

## A Confession-inscription from Jerusalem?

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In the recently published twenty-second volume of *Scripta Classica Israelica*, Eran Lupu republished a Hellenistic inscription carved on a limestone stele found in Jerusalem and kept in Tel Aviv (Eretz Israel Museum, Kadman Pavilion of Numismatics, inv. MHA 162).<sup>1</sup> The inscription was first published by S. Applebaum in 1980<sup>2</sup> and then properly registered and its text improved by the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it escaped my attention and probably the attention of other scholars interested in confession-inscriptions as well (see below), for the simple reason that one does not normally look for pagan confession-inscriptions in Jerusalem. I am therefore grateful to Eran Lupu for drawing our attention to this significant document.

The stele in question, made of brownish limestone, was found in unclear circumstances, i.e., 'it was rescued from a cart carrying soil evacuated from the cellar of an Arab house in the Old City (of Jerusalem)'.<sup>4</sup> It is broken below and on the right, so that only its upper left corner remains, together with eleven incomplete lines written in very small and early-looking letters. Part of the left margin survives, and above the first line of the text is a fine line for alignment; there is also a margin of 0.06 m between the upper end of the stone and the first line of the inscription, and the back of the stone is rough-picked. Its dimensions are: 0.225 m (height), 0.175 m (width), 0.115 m (thickness). Letters are carefully executed, 0.005-0.008 m high: O, Θ and Ω are smaller and suspended (0.004-0.005 m), A has a straight crossbar, Π and N a shorter right vertical *hasta*, Σ is smaller and exhibits parallel outer strokes; there are no serifs, and interlinear space is 0.005-0.007 m; left margin 0.013 m. The number of preserved letters gradually decreases from nineteen in the first two lines to only four in the last one.

The first editor read the inscription as follows:

"Ορκος. "Αρης ἀθλητής. Τά[δε. Ἐπειδὴ τὰς θεῶν τελε]-  
τὰς ἐπήγαγον ἐπὶ τὴν ἄκρα[ν - - 5 - - ἀμυνῶ δὲ ὑπὲρ]  
τούτων καὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην [ἄλλοις ἐπιτρέψαι καταλείπειν]  
καὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖς μαστ[ροὺς ἐπικρινῶ ὅτι θύσαι οὐκ]

<sup>1</sup> E. Lupu, 'A New Look at Three Inscriptions from Jaffa, Jerusalem and Gaza', *SCI* 22, 2003, 193-202 (the inscription in question, no. 2, is discussed on 195-199, and a photograph is supplied on plate 2). I am grateful to Professor Hannah Cotton and Prof. Leah Di Segni for checking the text of the inscription in the museum, to Eran Lupu and Charles Crowther (Center for the Study of Ancient Documents, Oxford) for providing me with a squeeze of the inscription and to Peter Fraser (*Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, Oxford) for reading the manuscript and offering several valuable suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> S. Applebaum, 'A Fragment of a New Hellenistic Inscription from the Old City of Jerusalem', in: A. Oppenheimer, U. Rappaport, M. Stern (edd.), *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period. Abraham Schalit Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem 1980, 56-59 (in Hebrew with an English abstract on III); cf. also S. Applebaum, B. Isaac, Y. Landau, *SCI* 6, 1981/2, 108.

<sup>3</sup> *SEG* 30, 1695.

<sup>4</sup> Applebaum-Isaac-Landau, op. cit. 108.

- 5 ἤθελον καὶ οὐκ ἐλάθ[οντο λείποντες τὰ ἐπιπαχθέντα]  
 ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν· τοῦ[ς γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἄκρα "Ἕλληνες διὰ πολέ]-  
 μου ἀπώλεσαν [- - -]  
 ἐνέβαλον κα[- - -]  
 σαν καὶ τα? [- - -]  
 10 εμπυον[- - -]  
 [-]τηεπ[- - -]

S. Appelbaum interpreted this text, dated by him to the middle of the second century BC, as an oath to Ares *Athletes* taken at the time of the Maccabean revolt by the Seleucid garrison stationed in the Akra of Jerusalem to protect Greek cults introduced under Antiochos IV. One of the editors of the *SEG*, H.W. Pleket, recognized that Ares in line 1 was a personal name, and that the following word was not ἀθλητής but αὐλητής, 'flute-player'.

After studying the same inscription on two occasions, E. Lupu presented an improved re-edition.

