The "Ivy of Liberation" Inscription

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AN INSCRIPTION from Eretria in Euboea, reprinted with some frequency during the past 250 years, continues to elicit commentary, most recently in 1990.[1] Yet none of these editors and commentators ever saw the stone. The only extant copy is incomplete, made in the course of travels by Cyriacus of Ancona (1392–1452). Some time later the stone disappeared, perhaps as a result of the fire that destroyed a large part of Cyriacus' collection of antiquities in 1514.

Working with the copy of the Greek text found in Cyriacus' notebooks presents two major difficulties: (1) Cyriacus wrote the Greek—what he could read of it—as a run-on text, giving no indication of where the individual lines began and ended; (2) likewise, he did not indicate lacunae or illegible places with any care, leaving modern scholars to guess at the placement of these and at the number of letters to be supplied in each case.

Rejecting Muratori's earlier attempt ("in arbitrarios versus diremit Muratorius"), A. Boeckh a century and a half ago made a line-division of the text that, with one later emendation by Dittenberger and another by Sokolowski, has since been universally accepted; most reprints, in fact, do not even mention the caveats indicated in the preceding paragraph.[2] With those emendations the text now reads:

Ὁ ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διονύσου Θεόδοτος Θεοδώρου καὶ οἱ
πολέμαρχοι Σ[ω]σίστρατος Πρωτομένου, Αἰσχύλος Ἀντανδρίδου,
Ἰθαιγένης Αἰσχύλου εἶπα(ν)· ἐπειδὴ τῆι πομπῆι τῆι Διονύσου

[1] A.-F. Jacottet, "Le lierre de la liberté," *ZPE* 80 (1990) 150–56 with bibliography.

[2] Editions and reprints: L. A. Muratori, *Novus Thesaurus Veterum Inscriptionum* ... I (1739) cxlv; A. Boeckh, *CIG* II (1843) 2144; P. Le Bas, *Voyage* II (1850) 1602 (reprints *CIG* without restorations); W. Dittenberger, *Syll.* (1883) 201; *Syll.*[2] (1898–1901) 277; C. Michel, *Recueil* (1900) 343; E. Ziebarth, *IG* XII.9 (1915) 192; W. Dittenberger and F. Hiller von Gaertringen, *Syll.*[3] (1915) 323; F. Sokolowski, *LSCG Suppl.* (1962) 46.

ἥ τε φρου[ρ]ὰ ἀπῆλθεν, ὅ τε δῆμος ἠλευθερώθη κ[....]α τοὺς
ὕμνους καὶ τὴν δημοκρατίαν ἐκομίσατο, ὅπως ὑπόμνημα τῆς
ἡμέρας ταύτης ᾖι, ἔδοξεν τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τῶι δήμωι· στεφανη-
φορεῖν Ἐρετριεῖς πάντας καὶ τοὺς ἐνοικοῦντας κιττοῦ στέφανον
τῆι πομπῆι τοῦ Διονύσου· τοὺς δὲ πολίτας [λαβεῖν τοὺς στεφάνους]
[ἀπὸ τοῦ δημοσίου], ἀπομι[σ]θοῦν τε [τὸν ἐν ἀρχῆι ὄντα ταμί]-
αν [τ]οὺς σ[τεφ]άνους· ἐπάρχεσθαι δὲ καὶ τοὺς χοροὺς [---]
[- - - χορ]είας τὰς τῶι τῶι Διονύσωι [.....] οἶνον καταπεμπο..

8–9 λαβεῖν ... δημοσίου suppl. Boeckh. 9 τὸν ταμί]αν Dittenberger, ἐν ἀρχῆι ὄντα Sokolowski.

1. *Some Problems*

(*a*) *Letters per line.* As presented in *Syll.*[3] and *IG* XII.9, the inscription shows a wide variation in the number of letters in a line, ranging from 33 letters in line 9 to 53 letters in line 7. Sokolowski's addition (made without comment) of ἐν ἀρχῆι ὄντα to the restoration in line 9 was doubtless intended to correct the imbalance by lengthening that unacceptably short line. It should be observed, however, that as to sense that addition is essentially otiose: it goes without saying that only the incumbent *tamias* could perform the stated function. Furthermore, even if we allow that insertion, which lengthens line 9 to 44 letters, the difference between 39 letters in line 1 and 53 letters in line 7 is still excessive. And if it be argued that line 1 may have been inscribed, like a caption, in larger (hence fewer) letters than the rest, the spread still remains excessive between 42 letters in line 4 and 53 letters in line 7.

