

Greek Graffiti from St Sophia's in Constantinople in the Archive of Robert van Nice (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.)

Abstract: In this article I present six previously unpublished Greek graffiti, which were found by Robert van Nice in St'Sofia cathedral of Constantinople in 1969. They are now to be found as pencil drawings in his archive (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.). We publish each graffito with paleographic, linguistic and other necessary comments.

Graffiti, scratched writings and drawings, include a great number of special features:

- 1) Their author can be any person, often just barely literate. This specific trait provides evidence of the informal speech, pronunciation, and dialects of the language; on the other hand, and in spite of the relatively small number of examples, it indicates the most common errors relative to the norm as well as revealing many discrepancies between pronunciation and orthography.
- 2) Graffiti are usually inscribed rather carelessly: they display a mixture of distinct paleographic traditions and writing styles.
- 3) Graffiti rarely contain dates. Their dating is only possible by indirect means, which makes the gathering and classifying of paleographic, linguistic and other dating-related data an especially important task.
- 4) Formulae are used more freely in graffiti than in more formal epigraphic material; moreover, graffiti demonstrate a larger variety of inscriptional genres.
- 5) Being geographically wide-spread, graffiti enable us to study the Greek language in the regions of dynamic linguistic and cultural exchange, in which the Greeks had contact with other peoples, and to draw conclusions about the mutual influence of languages and cultures.
- 6) The diversity of materials on which graffiti are written (frescoes, stones, ceramics etc.), on the one hand, widens the scope for paleographic analysis, but, on the other hand, it sometimes makes the results of the comparison rather ambiguous.

We will now focus on several Greek graffiti from St Sophia's in Constantinople. In his bibliographic article¹ describing Byzantine inscriptions and their publications, Cyril Mango states that Greek graffiti from St Sophia in Constantinople were for the most part published by Antoniadès (75 Greek inscriptions, not including 125 monograms, represented in separate plates).² In addition, more than 70 graffiti (not published by Antoniadès), located in the gallery of the second floor of the cathedral, were partly published by the present author in several articles.³ Inscriptions from this cathedral present us with an additional challenge because they are mostly written on marble walls, on some of which coloured stains impede the reading and photographing of the graffiti. The graffiti themselves are often poorly preserved because they were not thoroughly carved and have therefore faded over time; and in many cases inscriptions in different languages and from different times overlap in the manner of epigraphic palimpsests. Greek inscriptions are interspersed with Latin, Old Russian, Arabic, Ottoman, Scandinavian (runic) graffiti, which shows that the cathedral was frequently visited, often by foreigners. There are almost no dated graffiti, except one Greco-Latin inscription from 1413.⁴ But the palaeographic analysis of some inscriptions shows that medieval graffiti in the cathedral

¹ C. A. MANGO, The Byzantine Inscriptions of Constantinople: A Bibliographical Survey. *AJA* 55 (1951) 52–66: 59.

² E. M. ANTONIADES, Ἐκφρασις τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας, I–III. Leipzig 1907–1909, I 97–100.

³ A. A. EVDOKIMOVA, Grečeskie graffiti Sofii Konstantinopolskoj (istorija izučeniija), in: Vspomogatelnye istoričeskie discipliny: klassičeskoe nassledie i novye napravlenija. Moscow 2010, 201–205; EADEM, Grečeskie graffiti Sofii Konstantinopolskoj (predvaritelnye zamečaniija), in: Indo-evropejskoje jazykoznanie i klassičeskaja philologija, XI. Materialy konferencii pamjati professora I. M. Tronsky, 21–23 iyun 2011. St Petersburg 2011, 159–164.

⁴ EVDOKIMOVA, Grečeskie graffiti Sofii Konstantinopolskoj (istorija izučeniija) (*op. cit.*) 205 (graffito 13).

are found side by side with graffiti written in later periods, some as late as the 20th century. An analysis of the linguistic features of the graffiti from St Sophia's in Constantinople published by Antoniadēs can be found in my thesis⁵. The results of this analysis do not permit the dating frame to be narrowed, although it demonstrates the general aspirations of the graffiti authors to abide by the linguistic norm, including the use of the dative case. The inscriptions are far from uniform—among the traditional prayers Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῷ δούλῳ σου (Lord, help Your slave) we find monograms, declarations that some particular place in the cathedral belongs to a certain person, citations from biblical or liturgical texts, etc.