Here are his readings:

- "Ὀρκος· "Αρης αὐλητής τά[δε - - -]  
 τὰς ἐπήγαγον ἐπὶ τὴν ΟΙ.[- - - - -]  
 τούτων καὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην [- - - - -]  
 καὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖς μαστ[- - - - - - -]  
 5 ἤθελον καὶ οὐκ ἐλαθ[- - - - - - - - -]  
 ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν· του[- - - - - - - - -]  
 μου ἀπώλεσαν [- - - - - - - - -]  
 ἐνέβαλον κα[ι - - - - - - - - -]  
 σαν καὶ τα[- - - - - - - - -]  
 10 ΕΜΠΥΟΝ[- - - - - - - - -]  
 [- - -]ΤΗΕ . [- - - - - - - - -]

Line 2: οἰκ[ίαν (?) - - -] 5 ἐλαθ[όμην] or ἐλαθ[ον] 10 ἔμπυον?

Lupu's translation: *Oath; I (?)*, *Ares, a flute-player (?)* [- - -] *I led to/against the* [- - -] *and I did not say* [- - -] *and the priests* [- - -] *I wished and I/they did not* [- - -] *by the gods* [- - -] *they destroyed/lost* [- - -] *I/they threw in(?)* [- - -].

Lupu dated the inscription to the first half of the second century BC when the Hellenization of Jerusalem began. However, he is cautious as to the original provenance of the stone, in view of the circumstances surrounding its discovery. Noticing that the verbs in lines 2, 3, and 5 (ἐπήγαγον, ἐφάμην, ἤθελον) all have the first person singular endings referring probably to the oath-taker, he correctly inferred that the inscription contains a narrative which 'might relate the events which preceded the taking of the oath, events in which the oath-taker was involved, and which might, in fact, have necessitated it in some way'. Moreover, he proposed to read the second line as ἐπήγαγον ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκ[ίαν and to understand the whole phrase in a hostile sense, as an attack that might have constituted some offence. The phrase ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν in line 6 in his opinion 'implies divine intervention and suggests that the events in question were somewhat extraordinary', so that even the rare epithet ἔμπυον in line 10, meaning 'suffering from an abscess, suppurating', appears less peculiar.

S. Applebaum, B. Isaac and Y. Landau estimated the original width of the stele to 0.32 m and Lupu remarked that its considerable thickness (0.115) suggests that it was a sizeable one before it was broken. If we take into account the thickness of the stone, it is perhaps acceptable to view the partly preserved inscription as the first text (first column?) of a catalogue of similar texts originally inscribed on a larger block. This hypothetical catalogue would be comparable to one of the four (originally six) stelai erected around 300 BC in Epidauros with inscriptions recording miraculous healings performed by Apollo and Asklepios (ιάματα τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιού).<sup>5</sup> My estimate is that there were originally between twenty-four and thirty letters per line. Due to its unusual character, it is a risky undertaking to supply the missing part of the text. I have the following suggestions:

**Lines 1-2:** The first word, ὄρκος, possibly sums up the ‘case’ developed in the remaining part of the text. In the aforementioned Epidaurian ιάματα we come across several headings summarizing the inscribed cases of divine miracles: τριέτης φορά (II), παῖς ἄφωνος (V), Νικάνωρ χολός (XVI), Ἀγέστρατος κεφαλᾶς ἄλγος (XXIX), Καλλικράτεια θησαυρόν (XLVI), etc. Miracle number X in the first catalogue is preceded by a single word, κώθων ‘drinking vessel’, and it actually describes the case of a broken vessel miraculously repaired by the god. I am inclined to identify the first word of our text as its ‘title’: ‘(The case of the) oath’.

The flute-player Ares was first identified by H.W. Pleket. Other instances of Ἄρης as a personal name are adduced by Lupu in his note 5. To this list I can add two attestations from Knidos<sup>6</sup> and one from Ephesos.<sup>7</sup> Our Ares was an ἀλητής and I suspect that his occupation is stated not just for identification purposes, but also because it has relevance to the part he played in the whole ‘case’.

The rest of the text after τὰδ[ε] (sc. λέγει?) is Ares’ account of some events in which he played a major part. It is possible that he was acting not as a private person, but as an official sent to oversee the taking of an oath by a group of people. His account of events that transpired at an unknown locality, couched in direct speech, was recorded by himself or by a member of the sacred personnel attached to an unknown sanctuary.

The second line is fundamental for the correct understanding of the whole inscription. From its preserved part we gather that Ares brought a group of people to a certain locality ([- - ]τας ἐπήγαγον ἐπὶ τὴν ΟΙΙ[- -]). The letters -τας obviously belong to the lost object of ἐπήγαγον. I see at least two possibilities: στρατιώ]τας and πολί]τας. Together with this supplement, the original number of letters in the first line would have been between twenty-four and thirty-one.

