The “Dispilio Inscription” c.5260 +/- 40 B.C. and the “Neolithic Script(s)”

in West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas

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1 We are grateful to the archaeologists Dr. Arete Hontrogiani-Metoki, Director of Aiani Museum, Dr. Christina Ziotou, former Director of Aiani Museum and now Ephor of Florina, and Dr. Andromache Skreka, Ephor at Kastoria, for their intellectual and social hospitality in West Macedonia. We especially and warmly thank Dr. Georgia Stratouli and the Avgi Publication Group (APG) ‘in situ’ at the beautiful Museum of Argos Orestikon, particularly Kos. Odysseas Metaxas; Prof. Kostas Kotsakis and the School of History and Archaeology at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), particularly Kos. Markos Grasias ‘in situ’ at Dispilio; and Dr. Panikos Chrysostomou ‘in situ’ at the “Culture of the 4 Lakes” at Amindeon, particularly Kos. Tryphon Jagoulis and Ka. Valia Metoxianaki…😊


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1) INTRODUCTION

“The most unexpected of the finds, a wooden tablet from the lake bearing engraved symbols, was 14C dated to 5260 +/- 40 BC. In addition, clay tablets and pottery vessels engraved with similar symbols were also unearthed from layers dated to the same period. If this proves to be a primary source of written communication, the history of writing should be reconsidered and Neolithic societies should not be considered “societies without writing”2.

p.511, Y.Facorellis, M.Sofronidou, G.Hourmouziadis(+) 2014

«Η ανασκαφή είναι όπως ένα ναρκοπέδιο. Το πρώτο λάθος είναι και το τελευταίο.»
Γ.Χ. Χουρμουζιάδης – ‘sine (a)qua non’- ο τολμών νικά …
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“i) The first subgroup consists of a piece of wet cedar wood (cedrus sp.) with an almost quadrilateral shape measuring 23x19.2x2 cm. that bears traces of fire. The tablet was found during the July 1993 excavation campaign in a trial trench into the water very near the lake shore. There are archaeological finds and traces of anthropogenic activity into the water in the entire area (Sofronidou 2009). This trench was performed some meters away from the northwestern side of the Eastern trench (Figure 2). An excavation square (D158dc, Figure 3) was framed using wooden boards and the water was continuously pumped away. When the mud was gradually removed, the wooden tablet appeared floating on the water surface that was still entering inside the framed area, passing through and over the wooden boards due to the waters rippling. On the surface of the artifact, which is characterized as the front one, up to 10 rows of linear vertical and horizontal carved “signs” can be distinguished (Figure 5). Similar carved signs can also be seen on the upper thin side of the tablet. The signs were preserved due to the anaerobic condition of the tablet’s taphonomic environment. However, during the drying process most of their engraving depth has been lost.”

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“The most unexpected of the finds, a cedar tablet [from] the lake carved with 10 rows of “signs” was 14C dated to 5202 +/- 123 B.C., and is the oldest known engraved wooden tablet. In addition, clay tablets and other clay finds engraved with similar signs were also unearthed from layers dated either to the end of the Middle Neolithic or to the Late Neolithic I period. The dating of the Dispilio engraved finds is similar to those that appeared in southeastern Europe around 5300 BC, some 2000 yr earlier than any other known writing. These signs and inscriptions are considered by some scholars a specific script of literacy (Winn 1981; Merlini 2005; Lazarovici and Merlini 2005; Owens 2009). If this proves to be a primary source of written communication, the history of writing should be reconsidered and Neolithic societies should not be considered “societies without writing”3.

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The recent exemplary article by Y.Facorelli, M.Sofronidou and G.Hourmouziadis (+), 2014, has put the “Dispilio Inscription” on the long and winding road to being “Studiable”, the first small step on a journey, Odyssey in the Linguistic Labyrinth, towards being “Readable” and perhaps also hopefully one day “Understandable”.

The find has been C14 dated to c.5260 B.C., i.e., more than 4000 years before the Trojan War and Mycenaean Linear B from Mycenaean Greece recording the Mycenaean Greek language from Crete, Peloponnese, Attica, Boeotia, Thessaly and now in West Macedonia at Aiani (and perhaps also at Toumba, Thessalonikis?). Is it possible to try and approach the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) as the best preserved and most substantial example of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), including the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”), as a ‘Code of Communication’ in Neolithic West Macedonia in North Greece, Hellas, in the Stone Age Balkans in South East Europe?