During a thorough inspection of the walls and columns on the first floor of the cathedral in January 2008,¹⁴ Greek graffiti complementing Antoniadēs' corpus were found by the present author in the right gallery, and one more opposite the sanctuary. Some of them were published preliminarily in 2010⁶.

In September 2010, the second inspection enabled us to find 50 new inscriptions. A description and interpretation of ten of them were published for the first time in 2011.⁷ In July 2011, at Dumbarton Oaks, we analyzed some of the graffiti photographs made by Betty G. van Nice in St Sophia's in 1969 and all the papers devoted to the St Sophia graffiti in the Robert van Nice archive. Subsequently, in November 2011, the results of the above-mentioned analysis were verified *in situ*. Some of the inscriptions from Robert van Nice's papers were found, some others could not be identified. In this article, we present six previously unpublished graffiti.

1. Box 11, graffiti (9th folder), A4 sheet of paper, graphite pencil, one graffito with schematic picture of columns after it. In the right corner of the paper there is a small plan of the graffito location in the cathedral in the north-west gallery. Palaeography: lunar ε, one of the ν, μ and τ are minuscule, other letters majuscule. Orthography: ι instead of ει in βοηθι, ο instead of ω in αμαρτολον (Fig. 1).

† Κε ΒοΗθι ΤοΝ
Δθλον σθ Λεον
αμαρτολον

Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τὸν δ[οῦ]λὸν σου Λέον(τα) ἁμαρτωλὸν

Lord, help Your servant Leon, sinner

2. Box 11, graffiti (10th folder), A4 sheet of paper, graphite pencil (1-4 B). In the cathedral the inscription is located in the south-east gallery; it has not been found *in situ* so far. Paleography: lunar ε and σ, other letters majuscule. Orthography: ι instead of ει in βοηθι, η instead of ι in δηκοναν, υ instead of οι in Δεσπυνης (Fig. 2).

Κε ΒοΗθι ΤοΝ ΔΟΥΛΟΝCOY
ΛΛΜΗΑΝΟ^N ΥΠΟΔΙΑΚΟΝΑΝ
ΛΟΥΔΟΝ COY ΤΕΚΟ ΤΙC ΔΕCΠΥΝ
IC

Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τὸν δοῦλὸν σου
Δαμηιανὸν ὑποδιάκοναν⁸
λοῦδὸν σου τέκο τῆς Δεσποίνης

⁵ A. A. EVDOKIMOVA, Jazykovje osobennosti grečeskih graffiti Sofii Kievskoj. Autoreferat dissertacii. St Petersburg 2008.

⁶ EVDOKIMOVA, Grečeskie graffiti Sofii Konstantinopolskoj (istoriya izučeniya) (*op. cit.*) 201–205.

⁷ EVDOKIMOVA, Grečeskie graffiti Sofii Konstantinopolskoj (predvaritelnye zamečaniya) (*op. cit.*) 159–164.

⁸ Cf. διάκονας E. KRIARAS, Λεξικὸ τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς ἐλληνικῆς δημῶδους γραμματείας 1100–1669. Thessalonica 1969–, s.v. διάκων.

*Lord, help Your servant
The subdeacon Damianos,
Your toy, child of the Lady (Virgin Mary)*

3. Box 11, graffiti (10th folder), A4 sheet of paper, graphite pencil (1-4 C). In the cathedral this graffito is situated in the south-east gallery. Palaeography: lunar σ; δ, λ, one ν and σ minuscule, other letters majuscule. Orthography: υ instead of η and η instead of ει in βουθη; the particular spelling of this word characterizes some Greek graffiti from Cappadocia (fig. 3).⁹

Κε ΒοϒΘΗ ΤοΝ ΔΟΥΛΟΝ ΣΟΥ ΚΟC
8ΠΟΔΙαΠΟΝΟ ΤΗΣ ΜΓΑΛΗσ ΕΚΛΗ.ΗΑC

Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τὸν δοῦλόν σου Κοσ[μᾶ]
ὑποδιάκονο(ν) τῆς Μ<ε>γάλης ἐκ<κ>λη[σ]ήας

Lord, help Your servant Kosoupodion ...

