

SØREN LUND SØRENSEN

IMPERIAL PRIESTS IN NEOKLAUDIOPOLIS

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The famous imperial oath discovered by Franz Cumont in 1900 in Vezirköprü (Samsun Province) mentions an altar and a temple to Augustus in Neapolis/Neoklaudiopolis, the ancient predecessor of Vezirköprü. Since its discovery, no additional texts referring to the cult of the emperor in the city have been published. An inscription, hitherto not published, from the *chora* of Neoklaudiopolis mentions priests of the cult of the emperor, thereby corroborating and expanding the information found in the imperial oath.¹

Inscribed block from Bayramköyü

In Bayramköyü, approximately 17 km southeast of Vezirköprü, Eckart Olshausen and Gerhard Kahl on September 13, 1988 found an inscribed limestone block lying upside down (fig. 1a and 1b). During a visit to Bayramköyü in April 2013 the inhabitants informed this author that they have no knowledge of the stone's present whereabouts. All information about the stone and its text, therefore, rests on the photographs, squeezes and notes taken by Eckart Olshausen in 1988.

The present shape of the block (in 1988) is trapezoidal. It is broken on both sides, while the front, the upper and the lower surfaces are preserved. The condition of the back of the stone is not recorded. The present width varies between 50 and 110 cm. The depth of the block is 104–105 cm and its height ca. 31 cm. It can be gathered from the photos that the upper surface of the block has a recess along the front, but this side was not documented as the block was found upside down.

The front of the block consists of two fasciae respectively 6.5 and 8 cm in height. These are crowned by a slightly protruding moulding 10.5 cm in height. The moulding is composed of a cavetto-like profile supporting a plain taenia-band. The recess following above the moulding is ca. 6.5 cm in height. The Greek text is inscribed on the two fasciae.

The stone carries two lines of Greek text. The size of the letters varies from the first line to the second. The letters of the first line vary from 4 (Ω) to 6.5 cm (B) in height, while the letters of the second line are more uniform in size, 4.5 cm in height. The lettering, monumental in size, is of a very high quality with fine serifs on most letters. *Epsilon*, *sigma* and *omega* are all of lunar shape, and the *alpha* is a broken-bar *alpha* with apex. An unknown number of letters are missing on the left and right hand side but the preserved text is clearly legible apart from the first and last letter of the second line.

The original architectural context of the block cannot be determined with certainty. Another large fragment of an architectural block with identical decoration from Bayramköyü can be seen on a photo taken by Eckart Olshausen, which undoubtedly originates from the same building as the inscribed piece (fig. 2). Together these blocks may have formed part of an architrave-like course crowning a building wall, but it seems more likely that they served as a door-lintel or

¹ Many thanks are due to Eckart Olshausen (University of Stuttgart) for allowing me to publish this inscription as well as placing his photos and squeezes at my disposal. Furthermore, I would like to thank Kristina Winther-Jacobsen (University of Copenhagen) and Poul Pedersen (University of Southern Denmark) for much advice on the possible archaeological context of this inscribed block.

constituted the roof of a niche or an aedicula. It must, however, be said that we have no examples of such aediculae from the area of Neoklaudiopolis.²

Text

[...] Παυλείνου οἱ ἱερεῖς τῶν Σεβα[στῶν ...]

[...] γτι καὶ ἑαυτοῖς τὸ ἠρῶν ΕΤ[...]

[...] son of Pauleinos, the priests of the Augusti [...]

[... prepared] the tomb for [...] as well as for themselves [...]

Though fragmentary, the text of this building inscription is readily understandable. The subject of the sentence built or paid for the *heroon*, i.e. a tomb, of which the inscribed block almost certainly formed part. In Asia Minor a form of the verb κατασκευάζω is very often mentioned alongside ἠρῶν,³ and we may suppose that the verb κατασκεύασαν stood either at the beginning or at the end of the text.

In the translation above, οἱ ἱερεῖς has been understood as an apposition to Παυλείνου. It must be assumed that at least two names in the nominative preceded Παυλείνου, of which at least one was qualified by the patronymic in the genitive. An inscription from Kidrama in Karia mentioning imperial priests provides an analogy.⁴ Alternatively, Παυλείνου could be part of an absolute genitive referring to an eponymous magistrate. This is grammatically possible but not very likely in this context.

In the second line the first letter appears to be a *ny*, with only the last vertical hasta preserved, rather than an *iota*. Some, but not all, *iotas* have serifs. For the vertical hasta of the first letter of the second line and the letter *ny* in this inscription, the serifs are much less elaborate and sharp than those of the *iotas*. Furthermore, the space between the *iota* and a preceding letter in this inscription is smaller than the space between the two vertical hastae of the *ny*. γτι would thus seem to be the dative singular ending of either an active participle or a noun of the third declension (*ντ*-stem), e.g. ἄρχων. In support of the reading γτι it must be said that the author has no knowledge of a dative ending in ITI that would fit this context. The dative γτι is connected to ἑαυτοῖς by the copulative conjunction καί.

The last two letters of the preserved text ΕΤ could be the remains (or an abbreviation) of the Greek word ἔτους, i.e. a reference to the civic era of Neoklaudiopolis, which commenced in 5 BC.⁵

One can speculate about the original length of the text. In the first line two names in the nominative can be assumed to precede the preserved part of the text presumably with a patronymic in the genitive in analogy with Παυλείνου. If the second line ended with ἔτους and a number,

² The aedicula plays an important part in the so-called *scenae frons* architecture, which was popular in Asia Minor and Syria under the principate. In this context the aedicula is sometimes used in tombs, cf. Burrell 2006, 450–453; 457–459.

