

ΑΒΓΔΕΖΗΘΙΚΑΜΝΞΟΠΡΣΤΥΦΧΨΩ

αβγδεζηθικλμνξοπρστυφχψω

ΑΒΓΔ**ROGER D. WOODARD**ΥΦΧΨΩ

αβγδεζηθικλμνξοπρστυφχψω

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ΑΒΓΔ **THE TEXTUALIZATION**

αβγδε **OF THE GREEK ALPHABET**

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The Textualization of the Greek Alphabet

In this book, Roger D. Woodard argues that when the Greeks first began to use the alphabet, they viewed themselves as participants in a performance phenomenon conceptually modeled on the performances of the oral poets. Since a time older than Greek antiquity, the oral poets of Indo-European tradition had been called “weavers of words” – their extemporaneous performance of poetry was “word weaving.” With the arrival of the new technology of the alphabet and the onset of Greek literacy, the very act of producing written symbols was interpreted as a comparable performance activity, albeit one in which almost everyone could participate, not only the select few. It was this new conceptualization of and participation in performance activity by the masses that eventually, or perhaps quickly, resulted in the demise of oral composition in performance in Greece. In conjunction with this investigation, Woodard analyzes a set of copper plaques inscribed with repeated alphabetic series and a line of what he interprets to be text, which attests to this archaic Greek conceptualization of the performance of symbol crafting.

Roger D. Woodard is Andrew van Vranken Raymond Professor of Classics and Professor of Linguistics at the University of Buffalo (The State University of New York). His visiting positions have included appointments at the American Academy in Rome, Oxford University, the Centro di Antropologia e Mondo Antico dell'Università di Siena, the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin, and the Max-Planck-Institut für evolutionäre Anthropologie in Leipzig. He is author or editor of many books, including *Myth, Ritual, and the Warrior in Roman and Indo-European Antiquity*; *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*; *Indo-European Sacred Space: Vedic and Roman Cult*; *Indo-European Myth and Religion: A Manual*; *Ovid: Fasti* (with A. J. Boyle); *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*; *Greek Writing from Knossos to Homer: A Linguistic Interpretation of the Origin of the Greek Alphabet and the Continuity of Ancient Greek Literacy*; and *On Interpreting Morphological Change: The Greek Reflexive Pronoun*.

The Textualization of the Greek Alphabet

ROGER D. WOODARD

University of Buffalo

With a chapter by **DAVID A. SCOTT**

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*FOR ED BROWN, TEACHER AND FRIEND, AND TO THE MEMORY
OF HIS BELOVED NICKEY*

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Preface

Ἡρώων τὸν ἀοιδὸν Ἴω ἐνὶ παῖδες Ὀμηρον 1
ἤκαχον ἐκ Μουσέων γριῖφον ὑφηνάμενοι
νέκταρι δ' εἰνάλια Νηρηίδες ἐχρίσαντο
καὶ νέκυν ἀκταίη θῆκαν ὑπὸ σπιλάδι,
ὅττι Θέτιν κύδηγε καὶ υἷα καὶ μύθον ἄλλων 5
ἠρώων Ἴθακοῦ τ' ἔργματα Λαρτιάδεω.
ὀλβίστη νήσων πόντῳ Ἴος, ὅττι κέκευθε
βαίη Μουσάων ἀστέρα καὶ Χαρίτων.

Homer, heroes' bard, was deathly vexed in Ios 1
When by the Muses some boys did a riddle weave;
With Nectar, Nereids of Sea anointed him and laid
Him dead beneath a rocky ledge on shore,
For Thetis he had glorified, her son as well, and other 5
Heroes' fights, and deeds of Laertes' son of Ithaka.
Blessed among the islands of the sea Ios is, for it has hid,
The tiny isle, the Muses' and the Graces' star.

Greek Anthology 7.1 (*Alcaeus of Messene*)

The story goes that Homer died when fisher boys on Ios posed him a riddle that he could not unknot. Something like this: “Those we caught we left behind; those we did not catch we brought back with us. What is it?” It was no fish, as Homer seemed to imagine, but lice. And they say that this cleverly woven web – its creation inspired by the very Muses – proved to be Homer’s undoing when he could not tease apart its fibers.

