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Observations on the "archaic omphalos" of Delphi

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## OBSERVATIONS

### ON THE "ARCHAIC OMPHALOS" OF DELPHES

ΤΑρ 'έντως μέσον ομφαλῶν

Γας Φοίβου κατέχει δόμος;

Euripides, Ion, 222-223.

In the session of May 1, 1914 of the Academy of Inscriptions and Fine Arts, Maxime Collignon read a note by

Fernand Courby, relating to the omphalos of pores which he had just discovered, during the summer of 1913, during his last research for the publication of the Temple of Apollo (1). The terms of this preliminary report were taken up almost word for word in the first

issue of Volume II of the Excavations of Delphi, The Terrace of the Temple, I (1915), p. 69 sq. (2). F. Courby set out in detail the circumstances of the find

, at the presumed location of the adyton, gave a description of the object, and, with reservation, an interpretation of the apparently characters which he deciphered on the hemispherical archaic surface. of P «omphalos».

We shall return to this publication, which was generally accepted: there were, however, a few reservations which were quickly expressed (3), but which ceased when with authority AB Cook, Zeus, II, p. 177, hailed the find as "one of the most brilliant archaeological discoveries of our time." Not that the British scholar himself recognized the authenticity of the object: it was based only on the examination made on the spot (1) CRAI, 1914, p. 257-270.

(2) A note to the addenda the exact form of the third letter, to the issue specifies which Courby interpreted as an alpha.

(3) By P. Roussel, REG, 1915, p. 457, on the inscription, and by Ch. Picard, RA, 1921, I, p. 172 (on F. Poulsen's book, Delphi (1920)), arguing that the inscription is not archaic and that the object could be a weight. Cf. Ch. Picard, Ephesus, and Claros, p. 551, n. 7.

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by a traveler, the conclusions of which he reproduced in a note (1).

I copy it at the bottom of this page,

to testify that I know perfectly well what I am exposing myself to by in turn casting doubt on Courby's

archaic omphalos. At the risk of passing, after others, as "crazy or malicious," I will the results of the

confine myself to giving critical examination I undertook at Delphi in September 1950 on the stone itself

. The reader will first be publication

invited to reread F. Gourby's: he will discover, as it is sufficiently explicit (2), why

and how the circumstances of the find may have abused the first

inventor, and all who used his publication for their studies

of the history of religions (3).

It is the description of the monument (4):

worth first rereading "In September 1913, a survey was carried out against the south wall of the cella ...,

in the lower recess [sd lack of printing for interior]

of the foundation, showed a small monument of pores in the shape

of omphalos, which rested standing, against the siding, on the embankment

from the excavations. It measures 0 m. 385 in diameter and 0 m. 287 high.

The work is quite crude; the scissor strokes of the refurbishment

crisscross the surface in places. On aperçoit encore West Des debris

of a stucco analogue to look recouvrait the poros temple du au ive siècle.

In a channel of rectangular section that crosses it from top to

bottom enters, up to 0 m. 105 from the bottom, a flat iron rod, sharp on one

edge, with a curved profile on this side and ending in a point, which has all the

appearances of a knife blade; two nails pushed back subject-

(1) AB Cook, Zeus, II, 2, p. 1216, from a letter from CT Seltman, January 11, 1923:

"In the RA, 1921, I, 172, Ch. Picard attempts to discredit the omphalos found by F. Courby

within the temple of Apollo. He suggests that it is perhaps a mère weight and that the

inscription may not after ail be archaic. But MCT Seltman, who at my request has made a

careful examination of the original stone, sends me (Jan. 11, 1923) the following report: «It

seems to me that the suggestion of its being a forgery can only be born of madness and malice

1

The thing is smaller than one expected it to be, but it is to my thinking impossible that it should be a fake ... ».

(2) There is no question of questioning the quality of the work of F. Courby, who throughout his volume of FDs (not to mention his

other works) has shown a science and

a knowledge of stones his successors in field too often took advantage of to forget him, even for a moment

the the. On the contrary, it is thanks to the honesty of the archaeologist that it is

possible today to criticize a very small part of his enormous work, pursued in follow the path he has paved

difficult conditions, and to for us. with ardor and skill.

(3) Contrary to custom, I will stop here the bibliographical indications, which will be

easily found by all those who are interested in the question, both for general textbooks and for detailed articles., the sometimes  
Needless to say, savory mistakes of those who erred only in adding faith to an under-published monument. ,

(4) FD, II, Temple Terrace, p. 76. ....

