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A Yearly Journal

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THE JOURNAL OF EPIGRAPHIC STUDIES

2 · 2019



PISA · ROMA

FABRIZIO SERRA · EDITORE

MMXIX

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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Pisa n. 9 del 2 novembre 2018. Direttore responsabile: Fabrizio Serra.

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Stampato in Italia · Printed in Italy

ISSN 2611-979X E-ISSN 2612-3517

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TWO GREEK EPITAPHS FROM THE MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURAL CENTER IN TOKYO, JAPAN

LINCOLN H. BLUMELL · KERRY HULL

ABSTRACT · This article presents editions of two unpublished Greek epitaphs in the Middle Eastern Cultural Center in Tokyo, Japan, that date to the Roman imperial period. Though the museum's catalogue reports that both pieces come from Palmyra, it appears more likely that these pieces come from elsewhere in Syria.

KEYWORDS: Greek, Epitaph, Syria, Antioch, Zeugma.

The Middle Eastern Culture Center in Tokyo, Japan, boasts nearly 3,000 archaeological artifacts from the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East. Among the diverse artifacts at the museum are two Greek epitaphs that purportedly come from Palmyra, Syria. Despite this attribution in the catalogue, there is nothing about the texts that necessarily suggests they came from Palmyra as there are no stylistically obvious Palmyrene parallels in either inscription. These two pieces were first lent to the Ikebukuro Ancient Oriental Museum in Tokyo in 1978 by an antiquities dealer for an exhibition and were subsequently purchased by the Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Tokyo in 1980. Shortly after their purchase they were given on long-term loan to the Middle Eastern Culture Center. Since these pieces have not been published, we present here editions of both inscriptions.

1. Marble Funerary Stele for Two Women (Fig. 1)

The first piece bears the Idemitsu Museum of Arts inv. no. 08619 and measures $43 \times 19 \times 12$ cm (H×W×D).

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- ¹ The Center was established in 1979 under the auspices of Mr. Idemitsu Sazo, who was the founder of Idemitsu Kosan Co., Ltd., a major petroleum refining and manufacturing company, and through the initiative of Prince Mikasa Takahito.
- ² The Palmyrene provenance listed in the catalogue is based solely on the word of the antiquities dealer who sold the pieces to the museum.

 ³ Cf. Yon 2012.
- ⁴ We have obtained this information via email from Chieko Ando. Unfortunately, the catalogue records, while containing the date of purchase, do not mention the name of the antiquities dealer.
- ⁵ We would like to thank the Idemitsu Museum of Arts and Chieko Ando for permission to edit these pieces and to publish images of them. We would also like to thank Kenichi Suetsugu, General Affairs Deputy Manager at the Middle Eastern Culture Center, for hosting us during our visit and graciously accommodating our various requests. Finally, we would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their valuable critique and feedback.



Fig. 1. Marble Funerary Stele for Two Women, Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo, inv. no. 08619, photo by Kenichi Suetsugu.

Χάρει Εἰσιδώρου Μάρθας Ἀρτεμιδώρου ἄλυποι γαίρετε.

Charis daughter of Isidorus (and) Marthas daughter of Artemidorus, who did not cause any pain, farewell!

Notes

- 1 Χάρει is the vocative case of the common Greek name Χάρις (Χάρει for Χάρι, cf. *I. Kition* 2219) that has a wide geographic provenance. The name Εἰσίδωρος, a variant spelling of Ἰσίδωρος, which is a Greek theophoric name meaning "gift of Isis", is well attested. On the common ι > ει interchange see Gignac 1976, 190-191. On Isiac onomastics in Antioch see Feissel 1985, 97-98, with additional examples in *Bull. ép.* 2007, 495; 2013, 443.
- 2 The spelling of Martha as Μάρθας, instead of Μάρθα, is attested on other epitaphs: SEG 25.1545 (Commagene); IGLS 1 111 (Zeugma). On this spelling see also ILAN 2002, 424 n. 2. There is nothing problematic interpreting Μάρθας as a vocative. The name is from the Aramaic what means "mistress": see Jastrow 1903, 834. On the epigraphic rendering of this name see also discussion in Rey-Coquais 1982, 396. Ἄρτεμίδωρος is a Greek theophoric male name meaning "gift of Artemis".
- 3 The eulogizing formula ἄλυπε χαῖρε is well attested in funerary inscriptions, and while it appears in a wide geographic area, it was especially prominent in inscriptions from northern Syria and the Roman East. See Yon 2003, 151-159.

