

AN INSCRIBED FUNERARY MONUMENT FROM CORINTH

ABSTRACT

In this article the author publishes a Corinthian funerary inscription from the late 5th or early 4th century B.C. The stone's primary importance lies in its physical characteristics, which imply that it and other similar examples, usually interpreted as sarcophagus lids, are instead horizontal grave markers of the *trapeza* or *mensa* type; this class now represents the most common form of grave monument in pre-Roman Corinth. Secondly, given the presence of a base molding datable on stylistic grounds, this stone provides an isolated example of a pre-Roman Corinthian inscription that can be dated by criteria other than letter forms.

In August 1999, a large worked block was brought into the museum at Ancient Corinth, having been discovered several years earlier as a result of deep plowing in a field a short distance northeast of the Amphitheater.¹ The dimensions of the block, the inscription consisting only of a name, and the findspot together associate this stone with the class of Corinthian inscriptions commonly identified as inscribed sarcophagus lids.² Certain features of this particular stone, however, justify a reassessment of this identification and thus help to expand considerably the meager corpus of known Corinthian grave monuments.

1. I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of individuals, especially Guy D. R. Sanders, Director of the Corinth Excavations, for permission to publish this inscription, and Ronald Stroud, who suggested I publish it. Both also offered helpful criticism on a draft of this article, as did Charles K. Williams II, Nancy Bookidis, Sara Strack, and two anonymous *Hesperia* reviewers. The photograph in Fig. 1 was taken by Ino Ioannidou and Lenio Bartzioti. The drawing in Fig. 2 was inked by Karen Sotiriou. Simon Trépanier kindly

shared the work done by himself and Thomas Reinhart on a similar inscription found in the same part of Corinth. Ruth Siddall and Chris Hayward both lent their expertise regarding the geological characteristics of the stone.

2. For other such stones found in the same area of the city, see Stroud 1972, pp. 210–214, nos. 10–19; Stroud (1992–1998, p. 239, n. 2) refers to an additional, unpublished example, to be published by S. Trépanier and T. Reinhart. Similar stones have been found in or near Corinth itself (*Corinth* VIII.1,

pp. 35–36, no. 28, p. 49, no. 61; VIII.3, pp. 3–4, nos. 4, 10); possibly at Isthmia, or an area between Isthmia and Corinth (*IG* IV 198–200); north of the Isthmus on the Saronic Gulf at Ayioi Theodoroi (ancient Krommyon) (*Corinth* VIII.3, pp. 2–4, nos. 1, 5–7); north of the Isthmus on the Corinthian Gulf at Asprokampe (*IG* IV 414–423; *SEG* XI 242–243; XXVIII 377–378); and at the southern end of the Corinthia at Kleonai (Stroud 1992–1998). Probably also comparable is a stone from ancient Kromna (*SEG* XXII 219).



Figure 1. Corinth I-1998-4. Photo courtesy Corinth Excavations

Corinth I-1998-4

Figs. 1, 2

H. ca. 0.31 (finished surface 0.28), W. 0.64, Th. 1.33 m

L.H. 0.037–0.042 m

Rectangular block of hard, low-grade marble. Complete except for a few chips caused by damage while being unearthed by a plow. In the top, rear, right corner there is a cutting, made in antiquity, for a patch that is now missing. A small cyma reversa molding runs along the bottom of all sides. All four sides and the top are smoothly finished; the bottom is rough-picked and uneven.

Late 5th/early 4th century B.C.

Καλλιστράτου

The letters are carefully cut and generally well executed; the left diagonal of the upsilon is slightly thickened since it was cut with two strokes that are nearly, but not quite, parallel with each other. The cutter has a tendency to extend very shallow strokes ca. 0.02–0.04 m past the juncture with another stroke, a feature visible on the first alpha, both lambdas, the sigma, and the tail of the rho; these strokes are very difficult to discern without optimal lighting conditions. A trace of the bottom of the omicron is just distinguishable along the bottom edge of the deep gouge that eradicated most of the letter.