4. Box 11, graffiti (11th folder), A4 sheet of paper, graphite pencil (BR-4). The graffito is situated in the south-west bay of the cathedral, on the 49th column. Palaeography: lunar ε, other letters majuscule. Orthography: η instead of ι in ἀνατολικόν, Ηακοβον, Νικολάου, Τρικοκίου, διά. ο instead of ω in Ηακοβον (Fig. 4).

‡ ΚΕ ΒΟΗΘ τον δ8λον Cou ΤΟΝ Μδ ΗαΚΟΒΟΝ ΠρβυΤερο
ΜΝΗC Τ8 ΑΓΙοΥ¹⁰ ΝΗΚολαου Του ΤΡΗΚΟΚΗου ΕΚ ΤΟ
ΑΝΑτοΛΗκοΝ Ευχθε αυΤΟΝ Δηα¹¹ ΤΟΝ ΚΝ

Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τὸν δοῦλόν σου τὸν μοναχὸν Ἰάκωβον πρ<εσ>βύτερο(ν)
μονῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου τοῦ Τρικοκίου ἐκ τὸ
ἀνατοληκὸν εὔχ<εσ>θε αὐτὸν διὰ τὸν Κ(ύριο)ν

Lord, help Your servant Jakob, presbyter of the monastery of Saint Nikolaos Trikokios¹² from the (theme of the) Anatolikai. Pray for him before the Lord.

5. Box 11, graffiti (11th folder), A4 sheet of paper, graphite pencil. It is situated in the gallery, on the 60th column, facing south (BW Photo 15 film, 9–11). Palaeography: lunar ε; α, λ, υ and ω minuscule, other letters majuscule (Fig. 5).

‡ Λ_χ^εΦΗΛαι ΔουΛ Χ8

Λεχφίλα[ς] δοῦλο[ς] Χ(ριστ)οῦ

Lechphilas (?) servant of Christ.

⁹ EVDOKIMOVA, Jazykovye osobennosti grecheskih graffiti Sofii Kievskoj (*op. cit.*) 12. For more details, see A. A. EVDOKIMOVA, Jazykovye osobennosti grečeskikh graffiti Sofii Kievskoj. Dissertaciya. Moscow – St Petersburg 2008, 102–103, 110–111.

¹⁰ *In situ.*

¹¹ *In situ.*

¹² In the Peloponnesos, province Messenia, Pylos Nestoros.

† ΝΙΚΗΤ υπΔΚ Κ(αι) ιΗΤ Ρ̅ Κ(αι) ΑΝΤΩΝ Ι̅ Ι̅ Μ̅ Δουλ ΧΥ̅

Νικήτ(ας) ὑπ(ο)δ(ιά)κ(ονος) κ(αι) ἱητρὸ(ς) κ(αι) Ἀντώνιο(ς) μο(να)χ(ὸς) δοῦλ(οι) Χ(ριστο)ῦ

Niketas subdeacon and doctor, and Antonios, monk, servants of Christ

6. Box 11, graffiti (11th folder), A4 sheet of paper, graphite pencil. The inscription is located in the gallery (no photo). Palaeography: lunar ε and σ; minuscule ε in the word λει̅ σ̅ (fig. 6).

ΚΕ ΙΥ ΧΕ λει̅ σ̅ με .μωρτο λ̅

Κ(ύρι)ε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με ἁμαρτωλόν

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, the sinner

The dating of the graffiti presented is problematic because their texts do not contain dates. Besides, the names mentioned in them are quite usual, like Leon (in graffiti 1), Niketas (in graffiti 5), Antonios (*ibid.*), so there is no substantial reason to attribute them to any historical person. That is why we can only date these graffiti very approximately: judging by their palaeographic traits, they appear to have been created in the 10th–13th centuries.

