

A FRAGMENT OF AN INSCRIBED BRONZE STELE FROM ATHENS

(PLATE 54)

INSCRIBED bronze stelai from Athens have so far been known to us only through literary sources. Although there are several specific references to Attic texts inscribed ἐν στήλῃ χαλκῇ in the classical authors, no fragment which can be convincingly attributed to a monument of this sort has yet been published.¹ A few inscriptions on thin bronze tablets or plaques of modest dimensions have survived, mainly from the excavations on the Acropolis, but most of these were clearly designed to be nailed up on wooden posts or perhaps on walls and do not really qualify as free-standing stelai. With the exception of the mid-6th century plaque recording a dedication made to Athena by a board of Treasurers (*I.G.*, I², 393),² the few remaining Athenian inscriptions on bronze are mainly private in character with brief, stereotyped texts. Later occupants of the Acropolis and the lower city of Athens were so thorough in their search for metal which could be melted down that, without the literary notices, we might have assumed that bronze was seldom, if ever, used for large-scale official documents in Athens. Consequently, in attempting to reconstruct the form of an

¹ One of the most conspicuous bronze stelai at Athens must have been that which condemned the traitor Arthmios of Zeleia. It stood on the Acropolis *παρὰ τὴν χαλκῆν τὴν μεγάλην Ἀθηνῶν ἐκ δεξιᾶς*, Demosthenes, XIX, 272. See also Demosthenes, IX, 41 and F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Leiden, 1955, No. 342, Krateros, F. 14, where the other ancient testimonia are collected. Bronze seems to have been a favorite material in Athens for stelai recording ἀτιμία; see the condemnation of those who joined Kleomenes in holding Eleusis in 506 (Scholiast *ad* Aristophanes, *Lys.*, 273); Diagoras of Melos (Jacoby, *op. cit.*, F. 16); Phrynikos (*ibid.*, F. 17); Archeptolemos and the orator Antiphon ([Plutarch], *Vitae X orat.*, 833D—834B); Hipparchos son of Charmos (Lycurgus, *Leocr.*, 117). Though Thucydides does not specify the material (VI, 55), it is likely that the stele condemning the Peisistratidai, which was set up on the Acropolis, was also of bronze. See G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte*, II², Gotha, 1895, p. 398, note 2. International treaties were sometimes engraved on bronze stelai at Athens; see the pact made by Athens with several other Greek states on the eve of the Chremonidean War (*I. G.*, II², 687, line 43), though here a stone stele seems to have replaced the bronze one prescribed in the decree. A copy of such agreements was often inscribed on a bronze stele and deposited at one or more of the major Panhellenic centers, cf. The Thirty Years Peace (Thucydides, I, 115; Pausanias, V, 23, 3) and the truce signed by Athens, Argos, Mantinea, and Elis (Thucydides, V, 47; Pausanias, V, 12, 7; *I.G.*, I², 86), both at Olympia. Cf. Thucydides, V, 18 for the practice. For bronze stelai containing Athenian treasury records see W. S. Ferguson, *The Treasurers of Athena*, Cambridge, Mass., 1932, p. 124. Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.*, 54, 4) states that the annual draft-list for the ephebes, previously published on whitened boards, was in his day inscribed on a bronze stele.

² For the date see now L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*, Oxford, 1961, p. 72, no. 21.

Athenian bronze stele scholars have had to rely only on conjecture.³ Recently, there has come to light in a private collection in Athens a tiny fragment from just such a monument which, together with an interesting series of bases in the Agora, now gives us our first solid piece of evidence as to the original form of an Athenian bronze stele.

This fragment is here presented with the generous permission of the owner, Mrs. Alexandros Meletopoulou, to whom I am indebted for entrusting me with its publication. The piece originally belonged to Alexandros N. Meletopoulos, a well-known collector who assembled a large number of antiquities in his home and garden in Peiraeus near the turn of the century. Many of the bronze objects in the collection were obtained in the Peiraeus area and several of these passed to the Archaeological Museum of that city on Meletopoulos' death.⁴ In the hope of establishing the provenance of our fragment, Mrs. Meletopoulou kindly searched the private catalogue of the original collection, but no indication of its place of finding is recorded there. We are left to guess where the stele was first erected, and though Athens might be the most logical setting for a monument of this type, Peiraeus itself or perhaps even one of the Attic demes outside the city must also remain a possibility.

