Hair Dedication in Caria: An Inscribed Blade from Stratonikeia

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A n inscribed bronze blade belongs to the private collection of Ms. Berna Oğuz in Izmir. This artefact was purchased by her at the beginning of 2017 and registered at the Museum Directorship of Izmir on 9 March 2017 with the inventory no. 416 (fig. 1). It was said by the owner to have been found in a tomb in Alabanda, ca. 38 km. northwest of Stratonikeia (map 1).

This fine and slim object, a slightly bent bronze blade (length 82 mm., height 30, thickness 1.2–1.7: fig. 2), was probably used as a razor to cut hair, to judge from similar archaeological finds dating from the Roman Imperial period, or even earlier. Its probable wooden handle would have disappeared. It has two sides (A-B) inscribed inversely: points are used to shape letters of two different short Greek texts, three lines on the side A and five on the side B.

Height of the letters ca. 5 mm. Sigmas are lunate, indicating rather the end of the Hellenistic period or the beginning of Roman imperial times (c. second-first century B.C.E.), amongst other clues based on onomastics and religious context (see below).

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1 G. C. Boon, “‘Tonsor humanus’: Razor and Toilet-knife in Antiquity,” Britannia 22 (1991) 25, fig. 3b.

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Map 1. Western Asia Minor
Underlining indicates the local archaeological museums
(by S. Pataci, 2018)

Side A (fig. 1.a):

Παιόνιος
Διονυσίου
Ἱεροκωμ(ήτ)ου.

Paionios, son of Dionysios from Hierokome.

L. 1: the left hasta of Π is shorter than the right one (which is regularly shorter in Hellenistic inscriptions); the fourth letter is omicron, though we expect omega, the normal personal name Παιώνιος; the nu shows a right hasta not fully descended.

L. 3: the fourth letter is a suspended omicron; after the μ, the carving causes hesitation, but surely it is an abbreviation before the final genitive ΟΥ.
The shape of the letters on side A indicates a Hellenistic date, ca. second century B.C.E., earlier than the ductus visible on side B of the blade. Παιώνιος was a common name in Caria, for example attested in Panamara in upper-class families who supplied priests to the sanctuary. The patronym Διονύσιος is of course very frequent. Hierakome is the well-known deme of Carian Stratonikeia, frequently attested (and most often abbreviated ΙΕ) in the inscriptions of Lagina and Panamara.

Fig. 1: Inscribed blade from Stratonikeia (© Berna Oğuz, 2017)

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3 I.Stratonikeia 174. Otherwise see LGPN V.B 338: the name Παιώνιος is attested during the second century B.C.E. in Stratonikeia (and during the first century B.C.E. in this city), Miletos, Iasos, Mylasa, and Olymos; but also in Koliorga in 31 B.C.E. We could find few occurrences during the imperial period. For Ionia, Lydia, and Troas see LGPN.V.A 353.

4 Concerning the historical geography of Stratonikeia see n.6 below.
Fig. 2: Inscribed blade, side views (© Berna Oğuz, 2017)

Side B (fig. 1.b):

Στρατοκλῆς
Θέωνος τοῦ
Στρατοκλείους
Κολιοργεὺς
ν(εανίσκος) ἐ(ν) Κ(ομύριοις).

Stratokles, son of Theon, son of Stratokles, from Koliorga, young man at the Komyria.

The demotic/ethnikon Κολιοργεὺς gives us a precise geographical and historical context for this object: Koliorga is a well-attested site close to Stratonikeia. According to P. Debord, Koliorga was a city during the fourth century B.C.E. like Hierakome of side A) and became a civic deme of Stratonikeia, i.e. a part of its territory, under Seleukid rule in the third century B.C.E. During Hellenistic and Roman times, the demotic

6 P. Debord, “Essai de géographie historique sur la région de Stratonicée,”

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Kολιοργεύς is repeatedly attested in the dedications and other inscriptions carved in the famous sanctuaries of Hekate at Lagina⁷ and of Zeus Panamaros at Panamara,⁸ both in the territory of Stratonikeia.

