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GREEK INSCRIPTIONS IN THE OKAYAMA ORIENT MUSEUM

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GREEK INSCRIPTIONS IN THE OKAYAMA ORIENT MUSEUM¹

The Okayama Orient Museum (in Japan) has a collection of four unpublished Greek inscriptions that are among the centerpieces of its collection and have been on rotating display since the museum opened in the 1970s.² According to the museum's catalogue records, all four inscriptions were acquired in January of 1970 from the Lebanese antiquities dealer Fouad A. Alouf,³ and all of them purportedly originated in the modern Syrian city of Manbij (ancient Hierapolis), located some 84 km north-east of Aleppo.⁴ The four pieces, which are all inscribed on limestone, are funerary epitaphs that include iconic representations. Since these pieces have never been published we present here editions of them.

I. Epitaph for Fortunata

The first inscription bears the museum inventory number sc0012-0428 and measures 55 × 43 × 15 cm (H × W × D). The inscription is written around the incised portrait of a woman's bust carved in bas relief. The first three lines of the inscription are divided and written on either side of the relief while the fourth line, which bears the deceased's name, is not divided and is written below on the façade. The female bust is draped in a flowing, pleated vail that covers her mantle and both arms up to the wrist; underneath she wears a garment, likely a himation, and she has double-round earrings and a necklace. Her thick-lidded eyes gaze heavenward. Her right hand touches her cheek and supports the chin – a standard pose for sadness and mourning.⁵ In her left hand she holds a high-whorl spindle and distaff, which are thought to be symbols of a virtuous woman who was a capable householder.⁶ The position of one arm in front and one hand to the face, or *Pudicitia* pose,⁷ is standard for women on sculptures from Palmyra and its environs.⁸ Two remarkably

¹ We would like to thank Hiroshi Sudo, curator of the Okayama Orient Museum, for permission to image and publish these pieces as well as for his hospitality and helpfulness during our visit. We would also like to thank Zakarias Gram for reading a draft of this article and for providing valuable feedback.

² There is a fifth piece (inv. no. sc0013-0429) related to these four inscriptions, but the text at the bottom has been completely effaced. Despite a number of attempts we have been unable to identify a single letter, although we have been able to identify faint remnants of text on the bottom right corner of the piece. This funerary panel depicts two women, presented in elegant symmetry as near mirrored images of each other, recessed in a niche. There is also a conical glass bowl at the museum with the name Πρίσκου ("Of Priskus") inscribed in *tabula ansata* on the side; this item bears the museum inventory number gl0026-0265 and is unpublished as far as we know. It is unrelated to the four inscriptions. In addition, the museum has a Greek mosaic pavement, but it has been previously published: SEG 44.1306 (V/VI AD).

³ Mr. Alouf had a long career in the antiquities business from the mid-1930s until his death in 1986. Well-known in the antiquities market, Mr. Alouf sold items to various major collections, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, D.C., the Oriental Institute of Chicago, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

⁴ According to Pliny the Elder's description (5.19), this city was located in Coelesyria and was called by the natives Mabog, but that in Greek it was first known as Βαμβύκη before it was renamed Ἱεράπολις. It obtained the Greek name Hierapolis from Seleucus Nicator, owing to its being the chief seat of the worship of the Syrian goddess Astarte (see Strabo 16.1.27).

⁵ G. Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden in der griechischen Kunst* (Berlin, 1965), 128–30; N. Kaltsas and D. Hardy, *Sculpture in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens* (Los Angeles, 2002), 199; I. B. Romano, *Classical Sculpture: Catalogue of the Cypriot, Greek, and Roman Stone Sculpture in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, Vol. 125 (Philadelphia, 2011), 33.

⁶ M. Heyn, *Gesture and Identity in the Funerary Art of Palmyra*, *AJA* 114.4 (2010): 631–61; cf. G. Davies, *The Body Language of Palmyra and Rome*, in T. Long and A. H. Sørensen (eds), *Positions and Professions in Palmyra = Palmyrenske Studier/Palmyrene Studies*, Vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 2017), 20–36.