The fragment contains the ends of six lines of a *lex sacra* inscribed stoichedon (Pl. 54, a, b). Horizontal guide-lines, laid out precisely 0.01 m. apart, were incised along the top and bottom of each line and the space between lines is exactly 0.002 m. There is no trace of vertical guide-lines and it is most unlikely that any were used since the stoichoi are not strictly vertical. After establishing the length of the first line, the engraver trusted to his eye in placing each letter below the corresponding letter in the line above. Punctuation, consisting of three small holes punched one above the other, appears twice on the fragment. The letters, which stand out clearly against the smooth surface, were deeply and carefully cut with a sharp chisel after the bronze had hardened. Omicrons and thetas all measure 0.0085 m. in diameter and were mechanically engraved, perhaps with the tubular drill since no trace of a compass cutting remains on the surface of the bronze.⁵ The interpuncts and the dots in the thetas were made with the same punch.

The piece is broken on all sides except the right, which is preserved and forms a corner with the right lateral face. This face is preserved to a width of only about 0.008 m. At some time, probably when the stele was originally destroyed, the rest of this right side was cut away with a sharp instrument, but enough remains to show that its thickness is identical to that of the inscribed face and that both faces were

³ See A. E. Raubitschek, *Dedications from the Athenian Akropolis*, Cambridge, Mass., 1949, p. 352.

⁴ A catalogue of the objects from the Meletopoulos collection now in the Peiraeus Museum and a brief biographical sketch of the owner were published by Th. A. Arvanitopoulou, *Πολύμων*, III, 1947-1958, pp. ιζ'—λβ'.

⁵ For the use of this instrument see A. E. Raubitschek, *A.J.A.*, LV, 1951, pp. 343-344.

cast together in one piece. The back surface of both faces is preserved and the internal corner where they meet is slightly rounded, showing no trace of a joint. Although it is impossible to determine the height or width of the original monument to which this fragment belonged, we can be sure that it was inscribed on at least two sides, for the twin guide-lines of lines 1 and 2 can be traced around the corner on to the right lateral face at exactly their respective levels. They were clearly incised to set off the lines of text on the right face of the stele; unfortunately, we have been left with only a thin strip from its left margin, and it bears no trace of letters. As one holds the fragment, the most impressive aspect of it, apart from the care and precision with which the guide-lines and the letters have been engraved, is the weight and solidity of the bronze. It is a sturdy piece and obviously belonged to a monument of impressive dimensions.

Preserved height: 0.073 m.

Preserved width: 0.075 m.

Letter heights: *ca.* 0.01 m.

Thickness of bronze, side and front: 0.007 m.

ΣΤΟΙΧ.

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----- , A
-----] hierop
3 [οιοι -----]οσι : ηοι ε
----- ]: με επι (
5 -----] μισθο[. . ]
-----]ος ηι[. . ]

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The text is so fragmentary that in seeking a date for this inscription we have only the forms of the letters to guide us. Any argument based on so few letters is bound to be largely subjective and a date within sharply defined limits is impossible. The low, squat sigma, however, and the long right vertical of pi are striking and together with the shape of the mu they are perhaps most closely paralleled in a number of Attic decrees which belong to about the middle of the fifth century.⁶

That the stele may have carried some kind of sacred regulations is suggested by the presence of the hieropoioi in line 2 (and perhaps again in line 6) and the prohibition in line 4, but only a very imperfect idea of the content of these regulations seems possible.

Line 1: In front of the alpha is the bottom of an upright stroke which touches the guide-line and falls in the center of the stoichos.

⁶ Cf. especially *I.G.*, I², 22, Miletos Decree; *I.G.*, I², 24, first decree of Athena Nike; *I.G.*, I², 27, Proxeny Decree; *S.E.G.*, X, 24, Eleusinian Epistatai.

Line 2: The break has removed the tops of the three letters before the rho. At the left edge, touching the guide-line and lying in the stoichos, are the bottom parts of two verticals. The distance between these two strokes (0.0055 m.) is exactly that found between the uprights of the other aspirates in lines 2 and 6; no other letter seems possible here. Centered in the next letter-space is the bottom of another vertical. Following this letter the bottom half of epsilon is clear.

There is no indication which particular board of hieropoioi is involved in this line nor any hint as to what they are directed to do.⁷ It is not even certain that the noun stood here; some form of the verb *ιεροποιέω* is also possible (cf. *I.G.*, I², 84, line 19).

Line 3: If the first three letters are from the ending of a verb, they probably belong to a phrase qualifying the hieropoioi, but I fail to see a restoration here which is demanded by the context; any hope of thus fixing the length of line is remote. The last four letters are even more tantalizing, and with the hieropoioi appearing above it is tempting to look in this line for another group of officials involved in the sacred regulations such as *οἱ ἐπιμελεταί* or *οἱ ἐπιστάται* but *λοι* could simply be the relative pronoun.