The C14 dated (Dimokritos Athens Hellas etc p.511, Y Y.Facorellis, M.Sofronidou, G.Hourmouziadis (+) 2014) “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) is not only c.4000 years older than the Trojan War and Mycenaean Linear B (cf Aiani in West Macedonia and perhaps also at Toumba, Thessalonikis?) and significant quantities of Late Mycenaean pottery found in abundance within the Neolithic ‘peribolos’ i.e. dry stone wall (temenos), but also 2000 years older than the earliest ‘writing’ known so far from Sumer in Mesopotamia (c.3100 B.C.), predynastic Egypt (c.3400-3200 B.C.) and the Indus Valley (c.3500 B.C.)

It is also of interest and worth noting that from present to the Phaistos Disk (c.1700 B.C.) is roughly 37 centuries, and if another 37 centuries are added before the Phaistos Disk and Arkalochori Axe 17th Century B.C. on Minoan Crete then one arrives chronologically approximately at the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) c.5300 B.C. to give some idea of time depth and geographical spread, which is dynamic and should not be considered as static. The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) and “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”) are the best examples of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) 6th – 4th Millennia and date to c.5300 B.C., more than 3000 years older than inscriptions from Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece and c.2000 years older than the first inscriptions from the Indus Valley, Egypt and Mesopotamia

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4 The present author visited Dispilio (October 2014, May, July, December 2015) as the guest of the TEI of West Macedonia and is especially grateful to Prof. A.Blanta, for philoxenia at Kozani and Kastoria on beautiful Lake Orestiada in West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas.

5 For the latest developments in Early and Proto-Writing, see the Internet, the Modern Library of Alexandria, and especially the work of Dr Dreyer of the German Archaeological Institute in Egypt and the work of Dr Meadow of Harvard University in the Indus Valley, both predating the ‘creation’ of ‘writing’ in Sumeria, Mesopotamia. Curiouser and Curiouser. It is perhaps with an open mind that one should consider the “Neolithic Scripts(s)” (“NS”, “DI”, “TT”) of the 6th – 4th Millennia BC.

6 Dispilio is 5k from ‘Mesopotamia’ ‘sic’ and close to ‘maniakous’, strange but true,ouden allo sxolion.
2) Dispilio, Kastoria, West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas

Dispilio is located on the south shore of Lake Orestiada, Kastoria, West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas. It is also on the north edge of a fertile plain between hills opposite the city of Kastoria, on the route between the Adriatic, Albania, Maliq, Kastoria and Dispilio, then the Kleisura Pass heading towards Kozani, Aliakmona, Aiani and Vergina, Thessaly and ultimately the Aegean. It was the only excavated area in the 1990’s in Greece with lakeside dwellings. The final publication of the excavation is still underway but it is possible to begin to understand Dispilio from the outstanding pioneering publications by Prof. G.X.Hourmouziadis et alii (AUTH)\(^7\).

Nearby Neolithic Amindeon is approximately contemporary with Dispilio and the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) c.5300 BC\(^8\). Is Dispilio an offshoot/’parakladi’ of Amindeon and what is the relation with Avgi? Amindeon has Early Neolithic ie before Dispilio and Avgi, while Dispilio would seem to be older than Avgi. There seems to be some geographical and/or social relationship between Amindeon-Dispilio-Avgi. Amindeon would seem to look towards FYROM while Dispilio and Avgi would seem to look towards Maliq in Albania for trade and/or communication.

It is possible to begin to understand the Dispilio Neolithic lakeside settlement, after the pioneering work of Prof.Hourmouziadis (AUTH), continued by Prof.Kotsakis of the Ministry of Education through the excavated area, the reconstructed village, the eco-museum/scientific study collection ‘in situ’, the many publications and the website. It is also possible to understand better the Neolithic period in West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas, through the nearby Avgi farming settlement, reading the past in the present, centre for documentation and promotion of excavations at Avgi, Kastoria through the work of the Avgi Publications Group (APG), ably led by Dr Stratouli of the Ministry of Culture and the website.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) See fn.3 above for publications by Prof. G.X.Hourmouziadis et alii. Dispilio is on the beautiful Lake Orestiada near Argos Orestikon with its beautiful Archaelogical Museum. There would seem to be links with the Mycenaean Peloponnese both through pottery, found within the ‘peribolos’/temenos of Dispilio, and mythologically, Orestes the son of Agamemnon from Mycenae in the Argolid. Is the word Orestes/Orestiada possibly to be connected with the name for mountain – onronym?

