

A LINEAR-B-INSCRIBED 'HERRING' FROM GÖTEBORG: AN ICHTHYOMORPHIC EPIPHANY

We dedicate this new text to Professor Robin Hägg in thanks for his many great and successful efforts to advance our understanding of Aegean prehistory.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, we have been blessed with many exciting new discoveries and publications of Aegean inscriptions. These have revolutionized our outlook on Minoan and Mycenaean culture in general and specifically on the Minoan, Mycenaean and pre-existing Aegean components of religious practice and ideology in the 2nd millennium B.C.E. The publication of the Thebes sealings in 1990 in *BCH* by Piteros, Olivier and Melena and in *Aegaeum* 5 by Aravantinos has provided rich new insights into the processes by which sacrificial animals and other items were collected for the major commensal ceremonies that served as rituals of social unification and legitimation of power at Mycenaean palatial centers. Publication of the Thebes sealings and comparison of their contents with the contents of Linear B tablets from Pylos and Knossos has enabled Mycenologists and archaeologists like John Killen, John Bennet, Cynthia Shelmerdine and Jack Davis to shed light on aspects of ceremonial practice and even on ceremonial use of architectural space. The discovery of the famous 'Zeus and Dionysos' tablet Gq 5 at Khania by Erik Hallager and the Swedish excavation team and its prompt triple publication led not only to renewed interest in the mainland and Cretan pantheons of the late Bronze Age, but also to a reexamination of problems and methods concerning palaeography. Emmett Bennett's palaeographical and archival reassignment of a single tablet fragment at Pylos (Ea 102) led first to further secure evidence for the Dionysos cult in the late Greek Bronze Age, and lately to a sensational new join by José Melena which enables us to identify a sacrificial fire altar of Dionysos.

In the middle of the past decade, new Linear B tablets were found at Thebes by Vassilis Aravantinos and his team of expert Greek archaeologists. The careful work of Aravantinos, Godart and Sacconi and of collaborators like Cornelis Ruijgh and the late Michel Lejeune in moving towards a definitive interpretive edition of this material has added virtual riches to our understanding of diverse aspects of Mycenaean culture:

1. music: we now have a reference in the texts to a pair of lyre-players that can be compared to the famous lyre-player painted on the wall of the megaron at Pylos;¹

2. inter-regional relationships: who would have imagined finding someone named *Lakedaimonios* at Thebes!??!

3. language: the Thebes texts have revealed a potentially new phonogram and possible regional variants of values for standard phonograms;

4. religion: the Thebes texts raise the possibility of theriomorphic deities and may support the identification of a 'mother earth goddess' otherwise possibly attested within the Linear B tablets only on Knossos F 51 from the Room of the Chariot Tablets.

We should also mention the chance find of a sealing at Pylos that more closely links the *wanaks* with military weaponry, the discovery of a Linear-A-inscribed stone libation table on the island of Kythera, of Linear-B-inscribed sealings and stirrup jars at Midea, of Linear A at Miletus, and of a puzzling inscribed pebble at Kafkania near Olympia.

1 J.G. YOUNGER, *Music in the Aegean Bronze Age* (1998) 69, cat. no. 31.

Yet, as many of you know, there have been equally spectacular discoveries outside of the Aegean orbit. Throughout the decade we have had reports of amazing finds of Linear-B-inscribed tablets and even an inscribed *galet* or Belgian waffle at farflung conference sites associated with some of the principal scholars involved in this latest *Aegaeum* conference. I am speaking, of course, of organizers and devotees of Aegean prehistory such as Louis Godart and Anna Sacconi, Robert Laffineur, Phil Betancourt, Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, Lucien Basch, and most recently Ingo Pini and Walter Müller. These finds have generally been associated with an American Mycenologist of Lithuanian ethnic background now living in Austin, Texas,² who has traveled almost as peripatetically as the just-mentioned scholars in his quest for intellectual enlightenment *de rebus Aegaeis*. Many of you know him as a gentleman of such impeccable integrity and cautious scholarly reserve³ that the authenticity of the finds that he has made and published can hardly be questioned. His absence *in corpore* from the present gathering might seem to preclude further discoveries. But this is why the Greek philosophers from Socrates onward were careful to distinguish between τὸ δοκεῖν ‘seeming’ and τὸ εἶναι ‘being’.