Most of the dedications discovered in those sanctuaries were made by people bearing classical Greek and Macedonian names. On side B of this blade, we find Stratokles, son of Theon, son of Stratokles, a patronym and a papponym, so that we can observe a traditional Greek social practice of a man bearing the name of his grandfather. A person called Στρατοκλῆς is known in Lagina as father of Tiberius Flavius Diokles, in connection with the two mentioned sanctuaries, while another also in Lagina is the father of the high priest Menandros.⁹ The name Θέων appears at least once in Lagina in a dedication to Hekate during the first century B.C.E., and later in Koliorga (first-second century A.D.).¹⁰


⁷ E.g. I.Stratonikeia 659: regularly with an abbreviation as Κολιοργεύς, e.g. I.Stratonikeia 681.

⁸ E.g. I.Stratonikeia 123. Panamara was first identified by French scholars in 1886, whose evidence was mostly based on epigraphy. H. Oppermann, Zeus Panamaros (Giessen 1924), describes for the first time the priesthood, three festivals, as well as minor rites associated with Zeus Panamaros. See also T. Drew-Bear and T. Schwertfeger, “Zur Topographie und Epigraphik von Panamara in Karien,” ZPE 36 (1979) 195–196.

⁹ I.Stratonikeia 664 and 524. See also, in Panamara, I.Stratonikeia 15 and 193 (dedication carved under the “familial” priest Tiberius Flavius Menandros, son of Stratokles, from Koliorga, in Hadrian’s reign); cf. A. Laumonier, “Recherches sur la chronologie des prêtres de Lagina,” BCH 62 (1938) 267. For attestations of the name Στρατοκλῆς in Caria see LGPN V.B 390; for other examples in Anatolia, V.A 411.

¹⁰ I.Stratonikeia 510 and 1431. For attestations of the name Θέων in Caria
The abbreviation NEK in line 5 seems to be intended for a known purpose. In order to propose its expansion, we need to decide the use of this blade. First, we of course thought of a tool in religious ritual, which quickly was recognized as a razor used to cut hair. Then we logically connected the object to the well-known tradition concerning the cult of Zeus Panamaros: some young men used to offer and dedicate their hair to the divinity in his most sacred area called the Komyrion, very probably on the occasion of the Komyrion festival. Given this documented ritual context, we propose to expand the end of the abbreviation as ἐ(ν) Κ(ομυρίοις). The first letter has probably to be expanded see LGPN V.B 200; for other examples in Anatolia, V.A 219.


13 The formula is very frequent in the inscriptions of Panamara: see for example I.Stratonikeia 42 for a hair dedication, but also 183, 185, 192. We should also however consider ἐ(ν) Κ(ομυρίοις), which is less frequent (203, 207, 311).
ν(εανίσκος): the word is well attested in Panamara for a hair dedication, and in Caria we know for example νεανίσκοι in Apollonia Salbakè and Kaunos.

This inscribed blade was probably consecrated in Panamara at the Komyrion, on the hill of Bağyaka located ca. 12 km. south-east of Stratonikeia, between the second century B.C.E. and the second century A.D. The name of the divinity is not engraved on the blade, on the one hand because we can read the abbreviation NEK, on the other because the ritual object could have been put in a stele-box including the offered hair and covered by a stone plate bearing the detailed dedication, or put in a tomb. The ritual oblation was performed by men coming mainly from local civic elites, closely connected with the priests of Zeus Panamaros and Hekate, a fact generally confirmed by their traditional Greek and Macedonian names inherited from Classical and Hellenistic times. The young men, as neaniskoi/neoi, may have been primarily concerned, but regularly fathers, brothers, or other male family members were associated to the ritual: that is why it is not surprising to find a blade inscribed for two different persons, probably coming from the same family using the same blade on two different occasions (side A: end of Hellenistic period; side B: beginning of Roman imperial times). One may find sometimes threptoi or slaves as dedicants, but very

17 For a description of the suggested device (“petit coffret de pierre, ayant la forme d’une stèle”) see Deschamps and Cousin, BCH 12 (1888) 479–480.
18 See for example I.Stratonikeia 449, 456, 474.
19 See I.Stratonikeia 409 and 473.
probably in the sphere of upper-class families.  

Because of the features briefly described here, we shall argue for assigning the initial oblation ritual to ancient Carian religious practices, which later made sense for the Greco-Macedonian communities who ruled over Stratonikeia’s territory and populations from the third century B.C.E. into Roman imperial times, thanks to an adaptation to Greek rites de passage concerning young men, and to the ephebic education. The civic elites of Stratonikeia, conservative and jealous of their power, maintained this ancient ritual for their families during the Roman imperial era, as they were accustomed to hold priesthoods διὰ γένους.  

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21 I.Stratonikeia 193, 194, 1316.