\(^8\) See ‘The “Culture of Four Lakes”. Prehistoric Lakeside Settlements (6\(^{th}\)-2\(^{nd}\) mill.BC) in the Amindeon Basin, Western Macedonia, Greece’, Panicos Chrysostomou, Tryfon Jagoulis, Andreas Mader, Lakeside Settlements, Archeologie Suisse 38.2015.3, 24-32 including clay tablets with “proto-writing” signs as well as food supplies, blackberry seeds, garments, women’s fashions, burial customs and mixer, excavated from 2007, with preserved timber floor 5 square metres, cf ‘sanida’, ‘passaloi’, ‘koupi’, and a 4 legged wooden stool from Limnoxwri. The many settlements dated from c.6500-1200 BC were destroyed by fire, (as are most sites even after earthquakes and tsunamis such as with the nuclear power reactor in Japan/Nippon in the 21\(^{st}\) C AD).

These neighbouring sites in West Macedonia (Amindon, Dispilio and Avgi) North Greece, Hellas, are very different but yet complementary, when however studied and considered together, they present a very comprehensive understanding of Neolithic West Macedonia, in North Greece/Hellas\(^{10}\). It may well be instructive to consider Neolithic Crete, Knossos, Phaistos and Kastelli Phournis as an intellectual background to a ‘literate Bronze Age society’, sine (a)qua non\(^{11}\). Indeed, the fluid element is present everywhere and the 4 elements earth, water, air and fire are ever present at Amindon, Dispilio and Avgi. Dispilio, previously called Dupiaiki, is located on the south shore of Lake Orestiada of Kastoria and on the north edge of the fertile plain on the pass through the hills behind the lake. It is a very strategic location with ease of communication in all directions and two important quarries, thus the name Di-spilio, two-caves, that provide stone tools for the West Macedonia region, as does the neighbouring volcanic mount Mavrovouni. Dr Stratouli has also stressed the importance of ‘social storage’ i.e., self help/reliance on an extended family network, philoxenia between neighbouring sites such as Avgi, Dispilio and Amindon\(^{12}\).

The Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) was found in excavation square D158dc, in very close proximity to a Second World War Minefield, and Prof. Hourmouziadis (+) was correct in his statement, “The excavation is like a minefield. The first mistake is also the last”, but Fortune favours the brave. Who knows what to expect from the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) and who would have suspected that the Vindolanda Wooden Writing Tablets c.100 AD, would have provide such rich history, both social and military\(^{13}\).

\(^{10}\) It is perhaps worth noting that Dispilio has been excavated by Profs. Hourmouziadis (+) and Kotsakis of the Department of History and Archaeology, School of History and Archaeology, (AUTH), Hellenic Ministry of Education whereas Avgi is currently being excavated by Dr. Georgia Stratouli along with the Avgi Publications Group (APG) and Dr. Andromache Skreka of the IZ Ephoria of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. It is interesting and correct that both are now under the aegis of the Hellenic Ministries of Culture and Sport, Education and Religions, indeed quite rightly just as for example the ERASMUS+ programme of the EU is under the aegis of DG XII of Education & Culture.


\(^{12}\) Hospitality is still very strong as we recently and most pleasantly discovered. Indeed Philo-xenia is the perfect answer/antidote to Xeno-phobia.

\(^{13}\) The Roman Writing Tablets from Vindolanda, Alan K.Bowman, BMP, 1983.
As well as providing historical information concerning the Roman Army and Administration in Britannia, also contains social information talking about ‘Brittunculi’ Wretched (bloody) British and warm socks and underpants sent to soldiers to combat the cold of being garrisoned on Hadrians’s Wall. The shape of the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) is perhaps archaeological chance. It was originally a board, rectangular, and not mountain shaped but it changed shape from board, ‘sanida’, found with piles, ‘passalois’, and was described as an oar ‘koupi’ when discovered, but subsequently shrank when removed from the water in order to be photographed and consequently both conserved and preserved for future generations.

3) The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”)

The so called “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) is carved with c.10 rows/columns of linear signs. The dimensions are 23x19.2x2 cm. (i.e. almost A4 in size) and there are traces of fire. It was found north of the ‘peribolos’ i.e. the stone wall that surrounds three-quarters of the site of Dispilio on the southern shore of Lake Orestiada, Kastoria, in West Macedonia in North Greece, Hellas. It would appear to be a slice of cedar wood, with a ‘knot’ still existing, maybe even originally a part of a plank, ‘sanida’, like those used in the construction of the lakeside houses along with the wooden piles, ‘passalois’.