In May of 1998, on my fourth of five scholarly trips to Sweden this decade, Robin Hägg and I sat at dinner in surely the only restaurant in the modern world outside of the People’s Republic of China whose name is an ideogram. The restaurant is called simply ‘?’, and I hope you have the opportunity to eat there while attending this *Aegaeum* conference. Robin was very distracted at the time. He was adjusting to the demands of fatherhood and to the service of yet another *potnia*, in this case of the *alokhos* variety. He was also planning this splendid conference. Nonetheless I asked for some explanation of the peculiar identity of the ‘?’ restaurant. Such whimsicality was inconsistent with my own growing understanding of the defining characteristics of Swedish culture. I could not imagine characters in any of Bergman’s films or Lars Gustafson’s stories—tilers, beekeepers, ministers, aristocrats, wealthy tradespeople and industrialists, split *personae*, people crying, people whispering, people mainly *not* talking, even death and the devil himself—dining at a restaurant that advertised its own self-doubt. The Swedes, as you will discover even in Göteborg, have a certainty about them. They may not be certain about the cosmic essence of life, but they are about food. It is this national sense of certainty that enabled Martin Nilsson to write what he declared to be a *Geschichte der griechische Religion* and even to issue a revised edition in 1950, well before Linear B was deciphered and well before modern scholars of religion, with the exception, we should stress, of Robin Hägg and a few others, seemed intent upon forgetting that the Bronze Age does have something to say about later historical Greek culture.

How else can we explain Nanno Marinatos’s own temerarious certitude in her book entitled *Minoan Religion*? In it she explains virtually all aspects of Minoan cult and ritual—without even using any of the many translations proposed for key Minoan written and imprinted religious documents like the Phaistos disk and inscribed libation tables. In my opinion, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*: Nanno’s book was published in 1993 right after her eleven-year marriage (1981-1992) and scholarly association with a Swede named Robin Hägg.

Do you doubt my reasoning? Well then, I ask you to consider how many of us Robin Hägg has corrupted—and more than once!—into thinking *we* could say something about the most questionable topics, not only in Greek religion and Greek prehistory, but even in Greek history. Professor Hägg would seem to know no sense of shame. We Americans have a saying: “Fool me once, shame on you! Fool me twice, shame on me!” Well, I say, shame on all of us for being seduced by Robin Hägg into thinking time and again that we could meet, discuss and then write about questionable topics, and even enjoy ourselves in the process!

2 Namely Thomas G. Palaima. These texts have been expertly edited, transliterated, translated and discussed by T.G. PALAIMA in R. LAFFINEUR and L. BASCH (eds), *Thalassa, Aegaeum* 7 (1991) 4; POLITEIA 699-670; E. DE MIRO, L. GODART, A. SACCONI (eds), *Atti e memorie del secondo congresso internazionale di micenologia* (1996) 1645-1648; R. LAFFINEUR and P.P. BETANCOURT (eds), *TEXNH, Aegaeum* 16 (1997) 539-543; POLEMOS 507-511; W. MÜLLER (ed.), *Minoisch-mykenische Glyptik. Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion, CMS Beiheft* 6 (2000) 361-8.

3 He has even been known on occasion not to intervene following a paper during *Aegaeum* conference sessions. *hoc viderunt Hallager vir et uxor*.

How many of us he has lured into speaking and writing about the function of Minoan palaces and later the function of the Minoan villas, the Greek renaissance of the 8th century B.C.E., and—as a foreshadowing of this *potnia* conference—early Greek cult practice.⁴ Recall that these conferences have even led us to question fundamental notions like what we mean by 'palace' and 'villa' and 'cultural continuity'! He outstrips Socrates in being indiscriminate in whose minds he confuses and whose souls he corrupts. Young and old, male and female, Swede and non-Swede are all potential victims of Robin Hägg's fiendish and ever-questioning mind.

