

The early history of the Greek alphabet: new evidence from Eretria and Methone

John K. Papadopoulos*

**Department of Classics, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 308 Charles E. Young Drive North, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA (Email: JKP@humnet.ucla.edu)*

Inscriptions on new archaeological finds in the Aegean, examined alongside linguistic evidence relating to Greek and Phrygian vowels, are here used to explore the origins and spread of the Greek alphabet. The ‘invention’ of vowels happened just once, with all of the various Greek, Phrygian and Italic alphabets ultimately deriving from this single moment. The idea spread rapidly, from an absence of writing in the ninth century BC to casual usage, including jokes, by 725 BC. The port of Methone in the northern Aegean emerges as a probable candidate for the site of origin. A place where Greeks and Phoenicians did business together, with international networks, was this where Semitic, Greek and Phrygian letters first coalesced?

Keywords: Aegean, Greek, alphabet, writing, inscription

Table S1. The alphabetic inscriptions from the *hypogeion* at Methone.

Methone catalogue & inventory number (Page numbers refer to Bessios <i>et al.</i> 2012)	Comment
1. Meth 2249 (pp. 337–339)	Fragmentary Aeolian drinking cup, possibly from Lesbos: ΦΙΑΙΟΝΟΣΕΜΙ (retrograde)
2. Meth 2248 (pp. 339–343)	Fragmentary Euboian skyphos: ΗΑΚΕΣΑΝΔΡΟΕΜ[.....c.22.....]ΕΙΤΕΤΟ[.c.6.]ΜΕΚ [..c.6.]ΑΤΟΝΣΤΕΡΕΣ[ΕΤ]ΑΙ (retrograde)
3. Meth 2253 (pp. 343–344)	Rim and upper body fragment, locally produced Thermaic Gulf skyphos: vacat ΕΠΙΓΕ[-] (retrograde)
4. Meth 2237 (pp. 345–347)	Rim, neck and upper body fragment, Lesbian transport amphora: ΑΝΤΕΟΥΔΕΟΣ
5. Meth 2238 (pp. 347–349)	Fragmentary upper body, transport amphora of unknown provenance: vacat? ΘΕΟ vacat.
6. Meth 2427 (pp. 349–350)	Greater part of Attic SOS transport amphora: vacat? ΝΑΝ[-?] (retrograde)
7. Meth 2255 (p. 350)	Small rim fragment, Euboian skyphos: [-?]ΟΕΜ[-?] (retrograde)
8. Meth 2256 (p. 351)	Body and handle fragment, Euboian skyphos: vacat ΠΙ[-?] (retrograde)
9. Meth 2466 + 2431 (pp. 351–353)	Fragmentary ‘Methonaian’ amphora: vacat ΑΛ (= ΑΛ) vacat. (retrograde)
10. Meth 2250 (pp. 353–354)	Rim, body and handle fragments, Thermaic Gulf skyphos: vacat FA vacat. (retrograde)
11. Meth 2251 (pp. 354–355)	Body and handle fragment, Thermaic Gulf skyphos: vacat Ε[.?] vacat. (retrograde)

12. Meth 2254 (pp. 355–356)	Rim fragment, Thermaic Gulf skyphos: <i>vacat?</i> ΑΓ <i>vacat.</i> or <i>vacat</i> ΓΑ <i>vacat?</i>
13. Meth 2307 (p. 356)	Body fragment of skyphos of uncertain provenance: [-?].L (= .λ) <i>vacat.</i> (retrograde)
14. Meth 2482 (p.357)	Rim, neck and handle, Thermaic Gulf jug with cutaway neck: <i>vacat</i> NE <i>vacat.</i>
15. Meth 2421 (pp. 358–359)	Upper body, neck, rim and handle, transport amphora of uncertain provenance: <i>vacat</i> NE <i>vacat.</i> (retrograde)
16. Meth 2425 (pp. 360–361)	Upper body, rim, neck and handles, Samian transport amphora: <i>vacat</i> EY <i>vacat.</i> (retrograde)
17. Meth 2420 (pp. 362–364)	Fragmentary base and body, Samian transport amphora, with inscriptions (pre- and post-firing) on various parts of the vessel: <i>vacat</i> N <i>vacat.</i> ; <i>vacat</i> X <i>vacat.</i> ; <i>vacat</i> Η or Z <i>vacat.</i>
18. Meth 2028 (pp. 364–365)	Samian transport amphora: <i>vacat</i> N <i>vacat.</i> (retrograde)
19. Meth 2426 (p. 366)	Shoulder fragment, Samian transport amphora: <i>vacat</i> ΓΙ <i>vacat?</i> (retrograde)
20. Meth 2027 (pp. 367–368)	Base, body and handle, fragmentary Methonaian transport amphora: <i>vacat</i> X (or Ψ) <i>vacat.</i>
21. Meth 2219 (pp. 368–369)	Shoulder fragment, Chian transport amphora: [-?]K <i>vacat.</i>
22. Meth 2247 (pp. 369–370)	Fragmentary Thermaic Gulf skyphos: <i>vacat</i> Σχενι() <i>vacat</i> (= <Xσ>ενι() = <Ξ> ενι()) (retrograde)
23. Meth 2239 (p. 371). Late seventh–sixth century BC	Rim and neck fragment, transport amphora of uncertain provenance: <i>vacat</i> ΑΔ() (or ΔΑ()) <i>vacat.</i>
24. Meth 2305 (pp. 371–372). Late seventh or first half of sixth century BC	Body fragment, Attic SOS amphora: [-?].[-?].
25. Meth 2274 (p. 372). Middle of the fourth century BC	Base and lower body fragment, Attic black-gloss kantharos: [-?]T <i>vacat.</i>

Reference

BESSIOS, M., Y. TZIFOPOULOS & A. KOTSONAS. 2012. *Methone Pierias I*. Thessalonike: Centre for the Greek Language (in Greek).