Where did Ares lead these people to? The verb ἐπάγω followed by ἐπί with the accusative case invariably indicates the action of leading someone to a concrete place,

<sup>5</sup> Paus. II 27, 3; O. Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder*, Giessen 1909; *IG IV*<sup>2</sup> 1, 121-4; R. Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros*, Leipzig 1931 (*Philologus*, Supplbd. XXII 3); M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* II, München 1961, 223-224. Comparable are also the stelai from the sanctuary of Asklepios at Lebena in Crete (*IC I*: XVII 8-20).

<sup>6</sup> *AE* 1913, Chron. 17 nos. 1-2 (late Hellenistic).

<sup>7</sup> *IEph* 1037 (second century AD).

often with a hostile undertone. Cotton and Di Segni saw an *omicron* (dotted),<sup>8</sup> a *iota* and a vertical line and then a break (QII[- - -]).<sup>9</sup> I concur with E. Lupu that the lost word was apparently οἰκ[ίαν].<sup>10</sup> This building (a well-known one, judging by the definite article preceding it) was a public rather than a private structure, possibly situated within the confines of a sanctuary.<sup>11</sup> Is it possible that Ares escorted a group of soldiers/citizens from his own city to a sanctuary in another city for the purpose of oath-taking? At the end of line 2, I propose to supply τῶν θεῶν (cf. ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν τούτων in line 6). The phrase οἱ θεοὶ οὗτοι should refer to the local (perhaps also non-Greek?) deities ('*these gods here*')<sup>12</sup> offended by Ares' ensuing actions. It was not absolutely necessary to name them, since the stele would be erected in their sanctuary anyway. In the same manner a *lex sacra* from Magnesia on the Meander<sup>13</sup> stipulates (ll. 53-4): λαμβάνειν δὲ τὰ γέρα τὰ ἰθισμέν[α] τοὺς ἱερεῖς τῶν θεῶν τούτων, where οὗτοι stands for Zeus, Apollo and Artemis named in the immediately preceding lines. The second line of our inscription was originally thirty letters long.

**Line 3:** Here commences the report on Ares' transgressions committed in the same sanctuary where our stele once stood to warn the visitors against slighting the δύναμις of its tutelary deities. The first offence consisted in Ares' refusal to oblige someone or to give the right information to someone (the local priests?): καὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην [- - -]. The phrase οὐ φημι means *say no, deny, refuse*.<sup>14</sup> About 10 letters are lost here and we expect an infinitive to follow the finite verb.

**Lines 4-5:** These lines provide details on the second transgression committed by Ares on the sacred ground: his intention to whip the priests. We can supply either καὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖς μαστ[ιγῶσαι] or καὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖς μάστ[ιγι παίειν]. Violence against members of cult personnel features in several published and unpublished Lydian and Phrygian confession-inscriptions.<sup>15</sup> Line 4 was originally about twenty-six to twenty-eight letters long.

With **line 5** begins the report on divine punishment inflicted on Ares (and his family?). The verb λανθάνω (ἐλαθ[ου]) is most likely used absolutely and means *escape notice* or *detection* (sc. by the gods).<sup>16</sup> At the end of the line a participle is required to

<sup>8</sup> The squeeze, on the other hand, permits no doubts that the letter in question is indeed an *omicron*.

<sup>9</sup> Per ep.: 'In line 2 we saw at the end an omicron (dotted): THN QII[- - -]. The vertical line at the end could belong to a K, M, N but not to a Γ or a Π'.

<sup>10</sup> My original impression, formed on the basis of the photographs and the squeeze at my disposal, was that we should read ὀρκωμοσίαν, but Cotton and Di Segni's copy do not support this hypothesis.

<sup>11</sup> For οἰκίαι, οἴκοι, οἰκήματα belonging to gods, cf. *IG IX 1, 89*; F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cites grecques*, Paris 1969, 47; M. Segre, *Iscrizioni di Cos*, Rome 1993, ED: 149 face B; W.R. Paton, E.L. Hicks, *The Inscriptions of Cos*, Oxford 1891, 349; G. Petzl, *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens*, Bonn 1994, 37; *IStR* 668.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *LSJ* s.v. οὗτος, under C 5.

<sup>13</sup> *IMagn 98* = F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*, Paris 1955, 32 (197/6 BC).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *LSJ* s.v. φημί, under III: ἡ Πυθίη οὐκ ἔφη χρήσειν *said she would not* (Hdt. I 19), οὐκ ἔφασαν ἐπιτρέψαι (*Lys.* 13, 47).