But I think not. It was no weaving of a riddle that was Homer's bane – but the weaving of the alphabet – when the Muses began to show their favors far and wide – to practically anyone who could scratch out its symbols – not just to some boys on Ios. It was a woven viral hexameter that did him in.

There are many indications of this, not least of which is the great variability of letter shapes that were employed in early Greek inscriptional writing, within individual inscriptions, producing variegated graphemic patterns – text, literally. This variability has long been noticed. The prominence of the back-and-forth twining lines of boustrophedon is another indication. But the triad of copper plaques with which this study begins and that provides a continuous thread passing through the narrative of this work, I will argue, drags this metaphoric weaving out and lays it before us, making it unmistakably recognizable, gathering our attention to the alphabetic fabric that might have otherwise escaped our attention.

A word about that. While (1) the set of copper plaques etched with abecedarium after abecedarium and (2) the concept of the weaving of alphabetic strands are interlinked in this work, each is a distinct phenomenon. The investigation of each of the two constitutes a separate study. Each forms the centerpiece of a separate thesis. One thesis does not depend on the other, but one informs the other. One thesis concerns the interpretation of a particularly unique set of documents; the other thesis addresses the earliest Greek conceptualizations of alphabetic writing. The thoughtful reader is asked to evaluate them separately.

This book has affiliated with it a dedicated Cambridge University Press Web site: www.cambridge.org/9781107028111. There the reader will find the following images: (1) my hand-annotated X-ray images of each side of each plaque; (2) scans of the surface of each side of the plaques in the collection of Martin Schøyen, which were produced at the University of Oslo with the assistance of Professor Jens Braarvig; and (3) the three tables and seventeen figures that are referenced by Professor David A. Scott in Chapter 3.

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There are many to whom the author needs and wishes to offer his gratitude for assistance, encouragement, and insight provided in various valuable ways. To attempt to name all would inevitably result in the regrettable omission of some; but special thanks must be expressed to Martin Schøyen of Oslo and Irma Wehgartner of the Martin-von-Wagner-Museum in Würzburg; David A. Scott (who contributed the third chapter of this work) and his conservation staff at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles; Bernard Comrie and his colleagues at the Max-Planck-Institut für evolutionäre Anthropologie in Leipzig; Jens Braarvig of the University of Oslo, Department of Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages; David Porter, Kerry Christensen, Edan Dekel, Meredith Hoppin, Amanda Wilcox, and other members of the Williams College Classics Seminar of 2008, especially Paul A. Woodard, for sharing the podium with me; Temple Wright and Erika Bainbridge of the Center for Hellenic Studies Library in Washington, D.C.; James Clackson of Jesus College, Cambridge; President Hermione Lee and the Fellows of Wolfson College, Oxford; Robert Parker of New College, Oxford; Maggie Sasanow and Charles Crowther at the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, Oxford; Anna Davies, Philomen Probert, John Penney, and Andreas Willi of the Oxford Philology Seminar; Eleanor Dickey of the University of Exeter; Brent Vine and his colleagues in the UCLA Departments of Classics and Linguistics; and Leonard Chiarelli of the Aziz S. Atiya Middle East Library at the University of Utah.

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Isabella Vitti. Thanks too go to two anonymous manuscript referees for their insightful comments and to Brian MacDonald for invaluable editorial assistance.

As always and for all of the usual reasons the full measure of my debt to Katherine and Paul defies expression.

Abbreviations

AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AR	<i>Archaeological Reports</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
BDB	<i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1976)
CEG	<i>Carmina epigraphica graeca</i> (Hansen 1983–1989)
CIL	<i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i>
CIS	<i>Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
C Phil.	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
DAA	<i>Dedications from the Athenian Acropolis</i> (Raubitschek 1949)
Dietz	Ὄνόματα τῶν ἰατρικῶν ἐργαλείων κατὰ στοιχεῖα οἷς ἐν ταῖς χειρουργίαις χρῶμεθα (Dietz 1836)
Dübner	<i>Scholia graeca in Aristophanem</i> (Dübner 1969)
EG	<i>Epigrafia Greca</i> (Guarducci 1967)
FD	<i>Fouilles de Delphes</i>
FGrH	<i>Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Jacoby 1954–1969)
FHG	<i>Fragmenta historicorum graecorum</i> (Müller 1841–1870)
Gr. Gr.	<i>Griechische Grammatik</i> (Schwyzer 1939)

