

THE MEANING OF *EPISEMA* IN PAUSANIAS I, 17, 1

ACCORDING to Pausanias (I, 17, 1) the Altar of Eleos was one of those monuments *οὐκ ἐς ἅπαντας ἐπίσημα*.¹ R. E. Wycherley rightly finds unacceptable W. H. S. Jones' translation "not generally known,"² and indeed it is hard to think of a less apt description for the venerated monument. In his turn Wycherley offers "not easily distinguishable for everyone." He explains his choice of words: "The primary meaning of *ἐπίσημος* is 'bearing a distinguishing mark.' Perhaps Pausanias means that the altar was of a modest character, not obvious and easily distinguishable to the visitor. One might also bear in mind that according to Statius it was surrounded by shrubbery."³ Wycherley seems thus prepared to understand Pausanias' qualifying phrase as indicating that the altar did not "stand out," was in no way ostentatious, and, possibly, that its outline was blurred. While I am certain that Wycherley is correct in associating *ἐπίσημος* with its primary meaning—the other uses given in LSJ⁴ are all most unlikely in this context—I am equally certain that Pausanias' use of *ἐπίσημος* admits of a precise, rather than an ambiguous, definition.

There are at least five other passages⁴ where Pausanias uses a form of *ἐπίσημος*.

1. I, 34, 4. Near the temple the Oropians have a spring, which they call the spring of Amphiaraios. To it they sacrifice nothing, nor are they accustomed to use it for purifications or sacred water. However, when a man has been healed of disease in response to an oracle, it has been established that he throw into the spring silver and <or> gold stamped (*ἐπίσημον*), for they say that it was there that Amphiaraios rose up when become a god.

2. II, 30, 6. While he was king, they say that Athena and Poseidon argued about the land and that after the dispute they held it jointly, for so Zeus commanded them. Because of this they worship both Athena, naming her Polias and Sthenias, and also Poseidon called King. And moreover their old coinage bears as devices (*ἐπίσημα*) a trident and the head of Athena.

3. III, 8, 7. Such were the particularly notable (*ἐπίσημα*) deeds of war accomplished by Agis.

4. V, 5, 5-6. The Lepreans said that in their city there was a temple of Zeus Leukaïos, a grave of Lykourgos, son of Aleos, and another grave, that of Kaukon, over which was set as marker

¹ Analogous phrases with *ἐς ἅπαντας* appear several times in Pausanias: see H. Hitzig and H. Blümner, *Pausaniae Graeciae Descriptio*, IA, Berlin, 1896, p. 295, commentary on I, 27, 3.

² Jones' version is from the Loeb edition. Cf. also the translations of Frazer "not universally known," Dindorf "non omnibus nota," and Meyer "nicht bei allen Henschen bekannt."

³ R. E. Wycherley, *Athenian Agora*, III, *Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia*, Princeton, 1957, p. 71.

⁴ *ἐπίσημα* is also found as a manuscript reading at IX, 40, 10, where it has been justifiably emended to *ἐπίθημα*. In two other places, IV, 16, 7 and V, 25, 9, where *ἐπίθημα* appears to be the correct reading, some editors have suggested, unnecessarily, that the texts be changed to *ἐπίσημα*. In cataloguing Pausanias' use of this word, I have been greatly helped by Mr. Samuel Young, one-time graduate student in Classics at the University of British Columbia. To him I offer very sincere thanks.

a man holding a lyre. However as far as I am concerned they possessed neither a marked (*ἐπίσημον*) tomb nor a sanctuary to any of the gods except Demeter.

5. X, 19, 8. Thereupon Brennos both in public gatherings and in discussions with individual Gallic officers actively promoted an expedition against Greece, describing in detail the present weakness of the Greeks, the great wealth in their treasuries, and the greater riches in their sanctuaries, both offerings and silver and gold stamped (*ἐπίσημος*).

In four of these five passages, 1, 2, 4, and 5, *ἐπίσημος* is used to indicate that the object so described bears a visible distinguishing mark, which, one may add, renders that object identifiable. Gold and silver when properly stamped become coins, and particular coins are struck with particular devices. A tomb can be recognized and identified by the distinguishing funerary monument set upon it. In these four quotations Pausanias has used *ἐπίσημος* with a consistent literal meaning.

The remaining passage, 3, is different. Here Pausanias has applied *ἐπίσημος* figuratively to an object that cannot bear a visible distinguishing mark. These particular military deeds of Agis are recognized and identified by virtue of their intrinsic importance. They too can thus be said to be *ἐπίσημα*. Many parallels for this type of double use, the one literal, the other figurative, could be cited.⁵ The word "marked," for example, or even "hall-marked," has very much the same range of meaning as *ἐπίσημος*.

Let us now return to Pausanias I, 17, 1, the only other passage in Pausanias, as far as I know, where an object is described as *ἐπίσημος*. The Altar of Eleos belongs to a group of monuments *οὐκ ἐς ἅπαντας ἐπίσημα*. We have already seen that this is not the figurative use of *ἐπίσημος*: very few monuments in Athens were as notable as the Altar of Eleos. Here we can expect *ἐπίσημος* to have its literal meaning, the natural one when used of objects possessing physical reality. The Altar of Eleos was not one of those monuments that bore a distinguishing mark by which it could be recognized and identified by all. Instead, the altar was without a distinguishing mark and therefore could not be recognized nor identified by everyone. What Pausanias is telling his reader is this: when you walk around the Athenian Agora, among other things you will see some monuments that you will be unable to identify without prior knowledge, because these particular ones carry no signs, no distinguishing marks, by which they can be identified. The Altar of Eleos, despite its fame, is one of these "anonymous" monuments. While the visitor could recognize the structure as an altar (or so I assume), there was nothing to tell him that Eleos was the divinity worshipped there. It was this lack of identification that made the Altar of Eleos one of those monuments *οὐκ ἐς ἅπαντας ἐπίσημα*.

⁵ Herodotos is another author who understood this double use of *ἐπίσημος*. In I, 51, 5 he notes that Kroisos had deposited at Delphi *ἀναθήματα οὐκ ἐπίσημα*. They are clearly not dedications of inferior quality as several translators have supposed, but gifts that do not bear any distinguishing marks by which they can be identified as from Kroisos. II, 20, 1, on the other hand, provides an example of the figurative use: *ἀλλὰ Ἑλλήνων μὲν τινες ἐπίσημοι βουλόμενοι γενέσθαι σοφίην ἔλεξαν περὶ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου τριφασίας ὁδοῦς*.

What does this lack of identifying clues tell us about the Altar of Eleos? Two things become certain: first, that the altar carried no obvious dedicatory inscription, nor were there other significant inscriptions in close association with it; and second, that no works of sculpture revealed the god's identity. In this latter conclusion the meager notice of the altar by Pausanias and the rich account by Statius from the previous century come together in agreement, for Statius describes the altar as having no image:

nulla autem effigies, nulli commissa metallo
forma dei, mentes habitare et pectora gaudet.

(*Thebaid*, XII, 493-494)

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