One is tempted to liken the song of this particular Robin to the alluring and maddeningly destructive song from the honeyed lips of the beautiful sirens in book 12 of Homer's *Odyssey*. Remember what they promise those who attend *their* conferences and listen to their songs:

He journeys on delighted
and knows more than before.

After attending the important conferences organized by our modern siren Robin Hägg and after reading the many important books and articles that he has written and edited, we go away delighted and knowing—or maybe, and just as well, *not* knowing—much, much more than before.

The sirens, too, specialized in Bronze Age topics. Just as Robin Hägg, in 1974 in his dissertation⁵ on the Sub-Mycenaean, Protogeometric and Geometric burials of the Argolid, claimed to have done a *systematische Untersuchung* leading to a *Musterung* of the available data, the sirens declare that they have seriously researched a central problem in Aegean prehistory and that they

...know everything that the Greeks and Trojans
Suffered in wide Troy by the will of the gods.

Even Manfred Korfmann has not been able to find out everything about Troy, but then again Prof. Korfmann may not have had the empirical knowledge that Robin Hägg's association with beautiful feminine creatures like the sirens—or three wives—brings to a prehistorian. On this last point I myself can attest that ἡ ἐμπειρία διδάσκει καὶ ἡ ἐμπειρία ἡ τριῶν γυναικῶν μάλιστα διδάσκει.⁶

But let us return to my dinner with Robin Hägg. As has so often happened to me in life, I had to satisfy my own craving for knowledge on the subject of the restaurant named '?'. After dinner Robin went home to the comforts of wife and child, while I set out to stroll, as Bergman would say, with the best intentions. As I passed the Poseidon statue that dominates part of the Göteborg cityscape, I glanced downward and then picked up what I thought at the time were the fossilized remnants of a pickled herring, certainly *detritus* from some Viking excursion. It struck me at that moment as the *perfect* questionable souvenir to remind me of my trip to Göteborg and my dinner at '?'. But I was also aware of the strict prohibitions against transporting antiquities or food items from any foreign country into the United States. So I immediately took an antiquities collector's precautions. I wrapped this object inside a bundle of student papers that I had brought with me to Göteborg from the course on Mycenaean religious administration that I was then teaching at the University of Uppsala. I also convinced myself through the kind of self-hypnosis that collectors use that the object was an item of no value, was known to earlier collectors already in the 18th century, and would certainly be cared for better in my private study collection or in an American museum than it would be hanging around Poseidon and Robin Hägg in Göteborg.

4 R. HÄGG (ed.), *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation* (1983); *Function Palaces*; R. HÄGG, N. MARINATOS and G.C. NORDQUIST (eds), *Early Greek Cult Practice* (1988); R. HÄGG (ed.), *The Function of the Minoan Villa* (1997).

5 R. HÄGG, *Die Gräber der Argolis in submykenischer, protogeometrischer und geometrischer Zeit. 1. Lage und Form der Gräber, Boreas. Uppsala Studies in Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Civilizations 7:1* (1974) inserted *Zusammenfassung*.

6 "Experientia docet and the experience of three wives really *docets!*"

Given that the object was bundled with student papers, I of course never looked at it again throughout the rest of my stay in Sweden. Upon my return to the United States, however, the trained dogs in the Dallas airport customs hall sniffed out the 'herring' and it has been confiscated and shipped to the customs and immigration headquarters in San Antonio, where, like a little Cuban boy, it has now long awaited a decision as to whether it should return home to Sweden or take up residence permanently in the Buckhorn Museum of hunting, shooting and fishing in San Antonio.