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solidly woven this blade. In this way, what happened can be reconstructed  
. The cavity received a stem (of wood, no doubt, since there is no  
trace of it) which was later wedged in a rather primitive  
manner and by fortune-telling processes. - A 0 m. 18 about the engraved inscription  
archaic, where one easily recognizes the three  
bottom runs a deeply letters  $\epsilon\gamma\alpha$  and, perhaps, in the sign in  $\zeta$  which follows, the letter  $\varsigma$ .  
So we will read (follows the facsimile on a third scale) ”.

Photographs taken by Courby showed the stone on all sides  
, and a drawing (fig. 68, p. 79) showed the exact place of the blade and nails  
knife. Drawing far too  
precise by virtue of being schematic, and which erred in particular on the regularity of the  
quasi-hemispherical shape, and of the channel of rectangular section. It has the  
advantage of proving to us that the knife blade was complete to the ferrule (destroyed rust  
today by, already active on the weather-exposed portion  
cf. fig. 69, p. 80); it is clear that drawing could have been executed without the blade being  
removed

the from the channel where it was stuck (1). As early as 1939, I was  
struck by the modern air of this knife, without being able to justify this  
impression; it could also be found strange that the letters of the inscription were  
partly covered with "stucco": the mystical Epsilon and the name  
of the Earth were impressive enough that they were not  
hidden under this thick white layer. . Finally, the precarious nature  
of the installation, knife and nails, and the coarse work of the surface me to go  
seemed to rather badly with this venerable object among all: although  
this was a subjective impression, and to which a thousand answers could  
easily be made, nor was I's explanation of the  
content with Courby's system running through the omphalos (fixation of Vagrénon  
or the eagles). I also knew that it had been given up, to issue the theory  
of an omphalos- $\alpha$   
inhaler, "placed on the famous multi-hole slab {FD, *ibid.*, Fig. 59, p. 67), in such a left-wing  
manner that a

professional plumber would not guarantee its tightness or effectiveness.

It was necessary to confine oneself to a quick allusion (2) to the suspicions which had  
arisen in my mind, and which could not be verified until 1950, because

(1) It can be ensured that all the elements of Courby's description can be put together  
without removing the knife, which can be touched easily enough with the finger to recognize its  
sharpness  
and dimensions.

(2) BCH, 1940-41, p. 227, review of HW Parke's *The Delphic Oracle* (1939); one of the plates in this very useful work shows the porous omphalos placed on the omphalos

marble, at the time of the Museum's refurbishment work in 1937-39. This photograph allows 4th to compare the scale of the two omphaloi.

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the omphalos in 1940 was removed from examination by the precautions taken at the time brought to light until of the war, and was not 1949 (1).

My first

care was to wash the object with plenty of water, as it is an experimental fact that the wet pores reveal much more detail. It is

of a very light, dull yellow, and of a fine grain, quite sensitive to blows and even to the scratch of the nail, accusing very well the traces of tool. In the face

Fig. 1. - The "omphalos", seen below.

lower, which Courby has scarcely examined, is very interesting.

Perfectly flat on the ruler, it is a face worked with great care; we see in it the parallel traces of an ancient point (fig. 1), as on the facing bricks which of the archaic belong to the treasures of the sanctuary.

In places, by wetting the surface, one can recognize the very small debris of a very fine ancient stucco, currently yellowish white

, a thin film that does not exist on the "hemisphere". This surface

(1) These suspicions had already been refuted before they had expressed themselves publicly, cf. BCH,

1940-41, p. 157, n. 3.

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is unquestionably ancient, but it cannot be considered

a laying bed: it is a vertical facing, once visible.

It is surprising how different the characters of the

"hemisphere" are, visible today. If we give it that name, it's for short

. In fact, Courby was struck at first by the "rough"

and "coarse" work, and the irregularity of form; cut quickly and without

any address, it has a height of 0 m. 28 approx., For a smaller diameter

of 0 m. 35 to 0 m. 38, depending on the points where the measurement is taken. On the surface,

instead of the thin film of old stucco, there remain thick plates

of a whitish mortar, which contains tiny gravels of dark gray,

yellow, and reddish, and has no right to the name of stucco. I have sometimes handled pieces grooves of fourth-

of stucco from the columns

century— a few graffiti-inscribed — and I can

assure you that they are not of the same material at all. This mortar is hardly old;

the wash makes it swell and soften it, and there is no trouble in blowing it with a fairly fine tool

