

MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF LATE ANTIQUITY AND MEDIEVAL GREEK AND LATIN INSCRIPTIONS IN ISTANBUL

A REVISED AND EXPANDED BOOKLET



THE SUMMER PROGRAMME IN BYZANTINE EPIGRAPHY
THE KOÇ UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH CENTER FOR ANATOLIAN CIVILIZATIONS
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1. Preface

IDA TOTH and ANDREAS RHOBY

The inscriptional heritage of Istanbul spans multiple periods, habits, and traditions. Countless examples survive, both *in situ* and in various museum collections, and these provide a rich source for the study of the city's world of writing in any phase of its history, not least the medieval. Moreover, although great portion of this epigraphic trove remains hidden underneath the modern urban layer, recent findings – such as those emerging during the Yenikapı excavations – confirm that Istanbul still holds considerable promise of new and surprising discoveries.

The centrality of Constantinople to both the existence of the Byzantine Empire and the development of Byzantine Studies needs no explanation; neither does the fact that Byzantine Epigraphy, a discipline concerned with the inscriptions of the Byzantine world, looks to Constantinopolitan evidence for essential insights into the realities of public writing. And yet Byzantinists have been slow to engage with the diversity and wealth of Constantinople's epigraphic remains. The extant scholarship, where it has been forthcoming, has been predominantly interested in exploiting these epigraphs as historical sources, thus leaving a somewhat distorted view of the range and character of inscriptions in the Byzantine capital.

In convening a week-long **Summer Programme in Byzantine Epigraphy**, our agendas were rather different. We set out with the idea of examining both Istanbul's well known and some of its newly discovered epigraphic evidence, including inscriptions displayed in formal (and predominantly monumental) settings, and those that have often been described as casual, unofficial, and at any rate, insignificant. Such a holistic focus also benefited from a wide range of creative approaches – to context, display, taxonomy, ideology, materiality, transformation and performance – all of which have lately become part of the scholarly discourse in the field of Byzantine Epigraphy.

The present booklet was commissioned in preparation for the Summer Programme to provide work materials for the busy schedule of daily seminars, practical sessions in Istanbul's museums, and guided visits to Byzantine monuments and excavation sites. Our intention was to explore inscriptions from different viewpoints, and to open communication lines between experts in different fields. Responding to our brief to review extant epigraphic scholarship, all participants contributed chapters approaching their chosen topics from the direction of their own interests and expertise. As the week unfolded, and our group confronted an ever-greater quantity of diverse epigraphic material, new insights inevitably started to challenge many of our initial – as well as some of the traditional and long-established – assumptions. Our daily sessions also made it clear that any initiative aiming to propel the study of Constantinopolitan epigraphy forward must commit to being interdisciplinary, involving collaborations between textual and literary scholars, and between historians and specialists in visual and material cultures. Most pressingly, such an initiative requires a vigorous (re-)assessment of epigraphic evidence *in situ*.

The present volume, which we have renamed *Materials for the Study of Late Antique and Medieval Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Istanbul*, represents a revised and updated version of the original booklet. It has been prepared in the year following the Programme, and incorporates updated notes and observations, a large number of additional images, and new chapters on the Column of Constantine, amulets, late antique Latin epigraphy, the Lips Monastery and small finds from the Yenikapı excavations. We have also made

several (conscious) omissions: although we were fortunate enough to get access to some new finds from the Theodosian Harbour and to the restorations of St Euphemia, the unpublished materials from these sites – as has been requested – have not been included in the booklet.

In every other sense, our approach has been comprehensive. We have tried to create a resource whose relevance extends beyond the scope of the Summer Programme in Byzantine Epigraphy. Our hope is that this collection of essays can serve as a teaching tool and perhaps also as a dependable *vademecum* to the extant traces of Istanbul's rich late antique and medieval epigraphic legacy.

Oxford and Vienna, April 2020

Map of Constantinople



© https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Byzantine_Constantinople-en.png

13. Epigrams on Charioteers: Themes and Function

MARIA TOMADAKI

The Hippodrome of Constantinople was the principal place of athletic and ceremonial events and, therefore, an important center of social and political power in Byzantium. The circus factions of the Byzantine capital (e.g., the Greens, the Blues) had numerous devoted supporters, who expressed publicly not only their athletic preferences, but also their opposing views on political affairs (e.g. on the candidacy for the throne). Athletes, as representatives of the factions, participated in chariot races and their victories were honored in various ways both by their factions and emperors themselves.