(*b*) *The lacuna of line 4.* κ[ατ]ὰ τοὺς ὕμνους? was proposed by Boeckh and explained as signifying "inter ipsos hymnos cantatos." Sokolowski proposed κ[αὶ μετ]ὰ τοὺς ὕμνους, also referring to "le chant des hymnes [qui] fait partie du programme des fêtes." As Jacottet saw (*supra* n.1: 150 n.1), the intrusive καί makes Sokolowski's restoration "impossible syntaxiquement." Remarking that none of the proposed restorations is "pleinement satisfaisant," Jacottet also rejects Boeckh's ("la plus evidente epigraphiquement") because "l'explication selon laquelle la liberation avait été annoncée par les oracles de Dionysos me parait difficilement acceptable." Jacottet neglects to mention that it was T. Reinach who, citing Hesychius, suggested that

ὕμνους here referred to oracles[3]—and, we may add, not necessarily oracles of Dionysus.

While the matter is perhaps incapable of settlement on present evidence, it deserves to be noted that ὕμνους in this context is likelier not to refer to the ritual songs, and that for the following reason. After the statement that the garrison departed on the day of the Dionysiac procession, a further specification that the departure occurred at a particular moment of the ceremony is immaterial and would sound strained, to say the least. It is time, I think, to take Reinach's suggestion more seriously.

(*c*) *The lacunae of lines 8–9.* Major lacunae are postulated at the end of line 8, at the beginning of line 9, and at the end of line 9—places where, presumably, Cyriacus found the stone either broken or illegible. But it is surely an abnormal pattern of damage that is here postulated. Normally such damage in consecutive lines is found in the same position on the stone, *i.e.*, on the right side, on the left side, or in the middle. A rearrangement of the text that takes this point into consideration is offered below.

[λαβεῖν ... δημοσίου]: Boeckh's long restoration, as it is not guaranteed by formulaic language, has virtually no chance of reproducing the *ipsissima verba* of the original. It does, however, provide an acceptable sense, and that no doubt explains why it has found general acceptance during the century and a half since Boeckh (see [*d*] *infra*).

Dittenberger's restoration [τὸν ταμί]αν has never been challenged, doubtless because it, too, suits the context well. The later insertion of ἐν ἀρχῆι ὄντα has been commented on in (*a*) *supra*.

(*d*) *The meaning of lines 8–10.* The first point to be noted is that Greek words denoting "and the citizens," "and to rent out," and "the wreaths" are all that Cyriacus read in these lines; all the rest is restored, and the restorations have generally been made without comment or explanation. Only Sokolowski offers (98) a word of interpretation, and what he says there is demonstrably wrong. "Tous les habitants doivent porter les couronnes," he writes—so far so good; but then he adds, "que l'État fournit à ses faits." The idea that the city provided wreaths gratis is acceptable for sense; we note, nevertheless, that that

[3] Hesychius: ὕμνος· χρησμός; Reinach, *REG* 13 (1915) 201: "Il s'agit d'oracles qui avaient annoncé la délivrance du peuple d'Erétrie."

statement was not read on the stone but is in Boeckh's restoration. And the idea that *all* the inhabitants were thus provided is controverted by ἀπομισθοῦν τε ... [τ]οὺς σ[τεφ]άνους, an express statement—read on the stone, not restored—that some persons paid a μισθός to rent their wreaths. The simplest and most logical reconstruction of the sense in this clause would appear to be that the citizens received their crowns free while the non-citizens had to rent theirs, *i.e.* pay for the use of them during the festival and then return them.[4]

2. *The Text Rearranged*

The following division of the text into lines of 25–28 letters, with most lines having 26 or 27, solves the problem of the excessive variation noted above.

Ὁ ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διονύσου Θεόδοτος
Θεοδώρου καὶ οἱ πολέμαρχοι Σ[ω]σί-
στρατος Πρωτομένου, Αἰσχύλος Ἀν-
τανδρίδου, Ἰθαιγένης Αἰσχύλου
εἶπα(ν)· ἐπειδὴ τῆι πομπῆι τῆι Διονύ-
σου ἥ τε φρου[ρ]ὰ ἀπῆλθεν, ὅ τε δῆμος
ἠλευθερώθη κ[ατ]ὰ τοὺς ὕμνους καὶ
τὴν δημοκρατίαν ἐκόμισατο, ὅπως
ὑπόμνημα τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης ἦι, ἔ-
δοξεν τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τῶι δήμωι· στε-
φανηφορεῖν Ἐρετριεῖς πάντας
καὶ τοὺς ἐνοικοῦντας κιττοῦ στέ-
φανον τῆι πομπῆι τοῦ Διονύσου·

