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ΚΕΝΤΡΟΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΡΩΜΑΪΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΟΣ ● ΕΘΝΙΚΟΝ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
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Some notes on an epitaph from Hellenistic Cyprus

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Some notes on an epitaph from Hellenistic Cyprus[1]

Μνῆμα πατὴρ Λαΐαρχος ἐπέστησεν τόδε παιδὸς
αὐτοῦ ᾿Αλέξωνος· Θεσσαλία δὲ πατρίς

**Laiarchos erected this monument for his son
Alexon; Thessaly is their country**

The present epitaph was first published in 2000 by Ino Nicolaou in *RDAC* (see also *SEG* L 1377).[2] It is inscribed on the cornice of a grave stele (cf. fig. 1) found in Marion (western Cyprus). Both the dimensions and a meticulous description of the stele are provided by Nicolaou (2000, 303-304). Laconic though it is, this epitaph is interesting in more than one aspects, which I shall attempt to examine in the present article. Namely, I shall look into the following issues: the epitaph's date and vocabulary, the motifs and names appearing in the epitaph, as well as the possible reasons why the two Thessalians ended up in Cyprus.

The text is without difficulty, apart from the slight corruption of the middle part of the word ἐπέστησεν (cf. fig. 2). Even so, the presence of a capital heta is discernible to such a degree that allows us to read with certainty ΕΠΕΣΤΗΣΕΝ (and not ΕΠΕΣΤΑΣΕΝ).

The metre is elegiac distich; a mostly popular form for verse inscriptions.[3] The scanning is rather simple and should not hold us long. Still, what should not

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2. Cf. also Hadjisavvas 2000, 676, Fig. 38.
3. Cf. West 1982, 44-6.

escape detection is the correptio epica in the first foot of the second line (αὐτοῦ Ἀλέξωνος):

$$-\cup\cup\;|\;-\cup\cup\;|-\cup\cup\;|--\;|\;-\cup\cup\;|\;--$$
$$-\cup\cup\;|\;--\;|\;-\;\|\;-\cup\cup\;|-\cup\cup\;|\;-$$

DATE

Epigraphically speaking, the Hellenistic period in Cyprus is remarkable for the large number of epitaphs dedicated to foreigners, i.e. non-Cypriots.[4] Nicolaou (2000, 303) dates the present epitaph in the early 3rd century B.C. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that we should reconsider this date. Particularly, there are two key elements that need to be taken into consideration: i) the shape/style of letters (legible, large and sprawling; cf. figs 3 and 4), and ii) the use of Koine (NB the heta – instead of the Arcadocypriot alpha– in ἐπέστησεν and μνῆμα). Mitford has convincingly demonstrated that, concerning inscriptions originating from Marion, the combination of these two features proves a useful dating tool that points to the years between the siege of Tyre (332 B.C.) and the demolition of the city of Marion in 312 B.C. by Ptolemy I Soter.[5] Mitford's transcriptions of two inscriptions from Marion[6] are remarkably compatible with the letter forms of our epitaph. Since our epitaph also makes use of the Koine dialect, I would assign it to the years between 332 and 312 B.C.

VOCABULARY

a) ἐφίστημι: The meaning "to erect a funerary monument" is uncommon (cf. *LSJ* Suppl. s.v.). However, within the Cypriot epigraphical corpus the verb reappears three more times with this sense; in three inscriptions originating from Marion: in two inscriptions studied by Mitford (1961a, 93-8) and in the epitaph E61.[7] The fact that Marion is the place of origin of four –contemporary[8]– inscriptions, with this usage of ἐφίστημι, should not be lightheartedly overlooked. Though entirely con-

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4. Cf. Nicolaou 1967, *passim*.

5. Mitford 1961a, 93-8.

6. Mitford 1961a, 96, transcriptions 1 and 2.

7. The numbering refers to the edition of Voskos 1997. It should be noted that E61 is a digraphic inscription; ἐφίστημι occurs in the first part that is written in the Cypriot syllabic script (*e-pe-se-ta-se*), whereas the second part of the epitaph, consisting of two elegiac distichs, is written in alphabetic script.

