A Greek Inscription with Rider Iconography from South Shields, Britain

In the storerooms of the Great North Museum, Newcastle, lies an intriguing, but overlooked, monument inscribed in Greek (fig. 1).[1] It has a mysterious history, and, perhaps as a result of its uncertain origins, does not appear in any of the epigraphic corpora. It has only been treated to a short notice in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, in which it was mis-transcribed. Through this article we hope to rescue this monument from obscurity by presenting the text, for the first time, with revised readings and commentary, and by suggesting a possible origin based on clues in the content and iconography.

Figure 1. Photograph of rider monument with Greek inscription, from South Shields, Britain (Scott Vanderbilt, with kind permission)

The notice in the proceedings of 1894 declares simply that:

> 'Mr. Blair (secretary) announced that the fragment of a Greek inscription on marble had been discovered lately in a stonemason's yard in South Shields and given to him. Probably it has been brought from the Mediterranean by some ship. The stone is now 13 ins. square. On the upper part there are four rows of letters, the third row being smaller than the others. Beneath the inscription is a man on horseback hurling a spear or dart. The inscription in Greek capitals seems to read: —

[1] This article is an output of the ERC-funded project *Latinization of the North-western Roman Provinces* (LatinNow), grant number 715626. Our thanks go to our LatinNow colleague Scott Vanderbilt who alerted us to this stone in the Great North Museum and undertook autopsy and photography. Many thanks also to Andrew Parkin (Keeper of Archaeology, Great North Museum) for arranging access to the stone and permission to publish the images. The stone is owned by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the accession number is NEWMA: 1904.1. We are grateful to several colleagues who discussed this monument with us, including Angelos Chaniotis, Peter Liddel, Ben Russell, Hanneke Salisbury, and Alexandra Wilding.

ASPA]SIA ZE[NODOTOU]A
SKANIO CHRUSIP(POU)
KANAPITÓNA (?)
MNEMES CHARIN'[2]

This was followed in 1904 with a brief note under the heading 'DONATIONS TO THE MUSEUM':

> 'From Mr. R. Blair […] (ii) a fragmentary Greek inscription on marble, found in South Shields (see *Proc*. vi, 204).'[3]

From this we learn the date of transfer into the collection which is now housed in the new Great North Museum and find a black-and-white photograph,[4] but no further details about the monument itself. The date of the monument's (re-)discovery meant that its text was unknown at the time when *Inscriptiones Graecae XIV* (*Inscriptiones Siciliae et Italiae, additis Galliae, Hispaniae, Britanniae, Germaniae inscriptionibus*) was published in 1890 and it never made it into the later *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* (volume one published in 1965; volume three in 2009).

The discovery sometime in the late nineteenth century of a marble inscription at a stonemason's yard near Hadrian's Wall raises the question of how it came to be found there. A local origin, for example from the Roman fort known as *Arbeia*, could be countered by the fact that very few Greek inscriptions seem to have been produced in Britain: only seven monumental lapidary inscriptions are currently known, all dedications to Greek/eastern deities, with the exception of an epitaph for Hermes of Commagene (*RIB* I 758). The iconography of the monument, which might have been seen as fitting with the so-called *Reiter* reliefs (for which we have numerous examples in military contexts in the Rhineland and Britain), in fact should rather be related to another large group of Thracian 'rider' monuments. In the absence of any precise information surrounding the provenance of this object, we have to make the stone itself speak.

The stone appears to be heavily encrusted white-ish marble and the dimensions of the monument as we currently have it are as follows: depth of stone c. 19 cm, width c. 33 cm, height c. 33 cm.[5] These are not the original dimensions, since the horse has been truncated just below the haunches. Perhaps a third of the image may be missing, and it is possible that there may have been a further section of stone underneath the horse and rider relief. It seems likely, given the way that the stone has been worked, that we have the full width of the monument and the beginning of the text preserved, in which case we may have a complete text, with a small amount of possible loss of lettering through damage (middle of first line) and/or erasure (right side of first line).

The text was inaccurately cited in 1894 (see above). Figure 2 is a drawing of the text as we perceive it on the stone. Our edition and tentative translation follow:

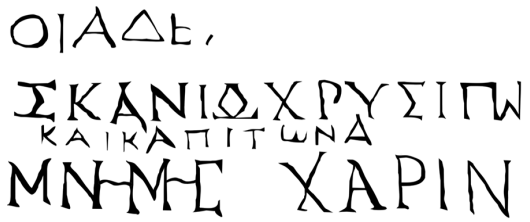

Figure 2. Drawing of the Greek text on the rider monument from South Shields, Britain (Michael Loy)

[2] *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (PSAN)* 1894: 204.