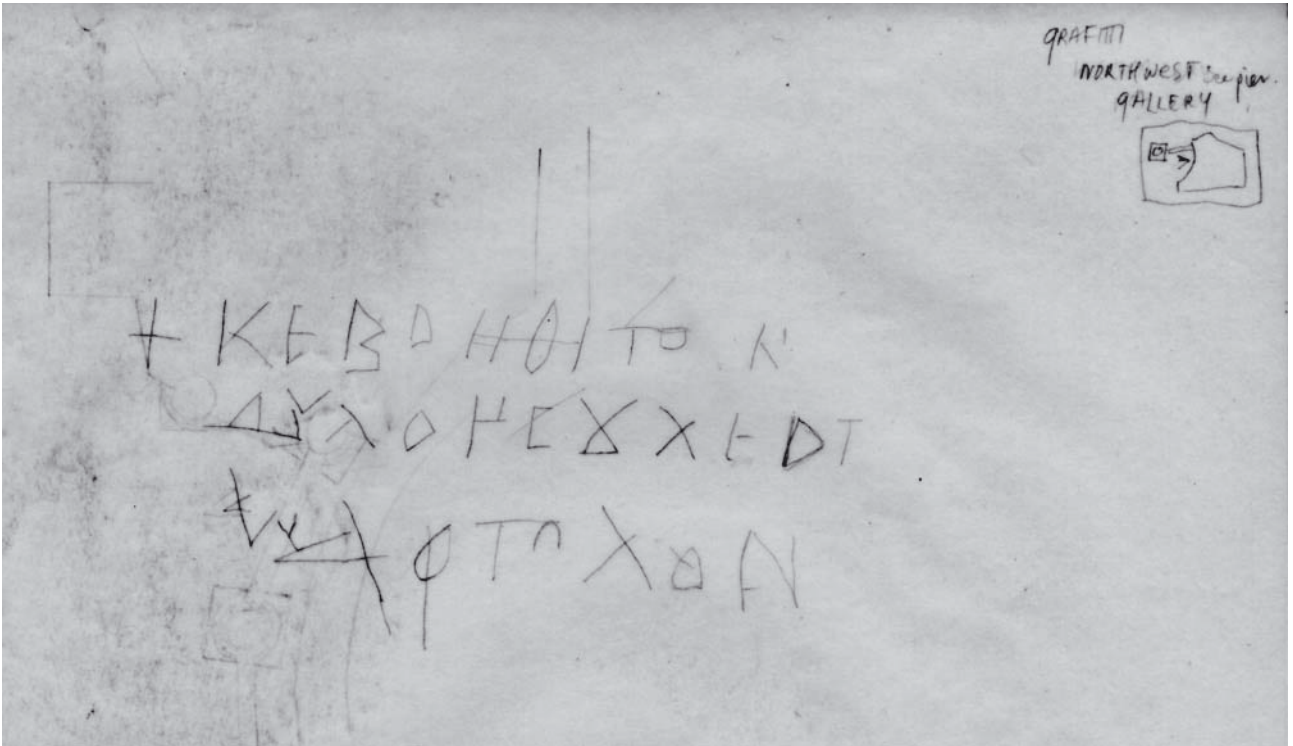


Fig. 1: Archive of Robert van Nice

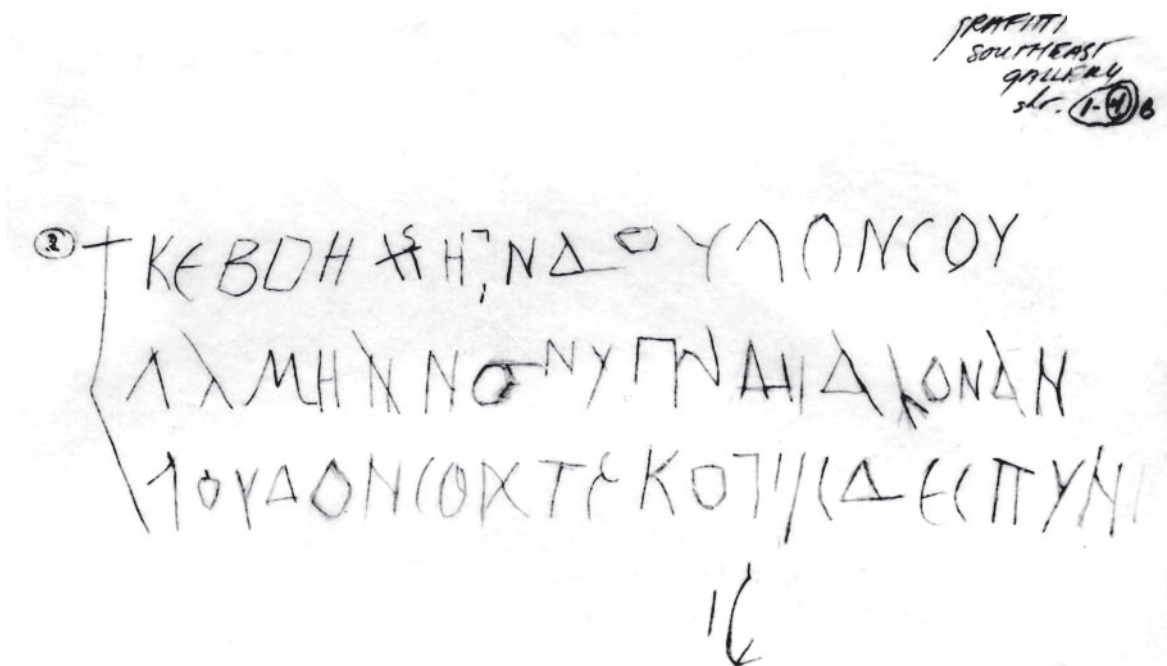