⁷ Davies, *The Body Language of Palmyra and Rome*, 25.

⁸ Heyn, *Gesture and Identity in the Funerary Art of Palmyra*, 634–35 has noted that of the 262 published funerary depictions of women from Palmyra, 186 (71%) have this pose.



Fig. 1

similar funerary sculptures from an area north of Palmyra show individual women in a curved niche, wearing a flowing veil, with one hand near their face and the other holding a high-whorl spindle and a distaff.⁹

The text of the inscription is upright and bi-linear and in places preserves a red patina, showing that it was once painted. In l. 1, the inscriber abbreviates ἔτους with a supralinear stroke over the upsilon (ε̄τοῡ), and in l. 3, the day of the month is signaled by a supralinear stroke, although in l. 2, the numeral designating the year contains no such supralinear stroke; in l. 4, at the bottom of the epitaph the sinusoid marker ζ is used to mark another abbreviation: κάρτ^ζ. When the cutter of the inscription ran out of room in l. 3 he incised the final letter of the line on the façade. The year (l. 2) given for the death of the deceased is 414 of the Seleucid Era (reckoned from 312/11 BC) that equates with roughly autumn AD 102 to autumn AD 103.¹⁰ The Macedonian month listed on the inscription is Panemos, which overlaps with July/August depending on the region.¹¹ While there is some ambiguity concerning the implementation and reckoning of the Seleucid Era in Hierapolis, it has been argued that in most years the month of Panemos began in Hierapolis on a date corresponding with August 23.¹² Taking this as the first of the month would mean that the date of Panemos 15 appearing on the inscription would correspond (in theory) to September 6, AD 103.

⁹ J. Jarry, Nouveaux documents grecs et latins de Syrie du Nord et de Palmyrene, *ZPE* 60 (1985): Tafel IV nos. 9 and 12. Regrettably, neither inscription is dated.

¹⁰ On the reckoning of the Seleucid Era in general see A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology: Calendars and Years in Classical Antiquity* (Munich, 1972), 139–51; cf. E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (2nd ed.; Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 70–73.

¹¹ For a discussion of the regional differences manifest in the Ancient Near East reckoning of the Seleucid Era see Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 176–78 and S. Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity: Empires, States, and Societies* (Oxford, 2012), 250–53.

¹² For a discussion of the Seleucid reckoning and its peculiarities and ambiguities in Syrian Hierapolis see Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 285–88.

	ἔτου(ς)	female	Παν-
	διυ'	bust	ήμου
			ει
4	Καρτ(ιλία) Πορτουνάτα		

1. inscr. ετου. 4. inscr. καρτ'; l. Φορτουνάτα.

Translation

(Died) Year 414, Panemos 15, Kart(ilia) Fortunata.

Notes

- 1–3 ἔτου(ς) διυ' Πανήμου ει. For the Julian date of the Seleucid reckoning see discussion above. Syrian inscriptions tend to write numerals in ascending order, thus διυ instead of υιδ and ει instead of ιε.
- 4 Καρτ(ιλία) Πορτουνάτα. That the letter combination καρτ() is an abbreviation is certain given the use of the sinusoid marker ζ following the tau; while this marker is not immediately evident on the image of the piece, when we examined the text in person it could definitely be seen. The abbreviation καρτ() does not appear in W. Larfeld, *Handbuch der griechischen Epigraphik*, vol. II (Leipzig, 1902–07), 2:524–32, M. Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions (The Near East 200 B.C. – A.D. 110)* (London, 1940), or Henry Cohen *et al.*, *The Coin Inscriptions and Epigraphical Abbreviations of Imperial Rome* (Chicago, 1978). Likewise, we have been unable to locate a clear parallel in the papyrological evidence. In P.Petaus 23.8–9 (AD 185/86; Ptolemais Hormou) the abbreviation καρτ() is attested, but it can hardly apply to the present inscription: εἰ[ζ] κατὰθ(εσιν) λαχ(ανείας) καρτ(ης) (“... for the planting of vegetables to be cut ...”).