Line 4: At the end of this line in the break there is part of an arc belonging to a circular letter. If a verb follows *μέ*, as seems most likely, then this clause may be interpreted as a prohibition perhaps connected with the cult. The circular cutting exerts some control on restoration but there still remain several possible readings, e.g. some form of *ἐπιθύειν*, *ἐπιθυσιάειν*, *ἐπιθύεσθαι*, *ἐπιθέειν*, *ἐπιφέρειν*, etc.

Line 5: Epigraphically, the slanting stroke which is preserved inside the break at the beginning of this line could also belong to alpha, gamma, or delta.

Line 6: Part of an arc preserved in the break shows that the first letter here was omicron, theta, or phi. It is followed by the top slanting bar of sigma. Of the letter after the aspirate only the top part of an upright remains, slightly to the left of center.

⁷ Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 54, 6, mentions two boards of officials who were known as hieropoioi at Athens: (1) *ιεροποιοὶ κατ' ἐνιαυτόν*, an annual board of ten men chosen by lot to manage all the great four-year festivals except the Panathenaia. Cf. *I.G.*, I², 304, line 6. (2) A second board of ten men chosen by lot to perform all sacrifices which might be demanded by oracles. There were in addition several special boards of hieropoioi in the fifth century who were entrusted with the supervision of individual temples, sanctuaries, and festivals. For those at Eleusis, who were known as *οἱ ιεροποιοὶ Ἐλευσίνι* or *οἱ ιεροποιοὶ οἱ Ἐλευσινόθεν*, see *I.G.*, I², 6, line 120, with B. D. Meritt, *Hesperia*, XIV, 1945, p. 74; *I.G.*, I², 76, lines 9, 17; *I.G.*, I², 311, lines 4, 11, 18, 25; *S.E.G.*, X, 24, line 2. In *I.G.*, I², 84 the duties of the hieropoioi attached to the cult of Hephaistos and Athena are elaborately described. This board consisted of ten men chosen by lot from among the dikasts. Another group of hieropoioi, which administered the rites of the goddess Bendis in Peiraeus, is found in *S.E.G.*, X, 64 (for a new text see now *S.E.G.*, XVII, 5). For the hieropoioi of the Panathenaia see Raubitschek, *Dedications*, nos. 326-328; M. Bieber, *A.J.A.*, XLVIII, 1944, pp. 124-125; *I.G.*, I², 10, line 4.

It is possible that the hieropoioi appear again here, this time in the accusative, but we might also read $\tau] \delta \varsigma \text{ } \eta \iota [\epsilon \rho | \acute{\epsilon} \alpha \varsigma$.

The text of this fragment is clearly disappointing, but the piece does provide us with valuable evidence for a type of monument which in Athens has hitherto been only a name. The happy chance that preserved a thin slice of the right lateral face makes it possible to establish two facts: the two faces meet at a right-angle and the presence of horizontal guide-lines on the right lateral face clearly shows that this side was likewise inscribed. Furthermore, there is no indication that the smooth, clean surface of the back of the fragment was ever in contact with any other material; the thickness of the bronze is such that the stele could easily have stood on a base without additional internal support, though if the monument was placed out of doors, there may have been some kind of plug or cap at the top to keep out rain. These two contiguous faces then, both inscribed horizontally, would have formed two sides of a hollow, free-standing stele. They were probably completed either by one side, the result being a triangular stele, or by two other sides which would form a square or rectangular stele.

In the first instance, the right-angle preserved on our fragment almost demands a stele in the form of a right-angled isosceles triangle with one side necessarily much wider than the other two. A monument of this type, though possible, is unparalleled in official Attic inscriptions of the fifth century on stone and is obviously an awkward and unsatisfactory shape. The existence of triangular stelai with three equal sides, however, is attested in both stone and bronze by five bases in the Agora which may be roughly contemporary with our fragment. These monuments suggest that the equilateral triangle was the regular form and make it even more unlikely that the strange right-angled type would have been constructed when the advantages of having three sides of equal dimensions were so obvious.