14 See also Francis Pryor, Home, A time traveller’s Tales from Britain’s Prehistory, 2014, which vividly reconstructs Stone Age Britain and Europe.

15 c.f. Catal Hoyuk for a Neolithic fresco of volcanic mountain Hasan Dag exploding over the town, I.Hodder, CATALHOYUK, The Leopard’s Tale, 2006, p.162 fig.63 and see references to comparable figurines, seal stones and bucraania. See Θωμάς Ράπτης MSc, Μεταπτυχιακή Εργασία, unpublished, Συμβολικοί τρόποι επικοινωνίας, η περίπτωση των χαραγμάτων απο τον νεολιθικό λυμάνιο ουκαμό του Δισπηλιού Καστοριάς, ΑΠΘ, 2014, which he most generously shared and in which he ‘organises’ the material in an exemplary way, as a pre-requisite to being “studiable” and he identifies the repeated signs/designs V X 2 = W inverted = M. Do they symbolize pubic triangle, mons veneris, breasts, uterus, bulls horns, twin peaks mountains or all and/or as fertility symbol? There are however near Dispilio, twin peak mountains directly across the lake and the neighbouring volcanic mount Mavrovouni, producing stones likes Obsidian from Melos and Catal Hoyuk, and Gobekli Tepe.

16 The description of the wood as an oar must make us think of Odysseus/Ulysses c.f. Homer, Nikos Kazantzakis and James Joyce, ‘walk with an oar until they do not know what it is’. West Macedonia is probably about as far away from the sea as it is possible to get in North Greece, Hellas, but the fluid element is still very strong indeed with lakes and rivers, Τα πάντα ρελ. μηδέποτε κατά τ’ αυτό μένεν. Clearly at Kastoria they know what an oar is, where the traces of a boat were found, long and flat bottomed exactly the same as that used on Lake Orestiada of Kastoria today where there is no current but there is a very strong wind. There is also strong evidence for fishing, boat and hooks etc, see Γ.Στρατούλη, Νεολιθικά Αγκιστριά από το Δισπηλιο Καστοριάς, Ανασκαμμα 2, 2008, 13-24 with English Summary, p.24, which would have supplemented the diet at Dispilio and interestingly see also G.Stratouli, S.Triantaphyllou, T.Bekiaris and N.Katsikaridis “The manipulation of death: a burial area at the Neolithic Settlement of Avgi, NW Greece, Documenta Praehistorica XXXVII, 2010, 95-104 at Avgi.
The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI") was found in July 1993 in the water north of the ‘peribolos’ and was brought to the excavator Prof. G.H.Hourmouziadis as a piece of wood in a bucket of water. The first description was ‘koupi’ i.e. oar as in Odysseus, Homer and Kazantzakis, and then signs were noticed and the object was photographed and subsequently conserved and preserved by Profs. Hourmouziadis and the university excavation team (Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki).

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“The most unexpected of the finds, a cedar tablet [from] the lake carved with 10 rows of “signs” was 14C dated to 5202 +/- 123 B.C., and is the oldest known engraved wooden tablet. In addition, clay tablets and other clay finds engraved with similar signs were also unearthed from layers dated either to the end of the Middle Neolithic or to the Late Neolithic I period. The dating of the Dispilio engraved finds is similar to those that appeared in southeastern Europe around 5300 BC, some 2000 yr earlier than any other known writing. These signs and inscriptions are considered by some scholars a specific script of literacy (Winn 1981; Merlini 2005; Lazarovici and Merlini 2005; Owens 2009). If this proves to be a primary source of written communication, the history of writing should be reconsidered and Neolithic societies should not be considered “societies without writing”.

The object, 23x19.2x2cm (c.A4) probably stood in a base upright, quadrilateral/rectangular. Is it writing and/or art? See similar signs on sealings from Avgi, Dispilio, Amindeon, Giannitsa, Nea Nikomedeia, Dimini and Sesklo, Knossos and Phaistos. Could it actually be writing with signs from “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) or is it a form of art/map/abstract art or ‘symbolic/sacred/old european’ script i.e. not even phonetic or ‘writing’ as such ‘per se’. Does it record a spoken or written language or does it symbolize something?

Is the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) an example, the most substantial and best preserved example, of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) i.e. phonetic inscription recording a language, but what was the spoken language of Dispilio 4000 years before the end of the Bronze Age finds of Mycenaean Greeks i.e. abundant pottery found on the inside on the ‘peribolos’ and Linear B from Aiani, West Macedonia (and perhaps also at Toumba, Thessalonikis?), i.e. c.1200 B.C. contemporary with the Trojan War?