(1). He insinuates himself into the jambs of the letters,

especially in the last branch to the right of the famous "epsilon mystical": it is certain that, if it were really a stucco, he would have concealed them. What a pity for an inscription laden with such a meaning ... But we have all, at Delphi, sufficiently demolished the walls of old Kastri or found remnants of lime kilns ("Asvestogourna") to identify what our workers call usually of the "tsimento," whose seniority is very relative. I no longer doubted, from that moment on; the object was used in a modern wall, used in a construction of Kastri. If so there was no reason to respect it, and while leaving undertook to clean large plates as a witness, I the whole registration area to better photograph it. With the assistance of the skilful technician employed at that time at Delphi by ML Lerat for the recollection of the Mycenaean and geometric vases, Mr. Tassos Pantazopoulos (2), I proceeded with this cleaning, first apprehension, then with an amused surprise: for as the mortar disappears-

(1) I point out, for whom it would be tempting to renew the experiment, that one should not use the blade of a knife, the edge of which can start the pores, but with a screwdriver or the "box opener" of a pocket knife, which allows a softer attack.

(2) The following were present at Delphi at that time: Mrs. Christiane Dunant, Swiss member of the School, MM. L. Lerat, on mission, and Georges Roux, second-year member. Mr. Constantin Touzloukof, our topographer, drew for me the drawing of the inscription on the scale, first from the stamping, and then in my presence in front of the stone: I can give it as perfectly accurate

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shone, revealing the bottom of the letters brown, darker than the surrounding pores, thus assuring us that we were not "making" letters to our fancy, jambs appeared not reported so far, inside the Epsilon, and then in the fairly wide space to its right which separates it from the "gamma," in the famous "Epsilon," two feet bound by their horizontal bar, and whose vertical rods were separated Figs . 2. - The "omphalos", after cleaning the inscription. by a very clear alpha. Another large alpha was already visible in Courby's photographs (1): it occupies the entire region between Courby's first two letters. The so-called "gamma" is a lambda, adorned with very sharp "legs" on ancient documents, and its left jamb is crossed by a clumsy and shallow first attempt, which was immediately abandoned in favor of the final letter, for which the tool was pressed harder. Finally, Courby's drawing, even corrected in his addenda, gives a very bad account of the last sign, which does not

(1) See CRAI, 1914, p. 268, fig. 3 and FD, I. c, p. 73, fig. 64.

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could be an alpha, archaic  
or not. Aussitôt que Ton  
commence à comprendre que  
l'inscription n'est pas archaïque, saute  
littéralement aux yeux que  
nous sommes en présence du  
caractère "ligatura» O T +, are  
the east panse rendue anguleuse  
by the promise of habileté du graveur  
and the speed of his work.

As for the "en sign" that follows, it is  
not a letter, but a series  
of scratches and erosion  
holes; no trace  
of, and it is far too  
deep to  
aformulating

tool is seen in it attempt to defend it by any hypothesis (fig. 2).

We no longer read: "

Epsilon de Gâ", which

removes interesting exegeses, but

Παπαλου, Papalou ... - It must be believed that a  
Kastriot

named Papaloukas wrote his name  
on the object (1), before being used mortar  
in a wall (fig. 3).

(1) Graffiti mania exists in

Delphi as, and we possess

elsewhere many inscriptions or blocks

of architecture which present either a name, whole or  
truncated, or the three initials of

modern names; these initials are sometimes very

useful, in the olive grove, where they are used to recognize the limits  
of properties.

Our foreman used to paint

, on the scaffolding timbers, the

three letters ΓΑΣ, which mean: Γαλλική

Ἀρχαιολογική Σχολή. He also

confirmed to me that a Papaloukas family

exists in Delphi; its current representative

is a doctor in Athens.