Figure 2. Corinth I-1998-4. Drawing
B. Millis and K. Sotiriou

The letter forms suggest a date in the Classical period; they are clearly not Archaic nor do they appear to be Hellenistic. The closest parallels for the lettering are inscriptions published in *Corinth* VIII.3 and dated by John Kent to the early 4th century B.C.³ The rho with a tail is presumably an archaizing feature rather than an indication of an early date.⁴ The general paucity of pre-Roman Corinthian inscriptions, together with a lack of securely dated examples, makes precise dating on the basis of letter forms impossible. In this instance, however, the cyma reversa of the base molding, in which the height and depth are nearly equal but the upper curve is somewhat shallower than the lower, supports a date late in the 5th century or perhaps early in the 4th.⁵

The name Kallistratos occurs elsewhere in the Corinthia on *IG* IV 355,⁶ coincidentally also dated to the 5th century B.C., and possibly on *IG* IV 208,⁷ tentatively dated to the Hellenistic period, but the name is common in all periods throughout Greece.

Although similar in its general characteristics to inscribed sarcophagus lids at Corinth, this block differs in a number of important particulars. Most obviously, unlike the others, which are all of soft, easily worked poros, and thus of the same material as the monolithic sarcophagi themselves, this stone was cut from a very hard marble, never used in extant sarcophagi at Corinth.

3. *Corinth* VIII.3, pp. 5–6, nos. 17–19. On the basis of letter forms, Kent originally dated these inscriptions to the middle of the 5th century, although he subsequently downdated them to correspond to Stillwell's understanding of the chronology of the theater; see *Corinth* II, p. 131.

4. One might reasonably suppose a use of archaism to create a desired effect, e.g., an increase in solemnity. The state of the evidence, however, at least for Corinth, is so poor that it is

impossible to say how common archaism is, in what contexts it might be used and to what effect, or even whether a given case is truly an example of archaism. Finally, although Jeffery (1990, p. 116; cf. p. 160) states without qualification that the tailed rho appeared in Corinth at the end of the Archaic period, it is extremely rare (e.g., *Corinth* VIII.3, p. 4, no. 11; *IG* IV 355). Wachter (2001) noted only a single example among Corinthian vase inscriptions; he found the occurrence

remarkable, noting that the tailed rho was "used (for the sake of clarity?) in a letter which had been miswritten first" (p. 227).

5. Cf. Shoe 1936, p. 89, pl. XXXVIII, nos. 2, 5, 6.

6. A bronze strigil of unknown provenience now in the British Museum and inscribed Καλλ(λ)ίστρατος Διοδώρου Κορίνθιος.

7. A gravestone seen near the Isthmus and inscribed Ευπατινός(?) Καλλ[ικρ]άτ[ους] (or Καλλ[ιστρ]άτ[ου]).

The uniqueness of the material suggests that the reason for choosing this stone, as opposed to the easily worked and commonly available poros, lay in the appearance that it presented. Its attractiveness may have been partially aesthetic,⁸ but both the material itself and the amount of labor and skill necessary to work it presumably would have connoted great expenditure and thereby added to its stature as a status symbol. These considerations, together with the carving of a base molding and the repair to the break or flaw at the rear of the stone, imply that the stone was meant to be seen.⁹

The second unusual aspect of this stone is the treatment of its bottom. Unlike the other examples cited, the bottoms of which are flat and approximate a finished surface, the bottom of this stone is rough-picked (Fig. 2). More importantly, the bottom was roughly worked into a convex shape and contains no flat surface.¹⁰ This cursory working makes it impossible for the stone to rest comfortably upon a sarcophagus or indeed upon anything other than soil.