Given the placement of καρτ() before the cognomen Fortunata we could expect a nomen. We are inclined toward Καρτ(ιλία): see SEG 33.1463 (c. I BC/I AD; Cyrenaica): (ἔτους) ιβ' Χοί[α]ς κζ' Καρτιλ[ί]α Πετρωνία; SEG 33.1462 (c. I BC/I AD; Cyrenaica): (ἔτους) ζ' Παχ[ώ]ν ζ' Καρτιλία Μυρ[τ]ῶ (ἐτών) ιδ'; cf. Agora XVII 1056.1–2, 6 (AD 81–96; Athens): *d(is) m(anibus) Valeriae Fortunatae ... Οὐαλερία Φορτουνάτη*; ILBulg 341.7–9 (date unknown; Moesia Inferior): *[C]l(audia) Fortu[n]ata mater*; IScM V 174.8–9 (c. AD 106–67; Scythia Minor): *Atilia Fort[una]ta*. For the binomial system of naming for females with Latin names see B. H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C. – A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor, 2002), 126–27.

Πορτουνάτα is clearly Φορτουνάτα (Lat. Fortunata); on the φ > π interchange see Gignac, *Gram.* 1.87–88.

II. Funerary Panel for Apollon

This panel carries the museum inventory number sc0006-0422 and measures 53 × 97 × 15 cm (H × W × D). The central figure on the panel is a man wearing a chiton and a himation, his right hand is bent and stretches across his chest, grasping the hem of his himation. The left arm appears in a similar position bent at the elbow and holding folds of fabric bunched up. Proportionally the head is somewhat elongated with ears higher on the head than normal. The chin is chipped and damaged. The iconographic formula depicts two eagles flanking the central individual. Both eagles are presented frontally, wings spread, with their heads turned toward each other and facing the man. In Greco-Roman art, two symmetrically positioned eagles on monumental sculpture is a known motif,¹³ and flanking eagles are an iconographic program well attested in other Syrian sculptures.¹⁴ The question as to why the eagle was chosen in northern Syria as a funerary

¹³ J. Dentzer-Feydy, Les linteaux à figures divines en Syrie méridionale, *Revue Archéologique* 1 (1992): 68.

¹⁴ For a stylistic parallel of two eagles facing a central figure (here the sun god) in a Palmyrene relief see W. I. Al-Salihi, Palmyrene Sculptures Found at Hatra, *Iraq* 49 (1987): 59 fig. 7. A similar image of two eagles flanking a sun-god-like head appears on a graffito from Khirbet Abu Duhur, to the northeast of Palmyra; see M. Gawlikowski and M. Pietrzykowski, Les sculptures du temple de Baalshamîn à Palmyre, *Syria* 57.2/4 (1980): 450 fig. 20.



Fig. 2

emblem is somewhat uncertain:¹⁵ one notable possibility is that the eagle was thought to transport deceased souls to their final abode in the hereafter.¹⁶

The eagle on the right side of the panel holds a wreath or crown in its talons, which is an iconographic convention common on funeral stelae from Hierapolis and other areas of Syria.¹⁷ In the present panel the wreath or crown has a ribbon dangling below.¹⁸ The eagle on the left side of the monument clutches onto a woven basket – a motif commonly attested in other Syrian sculptures.¹⁹

¹⁵ F. Cumont, L'aigle funéraire de Syrie et l'apothéose des empereurs romains, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 54 (1910): 146. Cumont notes the use of eagles “comme symbole sépulcral d'immortalité”, which “est probablement fort ancien en Syrie”. In addition, the presence of eagles on Syrian sculpture could be interpreted “comme symbolisant les âmes des défunts”; see A. Roes, L'aigle psychopompe de l'époque impériale, *Revue Archéologique* 31 (1948): 887.