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The cavity that through Γ "omphalos" from side to side is much less regular than F. Courby's drawing suggests \* It does not follow exactly a diameter (the center, at the "laying bed", is about 0 m 20 on one side, 0 m 17 or 0 m 18 on the other, even account taking into the breaks); its section, at the bottom, is a maximum of 35 x 50 millimeters, of a minimum 30 x 42; the useful breakthrough is no more than three inches by four. The line was very joyless grossièrement the n'est même pas ranger right on the car in commencé par les deux bouts pour rejoindre tant soites deux perforations with the milieu. It was possible, as F. Courby thought, to insert a stem a little less than 3 x 4 centimeters into it, but it is not because there is no trace of it that it must be supposed to be made of wood : it could have been metallic and disappeared just as well, and its presumed size (just under 3 x 4) could not tell us about its nature. To wedge it, no doubt, the blade, the handle of which no longer existed, was pushed out from above, and of a knife by force ; wide at least at the top - or at least what is left of it today - of 35 millimeters, it flares on the side of the edge up to 45 millimeters, and ends in a point, about 10 centimeters from the " laying bed ". The blade is still 27 centimeters long, though twisted at the top (1), and opposite the cutting edge is 5 millimeters thick. She was driven into the hole which was a little too small, and she bit into the soft pores ^ which was cut about an inch. So she was trapped by her sharp edge, which had rusted slightly: that's why no one had ever dared to remove it to clean it . It was still interesting : we do not knife meet so often an ancient (priest's knife, assumed a scholar)! In addition, this knife is itself wedged by two large nails, carpenter's nails, about 7 to 8 millimeters in section, about 12 to 14 centimeters long. One was a little deeper than the other, which was about 8 inches longer . The tip of the first is twisted, that of the second is crushed and open. Finally, I removed from the hole another piece of iron, uniformly half millimeters thick 35 millimeters wide and one and a; it is twisted and incomplete at both ends, but a length of 16 centimeters remains. It must (1) It is therefore not steel, which would have broken and not twisted, but of this artisanal metal called "aisalosidero".

FIG. 4. - The knife (in the center) and the nails.  
On the right, for comparison, a knife dated 1887.

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Fig. 5. - The omphalos knife  
between two modern knives.

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a fragment of a barrel circle: the Delphians use barrels for their  
wine that contain 400 or 500 geese, circled by a siephani  
that has these dimensions. photographs

Why is it not seen in Courby's, why is it not mentioned in his text? Did he  
deliberately not talk about it? Or do we owe it to the conservative  
scruples of our old friend Gondoléon? I did not solve this little problem.

By protecting the tip with a piece of wood, Tassos Pantazopoulos  
removed the blade without much difficulty, and without damaging the pores. It was  
not very rusty, nor were the nails, and a simple brush-cleaning revealed the  
geometric designs visible on both sides

of the blade, covered with a beautiful golden patina (fig. 6). But the most revéFig. 6. - The knife,  
cleaned, with the date: 1860.

lateur was the inscription engraved on one side: after an indistinct name,  
the date: 1860 is

deciphered with great sharpness. I then asked the foreman of get me to the village a few  
copies of these knives or χαντζάρια (khandjars), which the old  
pallikares wore passed to their belts (σουλάχι). One of these  
knives (fig. 5 on the left) is adorned on the blade of drawings, curls of leaves, with  
the name of the owner and the date: K. Stamaliou, 1730. The handle is made  
of gray horn. The other, with a reddish horn handle, presents on one side the  
date and place of purchase: 1887 Αγόργιανη (Agoriani is close to the ancient site  
of Lilaia, N. of Parnassus); on the other side the name of the:  
owner K. Komlis. We are well

acquainted with all these names, which are found on Saturday on the payroll of the excavation  
site. On each side of

the blade, is engraved with enough wit a bird that flies away from a branch.

Mr. Emil Seraf photographed for me these different khandjaria on the same  
plate, in order to show that the dimensions are the same as those of the blade  
removed from the "omphalos" (figs. 4 and 5).

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The 1860 knife was already obsolete when its blade was used to wedge the metal  
(or wooden) rod into the channel. The piece of pores.

was later torn from the building to which it belonged,

and used for a building, or repair, in any wallevery reason to believe  
of the old Kastri: there is that it was not long before the great

excavations began in 1892. The dates are

indisputable here, and historically constitute a perfect "range." How did



"omphalos" get to the bottom of the Temple adyton? It is impossible to tell his story, where a malicious chance must have intervened which was enough to abuse the author of the discovery. What is certain is already sufficient & extraordinary that one avoids spoiling the indisputable elements by a hypothetical explanation. Suffice it to say that the terrace of the temple was covered with houses, the foundations of which were laid on the network of cobblestones recognized by the first archaeologists who surveyed it . The excavation was difficult, because of the considerable upheavals effected over the centuries, the size and number of pores. limestones and marbles, often foreign to the Temple itself, which were found scattered on the site: in this inevitable disorder, it is permissible whose testimony that the piece of pores rolled in the place shown in the photograph is invoked by Courby (1), and that there is no need to challenge . Someone must have examined it and then rejected it as non-ancient: for Courby explains perfectly well that he discovered it not in the inverted position where the document shows it, but "standing against the wall, carefully placed on a backfill compacted ", backfill" from excavations ". It was for this reason that he at first risked "no hypothesis as to its origin" and that he regarded the stone only "as a copy of the primitive omphalos." "The," said foreman told me F. Courby in the note read to the Academy, "that he had not reported it to anyone because he believed it to be worthless, and that he had consequently abandoned at the place of finding. It was there that she was buried, when Greek Pephoria filled the bottom of the naos "(2).