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17 See G.Flouda, 2013. Materiality of Minoan writing: Modes of display and perception: In: Piquette, K.E. and Whitehouse, R.D. (eds.) Writing as Material Practice: Substance, surface and medium. Pp. 143-174. London: Ubiquity Press and Materiality and Script: Constructing a Narrative on the Minoan Inscribed Axe from the Arkalochori Cave, SMEA NS 1, 2015, 43-56 The object in question in this paper is referred to as the “Dispilio Inscription” “DI” not ‘Dispilio Tablet’ as unlike the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”) and Mycenaean Linear B and Minoan Linear A Tablets it is not an inscription on soft clay but an inscription on hard material, comparable to Minoan Stone Libation Tables from Iouktas and elsewhere, the Arkalochori Axes and the Font of Seal stones used to print the Phaistos Disk, which was then deliberately baked as opposed to the ephemeral clay tablets.
Is the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) an abstract code of communication or even art symbolizing something? The present author does not easily or comfortably accept symbolic/sacred/Old European script or symbolic/sacred of Old Europe. Such an idea concerning a symbolic/sacred script held back Sir Arthur Evans and thus others from progressing in the study of the Linear scripts of Minoan and Mycenaean i.e. Bronze Age Knossos and Crete.

The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) has up to 10 rows of linear vertical and horizontal carved “signs”. Similar carved signs can also be seen on the upper thin side (pleurography, drawing? CM, LB). The signs were preserved due to the anaerobic condition of the taphonomic environment. However, during the drying process, most of their engraving depth has been lost. The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) was an almost quadrilateral shape measuring 23x19.2x2 cm. (c.A4) that bears traces of fire (why? See Amindon). It could well have originated as a slice of cedar wood, piece of a wide plank, ‘sanida’, that was designated for a house along with the piles, ‘passaloai’, or even plank ‘sanida’ or oar ‘koupi’ of a boat, such as that the traces of which were found at Dispilio and very similar to those found on Lake Orestiada today.

There are c.10 rows of linear vertical and horizontal signs on the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”). Can these be isolated one by one, to do a transcription, exclude marks from woodworm ‘skoroi/entomoi’ etc and can a dbase be formed to detect a linguistic pattern and can the signs then be compared to the dbases of Winn (1973, 242 signs), Haarmann (1995, 232 signs), Merlini (2009, 292 signs), even if they subsequently reach very different observations and conclusions, and thus to enable a photo – drawing – transcription to make it ‘studiable’, the first stage – ‘sine qua non’ i.e. ‘studiable-readable-understandable’ (please see Appendix). How many signs 10x10? It is very difficult to compare, but there are maybe c.100 signs of “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) on the “Dispilio Inscription” (as opposed to c. 20 signs on the “Tartaria Tablets” “TT”). Is that enough to identify a syllabic script, if so what language is it writing? Is it possible to recognize phonetic linguistic crypto-analytic patterns in the ‘text’ but can one then proceed to decode/decipher it and return it to plain text i.e. to be ‘understandable’, after being ‘studiable’ and ‘readable’?\(^{18}\) Could c.10x10 i.e. c.100 signs be compared quantitatively to the first lines of the texts of the Iliad and/or Odyssey but c.4000 years older than the Trojan War.

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\(^{18}\) Cf. A.Hodges, Alan Turing: The Enigma, 1983, for a fascinating tale of code-breaking and brilliant minds, shaped both by nature and nurture, and the film The Imitation Game where Alan Turing, the broken genius, is brilliantly portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch. See also S.Singh, The Code Book, The Science of Secrecy from Ancient Egypt to Quantum Cryptography, 1999, and R.Parkinson, Cracking Codes, the Rosetta Stone and Decipherment, BMP, 1999. Can we learn from Turing etc in order to see how to approach the mind of the person who ‘wrote’ the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) and the person who ‘read’ ‘heard’ ‘understood’ the message with their feelings? Or failing that perhaps put “DI” through Google in reverse and see what comes up, all, images, videos, news, maps, search, tools etc? G
i) if alphabetic i.e. each sign represents a letter, then approximately equivalent to the first two or three lines of the Iliad and/or Odyssey
ii) if syllabic i.e. each sign represents a syllable, then approximately equivalent to the first seven lines of the Iliad and/or Odyssey
iii) if ideographic i.e. each sign represents a word, then approximately equivalent to the first fourteen or fifteen lines of the Iliad and/or Odyssey

4) The “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”)