[3] *PSAN* 1904: 106.

[4] *PSAN* 1904: 107.

[5] The stone is described as marble in the *PSAN* notice. Marble specialist Ben Russell thought that, based on photographic evidence, the tool markings produced by a toothed hammer/axe on the top of the stone seemed sharp and suggestive of a hard stone. The crystals visible through damage to the badly encrusted surface are compatible with a possibly coarse-grained white marble. White marble was available to Thrace, for example, from quarries on Thassos.

οἱ ἀδε̣λ̣[φοὶ]
Σκανίῳ Χρυσίπῳ
καὶ Καπίτωνα
4 μνήμης χάριν

line 2: ligature ΧΡΥΣΙΠΩ
line 3 an interlinear addition in smaller lettering
line 4: ligatures ΜΝΗΜΗΣ

'The brothers (erected this monument) to the memory of Scanius Chrysip(p)os and Capito.'

The opening line of the text is the only one that requires reconstruction, and the reading οἱ ἀδελφοί seems a safe option. The epsilon and lambda are only partially visible and the final three letters are missing in the damage to the central section of the top of the front of the stone. Though there are markings on the stone to the right of the damage none of these appears to be identifiable as writing, and there may never have been text in this right-hand portion. The letters are neat but not skilled. The stone cutter has used *variatio* in letter forms, with two forms of sigma (four-stroke in line two and three-stoke in line four) and three distinct forms of omega (angular versions of the capital and cursive omega in line two and a non-angular cursive omega in line three).

The brothers at the head of this text in the nominative seem to be the dedicators of the tombstone. The dedicatees are named in the second and third lines. The first two names, both in line two, are in the dative, a standard case for dedication with the formula μνήμης χάριν. The first name, according to searches of the database of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (*LGPN*) (see Table 1 for all the names attested on the stone), could be either Ἀσκάνιος or Σκάνιος, neither of which are common, the former receiving five attestations in the *LGPN* and the latter just one, but both attested in *LGPN* IV, comprising Macedonia, Thrace and the Northern Shores of the Black Sea. A sensible option might be to see the first name as a Greek rendering of the *gentilicium* Scanius,[6] creating a bi-nominal formation. The next name, perhaps the *cognomen*, is likely to be the dative of the relatively common name Χρύσιππος, with a banal de-gemination of the double consonant. Line three is an interlinear addition and contains a third name joined to the preceding names with καί. The name is the accusative of Καπίτων, another relatively well-attested name and a Greek version of the popular Latin name Capito.[7] The accusative is not unusual in a dedicatory context, but we expect a dative, or occasionally a genitive, with μνήμης χάριν. The use of the accusative for dedicatees where we might have expected a dative is often attributed to interference from honorific texts where the accusative of the honorand is standard.[8] The awkward change in case and interlinear nature of this line suggests that the second person was added at a later date and the original syntax was not followed, perhaps with the later party assuming the presence of the verb ἐτίμησαν. The formula μνήμης χάριν occurs in line four and is attested across the Greek-speaking world, occurring in high frequency in the Roman period (equivalent to *memoriae causa*).[9] Several examples of this formula can be found in ancient Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv), the area which produces the closest iconographic parallels to our monument, as we shall see below.[10]

[6] Scanius is rare, though there are two examples from Macedonia, see Tataki, A. B. 2006. *The Roman Presence in Macedonia. The Evidence from Personal Names*. Athens, p. 382; also Solin, H. and Salomies, O. 1994. *Repertorium nominum gentilium et cognominum Latinorum*. Hildesheim, 2nd ed., p. 164.

[7] For Capito, see Kajanto, I. 1965. *The Latin Cognomina*. Helsinki, pp. 17, 118–120, 235.

[8] For the use of the accusative in epitaphs, see Mednikarova, I. 2003. The Accusative of the Name of the Deceased in Latin and Greek Epitaphs, *ZPE* 143. 117–134.

[9] For μνήμης χάριν, see McLean, B. H. 2002. *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.–A.D. 337)*. Ann Arbor, p. 268.

[10] For example, *IGBulg* III,1 991; *IGBulg* III,1 999; *IGBulg* III,1 1095; *IGBulg* III,1 1488; *IGBulg* III,1 1489; *IGBulg* III,1 1521; *IGBulg* V 5464.