<i>Harv. Stud.</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
IC	<i>Inscriptiones Creticae</i> (Guarducci 1935–1950)
ICS	<i>Les inscriptions chypriotes syllabiques</i> (Masson 1983)
IF	<i>Indogermanische Forschungen</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones graecae</i>
IGA	<i>Inscriptiones graecae antiquissimae</i> (Roehl 1882)
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> (Donner and Röllig 1966–1969)
Kock	<i>Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta</i> (Kock 1880)
Kühn	<i>Medicorum graecorum opera</i> (Kühn 1964–1965)
KZ	<i>Kuhns Zeitschrift</i> (= <i>Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen</i>)
LIV	<i>Lexicon der indogermanischen Verben</i> (Rix 2001)
L-P	<i>Poetarum Lesbiorum fragmenta</i> (Lobel and Page 1955)
LSAG	<i>Local Scripts of Archaic Greece</i> (Jeffery 1961)
LSAG ²	<i>Local Scripts of Archaic Greece</i> (Jeffery 1990)
LSJ	<i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996)
MSL	<i>Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris</i>
MSS	<i>Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft</i>
NRSV	<i>Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version</i>
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
PRU	<i>Le Palais royal d'Ugarit</i> (Schaeffer and Nougayrol 1955–)
RÉS	<i>Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum</i>
Walde-Pokorny	<i>Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der indogermanischen Sprachen</i> (Walde and Pokorny 1927–1930)
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

ANCIENT AUTHORS AND WORKS

AESCHYLUS (AESCH.)

<i>Choe.</i>	<i>Libation Bearers (Choephoroe)</i>
<i>PV</i>	<i>Prometheus Bound (Prometheus Vincetus)</i>
<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Suppliant Maidens</i>

ANTHOLOGIA PALATINA (ANTH. PAL.; THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY)

ANTHOLOGIA PLANUDEA (ANTH. PLAN.; THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY)

ARISTOPHANES (AR.)

Eq. *Knights (Equites)*
Thesm. *Women at the Thesmophoria (Thesmophoriazusae)*

BACCHYLIDES (BACCHYL.)

Epigr. *Epigrams*

CALLIMACHUS (CALLIM.)

Epigr. *Epigrams*

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Protr. *Protrepticus*

CORNUTUS (L. ANNAEUS)

Theol. Graec. *Ἐπιδρομή τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν Θεολογίαν
παραδεδομένων* ("Summary of the Traditions concerning
Greek Theology")

DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS

Comp. *De compositione verborum*

EROTIAN

Voc. Hippoc. col. *Vocum Hippocraticarum collectio*

EURIPIDES

IT *Iphigenia Taurica*
Phoen. *Phoenician Women (Phoenissae)*

EUSTATHIUS

Od. *Ad Odysseam*

GALEN (GAL.)

De anat. admin. *De anatomicis administrationibus*
De loc. aff. *De locis affectis*

HERODAS (HEROD.)

HESIOD (HES.)

Op. *Works and Days (Opera et dies)*
Theog. *Theogony*

HIPPOCRATES (HIPPOC.)

Fist. *De fistulis*
Morb. *De morbis*
Nat. mul. *De natura muliebri*
Ulc. *De ulceribus*
VC *De capitis vulneribus*

HOMER (HOM.)

Il. *Iliad*
Od. *Odyssey*

HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO (HYMN. HOM. AP.)

LUCIAN

Apol. *Apologia*
Catapl. *Cataplus*

NICANDER

Alex. *Alexipharmaca*
Ther. *Theriaca*

NONNUS

Dion. *Dionysiaca*

OXYRHYNCHUS PAPYRI (P OXY.)

PHILOSTRATUS

Imag. *Imagines*

PINDAR (PIND.)

Isthm. *Isthmian Odes*

Nem. *Nemean Odes*

PLATO

Alc. *Alcibiades*

Resp. *Respublica*

PLINY

HN *Naturalis historia*

SCHOLIA IN ARISTOPHANEM (SCHOL. AR.)

Thesm. *Women at the Thesmophoria (Thesmophoriazusae)*

SCHOLIA IN LYCOPHRONEM (SCHOL. LYCOPH.)

SCHOLIA IN NICANDRUM (SCHOL. NIC.)