The catalogue record at the Idemitsu Museum of Arts and the placard at the Middle Eastern Culture Center where this object is currently displayed identify its origin as Palmyra; however, this is unlikely. Regional Syrian typologies suggest its origin is probably closer to Antioch, where more stylistic parallels are present. Epigraphically the formula ἄλυπε χαῖρε, which is attested in the inscription, is most common between Seleucia-on-the-Euphrates/Zeugma region and Hierapolis-Membidj. Indeed, most examples of the ἄλυπε χαῖρε formula are found in northern Syria and the Phoenician coast, appearing in no less than 45% of epitaphs in the areas of Antioch, Laodicea, and Emesa. 4

Surmounting the three-line Greek inscription is a rather elaborate depiction carved in low relief of the two deceased women (who are named in the inscription) seated and facing each other. This pediment stele is in the shape of a naiskos with a triangular gable. The akroteria above the pediment are almost completely destroyed. The sides of the stele face are pilasters surmounted by capitals that support a simple epistyle. Under the pediment is a narrow, concave frieze with a bucranium⁵ at the center flanked by garlands, a commonly paired motif in the Greek and Roman world,⁶ and two other bucrania above the capitals. The right side of the stele has one upper mortise joint, and left side has three mortise joints into which tenons fit to hold it in position.

¹ It is common for antiquities dealers (see n. 2, p. 77) to claim a piece is from Palmyra to increase its value. See Yon 2003, 155: «la popularité de Palmyre a contribué à ce que les stèles de cette région du nord de la Syrie et du sud de la Turquie soient souvent appellées palmyréniennes, sans doute pour leur donner plus de valeur dans le commerce des antiquités».

² See ÎGLS III/1, pp. 492-525; see also Bull. ép. 2005, 497, 520; 2006, 445; 2010, 586; 2015, 695; 2016,

³ Yon 2003, 151. ⁴ Yon 2003, 153.

⁵ Bucrania are common decorative motifs under the pediment in grave stelae. See Kaltsas, Hardy 2002, 199; Romano 2011, 303.

⁶ De Jong 2017, 179.

One particular iconographic element on the sculpture is a woven wool-basket that sits at the center of the tympanum, possibly surrounded by two now-eroded items to its left and right.¹ Other types of containers appear in a similar position, such as an unidentified vessel on a grave altar at the center of the tympanum.² A funerary stele from Erythrai, currently housed in Munich (Glyptothek no. 509), displays a single amphora under the pediment at the center of the frieze flanked by rosettes on either side.³ On a funerary stele from Odessos in the Archaeological Museum, Varna (inv. no. II 4934), two amphorae are present at each end just below the pediment.⁴ Additionally, a relief phiale also appears at the center of an incised tympanum on a grave stone from Odessos now in the National Archaeological Museum, Sofia (inv. no. 2978).⁵ The ostensible significance of a wool-basket was that it symbolically represented a woman's status as a good household-manager since wool-working was a synecdoche for a woman's household work.⁶

Within the architectural frame two women sit facing each other in low relief. The older woman on the left wears a chiton and long-sleeve himation with deep pleats. The seated younger woman on the right wears a flowing vail with a chiton and himation, her breasts exposed or only covered with sheer fabric. Both women sit on tripartite stools with large, fluffy cushions, the lower element of the stools possibly being a stone. The seated women lean slightly forward, each presented symmetrically with their innermost arm bent, the hand supporting the chin, and the other arm resting on their lap – a standard pose representing sadness and mourning.⁷ A remarkably parallel depiction of two seated women in a similar pose of mourning appears on a funerary stele in the Sinop Archaeological Museum in Turkey.⁸

The three-line Greek inscription is carefully inscribed with a uniform left margin and is bilinear. The letterforms lack ornamentation, and the text may be described as an upright script. Alphas are consistently written with a broken crossbar (A instead of A), and the crossbars of the epsilons and thetas are detached. Both sigmas and omegas are inscribed using monumental or 'classical' forms (Σ instead of the lunate C and Ω instead of ω). As it has been noted with respect to inscribed letterforms in the regions round about Syria that beginning in the second century A.D. one sees "a marked preference for rounded forms", 9 we would be inclined to date this piece prior to this general shift, given that it is written with a square upright script. While we have found a couple other Greek epitaphs from Syria that share a number of distinct paleographic features, these are regrettably undated. We would therefore tentatively date this piece to the first century A.D.

The inscription gives the names of the two deceased women followed respectively by the use of patronymics. It then concludes with the well-attested eulogizing formula

¹ In other funerary stelae, the object at the center of the tympanum is often a rosette, a mask of Medusa, or a round shield. See Stewart 1990, fig. 822; Vermeule, Brauer 1990, 117; Neer 2010, fig. 41 and 47; Petrova 2015, fig. 1.A4; Grossman 2001, 119, cat. no. 43.

² Angelicoussis 1992, 210. ³ Ridgway 2002, fig. 97.

⁴ Petrova 2015, 244-245, pl. 8.1, 3. 5 Petrova 2015, 228-229.

⁶ Masséglia 2013, 99.

⁷ Kaltsas, Hardy 2002, 199; Romano 2011, 33.

⁸ Akurgal 1955, 10-15; Temur 2015, fig. 5.

⁹ Welles 1938, 360.

 $^{^{10}}$ Most notably SEG 35.1514 and 1517. Images of these pieces can be seen in Jarry 1985, Tafel III nos. 3 and 7.

ἄλυπε χαῖρε that is especially prominent in inscriptions from Syria and the Roman Near East.

2. Funerary Stele for Homonoia (Fig. 2)

The second piece bears the inv. no. 08618 at the Idemitsu Museum of Arts and measures $53 \times 39 \times 10$ cm $(H \times W \times D)$.