<sup>15</sup> Petzl, op. cit. 25, 33, 49, 64, 114, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *LSJ* s.v., under A 5.

agree with ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν τοῦ[των in line 6, and the most obvious choice would be κολασθεῖς, ubiquitous in confession-inscriptions. However, we should not rule out the possibility that what Ares said was *my disregard for the laws/orders enacted by these gods did not escape their attention*. At the moment, I can offer no suggestions on the Greek equivalent to this hypothetical variant. Line 5 was about twenty-seven letters long.

**Lines 6-10:** The gods affronted by Ares' conduct in their sanctuary directed their fury initially at a member of his family<sup>17</sup> or a part of his property (slave, farm-animal). Line 6 was about twenty-six letters long.

**Line 7:** At the end of this line stood the object of ἐνέβαλον in line 8, the subject being the same as in the preceding line, i.e., *these gods here*. In view of ἔμπυον in line 10, I propose, *exempli gratia*, [καὶ ἐμοὶ ἔλκος] | ἐνέβαλον.<sup>18</sup>

**Lines 8-11:** Not enough remains of these three lines to enable us to go beyond the obvious, namely, that Ares is probably referring to his (?) 'festering wound/ulcer' which he regarded as divine punishment for his transgressions.

To sum up, I would reconstruct the whole story as follows: Ares the flute-player took some soldiers to a sanctuary to participate in a ceremony of oath-taking. Things went wrong and he tried to abuse physically the priests present at the ceremony. Foiled in his attempt, he was subsequently punished by the gods offended by his reckless behaviour. They seem to have directed their fury first at a member of his family (or his slave, donkey, bull, sheep, goat, and the like) by causing his/her/its death and afterwards they inflicted him with a festering wound/ulcer. This was enough even for the irresponsible *auletes*<sup>19</sup> to come to his senses, repent, confess his sins and erect this stele with a report of his transgression.

This is the new reading and translation of the interesting text from Jerusalem:

“Ορκος· Ἄρης ἀλητῆς τάδ[ε·?(τοὺς) στρατιώ-  
 τας ἐπήγαγον ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκ[ίαν τῶν θεῶν]  
 τούτων καὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην [ χ. 10 letters missing]  
 καὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖς μαστ[ιγῶσαι/ιγι παίειν]  
 5 ἤθελον καὶ οὐκ ἔλαθ[ον, ?κολασθεῖς]  
 ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν τοῦ[των· χ. 10 letters missing]  
 μου ἀπώλεσαν [?καὶ ἐμοὶ ἔλκος]  
 ἐνέβαλον ΚΑ[ χ. 15 letters missing]  
 σαν καὶ ΤΑΑ<sup>20</sup>[- - - - -]  
 10 ἔμπυον<sup>21</sup>[- - - - -]  
 [- - -]ΤΗΕΠ<sup>22</sup>[- - - - -]

17 The principle of 'collective responsibility' routinely appears in Lydian and Phrygian confession-inscriptions (Petzl, op. cit., 34, 37, 45, 59, 62, 69). At the end of line 6 we can tentatively supply τὴν γυναῖκα or τὴν θυγατέρα; τὸν υἱὸν is also possible, but probably too short for the average length of lines.

18 Cf. *Il.* V 795; XVI 511; Pindar, *Hyporch.* frg. 111.

19 Cf. Athen. VIII 18: Ἄνδρὶ μὲν ἀλητῆρι θεοὶ νόον οὐκ ἐνέφυσαν, ἀλλ' ἅμα τῷ φυσῆν χῶ νόος ἐκπέταται.

20 Cotton and Di Segni per ep.: 'L. 9: ΣΑΝΚΑΙΤΑΛΛ; either *lambda* could be either an *alpha* or a *lambda*'.

21 Cotton and Di Segni per ep.: 'L. 10: ΕΜΠΥΟΝ or ΕΜΠΥΟΜ'.

*(The case of the) oath: Flute-player Ares (says) this: I led [?(the) soldiers] to the hou[se of] these [gods] and I refused (?) to/said I would not [- -] and I wanted to flo[g] the priests and I did not escape detection, [?punished] by these gods he[re:] they killed my [- -] and inflicted me with [?a festering wound] and they [- -] and [- -] festering [- -].*

I have little doubt that this is a confession inscription, and a very early one at that, earlier than all the presently known confession-inscriptions and aretalogies from Asia Minor. Judging by the letter-forms, it could be either third or second century BC. Many relevant questions have no immediate answer. The most important is the provenance of the stone. Does it come from Jerusalem itself or was it brought in from somewhere? If it is a *pierre errante*, where does it come from? I prefer to leave these questions open, in hope that this note will stimulate scholars in Israel and elsewhere who are more competent to offer solutions to these puzzles.

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<sup>22</sup> Cotton and Di Segni per ep.: ‘L. 11: THEΠ; the *pi* seems likely’.