

## COMMENTARII BREVIORES

### ANAXIMANDER, HECATAEUS AND DIONYSIUS ON THE MYCENEAN SCRIPT

*Schol. Dionys. Thrac.* p. 183. 1 Hilgard:

...φασὶ γὰρ ὅτι Φοίνικες μὲν εὔρον τὰ στοιχεῖα, Κάδμος δὲ ἤγαγεν αὐτὰ εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Πυθόδωρος δὲ [ὥς] ἐν τῷ Περὶ στοιχείων καὶ Φίλλις ὁ Δήλιος ἐν τῷ Περὶ χρόνων πρὸ Κάδμου Δαναὸν μετακομί-σαι αὐτὰ φασιν· ἐπιμαρτυροῦσι τούτοις καὶ οἱ Μιλησιακοὶ συγγρα-φεῖς Ἀναξίμανδρος καὶ Διονύσιος καὶ Ἐκαταῖος, οὗς καὶ Ἀπολλώ-δωρος ἐν Νεῶν καταλόγῳ παρατίθεται.

We learn from a source as respectable as Apollodorus (*FGrH* 244 F 165) that the earliest and the most outstanding of the Milesian authors, Anaximander (*FGrH* 9 F 3), Hecataeus (*FGrH* 1 F 20) and Dionysius (*FGrH* 687 F 1),<sup>1</sup> de-

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<sup>1</sup> The testimony is presented as dubious in Anaximander section of Diels – Kranz. Jacoby confidently attributes it to Anaximander the Younger, the author of the *Interpretation of Pythagorean Symbols* (the late fifth century BC). He has, however, no argument to support his attribution, whereas there is much to say in favour of great Anaximander. His opinion was much more authoritative and, accordingly, more appropriate to cite; he was much closer to both Hecataeus and Dionysius chronologically and historically (the *Suda*, s. v. Ἐκαταῖος, dates them both to Ol. 65 = 520–17 BC), which was hardly neglected by Apollodorus, the author of the famous *Chronicles*; moreover, Apollodorus was most likely familiar with the book of great Anaximander (D.L. 2. 2; 12 A 1 DK; *FGrH* 244 F 29). Interest in matters of cultural history is attested in fragments of Xenophanes (18 B 3; 4 DK), and the silence of the doxographic tradition about such matters in the book of Anaximander proves nothing since the doxographic tradition ultimately depends on the work of Theophrastus, devoted to the *physical* opinions of the Presocratics. Many of these arguments were already advanced by William Arthur Heidel, “Anaximander’s book, the earliest known geographical treatise”, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 56 (1921) 237–288, esp. 256 ff. Adolf Kleingünther, *ΠΡΩΤΟΣ ΕΥΡΕΤΗΣ, Untersuchungen zur Geschichte einer Fragestellung* (Leipzig 1933 = *Philologus*, Suppl. 26. 1) 45 takes the attribution to Anaximander the Elder as a matter of course. However, the absolute majority of scholars followed Jacoby. Christian Froidefond, *La mirage égyptien dans la littérature grecque d’Homère à Aristote* (1971) 156, n. 303 even revised the attribution to Dionysius of Miletus; according to him, Dionysius Periegetes is cited in fact. But it is strange to make Apollodorus cite an author born many years after his death.

rived the Greek art of writing from Egypt.<sup>2</sup> This is puzzling since the affinity of Greek alphabet to the Phoenician letters suggests itself and it has been recognized at least as early as Herodotus (5. 58). A reference to a common belief in particular antiquity of Egyptian civilization<sup>3</sup> explains next to nothing.<sup>4</sup> Nor can we assume that all three Milesians were unaware of how Phoenician letters looked like. Nor will one cite the power of an authoritative statement if one takes into account the competitive pattern of Greek intellectual tradition.<sup>5</sup> Hence we are left with necessity to suggest *factual* grounds for the view common to Anaximander, Hecataeus, and Dionysius.

What could be regarded as such? A plausible answer seems to be available. Imagine, one finds inscriptions resembling Egyptian in the area of Greek settlement. In that case, one could be inclined to consider their Egyptian origin, provided that the story of Danaos was at hand. If such inscriptions did not look quite Egyptian, on the one hand, and showed a few signs of similarity with Greek letters, on the other hand, a conclusion about the transmission would seem justified.

Were there in the Greek world any monuments to meet these requirements? They are still being unearthed in a good quantity. Both Linear A and B frequently employ ideograms or hieroglyphs, however along with non-ideographic signs;<sup>6</sup> both use a number of characters which have (a chance) resemblance to several letters of Greek alphabet.

The use of ideograms appeared to the Greeks to be the most remarkable and characteristic feature of Egyptian script. If the presence of the ideograms on two monuments of the Asia Minor was taken as a proof of their Egyptian origin (Hdt. 2. 106), their presence on an inscribed vessel, or stone, or bronze plate, or seal could easily be treated in a similar way.

It should be noted, of course, that no stone or bronze inscription in Linear B is published so far. The absolute majority of Linear B inscriptions

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kleingünther, *op. cit.* 41: "Das Kriterium liegt nicht, wie etwa bei Palamedes, in der Persönlichkeit des Danaos – er war in der Überlieferung kein πολυμήχανος –, sondern... in der Überzeugung, daß die Buchstaben in Ägypten erfunden und von Danaos den Griechen vermittelt worden seien".

<sup>3</sup> Jacoby on *FGrH* I F 20.

<sup>4</sup> However, one may conclude that already Anaximander realized that Egyptian civilization was older than Greek.

<sup>5</sup> Repeatedly emphasized in scholarly literature, see especially Alexander Zaicev, *Das ägyptische Wunder* (Konstanz 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Examples are conveniently available in John Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B* (Cambridge 1958) 81 f., 93 f.

are found on clay tablets, and the possibility that such tablets were available to Anaximander or Hecataeus is meagre. However, some inscribed vessels of various provenance (including Miletus) are known, and the chances that such could still be seen in the sixth century are somewhat better. As to the monuments of Linear A, they are frequently found on stones and sometimes on bronze, but their dissemination is mostly confined to Crete. Nevertheless, some were recently found in the Peloponnese and Miletus.<sup>7</sup> Curiously, there was a strong tradition about Anaximander's visit to Sparta (12 A 1; 5 DK).

The most natural conclusion which follows is that the monuments of the linear script could be available in the sixth century, but they were probably rare. Such a combination accounts well for both the very idea of Egyptian origin of the Greek art of writing (dealing with a great number of linear inscriptions could rather undermine one's readiness to accept their Egyptian origin) and the fact that this idea gave way to the rival (and adequate) theory.

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Аполлодор цитирует мнение Анаксимандра, Гекатея и Дионисия, согласно которому письменность в Греции появилась благодаря Данаю, что по существу означает утверждение о ее египетском происхождении. Ввиду очевидного и признававшегося древними сходства греческих букв с финикийскими такое утверждение выглядит загадочным. По-видимому, оно объясняется знакомством с какими-то памятниками линейного письма (А и/или Б), в котором, с одной стороны, встречаются знаки, напоминающие буквы греческого алфавита, а с другой – нередко используются идеограммы. Такое сочетание могло наводить на мысль об архаическом греческом письме, выросшем на основе египетского.

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<sup>7</sup> For the Peloponnese see Y. Duhoux, "Mycénien et écriture grecque", in: *Linear B: A 1984 Survey* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1985) 29. A Mycenaean inscription found in Miletus was referred to by W. Niemeyer in his paper delivered in St Petersburg (June, 2000). I am grateful to Nikolai Kazansky for this valuable information.