The elegiac epigrams from the *Greek Anthology* (XV 41-50, XVI 335-379) offer an insight into the chariot races of Constantinople, on the most popular charioteers, and on the Hippodrome's monuments commemorating their victories. These epigrams were engraved on carved stone bases that were erected at the Hippodrome of Constantinople after the victories, the retirement or the death of popular charioteers, especially in the 6th century. They provide valuable information about the commission, symbolism, and function of these richly decorated monuments. Additionally, they demonstrate the intense interest and participation of the Byzantines in Hippodrome's spectacles, and the ways they honored their victorious charioteers.

Six of the epigrams (*Anthologia Graeca* XVI 340, 342, 351-353, 356) (fig. 1) can be still found *in situ*, inscribed in two charioteer monuments, the so-called *Old* and *New Base*, which are today kept in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Both bases are dedicated to the famous charioteer Porphyrius (figs. 2-4), who lived in Constantinople between the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries, and raced for the racing teams of the Greens and the Blues. The *Old Base* was erected by the Blues and the *New Base* by the Greens. The epigrams of these bases always mention Porphyrius, and they praise him highly by referring to his victories, awards, crowns and virtues. The poem AG XVI, 352 is an excellent case in point: Φύσις is personified as Porphyrius' mother; she emphatically declares that she cannot give birth to another person as charismatic as Porphyrius, because she has already given all her graces exclusively to him.

As regards the display, the epigrams have been executed in a majuscule script, set into inscriptional panels situated above or under the ornamental reliefs. They constitute the decorative programme of the monuments together with the short prose inscriptions (e.g. acclamations, names of horses) and reliefs depicting Porphyrius in his chariot, wreathed and victorious, surrounded by spectators as well as other scenes taking place in the Hippodrome. Since the content of the epigrams is not closely related to the depictions of the reliefs, they cannot be characterized as purely ekphrastic texts; rather, they can be defined as honorific, commemorative, and dedicatory. However, the epigram 242 stresses the vividness of the representation of Porphyrius, referring to a lost bronze statue, which most probably stood on top of the old base.

The motivation behind, and the function of, the cycle of the charioteer epigrams from the *Greek Anthology* should be examined in the context of the so-called *agonistic epigraphy*, which commonly features poetic depictions of charioteers, praising them not only for their athletic accomplishments and victories, but also for their beauty, glory, wisdom and general excellence. Porphyrius' monuments and the epigrams in his honor keep his memory alive as well as providing a valuable insight into Hippodrome's spectacles and its glorious past for the benefit of their viewers and readers alike.

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Appendix: epigrams on Charioteers – a selection

1.

Χρύσειον ἀντ' ἀρετῆς γέρας ἔπρεπε Κωνσταντίνῳ,
 οὐδένα τῆς τέχνης τοῖον ἐνεγκαμένης.
 κουρίζων νίκησεν ἀειδομένους ἔλατῆρας,
 γηραλέος δὲ νέους δεῖξεν ἀφαυροτέρους.
 ὄντινα καὶ μετὰ πότμον ἀειμνήστω τινὶ θεσμῶ
 δῆμος καὶ βασιλεὺς ἴδρυσαν ἀζόμενοι. (Anth. Pal. XV 43)

‘Constantinus deserved a golden gift for his merit, for his art has produced none like to him. While yet a youth he overcame the celebrated drives, and in his old age showed that the young were his inferiors. The people and the Emperor, reverencing him even after his death, set up his statue by a degree that will ever be remembered.’ (Translated by Paton 1918: 150-151)

2.