Ther. *Theriaca*

SOPHOCLES (SOPH.)

Ant. *Antigone*

Trach. *Women of Trachis (Trachiniai)*

*THEOPHRASTUS**Hist. pl.* *Historia plantarum**XENOPHON**An.* *Anabasis*

1

Background

In 1983 the antiquities and rare book dealer H. P. Kraus of New York issued Catalogue 165, in which were included, among other items, two copper plaques inscribed with Greek alphabetic writing, listed as “The Fayum Tablets.” Their provenience and date were given simply as “Northern Egypt, eighth century B.C. or earlier.” The two plaques measure 215 by 135 millimeters (plaque 1) and 212 by 137 millimeters (plaque 2); both are approximately 1.3 millimeters thick. The catalog further describes the plaques as: “Inscribed on all four plate faces (written surface 190 x 100 mm.; one plate partially cleaned, both plates having been covered by a layered structure of patina; small holes punched in each corner). In a red morocco box.”

In 1988 these plaques were acquired by a Norwegian collector, Martin Schøyen, in whose collection they presently remain. The plaques in the Schøyen collection represent a subset of some larger set of such plaques. A third member is housed in the Martin-von-Wagner-Museum of the Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, acquired by the museum in the gift of Egyptian and Greek artifacts from the collection of Alexander Kiseleff in 1982. The existence of a fourth plaque has been reported, but its whereabouts undisclosed.

In 1986 Alfred Heubeck, distinguished German classicist and linguist, published an analysis of the plaque from the Würzburg museum. His analysis was based on a careful visual examination of the plaque. Heubeck’s observations were necessarily hampered, however, owing to the heavy patina that covers a large portion of the Würzburg plaque – identical to the thick patina that likewise obscures much of the surface of the two Schøyen plaques. Even so, Heubeck realized that the alphabet of the Würzburg plaque was unique among

Greek alphabets in that it terminates with the letter *tau*: in other words, the alphabet has no *upsilon*, it has none of the so-called “supplemental consonant symbols” – *phi*, *chi*, and *psi* – and no *omega*. The Würzburg alphabet is thus coterminous with the Phoenician consonantal script, the source of the Greek alphabet, which runs from *alep* (Greek *alpha*) to *taw* (Greek *tau*). Heubeck also drew attention to the shape of *alpha*, *lambda*, and *sigma*, which he viewed as being closer to later, rather than earlier, forms of these letters, and to *iota* and *nu*, as being “in allen griech. Alphabeten ohne exakte Parallele.” Heubeck proposed a date for the plaques of late ninth or early eighth century BC.¹

In 1999 Martin Schøyen sent the two copper plaques in his collection to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles for physical and chemical analysis in order to verify their authenticity. The plaques were there subjected to a battery of tests, including binocular microscopic analysis, metallography, X-ray fluorescence spectrometry, X-ray diffractometry, X-ray radiography, and environmental scanning electron microscopy. These tests were carried out under the direction of Dr. David Scott, then director of the Getty Conservation Laboratory.²

In 2001 I contacted Dr. Irma Wehgartner of the Martin-von-Wagner-Museum regarding the possibility of examining the plaque held in that museum’s collection. The museum generously loaned the plaque to the Getty for the same analytic treatments: the outcome of that examination was consistent with the analysis of the Schøyen plaques and revealed that the three plaques had been cut from a single piece of copper. A summary of the analyses of the three copper plaques appears in Chapter 3, authored by David A. Scott.

A discovery that came to light in the process of examining the plaques in the Getty laboratories was that, even though large portions of the plaque faces cannot be read, and other portions read only with difficulty, or uncertainty, being encrusted by this heavy patina, radiographic images of the plaques fully reveal the letters with which they are engraved. A single radiograph displays the abecedaria incised on each side of a plaque, front and back, one set superimposed upon the other.

Methodical and repeated examinations of the radiographs, and the plaque surfaces where possible, revealed that the numerous abecedaria on the three copper plaques preserve – in the case of most letters – not a single letter shape but a set of variant letter shapes: in some instances the variation is subtle but clearly observable, in other instances the variation is remarkably ostentatious. The extent and degree of variation in some cases had not escaped Heubeck’s attention. The treatment of the variant forms of the Greek letters of the copper

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