[4] Jacottet's interpretation (*supra* n.1) is the same for the citizens but fuzzy on the *apomisthoun* clause: "que les citoyens reçoivent leurs couronnes au frais de l'État, et que le trésorier qui est en charge donne (en location?) les couronnes." For a similar distinction between citizens and others, in a grimmer situation, compare the following dispatch which appeared in *The New York Times* (2 October 1990): "Jerusalem, Oct. 1.—The Israeli military announced today that it would begin distributing gas masks nationwide to the general public next week.... While the protective gear is being handed out to the Israeli public—both Arabs and Jews—free, the army said Palestinians would be required to buy theirs, at an unspecified price. The army argued that Israelis have already paid for their kits in their taxes."

The gratuitous interpretation of the clause in *RE* 21 (1922) 1594—"Kränze ... die wohl an Ärmere gegen geringes Entgelt ausgeliehen wurden"—has, happily, enjoyed condign neglect.

τοὺς δὲ πολίτας [
ἀπομι⟨σ⟩θοῦν τε [
16 αν [τ]οὺς σ[τεφ]άνους· ἐπάρχεσθαι δὲ
καὶ τοὺς χοροὺς [

It is impossible to know how to place the two remaining phrases of the text.

How, in this rearranged text, are lines 14ff to be restored? On the Boeckhian pattern the sense proposed above (1.*d*) would call for something like

τοὺς δὲ πολίτας [λαβεῖν δημοσίᾳ]
ἀπομι⟨σ⟩θοῦν τε [τοῖς ἄλλοις τὸν ταμί-]
αν [τ]οὺς σ[τεφ]άνους,

"that the citizens obtain theirs at public expense and that the city treasurer rent out the wreaths to the others."

But it is long past time, I suggest, to break out of this inherited mindset, at least to the extent of examining whether other approaches may not produce a preferable result. One such approach, starting from the premise that ταμί]αν is but one of scores of *alpha* nouns that might have been inscribed at that place, could lead to a restoration or restorations along the lines of

τοὺς δὲ πολίτας [κοσμεῖν δωρεὰν]
ἀπομι⟨σ⟩θοῦν τε [ἄλλοις ὑπὸ ἀσφάλει-]
αν [τ]οὺς σ[τεφ]άνους,

"to deck out the citizens free of charge, and to rent out the wreaths to others on security."

Still other restorations are surely possible.[5] It deserves to be re-emphasized, however, that—especially where lacunae are of considerable length—in the absence of a guiding parallel no restoration can claim, or even hope, to recapture the original wording exactly. The best that can be attained is a reasonable, and if possible a cogent, sense.

[5] *E.g.* τοὺς δὲ πολίτας [δωρηθῆναι πάντας], ἀπομι⟨ς⟩θοῦν τε [ἄλλοις ἐπὶ θεωρί]αν (note Pl. *Leg.* 650A: τῆς τοῦ Διονύσου θεωρίας), or πρὸς εὐτυχί]αν, or πρὸς εὐσέβει]αν.

3. *Reusable Ivy?*

Given the general dearth of commentary on this inscription, it is hardly surprising that no one has faced—at least in print—the implications of ἀπομισθοῦν τοὺς στεφάνους.

First, the reading of the verb. Although the *sigma* is missing, whether through the stonecutter's oversight or Cyriacus', there can be little doubt that the present infinitive of ἀπομισθόω, "to rent out," was intended; nothing else fits.

What, then, does the phrase ἀπομισθοῦν τοὺς στεφάνους tell us about these ivy wreaths? Objects that are rented—mobilia and immobilia alike—have, by definition, to be returned to the lender at the expiry of the rental period. Accordingly, the rented wreaths of this inscription would be returned after the festival. But it is hard to imagine why the city would want them back unless they could be used again on a later occasion. But the ivy, even if freshly picked for the festival of Dionysus, would dry out thereafter: the stems, already woody, would harden further, and the leaves would become sere and brittle.[6] The result would be an unsightly mess that no one, surely, would deem worthy to grace a public celebration.

The conclusion seems inescapable that the wreaths referred to in this inscription were fashioned of material that was, or was made, durable. Such wreaths could have been produced in either of two ways. Both archaeological finds and literary evidence assure us that floral wreaths were imitated in wood and metal. Alternatively, the Eretrians may have made their Dionysiac wreaths of real ivy and preserved them by covering them, while they were still fresh, with a paint or other substance that would seal them hermetically.

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[6] My thanks to Professor Peter Stevens of the Harvard University Herbarium for relevant technical information on ivy.