Πλάστης χαλκὸν ἔτευξεν ὁμοίον ἠνιοχῆι.
 εἶθε δὲ καὶ τέχνης ὄγκον ἀπειργάσατο,
 ὄγκον ὁμοῦ καὶ κάλλος. ὅπερ Φύσις ὀψὲ τεκοῦσα
 ὤμοσεν· "Ὡδίνειν δεύτερον οὐ δύναμαι."
 ὤμοσεν εὐόρκοις ὑπὸ χεῖλεσι· Πορφυρίῳ γὰρ
 πρῶτῳ καὶ μούνῳ πᾶσαν ἔδωκε χάριν (Anth. Pal. XVI 352, New Base)

‘The sculptor made the bronze like unto the charioteer, but would that he could have fashioned also the vastness of his skill, its vastness and beauty, a thing that when Nature brought forth late in her life she swore, “I cannot travail again”. She swore it with truthful lips, for to Porphyrius first and alone she gave all her gifts.’ (Translated by Paton 1918: 371)

3.

Αὐτὸν Πορφύριον μὲν ἀπηκριβώσατο χαλκῶ
 ὁ πλάστης ἔμπνουν οἷα τυπωσάμενος.
 τίς δὲ χάριν, τίς ἀεθλα, τίς ἔνθεα δήνεα τέχνης
 τεύξει καὶ νίκην οὔποτ' ἀμειβομένην; (Anth. Pal. XVI 342, Old Base)

'Den Porphyrios selbst hat der Künstler zwar treulich gebildet, hat ihn im ehernen Bild gleichsam zum Leben geformt. Wer aber bildet sein Können, die Kämpfe, die hohen Gedanken seiner Kunst und den Sieg, der ihn noch niemals verließ?' (Translated by Beckby 1958: 487)

4.

Ἦφελος ὄπλα φέρειν, οὐ φάρεα ταῦτα κομίζειν
 ὡς ἑλατήρ τελέθων καὶ πολέμων πρόμαχος.
 εὔτε γὰρ ἦλθεν ἀνακτος ὀλεσσιτύραννος ἀκωκίη,
 καὶ σὺ συναιχμάζων ἦψαο ναυμαχίης·
 καὶ διπλῆς, πολύμητι, σοφῶς ἐδράξαι νίκης,
 τῆς μὲν πωλομάχου, τῆς δὲ τυραννοφόνου. (Anthol. Pal. XV 50)

'Waffen müßtest du tragen, nicht diese Farbengewänder, Rennfahrer warest du wohl, aber ein Krieger zugleich. Als der Kaiser das Schwert zum Tod der Tyrannen gezückt hat, zogst als Kämpfer auch du fort in die Seeschlacht mit ihm. Weise hast du, o Kluger, dir doppelte Siege errungen: als du im Rennen gekämpft und du Tyrannen erschlugst.' (Translated by Beckby 1958: 298)

5.

Ἄντολῆς δύσιός τε μεσημβρίας τε καὶ ἄρκτου
 σὸς δρόμος ὑψιφαῆς ἀμφιβέβηκεν ὄρους,
 ἄφθιτε Κωνσταντῖνε. θανεῖν δέ σε μή τις ἐνίσπη·
 τῶν γὰρ ἀνικῆτων ἄπτεται οὐδ' Αἴδης. (Anth. Pal. XVI 369)

'Your course, shining afar, has traversed the bounds of east, west, south, and north, immortal Constantine. Let no man say you are dead. Hades himself cannot lay his hands on the unconquerable.' (Translated by Cameron 1973: 61)



Fig. 1 Anth. Pal. XVI 353 (© Ida Toth)



Fig. 2 The Old Base of Porphyrius, left face (prose inscription) (© Ida Toth)

