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FORTUNE, A BULL, AND TWO RAMS – A NEW *OSTOTHEKE* PROBABLY FROM EPHEOS

We present an *ostotheke* with an unpublished inscription (Fig. 1).¹ This cinerary urn was made of limestone from around Lydia and Caria, perhaps from the quarries of Hierapolis. It presents a rectangular shape with a beveled base, measuring 34 cm. high, 59 cm. wide and 36 cm. deep. A festooned garland traverses the front long side in two rounds that are held up by three heads, that of a bull in the center and of two rams on the sides.

This sort of funerary object, also called ossuary, is a container for the calcified bones left after the cremation of a corpse. Its function is thus similar to the ash chest or cineraria found in Rome and Italy, although it differs in size and decoration.²



Fig. 1. Ostotheke / Sotheby's Inc. © 2019

The text

The *ostotheke* contains two lines of text. The first one is located over the garland, in a single line divided into two segments by the head of the bull:

ΠΟΥΦ[–] (vacat) ΤΥΧΗ

Transcription 1: ποῦ φ[–] Τύχη;

Translation 1: Where (...) Fortune?

Transcription 2: Πουφ[ίω] Τύχη

Translation 2: To Pufius, Fortune!

¹ Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's Inc. © 2019. We wish to thank Jorge Wong for the proof-reading.

² Thomas and İçten 1999: 550.

This is an uncommon epitaph and we have been unable to find another case of this kind that casts some light on the two missing letters of the second word. We suggest, however, two possible interpretations. The first one is to read a term linked to φῶς, “light”. In this sense, a possible solution could be ποῦ φ[άε] Τύχη;, that is to say, “Where did Fortune shine?” In his compilation of Greek and Roman epitaphs, Lattimore mentioned some cases where light appears as a reference to the living world, whereas in the grave or the urn – in Hades – there is darkness.³ If our hypothesis is right, this would be an alternative way to allude to the shift from light of life to other places. A more frequent formula in epitaphs is the name of the person followed by χαῖρε. There are quite a few examples in the sarcophagi from Ephesos,⁴ where, as we will explain, our *ostotheke* was probably manufactured.

The second hypothesis is the reconstruction of the name Πούφιος, the Greek version of the latin name Pufius, also attested in more epigraphs of Asia Minor and other regions.⁵ This would mean therefore that the *ostotheke* registers a conventional formula for the deceased in the afterlife.

The second part of the epigraph is more problematic because most of it is lost. Originally, it was a single line that covered almost the entire width of the *ostotheke*, below the sculpture reliefs. The current state of the epigraph allows us to read the following:

[-----]Υ[---]Ο[-Υ?--]ΟΥ

It is not possible to reconstruct the sentence in this state of preservation. Nevertheless, one might see some similarities with an exemplar currently at the Museum of Tyre, in Lebanon. The only reference we have found of it is an image in a monograph of Koch focused on Roman imperial sarcophagi from Turkey.⁶ The *ostotheke* has the same decoration in relief. The upper part, a bit damaged, does not seem to bear any text. But below the garland with animal heads a one-line epigraph is almost entirely preserved. It has not been possible for us to find this reference in any corpus or periodical, but the picture is accurate enough to discern the letters:

ΠΟΠΛΙΟΥΑ[Υ?]ΔΙΟΥΒΑΣΣΟΥ

Transcription: Ποπλίου Α[ύ?]δίου Βάσσου

Translation: (Of) Poplius Audius Bassus

The reconstruction of the second word is possible based on similar cases were this name is attested both as Αὐδίου Βάσσου⁷ or Κλαυδίου Βάσσου.⁸ We can be fairly certain that the damage line of the *ostotheke* here presented contained the name of the deceased. If the second interpretation explained above is right, the name Πούφιος, or more correctly Πουφίου, would appear

3 Lattimore 1942: 161–162. Examples: φῶς δ’ ἔλιπ’ εὐδαίμων (“He left the light happily”, *EG* 44, 4) and οὔτε γὰρ εἰσορόω λαμπρὸν φάος οὔτ’ ἑσακούω (“For I see no bright light, nor do I hear anything”, *EG* 298, 3).

4 *Ephesos*, Teil VI, no. 2447; *SEG* LX, no. 1164–1165, 1167–1168, 1170–1174.

5 *Smyrna* 806, for example. We wish to thank Jorge Wong for the suggestion of this hypothesis.

6 Koch 2010: fig. 78 (no museum reference).

7 *JRS* 29 (1939) 193, 5.

8 *Miletos* 407.

again here. Unfortunately, the few letters preserved are not enough to read the name of the person.

Commentary

The typology of this *ostotheke* fits within the *officinae* of the Roman province of Asia, despite the fact that this garland decoration is used also abroad (for example in Rome).⁹ The reliefs do not follow a single pattern, but there are different styles that use one or more of the elements we see in our piece. For example, the Pamphylian and Cilician *ostothekai* are commonly designed with only a bull's head.¹⁰ The introduction of the ram head is more common in the area between Lydia and Ionia with very close parallels also present in some urns from Kula and Selçuk.¹¹ Another variation displays rams in the edges and a Gorgon head in the center.¹²

This decoration is well known from the Proconnesian sarcophagi of the 1st to 3rd centuries CE.¹³ Ephesos seems to have held most workshops that manufactured this sort of *ostothekai*, primarily those with garlands which, in the simplest modality, are accompanied by ram heads in the edge and a bull in the center.¹⁴ They were usually half-fabricated, that is to say, only one of the large sides was sculpted,¹⁵ and they have the shape of a box or casket with small feet.¹⁶ The iconography of these *ostothekai* appears in the beginning of the Empire, has its heyday during the 1st century, and endures until the 2nd CE.¹⁷ Ephesos was not the only place for the production of *ostothekai*. In fact, we can add Dokimeion, Bithynia, Sardes, and the areas of Caria, Pisidia, Pamphylia, and Isauria-Lykaonia.¹⁸

With regard to the material, most sarcophagi from Asia Minor were made of porphyry, granite and marble.¹⁹ In this case, limestone is the rock employed, although the most common material in Ephesos for these objects was local marble.²⁰

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9 Sinn: 1987, no. 6 (circular shape), 7 and 8.

10 *Vid.* Korkut 2006.

11 Asgari 1977: 336–338, figs. 17–19.

12 Koch 1982: 197, fig. 33 (Museum of Aigina, no. 700).

13 Koch and Sichtermann 1982: 491, type 2.

14 Asgari 1977: 335–343, esp. 339–341.

15 Koch 2010: 68.

16 Koch and İçten 1999: 558.

17 Koch 1993: 154–155 and 158.

18 Koch 1993: 154–162; 2010: 67.

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Özet

Bu makale bir antika pazarındaki küçük boyutlu bir lahitten incelenmiş olup yayınlanmamıştır. Onun tipolojisi ve yazıtı Boğa ve Çelenklerin süslemesi ile belirlenmiş olup, Efes yakınlarındaki bir kökene işaret ediyor.

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