(1) FD, I. c, p. 49, fig. 47, quite indistinct in the reproduction of the Excavations (French School of Athens, A 167).

(2) The text of the FD, p. 7.7, explains in a slightly different way: "Information taken, it was through the fault of a foreman that the monument was reburied, almost immediately after it was cleared." I suppose that indeed the foreman, more aware than the archaeologist of the details of the life of the nineteenth-century Kastri, understood only what we guess today : it is quite possible that he did not want to then upset Courby, and answered him in such a way as to satisfy him while apologizing for his best. - - I have trouble understanding what-

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Fig. 7. - Iconostasis of the Virgin, above the gymnasium.

FIG. 8. - Iconostasis of St. Theodore, in the ravine below Castalia.

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Thus was created the conviction "of which one defends oneself first, but which is imperatively imposed afterwards," imposed in turn by Courby on the scholars who used his work. "All in all," he concluded in his note to the Academy, "the expected conclusions are not always, even in archeology, the true conclusions." We will benefit from repeating this observation for our use.

Is it possible to explain now the fate of this hemisphere of pores? There is, above the gymnasium, a small building about two meters high, which on the southern slope of the road to Arachova commemorates the memory of the monastery of Panaghia, once installed on the site of the gymnasium. There is another, of the same type, in the road leading to the church of the Virgin, built in the olive grove near a spring and beautiful walnut trees : it is under Castalie, at the place where the road crosses the ravine (figs. 7 and 8). These "proskynitaria", less well known as iconostases by the inhabitants themselves, are formed of a frame similar to a cippe, supporting four uprights that form a tabernacle containing icon theand the night light. A plate serves as a crown, and supports a carved stone in. orthodox fashioned dome, in which the Christian cross is planted. I have no doubt that our "omphalos" is an "ancient" dome of proskynitari, the same size as those that still exist. The stem which was driven into it and wedged by the old khandjarnailswood or iron and theis that of a cross of; these small monuments are the object of constant care on the part of the Kastriotes, who continually maintain an oil lamp there, and renew them when they fall from obsolescence. The same is true of the Greek villages, where these pious foundations are used for. recall the memory of a demolished chapel, or stand on the roads, at the exit of the agglomerations, just like the ordeals or mission crosses in the French roads. It is quite normal that a monument of this kind was erected in the old Kastri, and that its dome was used to carve an archaic porous brick, the very well-erected siding of which served as laying bed. means the repeated phrase CRAI, p. 269 and FD, p. 77: "the overturned monument, as it must have rolled in a normal fall (?), When the ground that carried it collapsed." There can be no collapse in this portion of land, except at the time of the excavations, or rigor when laying the foundations for a house in Kastri. One cannot think, neither of the destruction of the Temple, nor of the reflections of the fourth century.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE "ARCHAIC OMPHALOS" OF DELPHES 223 · There is no other explanation, in my view, of the difference in work between this finely stuccoed siding and the curved surface on which the name Papaloukas was written (1 ).

I will recall in concluding that there is another omphalos at Delphi-

(in addition to the Roman marble copy covered with the meshes of Yagréron) r  
in limestone, discovered "against the wall behind the treasure of the Athenians" (2);  
it is still southwest of the Treasury. We merely pointed it out without perhaps it fell  
particularly studying it (3): in a straight line from the  
terrace of the Temple. Surely there was more than one omphalos in Delphi: will this  
one allow the question to be taken up again? In any case, my purpose ends  
here: for the historians of religions to conclusions  
draw the necessary.

Rennes, December 1950.

Jean Bousquet.

(1) I apologize for sounding like telling all the "gossip" of the village of Delphi: but it  
seems instructive to me that our friend Condoleon once reported the ruins of a chapel of St.  
Athanasius, a little farther than the Logari on the road to Arachova, another "omphalos" - in  
that red conglomerate - which he stored in the Museum; it is not pierced with a hole,  
but carries only a small bowl at the top.

(2) Journal des fouilles au 13 juin 1893.

(3) E. Bourguet, Ruines de Delphes (1914), p. 248, n. 1, fig. 31; F. Courby, FD, II, TerrTemple, p.  
70, n. 4; Hesperia, 1937, p. 112, n. 1.