

Dionysia or Dionysias at Kourion, Cyprus

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Abstract: An inscribed stone was discovered during the Kourion Urban Space Project 2015 season. The paper discusses its discovery and the inscription itself, which is now in the Episkopi Museum, Cyprus.

On 6 June 2015, while conducting topographic survey for the Kourion Urban Space Project (KUSP), Benjamin Ioset located an inscription in the Krommya Valley, east of the Kourion acropolis. The block was lying in a wadi bed about 190m east of the south-eastern cliffs of the acropolis, Figure 1. The location of the site was Easting 490,071.53, Northing 3,836,036.67, UTM WGS 84 Sheet 36N at an elevation of 34.11m above sea level.

The inscribed stone was located at the base of a slope rising 80m to the north-east of the wadi, Figure 2. Several other worked stones were in the immediate vicinity of the inscribed stone. All were situated along the base of the slope down which they had no doubt tumbled.

A number of tombs were located near the crest of the slope above the inscribed stone, Site 'E' of the British Museum 1895 excavations. These were cleared without accurate plans being made. It is possible that the inscribed stone was once associated with these tombs.



Figure 1: The find spot of the inscription viewed from the north-west. The Kourion acropolis is to the right and the village of Episkopi is in the distance to the left. Image: C.J.Davey

The stone is made of limestone. Its surface is rough, but the part of the face that carries the inscription was dressed, albeit rather poorly, possibly to make the text more legible. Some chisel marks were evident, but the inscription itself has a U-section and was probably made by abrasion.

The base of the stone was partly cut away indicating that it had a structural purpose at some stage. Part of the bottom edge was also bevelled. A brief inspection of the slope revealed that there had been a number of wall structures above the find spot. However, the area is outside the KUSP excavation concession, and as no other inscriptions were evident, the investigation was taken no further.



Figure 2: View of the inscription find spot looking east from the Kourion acropolis. Tombs located near the top of the rise above the inscribed block were cleared in the nineteenth-century. Image: C.J.Davey

The stone was found lying on its right side and partly embedded in the silt of the wadi, Figure 3. The inscribed face was uppermost and facing the wadi, but the inscription would have only been evident to the casual observer when light conditions were conducive. The area was also heavily infested with thistles. The stone could have been in its current location for many years. The last survey of the area was undertaken by the Kourion Mapping Project in about 2005.

On 8 June the inscription was further documented *in situ* and, with the permission of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities, removed for cleaning and further examination. It has been lodged with the Episkopi Museum where it was registered as RR 1503.



Figure 3: The inscription *in situ*, view looking east. The stone is on its right side so that the inscription runs from top to bottom. Image: C.J.Davey



Figure 4: A drawing of the inscription. The edges of the letters were detected by feel and traced onto a clear plastic overlay.

Inscription

Dimensions (in millimetres) are as follows: 450h (right; 344 on left due to the cutting away of the lower left corner) x 535w (at top; 355 at base, due to the cutaway of part of the stone) x 281d (top, widening out to 383 at bottom right). The dressed portion of the face extends down from the top approximately 200mm, though slightly more on the right edge.

The lunate letters vary considerably in size, from 48mm for N to 67mm for Δ. The space between varies, too, but can be as much as 14mm. The single line of text proceeds slightly upwards towards the right. No squeeze was made of the lettering, but a drawing was made in addition to photographs using different filters, Figures 4 & 5.

The text reads ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΑC.

The fourth last letter appears to be *epsilon* carved by mistake for lunate *sigma*. The final letter is barely visible in the photo, Figure 5, but the drawing reflects the impression felt by the fingers of the discoverers.

The amount of vacant space on the stone above the lettering suggests that there was no additional stone with an earlier portion of text below which this one was placed. Accordingly, we have as the entire text either the genitive of the female name Διονυσία, or the nominative of the male name Διονυσίας. Either option would suit a laconic gravestone: '(tomb) of Dionysia', or 'Dionysias (lies here).' The crudity of the carving is suggestive of a graffito, or at best a very roughly done job by a mason. The latter is perhaps to be inferred from the evidence of the chisel marks on the roughly smoothed surface on the part of the stone where the inscription was carved.

Few instances of Dionysia are attested on Cyprus: three in *LGPN* 1.136. None are attested from the island for the male form Dionysias. These and related forms of the masculine (Dionysas, Dionnyas, Dionys, Dionnyas, Dionysias, and the ubiquitous Dionysos) occur in varying degrees of frequency eastwards from the Italian peninsula (some of these in Latin script: twice each at Puteoli and Misenum, *LGPN* 3.128) and Sicily. Checks in *SEG* do not alter the picture for this Dion- name group, except numerically to add more attestations.



Figure 5: An image of the inscription enhanced using Image J software. Image: David Saunders.

Mitford (1971) records two Dionysios inscriptions, one from the Temple of Apollo (no. 86) and the other from the Basilica (no.92). Two inscriptions (nos. 147 & 155) come from the ruined chapel, Panagia Chrysanaïotissa, near Site 'E'. None relate to this inscription in content or style.

Without a dateable archaeological context for this inscription, we must rely on the letter shapes and the quality of the carving. We suggest that it belongs in the Imperial period, probably at least AD III, though a later century would be no surprise. The crude quality and laconic nature of the majority of the *angelos* epitaphs from Thera (Horsley, Luxford 2016 forthcoming) come to mind as an analogy, though we are not implying that this inscription from Kourion is also a Christian epitaph as they certainly are.

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Abbreviations

LGPN – P.M. Fraser, E. Matthews (eds.), *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*. Vol. 1, *Aegean Islands, Cyprus, Cyrenaica*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987. [Subsequent volumes of *LGPN* (five vols in seven) cover other regions in the Mediterranean, including so far (to vol. 5B, 2013) Attica, rest of Greece, Italy and Sicily, Macedonia with Thrace and the northern Black Sea, Asia Minor (in progress).]

SEG – *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

Reference

- Horsley, G.H.R. & J.M. Luxford 2016 forthcoming
Pagan angels in Roman Asia Minor: revisiting the epigraphic evidence, *Anatolian Studies* vol. 66.
- Mitford, T.B. 1971 *The Inscriptions of Kourion*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.