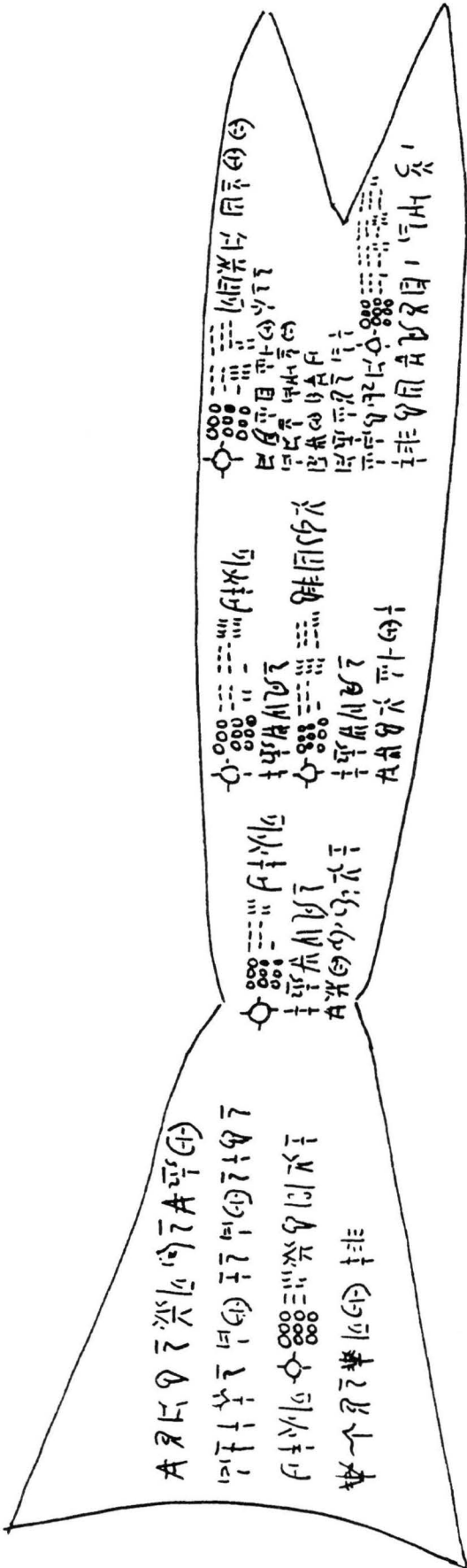
Fortunately for our scholarly interests, as the 'herring' was being unwrapped in the Dallas Airport, it fell to the airport floor making the sound not of a fossilized fish, but of a well-baked Linear B tablet. Imagine my excitement when I examined it and found out that the first *zoomorphic* tablet in the Aegean scripts was clenched firmly in the teeth of a canine customs agent. Here follows my learned commentary on the rough drawing I was able to execute under very trying conditions.