³ E.g. *IK Iznik* 134; Bosch 1967 no. 390,25. Additionally, an unpublished inscription from Yağci (recorded by Eckart Olshausen) in the *chora* of Neoklaudiopolis includes the verb κατασκευάζω in connection with a building.

⁴ Robert–Robert 1954, no. 184: Φιλώτας Ἀρτεμιδώρου καὶ Ποσιδώνιος Ἀτάλου οἱ ἱερεῖς τῶν Σεβαστῶν.

⁵ Ramsay 1888, 251; Anderson 1900, 152–153; Dessau 1906, 335–337; Ruge 1949, colls. 2528–2532; Leschhorn 1993, 170–175.

the first line might have ended with Σεβα[στῶν]. The first word of the second line was perhaps κατεσκεύασαν followed by at least two syllables required for completing the dative]ϣτι.

This is the first inscription to mention priests of the cult of the emperor in the area of Neoklaudiopolis. It is likely that these men served as priests in a temple in the city. A temple and altar for the cult of the emperor is mentioned as early as 3 BC in the oath from Neapolis,⁶ and a temple also appears on coins struck by the city of Neoklaudiopolis when Septimius Severus was emperor and Caracalla carried the title of Augustus (AD 200/201).⁷

Temples to the cult of the emperor as well as priests serving in these temples are found in the neighbouring cities of Pontos in Neokaisareia, Amaseia,⁸ Komana Pontike⁹ and Sebastopolis.¹⁰ Similarly, a priest for the cult of the emperor is found in Pompeiopolis west of the river Halys in Paphlagonia.¹¹

The plural τῶν Σεβα[στῶν] is common in inscriptions from Asia Minor and need not imply a reign of two emperors when the text was composed.

Pauleinos mentioned in this text is unknown, but the name Pauleinos/Paulinos is not uncommon in Neoklaudiopolis. In an undated epitaph Aurelius Paulinos, freedman of Aurelius Agricolaos turns up,¹² and another Paulinos, son of Paulinos figures on a grave stele dated AD 165/166.¹³ A third Paulinos from the *chora* of Neoklaudiopolis appears on an unpublished grave stele.¹⁴ Pauleinos is a Greek form of the Latin Paulinus. We do not know the name of the son of this Pauleinos, but the decision to include a patronymic rather than a Roman *tria nomina* implies that he was a peregrine and not a Roman citizen.¹⁵ Aurelius Paulinos, the freedman, is the only Pauleinos/Paulinos from Neoklaudiopolis and its environs who seems to have held Roman citizenship.

The inscription is too fragmentary to be dated.

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⁶ *Studia Pontica* III: 1, 75–86 no. 66 = *OGI* 532 = *IGRom* 3.137 = Dessau, *ILS* 8781 = *EJ* 145, no. 315.

⁷ Delrieux–Dalaison 2015, nos. 27a; 27b (with a statue of Artemis “Ephesia”); 33; 35a; 35b.

⁸ Burrell 2004, 205–211 with reference to coins of Neokaisarea and Amaseia citing *neokoria*.

⁹ Ramsay 1882, 153 no. 14; Reinach 1895, 86 no. 31.

¹⁰ Mitford 1991, 199–200 no. 11; 213, no. 20; Le Guen-Pollet 1989, 69 no. 14.

¹¹ Marek 1993, 142 no. 21.

¹² *Studia Pontica* III: 1 no. 39.

¹³ Bekker-Nielsen–Høgel 2012, 153–154.

¹⁴ The stone, which according to the former owner in Vezirköprü originally comes from Boruk approximately 15 kilometers southeast of Vezirköprü, stands in the lapidarium of Samsun Arkeoloji ve Etnografya Müzesi and carries the inventory number 21-1/1990.

¹⁵ Majbom Madsen 2009, 98–99.

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Özet

Makalede, Neoklaudiopolis (Vezirköprü) arazisindeki Bayramköyü'nde bulunmuş olan bir kireçtaşı blok üzerindeki Grekçe bir yazıt incelenmektedir. Hem sağ ve hem de sol kenarları kırık olan iki satırlık bu yazıtta en azından 2 imparatorluk kültü rahibinden söz edilmektedir. Bu rahiplerin adları maalesef korunmamış olmakla birlikte, bunlardan birinin baba adının (*patronymikon*) Pauleinos olduğu görülmektedir. Adlarını bilmediğimiz bu iki rahibin kendileri için bir anıt-mezar (*heroon*) yaptırıldıkları anlaşılmaktadır. Bayramköyü'nde bulunmuş olan diğer bir blok parçasının da bu mezara ait olduğunu düşünmek mümkündür. Elimizdeki bu fragment, Neoklaudiopolis'deki imparatorluk rahiplerinden söz eden ilk yazılı buluntu olması bakımından önemlidir.



Fig. 1a. Inscribed block from Bayramköyü (Photo: Eckart Olshausen)



Fig. 1b. Inscribed block from Bayramköyü (Photo: Eckart Olshausen)



Fig. 2. Fragment of an architectural block (Photo: Eckart Olshausen)