Before the discovery of the “Dispilio Inscription” by Prof. G.H.Hourmouziadis in July 1993 but after the decipherment of Mycenaean Linear B by Michael Ventris, OBE, (1-6-1952 ‘Are the Knossos and Pylos Tablets’ written in Greek’, Work Note 20) the three “Tartaria Tablets” were discovered in 1961 by Nicolae Vlassa, near Cluj-Napoca in Transylvania, North Romania19. They are approximately the same date as the “Dispilio Inscription” c.5300 B.C. and were found with stone and clay figurines, a shell bracelet and human bones20. They were widely discussed, debated and disputed in both academia and popular science21. They have been called at various time ‘Vinca Script’ (by Romanian archaeologists), ‘Sacred Script’ (Winn 1973), ‘Old European Writing’ (Haarmann 1995), ‘Danube Script’ (Merlini 2009) and most recently as belonging to the “Neolithic Script(s)” by the current author22.

19 It is a pleasure to thank Joan Marler, Miriam Robbins Dexter, Harold Haarmann and Marco Merlini (IAM-UCLA) for their company and scholia as well as Zoia Maxim, Gheorghe and Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici for their outstanding Neolithic Hospitality at Taga and the National History Museum of Transylvania, Romania, 2009. Are these “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”) part of the corpus/dbase of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), do they contain Neolithic Numerals, and are they Personal/Religious and/or Administrative/Bureaucratic in epigraphic nature.

20 The bones have now been identified as ‘female, bone with gracile feature, very old for the standards of the time (50-55 years). The estimated height of the skeleton is 147 cm., indicative of a small-statured woman…Milady of Tartaria was of Mediterranean type’. It is interesting and thought provoking that inscribed figurines and spondylus shell bracelets have been found at Tartaria, Dispilio and Crete


Such ‘Vinca Signs’ are also known from Turdas in Transylvania, Gradeshnitsa in Bulgaria, and sites in West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas, such as Dispilio and Giannitsa. The objects found with the “Tartaria Tablets”, such as the shell bracelet and the figurines, have a comparable find context with the “Dispilio Inscription” and would seem to indicate communication (trade-routes, volcanic obsidian, metallurgy etc) with the Black Sea, and the Aegean Sea, especially the Cyclades on the way to Crete.

5) The “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”)

Does the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) belong to the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), including the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”), of the Stone Age Balkans? Previous scholars talked about a sacred/symbolic script of Old Europe. Is the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) actually an example of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) i.e. the ‘script’ that was prevalent around the Danube in South East Europe including West Macedonia in North Greece/Hellas in the Stone Age and is this actually a ‘script’ i.e. representing phonetically the spoken language of Neolithic Dispilio, 4000 years before Mycenaean Greek was recorded in West Macedonia, North Greece, Hellas by Linear B as in Aiani Museum (and perhaps also at Toumba, Thessalonikis?) and the Mycenaean stage of the Hellenic language? Or is the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) and “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), including the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”) perhaps a symbolic code of communication but not a phonetic script, even recording a spoken language but rather representing abstract ideas, art, map, something sacred and/or symbolic, could it be art which is a code of communication, portraying a message understood by those who ‘wrote’ it and by those who ‘read’ it standing upright on its base for all to see?23

Now that there are some photographs, from 20 years ago, and a drawing, is it possible to exclude the marks made by woodworm and to concentrate on the signs deliberately executed on the wood, a board from a cedar tree, a plank like those found with the wooden piles. Can a drawing be reproduced at life size 23x19.2x2 cm. (1:1 c.A4), then lines from insects excluded, and then signs be isolated in order to see if any patterns emerge. There are c.10 rows of linear vertical and horizontal carved signs, each with c.10 signs. Can the signs be isolated and compared to sign lists of Winn (1973, 242 signs), Haarmann (1995, 232 signs), Merlini (2009 292 signs), even if they reach very different conclusions?24

23 We thank Dr. G. Stratouli most warmly for this personal communication/observation. Other codes of communication, in addition to languages and scripts, potters/masons marks are music, art, computer programming, body and sign language. It is a ‘code of communication’ but it might not be a ‘script’. It is not easy nor comfortable to accept symbolic/sacred script, a script is a tool for language, symbolic and/or sacred is art and/or religious, no less valid as ‘code of communication’ but not a ‘script’.

Are the signs to be read from left to right, top to bottom, or bottom to top, right to left, or perhaps boustrophedon or even spirally in a labyrinthine way? There are traces of fire (why? Also at Amindeon) and while the signs were preserved due to the anaerobic condition of the tablet’s taphonomic environment, however, during the drying process most of their engraving depth was lost (and pleurography, drawing?).