8. The controversy surrounding the dating of E61 is discussed by Voskos 1997, 436. A date towards the end of the 4th century B.C. is supported by many.

jectural, none the less the possibility that we are dealing with the same cutter or scribe inevitably presents itself. At the very least, four contemporary inscriptions with the same verb bearing the same sense suggest that we may be looking at a local habit / usage.

b) **μνῆμα**: A widely used word to denote the *tomb*, the *funerary monument*. However, this is a hapax within the Cypriot epigrammatic corpus, where the alternative σᾶμα (or σῆμα) is preferred.[9]

MOTIFS

We can identify two motifs that regularly appear in epitaphs:

a) Death in foreign land, away from home. Within the Cypriot corpus this motif occurs very frequently,[10] particularly during the Hellenistic period, when – as has already been mentioned– the presence of foreigners on the island was distinctively high. None the less, we have an interesting variant here. Instead of an *ethnikon* (cf. E1 Στόλος Θέωνος 'Αθηναῖος) or a τῆλε-clause (cf. E20 τῆλε Καλύμν[ας] πατρίδος), the present epitaph ends with a statement about homeland. The distinct clause that is emphatically put at the end emphasises the distance from homeland.

b) The tragic figure of the father who buries his own children.[11] Though profoundly moving in content, here the concept is restraint in tone, in a way that adds to the effect of pathos.[12]

NAMES

Λαΐαρχος: An exceptionally rare name. It reoccurs twice more: in a 2nd century B.C. inscription from Aetolia and in a 4th century B.C. one from Argolis.[13] It should be noted here that Λαΐαρχος must be printed with a diaeresis on iota (so

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9. The case of E14 (v.2: μ]νᾶμα θυαπολίας) is entirely different. Here the word does not indicate any kind of funerary monument, but rather a *reminiscence*, a dedication/gift *reminiscent* and *reminiscing* of a priest's worship of Aphrodite. Cf. Voskos 1997, 84-85, 257-260.

10. Cf. Voskos 1997: E3 (Halicarnassus), E9 (Argos), E18 (Tenedos), E22 (Crete), etc.

11. There are abundant examples of this motif in both the Cypriot corpus of epitaphs (e.g. Voskos 1997: E28, E49, E61) and the *Palatine Anthology* (e.g. 7.361, 7.300, 7.453). Cf. Lattimore 1942, 187-91; Skiadas (1967) 17-25.

12. Contrast this with the reference to πλῆθο]ς ἀχέων in Voskos 1997, E61.

13. Cf. *LGPN* III.A, 265.

Hadjisavvas [2000] 676; however, the diaeresis is omitted by both Nicolaou [2000] 303 and *SEG* L 1377).

’Αλέξων: A comparatively common name; from Thessaly alone there come six inscriptions.[14] However, despite the high occurrence rate elsewhere, our epitaph is the only surviving evidence originating from the island of Cyprus.

FROM THESSALIA TO CYPRUS

As far as the reason(s) why these two Thessalians, father and son, find themselves in western Cyprus in the late 4th century B.C., various conjectures could be made:

a) Either the father or the son might have been a soldier in the mercenary army installed in Cyprus by the Ptolemies.[15] Since the particular army was not a wandering one, but was garrisoned on the island for several years, it is not inconceivable that the son, while in the army, had his father with him or vice versa.[16] However, a possible objection against this hypothesis would be that our epitaph has no apparent heroic tone.

b) Both Λαΐαρχος and ’Αλέξων might have been craftsmen of some sort. Mitford has shown that various craftsmen lived and flourished in ancient Marion, such as murex fishers, purple-dye workers, tanners, bronze-smiths, etc.[17] Despite the military operations, Cyprus enjoyed a remarkable economic prosperity during the late 4th century B.C., which must have reasonably attracted metics on the island.[18]

c) Father and son may have been sea-traders, making a brief stop in Cyprus, on the route to their final destination. During their stay the son may have got sick and died.

d) They could be worshippers of Aphrodite, intending to pay a visit to her renowned sanctuary in Palaepaphos.[19] Again, the son may have accidentaly died from illness.

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14. Cf. *LGPN* I, 28, II, 21, III.A, 27, III.B, 24. For numismatic evidence see Münsterberg [2]1973, 34 (102).

15. See Hill 1940, 156-60; Maier [2]1994, 333.

16. Accommodation for families was probably provided for by the contract of mercenaries; cf. Griffith 1935, 261.

17. See Mitford 1961a, 94; Mitford 1958, 58-60.

18. Cf. Maier [2]1994, 335; Hill 1940, 173-5, 178; Michaelides 1996.

19. This sanctuary was a famous place of pilgrimage in antiquity. See Mitford 1961b; Mitford 1938; Maier & Karageorghis 1984, 239-45 (Hellenistic period) and 270-80 (Roman period).

The possibilities are endless and certainty is impossible. Presumably, the painting that existed below the inscription provided some information about the life and occupation of Ἀλέξων.

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Fig. 1. The inscribed grave stele

Fig. 2. The central part of the inscription

Fig. 3. The left part of the inscription

Fig. 4. The right part of the inscription