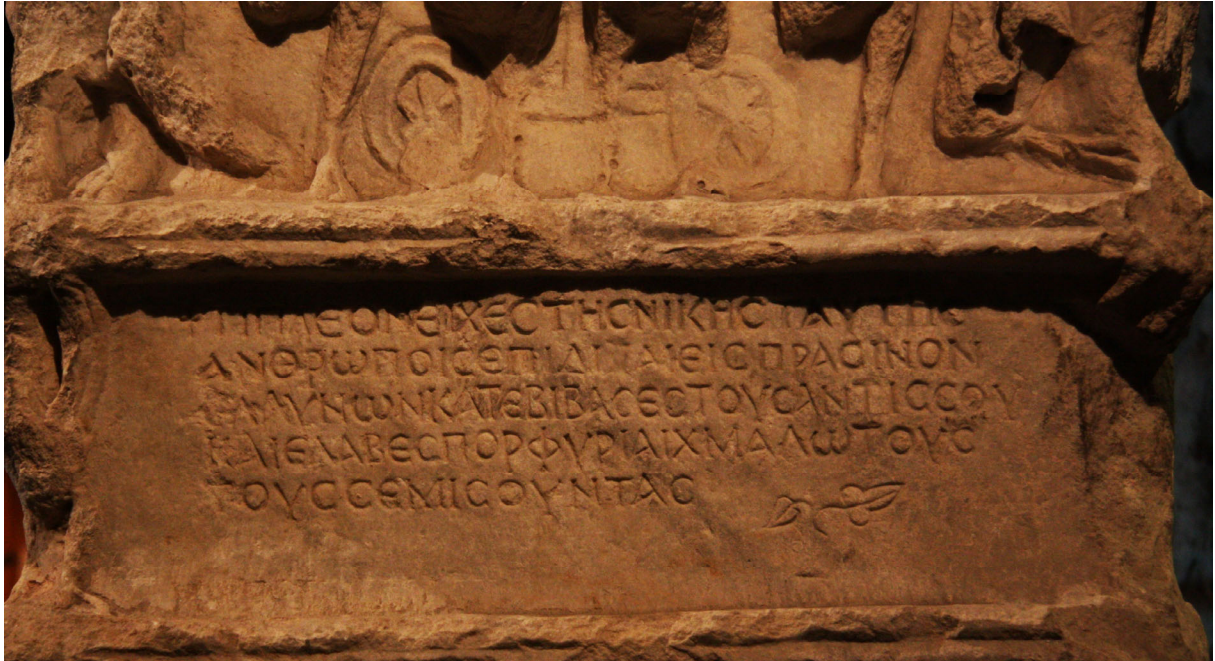


Fig. 3 The New Base of Porphyrius, left face (prose inscription) (© Ida Toth)

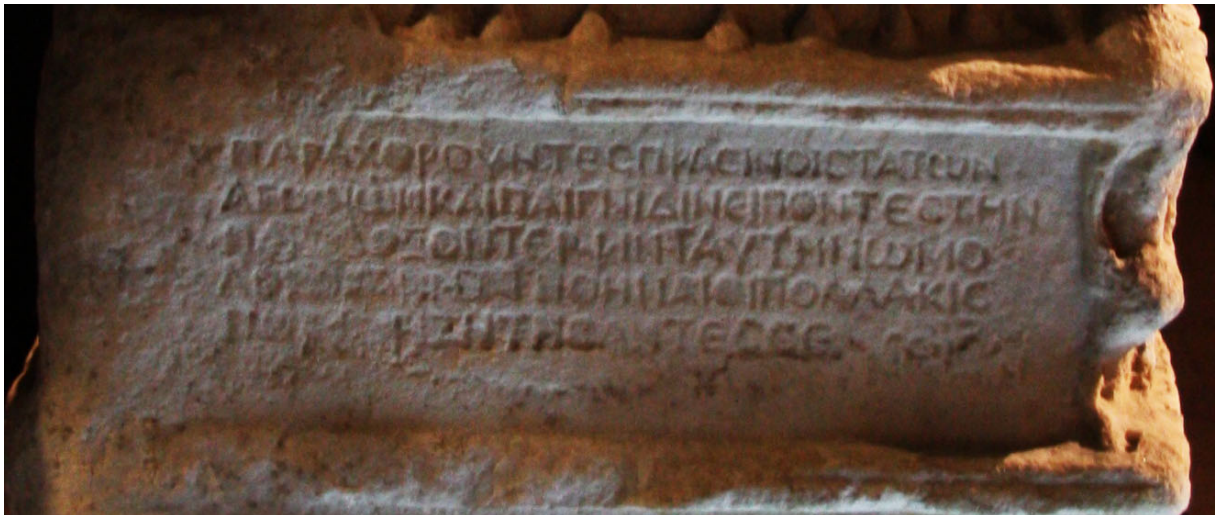


Fig. 4 The New Base of Porphyrius, right face (prose inscription) (© Ida Toth)