The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) was conserved and preserved for future generations by the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, after its discovery in the lakeside area north of the Neolithic ‘peribolos’/temenos in square D158dc. All research and subsequent study must progress from the drawing from the first photograph taken before it subsequently dried out.

Merlini, 2009, called the signs “Danube Script” (as opposed to Winn ‘Sacred Script’, 1973, and Haarmann ‘Old European Writing’, 1995) and saw it as a ‘symbolic script’ i.e. Sacred Script of Old Europe as advocated by Gimbutas et alii (Tartaria Tablets). Merlini talked about the “Danube Script” as a system of writing in ‘statu nascenti’ (i.e. in a formative stage of development) and not as ‘pre-writing’ or ‘proto-writing’ c.f. website and book re ‘Danube Civilization’ and ‘Danube Script’ map, for the core area of the ‘Danube Civilization’ flanking the Danube and comprising Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, South Ukraine, Slovakia, East Czech Republic, East Austria, States of Former Yugoslavia, Albania and West Macedonia in North Greece, Hellas. The ‘Danube Civilization’ cultural area extends further to include South Italy, West Asia Minor and South Greece and the Aegean, i.e. not just the Danube but extends to Adriatic, Aegean and Black Sea Areas in the Stone Age, i.e. “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), including the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) and the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”).

If the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”), like the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”), belongs to the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) corpus is it possible to do a transcription to go along with photos and drawing to see if it can indeed be ‘read’ using Merlini’s corpus of signs? The corpus/dbase of Winn (1973, 242 signs), Haarmann (1995, 232 signs), Merlini 2009 (292 signs), suggest between 200 and 300 signs.

There are 3 systems of writing in the world.

i) Alphabetic Scripts = 10s of signs max c.75.
ii) Syllabic Scripts = 100s of signs.
iii) Ideographic script = 1000s of signs.

The “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) of “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) is most probably neither an alphabetic nor an ideographic script, so by a process of elimination, it is most likely to be a syllabic script (maximum 232-242-292, probably substantially less) if it is indeed ‘writing’, phonetically representing a spoken language.
Is it possible to isolate the signs on the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) and try to see them as “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) in the corpus of Merlini, can one then read the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) signs as “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), which would show that they belong to the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), including the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”), of the Balkans in the Stone Age in the 6th to 4th Millennium BC. If indeed they can be ‘read’ do they represent a syllabic script i.e. phonetically representing the spoken language of Neolithic Dispilio 4000 years before the Mycenaean pottery found within the fallen stones of the Neolithic ‘peribolos’ and the Linear B inscription on a pithos from Aiani (and perhaps also at Toumba, Thessalonikis?) in Mycenaean Macedonia.

**CONCLUSION**

Did the “Neolithic Script(s)” actually inspire the latter Syllabic Scripts of the Aegean and Cyprus 25 (LB, LA, “CH”), PD+AA, CM 0-1(LC)-2(Enkomi)-3(Ugarit) and CS and is there perhaps an intellectual connection26. Is the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”), including the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”), 6th to 4th Millennia the intellectual ancestor of the Aegean Linear syllabic scripts of the Second Millennium, and should the possibility be considered that there may even be an epigraphic missing link, yet to be discovered from the Third Millennium B.C. Aegean27.

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26 C.f. CM0-1(Linear C)-2(Enkomi)-3(Ugarit) and CS influenced by cuneiform and by the writing implement used to execute them. CM0=#001. #170 o-pe-le-ta-u OPHELTAU is latest Cypro-Minoan, and not earliest, (terminus ante/post quem) Cypriot Syllabic according to J.P.Olivier. For CM 0-1-2-3 see P.M. Steele, Syllabic Writing on Cyprus and its Context, and, A Linguistic History of Ancient Cyprus, both 2013, CUP, as well as S.Ferrara, Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions, Vol.I Analysis, 2012, Vol.II The Corpus, 2013, OUP. These 4 books have made the Cypro-Minoan Scripts ‘studiable’, the first step towards ‘reading’ them and hopefully one day ‘understanding’ them. Rome was not built in a day but London was burnt down in a night. I thank John Coleman, Professor of Phonetics, Faculty of Linguistics, for his social and intellectual parea and philoxenia on matters concerning scripts(s) and language(s), and not only, i.e., communication and not just for the gift of these books.

