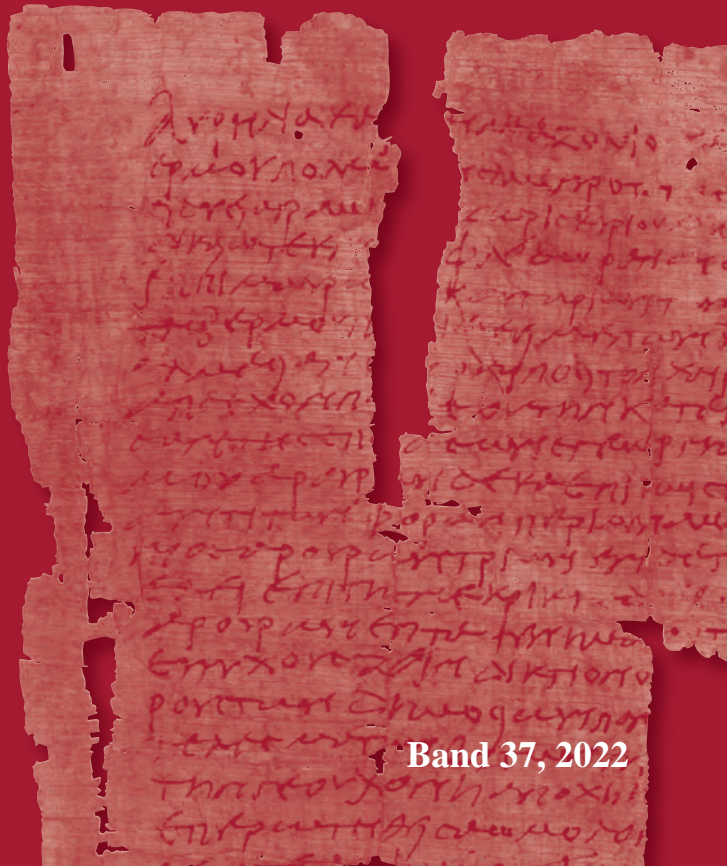


# TYCHE

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Papyrologie und Epigraphik



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ALAN JOHNSTON

## A Warning from Olympia

The text presented here is a graffito on a vase from Olympia which I studied in 1968, courtesy of A. Mallwitz and G. Papathanasopoulos. Brian Sparkes included mention of it, I believe from my report of it to him, in *Agora* xii<sup>1</sup>, and Nassi Malagardis quotes it in her work on the Attic skyphos<sup>2</sup>. I had no photograph and it is only recently that with the considerable help of Oliver Pilz that photos were identified in the Fotothek of the DAI in Athens. While the piece was excavated in the SE area of the Altis it was for some reason between 1968 and 1979 given an Ephoria inventory number, Π2908.<sup>3</sup> The text is difficult to transcribe in an orthodox epigraphic manner, since the writer was clearly enthusiastic but wayward.

The object is a fragmentary black-glazed skyphos, 10.2 cm high, about half preserved; the remains of the handles showed that it was a glaux, with one horizontal and one vertical handle. The underside is reserved with a small dot and circle at the centre. I thought it of local manufacture. Ceramically it belongs roughly to the first half of the fifth century BC, certainly if it is Attic.<sup>4</sup> This shape is to my knowledge rare at Olympia; an intact excavated example is dated 475–450.<sup>5</sup>

Ἐργίνω ἐμ vac

κό...ς μητίς

μητείς ἐμι

θιγέτο

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Sparkes, *Black and Plain Pottery of the 6<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.*, The Athenian Agora 12 (1970) 6.

<sup>2</sup> N. Malagardis, *Skyphoi attiques à figures noires*, Athens 2017, 14.

<sup>3</sup> It is not included in P. Siewert, H. Taeuber, *Neue Inschriften von Olympia. Die ab 1896 veröffentlichten Texte* (Tyche Sonderband 7), Wien 2013. The documentation with the photos suggests it was found in the court area of the SE baths, where the earliest structure found is not earlier than the fourth century BC (A. Mallwitz, *Olympia und seine Bauten*, Munich 1972, 206). I am grateful to the Ephoria for permission to publish the piece here.