The conclusion drawn from the physical characteristics of this stone is that it cannot have been a sarcophagus lid, but must instead have served as a grave monument of the sort called a *trapeza* or *mensa*.¹¹ This type of grave monument, well known but never systematically studied, is merely a squared stone block placed either directly on the ground or on a base. The monument may be adorned with an inscription, usually on one of the short sides, a base and/or crown molding, relief decoration, usually simple, or a combination of the above. Occasionally a large stone lekythos is affixed to the top; it is possible, but without proof, that this feature reflects a practice of placing ceramic vessels used in the grave liturgy on top of the monument. *Trapezai* are found throughout much of Greece, although perhaps the best-known, and most thoroughly published, examples are from the Kerameikos in Athens.¹²

If the identification of this stone as a *trapeza* is correct, reconsideration of other stones classified as sarcophagus lids is warranted. The major argument for retaining the previously published examples as sarcophagus lids is their flat, worked undersurface; however, this feature may simply be a reflection of the ease with which poros can be worked. The presence of an inscription strongly suggests that at least the inscribed part of the stone

8. This stone and the poros examples, although today strikingly different in appearance, would originally have resembled each other, due to the white stucco with which the poros stones were coated. Coating poros blocks with stucco seems to have been a regular practice: e.g., nine (nos. 10–13, 15–19) of the 10 examples published by Stroud (1972, pp. 210–214) bore traces of stucco, and he plausibly suggested that the tenth (no. 14) was originally stuccoed as well. The finest and best-preserved example is the stone to be published by Trépanier and Reinhart (see n. 2, above).

9. There is, of course, the additional argument that all inscriptions were, *prima facie*, cut in order to be viewed.

10. The weight and present location of the stone precluded the possibility of taking a photograph that would adequately illustrate the stone's underside. Fig. 2 indicates the surface treatment and the contour of the bottom near the front of the stone, although the contour is so uneven that it continually changes across both the length and width of the stone.

11. For a brief discussion of this type of monument, see Koumanoudis 1871, pp. 15–16; Kurtz and Boardman

1971, pp. 235–237 (cf. pp. 168–169); *Thera* II, pp. 106–108. For critical remarks on the terminology, see Twele 1975. For examples of various forms of this monument, see *Kerameikos* XIV, p. 108, n. 189.

12. Most notably, the grave of Demetria and the graves of the Messenians (*Kerameikos* XIV, pp. 84, 105–110). The current state of knowledge suggests that such monuments are most common in traditionally Dorian areas of Greece, including the graves of people from these areas buried elsewhere. This impression may prove illusory if examples are collected systematically.

was meant to be seen; the existence of a base molding on several examples implies that the whole stone would have stood above ground.¹³

Much the same conclusion was reached by Keith Dickey, who added the additional strong argument that the supposed lids are too short for the known sarcophagi.¹⁴ Dickey argued as well that a number of similar large, rectangular stones found in the excavation of the North Cemetery also served as grave monuments, although none bore inscriptions.¹⁵ He interpreted graves 499 and 500, neither of which contained a skeleton or any object that could be reasonably interpreted as a grave offering, as grave markers of this same sort for graves 29 and 20, respectively, which lay beneath graves 499 and 500.¹⁶ Moreover, he plausibly suggested that the stones found above graves 19, 33, 35, and 36 were horizontal grave markers rather than upright stelai that had fallen over, as had been argued in *Corinth XIII*.¹⁷ The stone published here strongly supports Dickey's arguments since it can only have rested on the ground and therefore cannot have been a sarcophagus lid.