The other alternative, a square or rectangular stele probably inscribed on three or on all four sides, is a much more reasonable reconstruction. Such a monument has several parallels in stone of which the closest are perhaps the law regulating the Eleusinian Mysteries (*I.G.*, I², 6) and the *lex sacra* of the deme Skambonidai (*I.G.*, I², 188). In both cases the texts are inscribed on tall, rectangular pillars with fairly narrow faces. Our fragment probably belongs to the same class of sacred documents as these two inscriptions and cannot be far removed from them in date. It is impossible to determine the height or width of the bronze stele, but if the parallel with these two inscriptions on stone is valid, our monument would have had a rather tall, pillar-like appearance. Certainly two of the four sides were cast together and it may be that the whole stele was made hollow in one piece and then inscribed before being set into its base.⁸

⁸ Bronze stelai from other sites in Greece differ considerably from the type of monument to

Clear indication of the way in which our bronze stele was probably mounted is afforded by four of the bases mentioned above which were discovered in the excavations of the Athenian Agora.⁹ All these bases once supported hollow, triangular bronze stelai and thus provide good evidence for a second variety of this type of monument. In each case a narrow trough (*ca.* 0.02 m. wide) which follows the outline of an equilateral triangle was sunk into the top surface of the base to a depth of *ca.* 0.05 m.; the center of the triangle thus formed was left untouched. The hollow, triangular stele was then set into the cutting and the trough filled up with molten lead to the level of the top surface of the block, thereby fastening the stele securely into position. In three of the bases no trace of either bronze or lead has survived, but in one other instance¹⁰ ample traces of both metals are still in position on two sides of the triangle to the level of the top surface of the base (Pl. 54, c, d). Fortunately, one of the angles of the original stele is still preserved and it appears that the two sides which form it were cast as one piece. Another important fact about the stele which stood in this particular base is that it was exactly the thickness of our new fragment (0.007 m.). The similarity in the width of the troughs on the other bases suggests that they too were designed for stelai of a similar thickness and this may well have been a standard gauge.

Slight as it is, the text of our new fragment does indicate that, in addition to the different types of documents listed in note 1, bronze stelai at Athens were also inscribed with texts of a sacred nature. The physical characteristics of this small piece of bronze, moreover, when combined with the evidence of the bases in the Agora, clearly show that Athenian bronze stelai were cast hollow with stout, thick sides and were made in either a triangular or rectangular form. They were large and impressive monuments, built to last, and capable of carrying a text of considerable length and importance.