Commentary on GÖ IKH 1935-2000

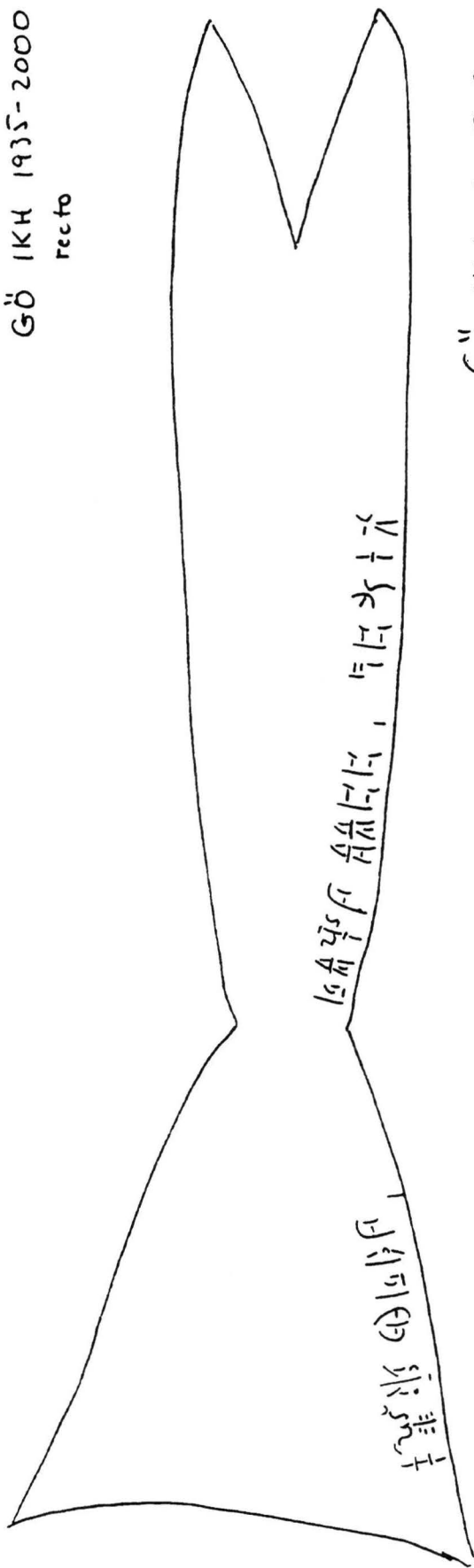
This unusual tablet was found near the grand Poseidon statue in Göteborg and later transported clandestinely into the United States, where it was confiscated by customs police in late May 1998. Unfortunately, as is so often the case in elaborate bureaucracies—witness the number of items such as sheep that are recorded as 'owed' or 'missing' in Linear B tablets—the tablet has been misplaced by the customs and immigration authorities in San Antonio, Texas while awaiting a judicial and congressional ruling concerning its citizen status. We have two causes for hope that it may eventually be found. First San Antonio or *Hagios Antonios* is known to be the patron saint of 'lost items'. Second, the world-famous Buckhorn Museum in San Antonio specializes in *curiosa* relating to hunting and fishing—cf. its Luristan dagger and its 'dressed fleas'. If the tablet has not been lost, but purloined for later sale, it may well turn up in the Buckhorn's collection.

The tablet is *zoomorphic* or, to be more precise, *ichthyomorphic*. It has been molded into the shape of a fish. From the perspective of the text upon it, the tail fin is at the left and the gaping mouth of the fish is at the right. The text is arranged in blocks according to four vertical columns. The shape of the tablet and the text at first cast doubt on their authenticity. But close study suggests that they are authentic. The text has revealed many clear references to sites in Sweden (Uppsala: lines C.2, B.3, A.5; Göteborg [ko-te-wa-tu = Gothenburg] in line C.4; Sweden itself in line D.2) and Greece (Athens and Asine in line D.3). Both countries have strong ties to the sea in prehistory, history, legend and lore. We may note the reverence for *psaria* shown by the extravagant prices charged for fish in most Greek seaside tavernas and the infinite ways that the Swedes have of cooking herring. Lastly the justly famous *ra-pi-ne-u* once again appears on a Linear B tablet—here in an intriguing phrase on the verso—and he has strong associations with *Thalassa* at yet another locale: Calvi, Corsica.

Archaeologically we have fish and boats represented on prehistoric Cycladic 'frying pans', no doubt in reference to a kind of sympathetic ritual whereby the catch of a boating expedition was hoped eventually to make it into breeding and oil for a commensal ceremony. Note that the Linear B texts contain ample references to grain and olive oil, spices and wine that would be perfect for making a fish dinner. Skeptics may assert that we have not found the word for fish yet in the Linear B tablets. To that I reply that we did not have references to snakes or geese either until Aravantinos, Godart and Sacconi did something to correct that failing. Remember, too, that our commensal banqueting texts refer to ceremonies at the central palaces, where the 'Homeric' nobility, like modern Texas ranchers and businessmen, liked two kinds of food: rare beef steak and well-done beef steak. We must excavate a Mycenaean seaside resort if we want to find tablets referring to fish.