<sup>4</sup> Sparkes, *Pottery* (n. 1) 86–87, where the shape is termed ‘type B skyphos’

<sup>5</sup> J. Schilbach, *Die Datierung der Schichten im Südostgebiet*, in: K. Herrmann, J. Schilbach, *XI. Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Olympia*, Berlin 1999, 88 and pl. 8,3.



Olympia Museum Π2908. Profile and underside (© DAI Athen)

ΕΡΓΙΝΟΥ ΕΜ  
 ΚΥΛΙΞΕ ΜΗΤΙΜ  
 ΜΗΤΕΙΣΕ ΜΙΜ  
 ΟΙΚΕΤΟ

1. 1. There is no trace of an iota after the mu.
1. 2. Damage regrettably complicates the reading of what must be a defective κύλιξ; only parts of two verticals are preserved before the sigma; particular frustrating is whether lambda was omitted, or, if it was cut, what form it took. The writer seems to have bungled the writing of μητείς; the sigma is probably included, atilt, at the end of the line; but the inscriber immediately gives a better version in l. 3.
1. 3. While there is no clear epsilon at the end, the stroke following the mu could indicate an attempt at it; at any rate the genitive expected with θιγγάνω seems highly unlikely to have been intended. Or was the writer misled into thinking he should write EMI again?
1. 4. The third letter would appear to be a gamma cut later than an underlying kappa, with the lower diagonal of the kappa cut twice.

A translation is far easier: ‘I am the kylix of Erginos, let nobody, yes nobody, touch (me)’. The sentiment is common enough,<sup>6</sup> and I do not expand on it here, other than to note that the general location of the find-spot gives little clue as to the reasons why Erginos took this precaution, not otherwise to my knowledge so fully expressed at Olympia; even Pheidias merely put his name on his famous mug (somewhat akin in shape to a glaux skyphos).

<sup>6</sup> The warning “hands off!” is known in the seventh century, rock-cut, on Thera (*IG XII 3*, 451) and from the mid-sixth probably in the dipinto on the black-figured amphora in New York, Metropolitan Museum, 56.171.13 (BAPD 310310, AVI 5710).

Script and dialect present individual problems. Few letters are diagnostic except the gammas and the use, almost certainly, of XΣ for xi. Together they point strongly to Attica, or just possibly the sequence Paros/Delos/Thasos. The partial, somewhat uncertain, use of eta and omega, points to a fifth century date. The genitive in -ω is most at home in Athens, and in the earlier part of that century; as noted by Lesley Thraette<sup>7</sup> it would be unexpected in the alphabets of Paros and Thasos, where there is no indication that there was any intermediate stage between the ‘reversed’ local use of ω and o and the adoption of the Ionic script. In these circumstances a date before 450 should be adopted, though perhaps not much before. Phonologically, the use of unvoiced tau and (originally) kappa in μητείς and θικέτο is a striking peculiarity, one that might suggest an origin of Erginos (if he himself indeed was the writer) from outside the Greek-speaking world. Certainly, such uses are very sporadic in Attica, and most of them are the result of dissimilation.<sup>8</sup> One could hypothesise a non-Greek workman from the mainland *peraia* of Thasos, but on balance Attica seems a more probable source (whatever the ethnic background of the inscriber).

Erginos is not a very common name, though not so rare as to point in any clear direction; it has fifty entries in LGPN, though few are pre-Hellenistic; the earliest attested Erginos is on a stele inscribed boustrophedon from Apollonia Pontica (IGBulg I no. 404). Another relatively early example is the late fifth century Athenian potter, and one may be tempted to think of our man as an older relative, an artisan working on a project at Olympia (perhaps the temple of Zeus), and taking good care of his property, rather than a simple festival attender.

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<sup>7</sup> L. Thraette, *The Grammar of Attic Inscriptions I*, Berlin, New York 1980, 47–49.

<sup>8</sup> Thraette, *Grammar* (n. 5), 437–439.