Όμονοία ἄλυπαι χεραι.

Homonoia, who did not cause any pain, farewell!

Notes

- 1 For ὑμονοία see *IGLS* III/1 961.2-3, epitaph (Roman period; Antioch). Homonoia is the Greek equivalent of Latin *Concordia*.
- 1-2 The misspelling ἄλυπαι χἔραι for the phrase ἄλυπε χαῖρε is also attested in SEG 20.388 from Syria (Roman period; Sidon). On similar misspellings in funerary inscriptions from Syria see SEG 26.1507, 1522, 1614 (Roman period; Commagene); SEG 32.1398 (212 A.D.; Commagene); SEG 35.1509 (Roman period; Palmyra); SEG 37.1396 (Roman period; Commagene); IGLS I 183 (Roman period; Cyrrhestica). On this eulogizing formula see Yon 2003, 151-159.

As with the previous inscription, the catalogue at the Idemitsu Museum of Arts and the placard at the Middle Eastern Culture Center give its provenance as Palmyra; however, closer parallels exist in the Middle Euphrates valley, and especially at Zeugma. As noted above, the formula ἄλυπε χαῖρε, which also appears in this inscription, is especially common at Zeugma, where it appears principally with deceased women, people with Aramaic names, or Roman citizens. 3

This limestone stele contains the frontal depiction of a female bust in high relief recessed in a niche. On the upper rim of the stele there are two equidistant holes above the shoulders. The holes were likely the loci of funerary wreaths, suggestive of ritual practice at the gravestone. There are tooth-chisel marks on the upper right of the front of the stele. In addition, incised markings to the left of the woman's forehead almost have the shape of letters. She wears a chiton, a pleated himation, and a pearl necklace. Her left arm crosses in front of her chest, and her left hand is completely covered by the himation, a motif known as the 'hanging sleeve'.'

Below the image is a short two-line inscription. The inscription is clearly cut and generously spaced, being centered on the stone, and letters are written without any ornamentation. Notable letterforms include the mu (l. 1) that is written with distinct curved hastas that flare out at the bottom and has a rounded saddle so that it has a dis-

¹ The left edge of the stele has a rust patina, and while the cause of the discoloration is not immediately clear, it does not appear to be remnants of paint.

² Wagner 1976, 233-234, No. 108 (image at Tafel 45) where a funerary stele for a deceased woman is remarkably similar in appearance to the present piece; RIFAT, YON 2012, 151-200. For other iconographic parallels at Zeugma see Yaman 2013, 31-48, Resim 2, Resim 4, and Resim 10 No. 6.

³ YON 2003, 154-155.

⁴ GROSSMAN 2001, 95. See also YAMAN 2013, 34, Resim 4 and Resim 10 No. 6 where examples from Zeugma are given that have the same holes and similar iconography.

⁵ Grossman 2001, 8.

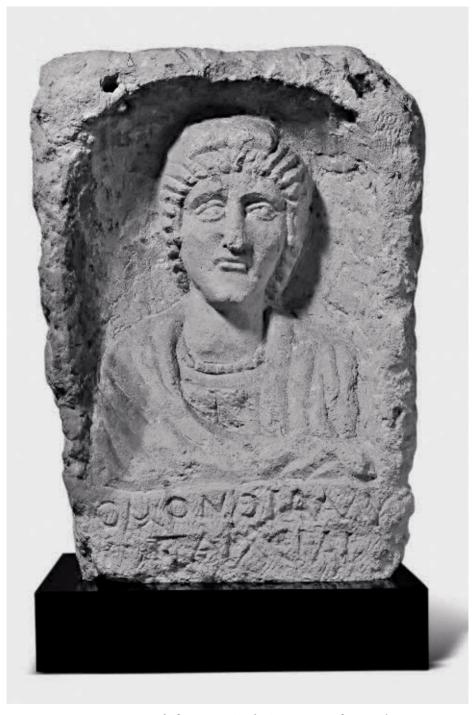


Fig. 2. Funerary Stele for Homonoia, Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo, inv. no. 08618, photo by Kenichi Suetsugu.

tinct cursive form; the upsilon (l. 1) is similarly written with curved hastas that flare out at the top; and the epsilon (l. 2) has a distinct lunate shape. Given that these graphic trends find their best parallels in inscriptions from the second or third centuries A.D., we would date the inscription accordingly. The two-line inscription contains the name of the deceased and the well-attested funerary formula $\Delta\lambda\nu$ \D

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¹ GORISSEN 1978, 149-162 where it is noted that lunate letterforms are generally indicative of the later Roman period (second through fourth centuries A.D.).

 $^{^2}$ On the interchanges $\alpha\iota>\epsilon$ and $\epsilon>\alpha\iota$ see Gignac 1976, 192-194.

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COMPOSTO IN CARATTERE SERRA MANUZIO DALLA FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE, PISA · ROMA. IMPRESSO E RILEGATO DALLA TIPOGRAFIA DI AGNANO, AGNANO PISANO (PISA).

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Settembre 2019

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