Fig. 2: Archive of Robert van Nice

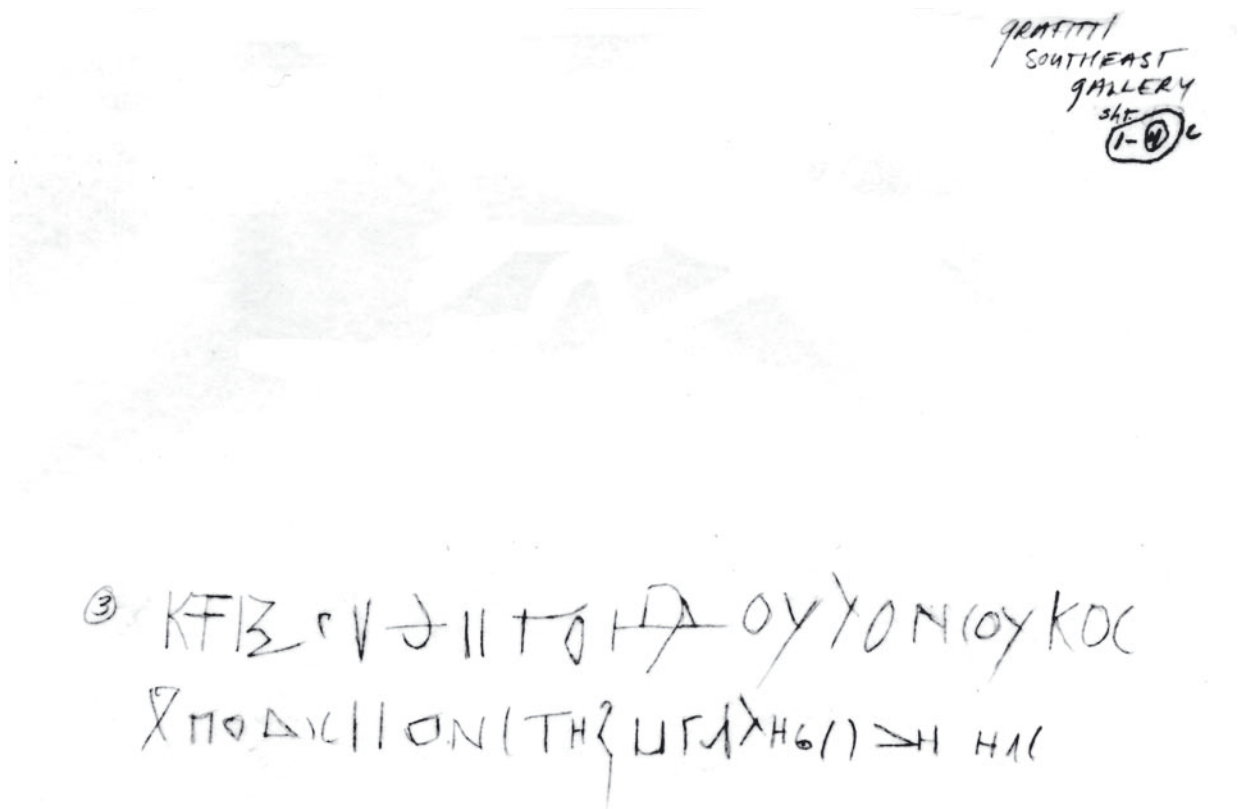


Fig. 3: Archive of Robert van Nice