We are thus now able to establish a clearly defined and well-documented category of Corinthian grave monument of the Classical period, the horizontal *trapeza* type. This conclusion is particularly important given the remarkable paucity of grave monuments from pre-Roman Corinth, despite more than a century of archaeological investigation, including the excavation of a large cemetery area. No satisfactory discussion of Corinthian grave monuments, either generally or of specific types, has been possible due to the lack of evidence;¹⁸ indeed, B. S. Ridgway was able to provide a relatively full overview of the state of our knowledge for the Classical and Hellenistic periods in a single paragraph.¹⁹ The absence of evidence is so overwhelming that the authors of *Corinth XIII* quite naturally concluded that "the practice of setting up grave stones must have been limited at best."²⁰ The continued lack of evidence to the contrary over the 40 years since the publication of *Corinth XIII* has seemed to confirm the view that

13. Unfortunately, with the exception of I-1998-4, the examples with a base molding all come from secondary contexts in which the molding seems to have been deliberately removed, presumably to facilitate use of the stone as a wall block. For visible traces of moldings, cf. *Corinth VIII*.3, p. 3, no. 5, pl. 1; Stroud 1972, p. 211, no. 11, pl. 37.

14. Dickey 1992, p. 117. Note also that no lid definitely associated with a sarcophagus and inscribed has ever been found in pre-Roman Corinth.

15. Dickey 1992, pp. 115–117. Stroud (1972, p. 215) refers to uninscribed examples found together with inscribed ones in the area northeast of the Amphitheater. It is also possible that an inscription was cut into a stucco coating that is no longer extant.

16. Dickey 1992, p. 116. See also *Corinth XIII*, p. 294, where the possi-

bility is raised that graves 499 and 500 are grave markers. For grave 29, see *Corinth XIII*, p. 31, and pl. 15 for a photograph of the stone identified as a marker for this grave. For grave 20, see *Corinth XIII*, p. 28.

17. Dickey 1992, p. 116. *Corinth XIII*, pp. 27–28, 32–33.

18. Dickey (1992, pp. 112–119) provides an important but brief preliminary overview of Corinthian grave monuments of the Geometric and Archaic periods, with occasional Classical examples.

19. Ridgway 1981, pp. 428–429. Nonsculptural monuments of these periods, not discussed by Ridgway, include the large base published in *Corinth XIII*, pp. 66–68, and VIII.1, p. 37, no. 31, the scanty remains of which are most plausibly interpreted as a funerary epigram. For the Archaic period, note

the still not fully published sphinx referred to, with bibliography, by Ridgway (1981, pp. 423–424) and *IG IV* 358, an inscribed stele with a molding, possibly a pediment, across the top, marking the cenotaph of Deinias. Other possible grave monuments are some of the stray finds of columns and capitals found in and around Corinth. One might also suggest that the small Geometric columns published by Brookes (1981) may have been intended for use in funerary monuments, especially since the only other evidence for Corinthian stoneworking in this period is tied to funerary practice, i.e., the production of large sarcophagi; similarly faceted columns, albeit on a larger scale, are found as funerary monuments in the Archaic period in the eastern Argolid (e.g., *IG IV* 801).
20. *Corinth XIII*, p. 66.

the Corinthians' use of grave monuments was sporadic and that they had no strong tradition or preference for any particular type.

With the grave monument of Kallistratos forming the basis for reinterpreting those stones previously published as sarcophagus lids, grave monuments of the *trapeza* type are now recognized as predominant at Corinth (ca. 75% of the approximately 50–60 identifiable grave monuments). In the current state of our knowledge, therefore, the *trapeza* form seems to be the standard type of grave monument used in pre-Roman Corinth and, if Dickey's interpretation of the stones from the North Cemetery is correct, this type represents a tradition stretching from the Geometric period until presumably the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C.

These monuments, although modest in form and largely unadorned, were not necessarily markers for simple graves as opposed to those that had sculptured monuments. On the contrary, the grave monument of Kallistratos involved substantial expenditure, but perhaps represents an aesthetic averse to ostentation, one in which the use of sculpture for funerary monuments was exceptional. The shape of these monuments, however, encouraged their reuse,²¹ apparently resulting in the disappearance of most from the cemeteries of Corinth and contributing to the nearly total absence of Corinthian funerary monuments from the archaeological record.

21. E.g., the stones published by Stroud (1972) were used as part of a defensive wall and numerous other examples were incorporated into buildings in and around the Roman Forum.

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Benjamin W. Millis

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