¹⁶ G. H. Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus* (Leiden, 1972), 82.

¹⁷ E. Gibson, The Rahmi Koç Collection. Inscriptions. Parts IV and V, *ZPE* 35 (1979): 269; J. P. Rey-Coquais, Deux stèles inscrites de Syrie du Nord, *Syria* 75 (1998): 197 fig. 2. Cf. Cumont, L'aigle funéraire de Syrie et l'apothéose des empereurs romains, 142 and Roes, L'aigle psychopompe de l'époque impériale, 56, where the image of the eagle and wreath or crown is believed to be an iconographic complex associated with apotheosis. Within Syro-Phoenician iconography the eagle represents Ba'alshamin (“Lord of Heaven”); in Palmyra, “Bēl and Ba'alšamīn, gods who symbolize the canopy of heaven, are escorted by sun and moon, and are sometimes represented as an eagle with wings outspread”. See H. J. W. Drijvers, Some New Syriac Inscriptions and Archaeological Finds from Edessa and Sumatar Harabesi, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 36.1 (1973): 12.

¹⁸ In Syrian sculpture, the ribbon attached to the crown is sometimes replaced by a snake, thereby linking the iconography to a mythic motif of a battle between good and evil. There is some room for debate on whether a ribbon or snake is meant in many depictions of a crown/wreath in association with an eagle. See B. W. Bacon, Eagle and Basket on the Antioch Chalice, *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 5 (1923): 19. Cf. R. Wittkower, Eagle and Serpent. A Study in the Migration of Symbols, *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2.4 (1939): 48–49.

¹⁹ Rey-Coquais, Deux stèles inscrites de Syrie du Nord, figs. 1 and 2. Such baskets can sometimes contain loaves that can symbolize victory over the hostile forces of nature as part of a mythic narrative. Bacon, Eagle and Basket on the Antioch Chalice, 7, 10, 18 connects the triumphant Orpheus being “born aloft on eagles' wings” on his return from the land of the dead. Macrobius, *Saturn.* 1.17 reports that the basket (κάλαθος) on the head of Apollo in the shrine of Dionysus at Heliopolis-Baalbek (an image with flanking eagles and a crown like the Okayama panel) represented “the highest stratum of the aether, whence the substance of the sun is believed to be derived”.

The inscription at the bottom of the panels is badly damaged; nonetheless, most, if not all of it can be tentatively read. The name of the deceased, Ἀπόλλων, can be read on the bottom center-left position of the façade. To the left of the name the façade is completely effaced so that it cannot be determined whether any text preceded the name. Following the name, the letters lambda and pi can be securely read and the spacing is such that the word ἄλυπε, common in funerary epitaphs, seems rather secure. Following this word all that can be securely read is an alpha, and the spacing suggests the word χαίρει; here it may be noted that the word ἄλυπε is often followed by χαίρει in funerary inscriptions. Reinforcing these readings is the fact that in two other funerary epitaphs from Manbij that depict eagles clutching wreaths the inscriptions are remarkably similar.²⁰ The extant letterforms are upright and quite similar in formation and presentation to the inscription no. I (above). Therefore, we would date this piece to the second century.

1] Ἀπόλλων ἄλυπε [χ]α[ί]ρει].

Translation

Apollon, free from sorrow, farewell!

Notes

- 1 ἄλυπε [χ]α[ί]ρει]. On this eulogizing formula see J.-B. Yon, À propos de l'expression ΑΛΥΠΗ ΧΑΙΠΕ, *Syria* 80 (2003): 151–59 (pp. 155–56 discuss the evidence from Palmyra and environs specifically). It may be possible that after this formula the date of death was inscribed. In IGLSyr I 240 (AD 115), that also comes from Manbij and preserves a remarkably similar formula, the date is given (see footnote no. 20).