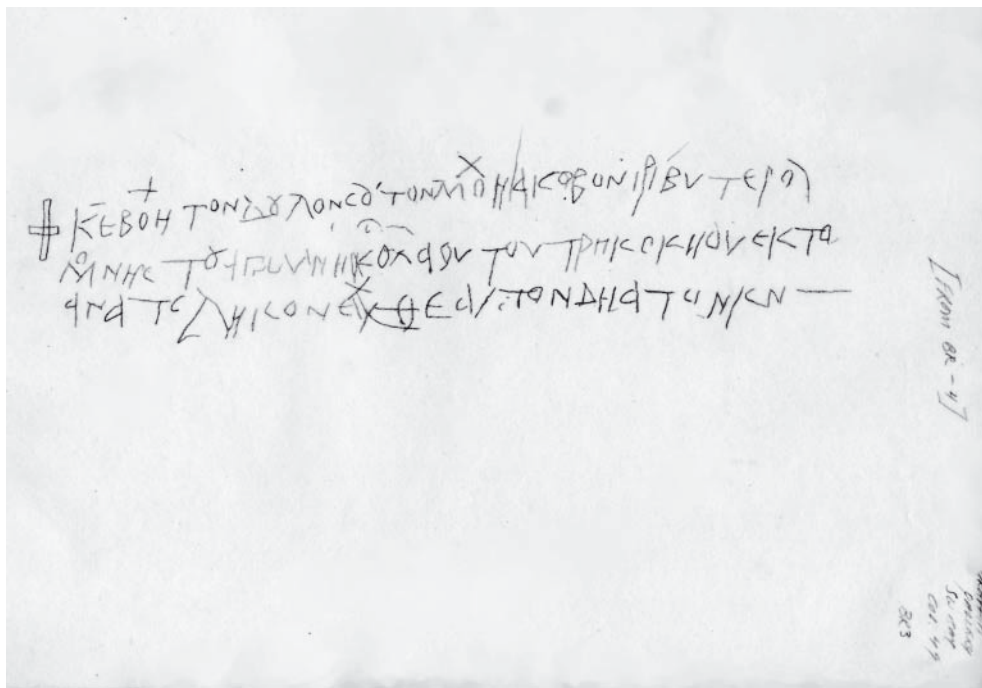


Fig. 4: Archive of Robert van Nice

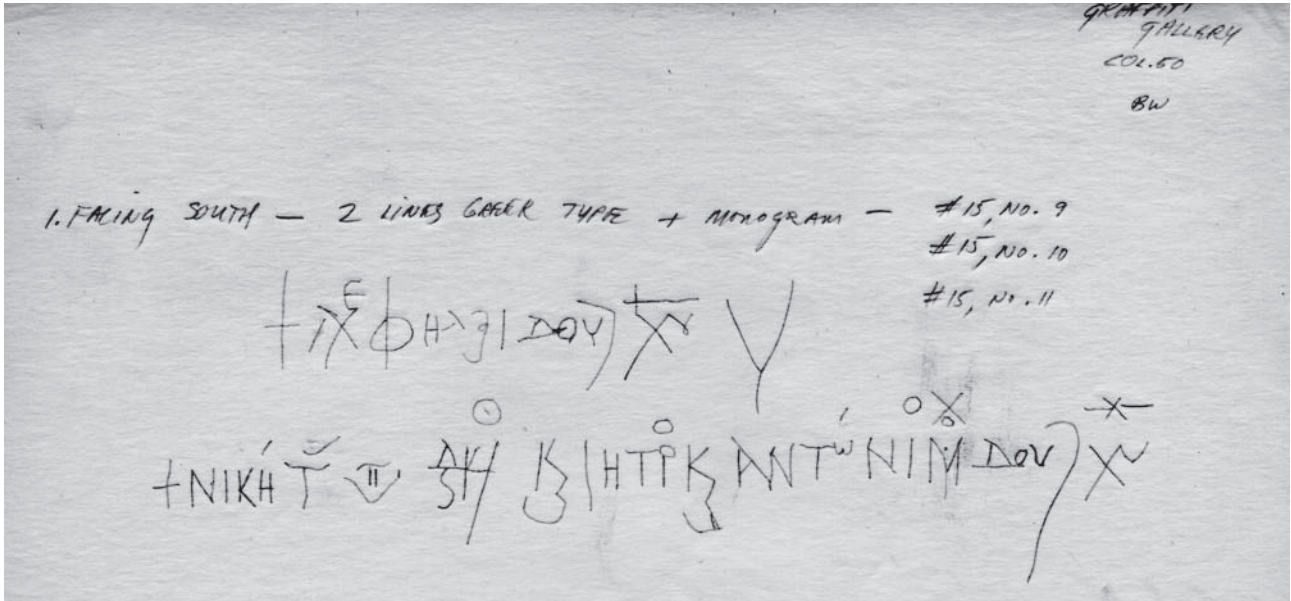