GÖ IKH 1935-2000
recto



GÖ IKH 1935-2000
verso

GÖ IKH 1935-2000

<i>recto:</i>	A	B	C	D
.1	e-ri-ta-ko-jo ke-ra-so-jo e-ne-ka			1976-1994 ra-wa-ke-ta wa-na-ka-qe
.2			1962-78 u-pa-sa-ra su-wi-di-ja	di-da-ka-re-jo-jo
.3	a-to-ro-qo-jo a-ka-to-jo a-ka-jo-ro-ko-jo	1975 u-pa-sa-ra	pa-ne-pi-ti-mi-jo	a-ta-na a-si-na-qe
.4		pa-ne-pi-ti-mi-jo-te	1979-83 ko-te-wa-tu-wo	o-pi-ka-pe-e-u
.5	u-pa-sa-ra 1935 ke-ko-nu-wo-to	e-ke-qe-qa-ku-wo-to	pa-ne-pi-ti-mi-jo	su-ne-di-ri-jo po-ro
.6			e-pi-ko-wo di-da-ka-ro	di-a-ko-me-ta 1981-84-86-92
.7	pu ₂ -*22-ri-jo-pu ₂ -ra-ka pa-te			pa-te ko-wa e-mi-ri-ja 1 po-si MUL 3

verso: pa-ra₃-ma ka-ra-pe-u , ra-pi-ne-u e-pi-ta-ta, po-ta-mo-ro-wo

Translation:

front side:

.1	for the sake of Robin Bird-Cherry			1976-1994 <i>lawagetas</i> and <i>wanaks</i>
.2			1962-78 of Uppsala	of the Swedish School
.3	a good man and archaeologist	in 1975 of Uppsala	the University	at Athens and of Asine
.4		from the University	1979-83 of Gothenburg	overseer of digging
.5	at Uppsala in 1935 born	having graduated	the University	of many <i>sunedria</i>
.6			assistant professor	organizer in 1981, 1984, 1986, 1992
.7	his father a librarian			father of daughter Emilia 1 husband WOMEN 3

back side: Palaima scribe Laffineur *epistates* (i.e., commissioner), for *Potamorowos* (= 'River-Stream' = Åström)

Some may be surprised by or suspicious of the ichthyomorphic shape of the Göteborg tablet. But as comparanda we may cite the Near Eastern *hepatoskopie* tablets in the shape of livers and the famous Liège *gallet* in the shape of a Belgian waffle. The actual text here seems to be honorific in nature. It celebrates the remarkable achievements of an individual named *Erithakos Kerasos* (in the genitive in line A.1). In ancient Greek, ἐρίθακος means the bird we call the 'robin', while the κερασός is the tree known as the 'bird-cherry'. Since the text deals with Swedish as well as Greek toponyms, we should not necessarily conclude that the Greek form of the name here means that the individual is of Greek ethnicity. If we assume that the name is a translation into Greek of an original Swedish name, we might render it in the original language as Robin Hägg. Likewise on the verso the last name translates from the Greek as 'River-stream' which would yield 'Åström' in Swedish.

Among terms previously unattested in Linear B, we note the following as of particular interest:

*pu₂*22-ri-jo-pu₂-ra-ka* = *bibliophulaks* = 'librarian' with special treatment of the syllables bu, phu, and *22 = mbi.

ke-ko-nu-wo-to = perfect active participle genitive singular masculine. Later Greek γεγονότος.

e-ke-qe-qa-ku-wo-to = perfect active participle genitive singular masculine. Later Greek ἐκβεβηκότος.

The text contains two terms of archaeological interest: *a-ka-jo-ro-ko* (*arkhaiologos*) in A.3 and *o-pi-ka-pe-e-u* (*opiskapheeus*) in D.4. The latter term is attested in the plural form in PY Jn 829. There has obviously been a semantic shift from an original meaning 'overseer of (agricultural) digging' to 'overseer of (scientific) digging'.

Much care was obviously taken to achieve the 'fish form' and stylistic niceties of the text. Note the balance achieved by recording the father of the honoree in A.7 and the fatherhood of the honoree in D.7. This obviously reflects the great esteem in which the honoree is held by his peers in Aegean prehistory and the generational process by which progress is made in the field of archaeology.

The text varies in A.3 from the standard phrase ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός of ancient honorific inscriptions and uses the word ἄνθρωπος instead. This may reflect general social attitudes in the period when the honoree lived or even his own desire to be remembered as a 'good person' rather than explicitly as a 'good man'.

Thomas G. PALAIMA