III. Epitaph for Loukas

This four-line rectangular inscription carries the museum inventory number sc0011-0427 and measures 51.5 × 35.0 × 6.5 cm (H × W × D). The inscription is written immediately below a beautifully inscribed eagle in bas relief that occupies the top half of the stele and is inset within a square boarder measuring 31.0 × 29.5 cm (H × W). The eagle is depicted frontally with wings spread, head turned to the left, and clutching a wreath in its talons; in its beak it holds a garland. Funerary eagles at Hierapolis often have garlands in the mouths, a motif common in Syria.²¹ A remarkably similar depiction of an eagle on an epitaph from Syria appears in SEG 29.1583 that also dates to the second century AD.²²

The text is inscribed with an upright script that is generously spaced and contains no ligatures. On the face of the stone surrounding the inscribed letters there is red patina from where the painted text has bled out. The inscription begins with the name of the deceased, Loukas, followed by the funerary formula χρηστὲ χαίρει, which is widely attested on epitaphs from all over the Roman world. Lines 3 and 4 of the inscription contain the date of death by reference to the Seleucid Era (reckoned from 312/11 BC) and the Macedonian month. The numerals for the year and day of month are marked by a supralinear stroke with the year being 442, which corresponds with autumn AD 130 to autumn AD 131. In l. 3, the month given is Dios, which was typically the first month of the Macedonian calendar, but it is well known that in the different locales of the ancient Near East there were differences over when the month of Dios commenced.²³

²⁰ IGLSyr I 240 (AD 115): Βάκχιε χρηστὲ ἄλυπε χαίρει. ζκυ, Γορπιάιου β (“Bakchie, excellent one, free from sorrow, farewell! (Died year) 426, Gorpaios 2.”); IGLSyr I 246 (date unknown): Μαρία χ[ρηστὴ καὶ] ἄωρε χ[αίρει] (“Maria, excellent one and untimely dead, farewell!”). For images of these two pieces see Cumont, *L’aigle funéraire de Syrie et l’apothéose des empereurs romains*, 120 (discussed on pp. 119 and 121).

²¹ Gibson, *The Rahmi Koç Collection. Inscriptions. Parts IV and V*, 269.

²² An image of this epitaph can be found in Gibson, *The Rahmi Koç Collection. Inscriptions. Parts IV and V, Tafel XVIIb*. The text reads: Κόρυνθα | ἄλυπε χαίρει (“Korynthos, free from sorrow, farewell!”).

²³ For example, in Ascalon Dios began on November 27, in Gaza October 28, in Caesarea on November 3 and in Tyre November 18. See Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 177. Cf. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, 25 who notes that the “vagaries of local calendars were sometimes caused by arbitrary intercalations” and discusses the examples of the month of Dios. See also B. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C. – A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor, 2002), 166.

In the city of Hierapolis, the month of Dios appears to have begun on December 23,²⁴ thus the death date of Dios 19 listed in the inscription would accord (in theory) with January 9, AD 131.

Λουκᾶ χρηστὲ
χαῖρε.
ἔτους β̄μυ Δείου
4 θι.

3. l. Δίου.

Translation

Loukas, excellent one, farewell! (Died) Year 442, Dios 19.