Fig. 5: Archive of Robert van Nice

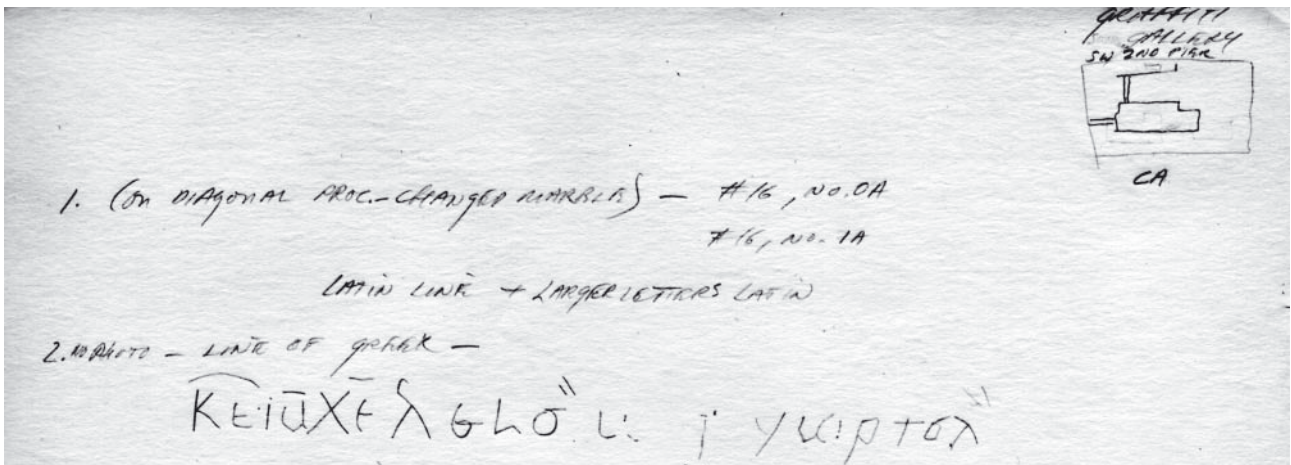


Fig. 6: Archive of Robert van Nice

