

A Greek Inscribed Altar from Amman

by

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The lower part of a Greek inscribed altar was discovered in the debris near the stairway of the west portico of the Roman forum at Amman in 1968. Carved in hard *mizzi* limestone, the fragment is 1,25 m. wide and 0,40 m. thick. The inscribed panel is 1,10 m. by 0,35 m. Except for five partly damaged letters in the second line, the inscription is well

preserved. Very scanty and faint traces of a few letters in the lowest part of the panel, may indicate the presence originally of a third line. This is, however, extremely difficult to ascertain, (Plate XXXV, 2 and Fig. 1). The preserved letters average 0,035 m. in height.

The inscription reads:¹

ΕΑΝΤΙΣΕΥΡΕΘΗΠΛΟΙΝΩΝΗ
ΛΑΧΑΝΑΕΠΙΤΩΒΩΜΩΤΙΘΩΝΔΩΣΗ

The inscription reads:¹

Ἐάν τις εὐρεθῆ πλοίωνων ἢ
λάχανα ἐπὶ τῷ βωμῷ τῶν δώσῃ

“If anyone is found washing or placing vegetables on the altar he shall give ...”

of the theater which as reported, date the construction of the three porticos of the forum to 189-190 A.D.⁴

It is evident at a first glance that there are at least three styles of lettering represented in this inscription: the Tall Narrow, the Oval, and the Revived Square Alphabet as given by Welles.² On stylistic grounds the inscription should be dated very late second or early third century A.D.³ This date is further supported by the fact that this inscribed altar fragment was discovered near the forum's west portico which is a later construction in the late second century A.D., and by the discovery of two Greek inscribed architrave blocks near the eastern vomitorium

It seems that the present inscription was the work of an unskillful cutter, or else was done in haste. There is also the possibility that the inscription was done by two different cutters. There is a lack of consistency in certain of the letters, especially in A, which in the first line has a horizontal bar, and throughout the remainder of the inscription a slanting one. The examples of S are also different. In the first line it is rectangular while in the second line it is rather curvilinear.

(1) The writer wishes to acknowledge his debt of gratitude to Mrs. Gladys S. Weinberg of the Museum of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Missouri and Prof. Robert H. Smith of the Department of Near Eastern Archaeology at the College of Wooster Ohio, for helping in the reading and translation of this inscription.

(2) For a study of the classification and the

chronology of the Greek epigraphical alphabets in the Roman East, see C.B. Welles, “The Inscriptions,” in C.H. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, 1938, pp. 355ff., Figs. 8-16.

(3) Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 358ff., Figs. ii, 12, 13.

(4) Cf. Fawzi Zayadine, “A Greek Inscription from the Forum of Amman-Philadelphia A.D. 189” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 14 (1969), pp. 34ff., Pls XXI - XXIII.

In order to make sense of this inscription, the word $\kappa\lambda\omicron\acute{\iota}\nu\omega\nu$ in line 1 on this altar fragment is being interpreted as a local spelling for $\kappa\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\nu\omega\nu$ 'washing'. Possibly, the word was pronounced "plinon" and the $\omicron\iota$ diphthong was used for υ .

Regarded as a whole, the present fragment indicates that little attention was paid in contracting the workman or workmen who were responsible for the cutting of this public inscription. It is very clear that these workmen did not understand Greek very well.⁵

(5) On the question of the low quality of public inscriptions during the Roman period in Palestine, see J. H. Iliffe, "The $\Theta\text{ANAT}\omicron\text{S}$ Inscription

from Herod's Temple," *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 6 (1936), p. 2.