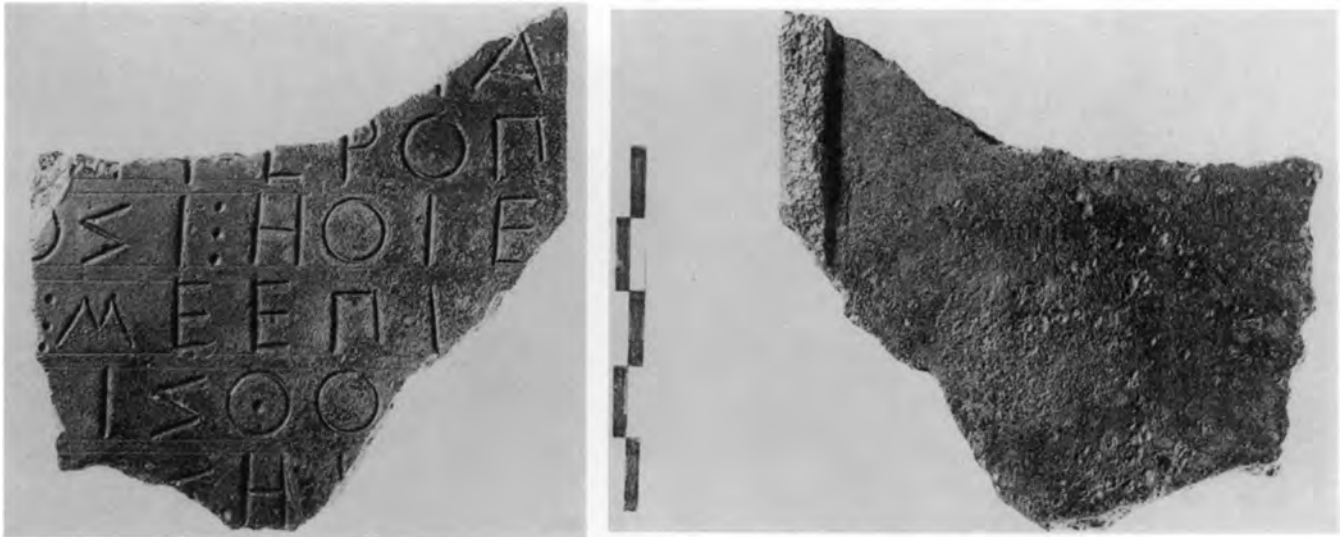
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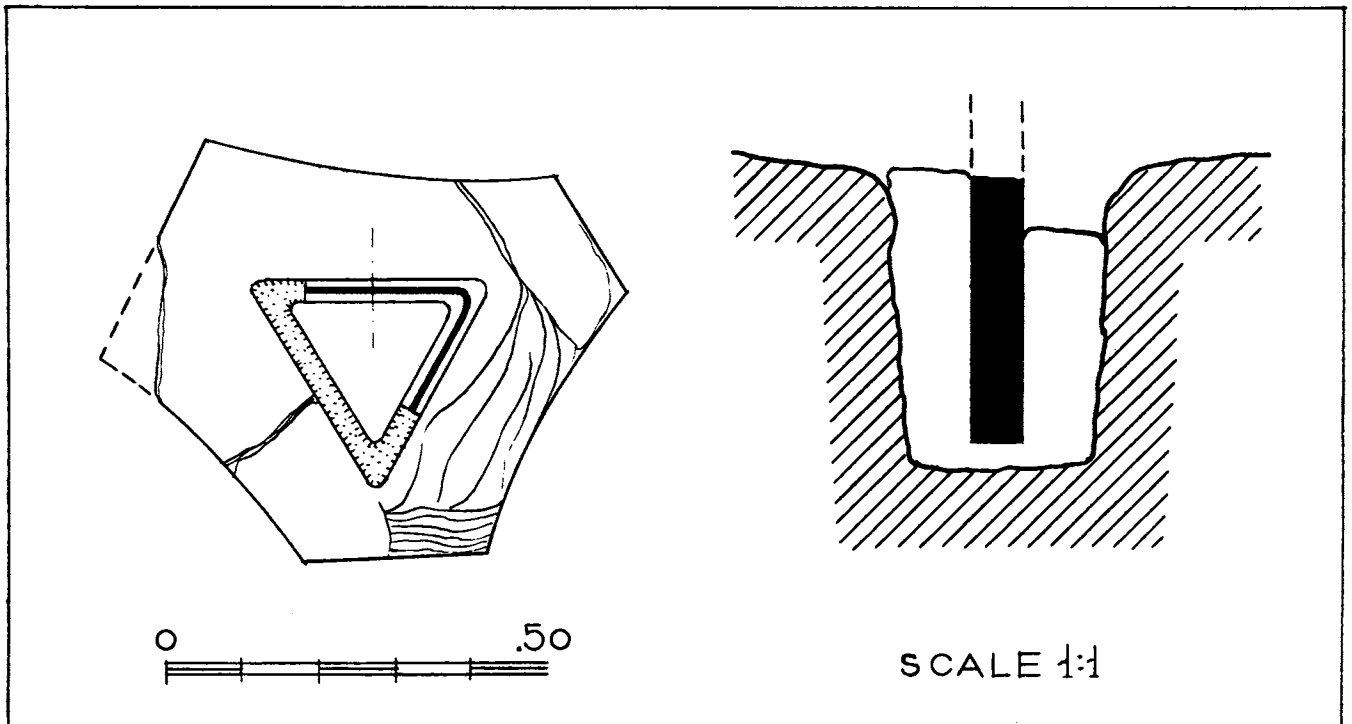
which our fragment belongs and are of little help in attempting a reconstruction. A full list of such stelai and other public inscriptions on bronze has been conveniently presented by L. Robert in *Collection Froehner*, I, *Inscriptions Grecques*, Paris, 1936, pp. 47-48; *Hellenica*, X, 1955, pp. 289-290; see also J. and L. Robert, *R.E.G.*, LXXIV, 1961, pp. 140-141, no. 154.

⁹ I am indebted to Professor Homer A. Thompson for permission to use this illustrative material and plan to make these bases the subject of a special study. R. E. Wycherley notes their presence near the Monument of the Eponymous Heroes, *The Athenian Agora*, III, Princeton, 1957, pp. 86-87, no. 233.

¹⁰ Agora A 1826. A limestone block of roughly triangular shape with the angles squared off and the sides slightly concave. Found opposite the Metroon, east of the Great Drain and north of the base of the Eponymous Heroes (I-9). Height: 0.27 m. Thickness: 0.505 m. Width: 0.61 m. Outside measurement of triangular cutting: *ca.* 0.30 m. on each side. Thickness of bronze: 0.007 m.



a. and b. Fragment of Bronze Stele in Meletopoulos Collection, Front and Back.



c. and d. Stele Base in Athenian Agora (A 1826).

