Α was clearly added afterwards and hence the word corrected by the cutter himself. So, we might have ΝΕΤΕΣΑ i.e. Ν□ΕΤΕΣΑ with a negative 'n'.

(3) ΙΓΕΚΟΑ has been interpreted in many ways but mainly as a perfect form = Gr. ε)/ζησα, 'has lived' (Schmitt-Brandt, Georgiev).³²

Now, we think that after the genitive form ΕΒΑΡΟΖΕ there should be a verbal form plus something that explains the idea of possession.

Whatever the meaning of ΑΣΝ-/ΑΣΝΗ, ΝΕΤΕΣΑ and ΙΓΕΚΟΑ look symmetrical and might be linked.

Conclusions.

1) There are suggestions that the stele is a tombstone of a fallen soldier rather than a dedicatory inscription. The other two parts of the inscription speak in favor of that idea.

2) Based on the archaeological evidence, the existence of a necropolis from as early as the 6th century B.C. accounts for the use of the inscribed stone.

3) The size of the stele points out to the fact that it could not have served as a cover slab.

4) There is sufficient archaeological evidence produced by Totev, and Dremsizova-Nelcinova, that the stele in question was found face down on the top of the tomb. Most recent publications follow Dremsizova-Nelcinova's opinion that the inscribed stone had been worked on and then re-used.

²⁹ Εβρουζελμιφ, son of Seuthes III and Berenike, IGBulg. III 1731 and Elvers 1994, end of 4th BC and Εβρουζενιφ Μουκακακεουφ, IGBulg.538 from Glava Panega 2nd BC (?).

³⁰ Εβαροζε(φ) for (/Εβροφ, Homeric Ευ(/ροφ. As the genuine form has full-fledged shape with open syllables, so the syncopated form should be altered where possible. Liquids allow for that phenomenon to occur, while sibilants don't or at least show a different attitude and hence no s-endings in a possibly nominative case form.

³¹ See Aristophanes Birds 1615:

ΝΑΒΑΙΣΑΤΡΕΥ and 1628: ΣΑΥ ΝΑΚΑ ΒΑΚΤΑΡΙ ΚΡΟΥΣΑ.

³² Georgiev 1983, 1161-62; Beševliev 1965a, 321.