27 See Linear B from Aiani, Pithos rim, Mycenaean pottery, no doubt that Macedonia is part of Mycenaean Greece i.e. Late Helladic Greece c.1200 B.C. See object on display and G.Karamitrou-Mentessidi, Aiani Sites and the Museum, Archaeological Guide, Catalogue, 2008, p.81 fig.122, with photo reversed (?) in order to help the direction of reading TE-RE-DA or DA-RE-TE possible name ending in –DAS or -THP as owner of the pithos, which shows continuity in West Macedonia in North
Does the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) as an example of “Neolithic Script” (“NS”) record a written syllabic language for all to see standing on its base in view – centrally organized in a Neolithic Farming community – or is it even symbolic and or sacred i.e. art and religion = civilization? Are there indeed c.10 rows of 10 signs = 100 signs? Can one commence ‘studying’ the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) before attempting the “reading” or even the “understanding” of it?

The important work at Dispilio, is based on and built upon the works of A. Keramopoulos, N.Moutsopoulos and N.Hammond (Vergina Aiges) 1972, A History of Macedonia, p.230 who said that “the settlements of Kastoria and Malik lie upon the route from Thessaly via the Haliakmon valley and the Tsangon Pass to the Adriatic Coast”. Maliq is in Albania near Prespes Lake. To Nhsi, the island, Dispilio was ‘hardcore’ and then people left to go to the plateaux of Kozani and Ptolemaida. This work was carried on by G.H.Hourmouziadis of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki with the inspired and inspiring Neolithic EcoMuseum/Study Collection/Village. This has now been importantly, restored, conserved and preserved by K.Kotsakis with the successful completion of ESPA investments in Culture.

Hourmouziadis, 1996, disagrees with Hammond 1972, that Dispilio is vibrant just because it is on the route from (the Aegean and) Thessaly (and Macedonia) to the Adriatic, but rather it is a vibrant culture (lake and plain) that makes such a route possible. Surely this is two sides of the same coin – did the place make the people and/or did the people make the place – nature and/or nurture?

Greece from Neolithic/Stone Age to Mycenaean/Bronze Age. If the “Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) is part of the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) dbase/corpus, including the “Tartaria Tablets” (“TT”), and indeed writes a language then it could perhaps write the predecessor of Mycenaean Greek as written in Linear B, and indeed the “Neolithic Script(s)” (“NS”) may be a syllabic script i.e. not alphabetic and not ideographic, just like LB, LA, “CH”, PD+AA, CM 0-1(LC)-2(Enkomi)-3(Ugarit), CS etc. Copious amounts of Mycenaean pottery sherds were found within the Neolithic walls of Dispilio, west (deposit) north (tablet find place),and east of the site, but not south where there is now a wall of historic times near the Greek Orthodox Church of Analipsews (ATM? ©). ‘Peribolos’ is a Neolithic stone dry wall that was cleared, stones collected and partially reconstructed (ESPA and ‘guestimated’ to have existed up to a height of 2 metres tall based on how the stones fell), temenos. We thanks Dr Maria Andreadaki-Vlazaki, General Secretary of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport, for valuable discussions on this and other matters (olives/figs/offerrings/tamata as food for thought) including the suggestion that the missing ‘epigraphic’ link in the 3rd Millennium may be found or at least sought after in the Minoan ‘potters’ marks’ and ‘masons’ marks’ of the Bronze Age Aegean.

28 Maybe there is evidence for organized religion and agriculture like the Natufian Culture in the Middle East? Cf J.Cauvin (trans S.Preve UCP 1997) Naissance de divinites, Naissance de l’agriculture. La Revolution des Symboles au Neolithique. in honorem memoriaque Antonios Blantas…

29 It seems correct that Prof.G.H.Hourmouziadis (+), Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Dispilio (Kastoria) the prehistoric lakeside settlement, p.54-63 should have the final word (for now) in this ongoing discussion on the «Dispilio Inscription” (“DI”) ‘sine (a)qua non’ – ο τολμάω νικά...
# Appendix

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Y. Facorellis, M. Sofronidou, G. Hourmouziadis (+) 2014, Figs 5 & 6

Figure 5  Cedar tablet carved with 10 rows of linear (vertical and horizontal) signs, some of them resembling the letters Δ, E, or Λ. Dated to 5202 ± 123 BC (5324–5079 BC) within 2σ (DEM-321).

Figure 6  (A): Samples of carved "signs" on the wooden tablet and other clay finds from Dtapilio; (B) samples of Linear A signs; (C) samples of signs on Paleoeuropean clay tablets (modified from Hourmouziadis 1996).