Notes

- 1 Λουκᾶ. The letter combination Λουκα could either be the genitive (Λουκᾶ), dative (Λουκῶ), or vocative (Λουκᾶ). While inscriptions beginning with the name of the person in the dative case are well attested (e.g., “for/to NN”), when a name is followed immediately by the adjective *χρηστὲ* the name is in the vocative case for the sake of agreement.
- 1–2 *χρηστὲ χαῖρε*. On the use of this ubiquitous formula in funerary inscriptions see L. Robert, *Études anatoliennes: Recherches sur les inscriptions grecques de l’Asie mineure* (Paris, 1937), 369–70; cf. J.-C. Decourt, *Χαῖρε καὶ ὑγίαινε: à propos de quelques inscriptions lyonnaises*, *RPhil* 67 (1993): 237–50.
- 3–4 ἔτους β̄μυ Δείου θι. For the Julian date of this inscription see discussion above. It is typical in Syrian inscriptions to write the numerals in ascending order, thus β̄μυ and not ῡμβ and θι and not ιθ. On the ι > ει interchange see Gignac, *Gram.* 1.90–91; the rendering Δείος (for Δίος) is well attested.



Fig. 3

IV. Epitaph for an Unnamed Female

This epitaph bears the museum inventory number sc0008-0424 and measures 62 × 24 × 12.5 cm (H × W × D). The epitaph contains a depiction of a female bust carved in bas relief surmounting a three-line inscription. The bust is unadorned and the overall depiction is rather plain; the female has no distinctive features, physical or dress, and her limbs are not even depicted. Given that the inscription underneath the bust lacks a name and only contains a well-known, but nonspecific, funerary formula, it may be that this tombstone was generically produced even before the individual’s death. That the tombstone may have been prefabricated might also be suggested by virtue of the fact that there is a gap of almost 10 cm between the bottom of the bust and the first line; here the name of the deceased could have easily been inscribed.

The three-line inscription is cut in a cruder script than the other pieces as letter sizes fluctuate somewhat and ll. 1 and 2 are written with a distinct slant to the right. Some letters contain serifs, although it is not consistent throughout, and the letter combination tau-eta (l. 1) is ligatured as the vertical hasta of the tau doubles as the left hasta of the eta. Compared to the previous three inscriptions the script is more lunate; this is most obvious in the curvature of the oblique extensions on the upsilon and psi in l. 2. As it has been noted with respect to inscribed letterforms in the regions round about Syria that beginning in the second century AD one sees “a marked preference for rounded forms”,²⁵ and that this becomes more common in

²⁴ Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 251 where he notes that Tisheri (= Dios) began on this date in Hierapolis; however, a little later (pp. 285–88) he notes that there are some minor uncertainties with the Hierapolite calendar in terms of intercalation and beginning and ending of months.

²⁵ C. B. Welles, *The Inscriptions*, in C. H. Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, 1938), 360.

subsequent centuries,²⁶ we would be inclined to date this piece to the second century (when the other pieces are dated) or perhaps even to the third century given this graphic trend.

The terse inscription finds phraseological parallels in SB 1.372 (date unknown; Alexandria) and I.Kition 2204 (Rom. Imp. period; Cyprus); but in these texts the name of the deceased is typically mentioned, whereas here the dedication is anonymous.

χρηστῆ
εὐψύ-
3 χι.

2–3. *l.* εὐψύχει.

Translation

Excellent one, farewell!

Notes

- 1 χρηστῆ. This adjective was used to praise the qualities the deceased possessed in this life: see Robert, *Études anatoliennes*, 369–70; L. Robert, *Les inscriptions de Thessalonique* (Review: *Inscriptiones Graecae*, X, pars II, fasc. I), *RPhil* 48 (1974): 224. While the letter combination *χρηστη* could be taken as the female name *Χρήστη* (“Chreste”), thus “Chreste, farewell” we are more inclined to take it as an adjective given the ubiquity of *χρηστή/χρηστέ* in funerary inscriptions.
- 2–3 εὐψύχι. On the use and meaning of *εὐψυχέω* in funerary inscriptions see McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy*, 269. On the *ει > ι* interchange see Gignac, *Gram.* 1.189–90.



Fig. 4

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²⁶ J. B. Gorissen, *Litterae Lunatae*, *AncSoc* 9 (1978): 149–62 where it is noted that lunate letterforms are generally indicative of the later Roman period (second through fourth centuries AD).