Name	*LGPN* I: Aegean Islands, Cyprus, Cyrenaica	*LGPN* II: Attica	*LGPN* IIIa: Peloponnese, Western Greece, Sicily, and Magna Graecia	*LGPN* IIIb: Central Greece: From the Megarid to Thessaly	*LGPN* IV: Macedonia, Thrace, Northern Shores of the Black Sea	*LGPN* Va: Coastal Asia Minor, Pontos to Ionia	Total attestations in *LGPN* online
Ἀσκάνιος	0	0	0	0	2	3	5
Σκάνιος	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Χρύσιππος	24	27	10	7	20	28	116
Καπίτων	9	6	3	0	10	53	81

Table 1. Attestations of possible names in the South Shields rider inscription across the *LGPN* database

The image below our text is a carved relief scene, which centres on a horseback rider. We understand that the figures are in motion, as the front left leg of the horse is raised in the style of a gallop, and the rider's chlamys billows out behind him to the left of the frame. The figure is turned to the right, and both his arms are raised over his right shoulder – presumably to hold a spear or another such weapon which does not survive. Even though the face of the figure has been eroded away, we can tell that it is turned towards the bottom of the frame, to a part of the image which has not been preserved, perhaps a human foe or hunted wild animal. To the extreme right of the frame stands a palm tree, with possible coiled serpent around the trunk. This tree does not seem to be part of the main narrative of the scene, but it could, as we suggest below, have imbued the image with some wider symbolic meaning.

Stylistically our image resembles one of the 'Thracian rider' scenes, a group of more than 3000 rider and horse relief monuments found in ancient Thrace and dated between the third century BC and the third century AD. These stones were set up either as cultic dedications or funerary commemorations, but there is no way of making this distinction on the basis of iconography alone.[11] When inscriptions accompany the rider images, they are addressed to either a divine figure or hero, or to the memory of departed men. In particular the palm tree (sometimes intertwined by a serpent, often thought to be associated with Asclepius) has been interpreted as a cultic symbol, but it appears variously on rider monuments of both the cultic and funerary types. The closest iconographic parallels for our image are dated to the mid to late second cen-

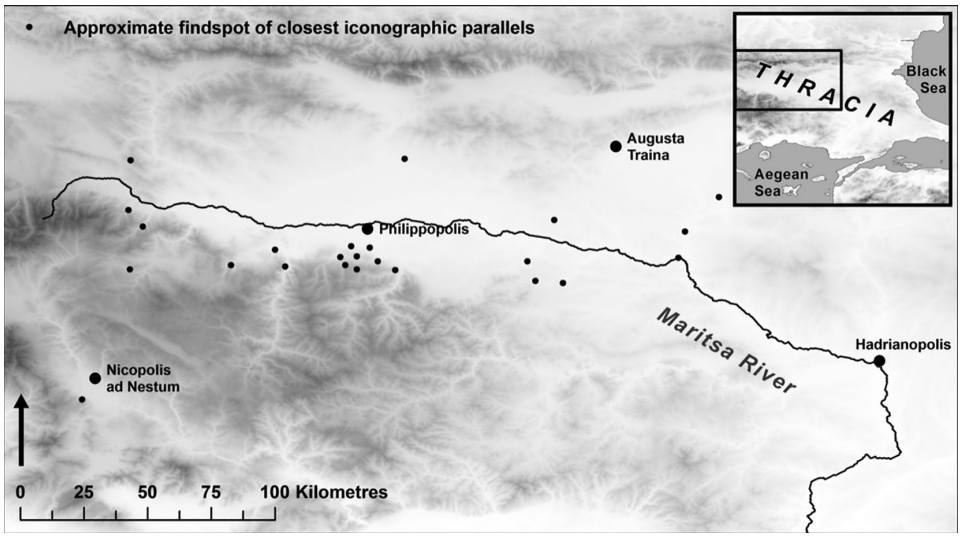

Figure 3. Map showing approximate findspots of lapidary monuments with similar iconography to the South Shields rider (Michael Loy)

[11] Dimitrova, N. 2002. Inscriptions and Iconography in the Monuments of the Thracian Rider, *Hesperia* 71(2). 209–229.

tury AD and originate from Thrace in the area around ancient Philippopolis, on either side of the Maritsa river between its source in the Rila Mountains and ancient Hadrianopolis (fig. 3).[12] The inscriptions on our iconographic *comparanda* are both cultic and funerary, but the piece from South Shields is clearly of the latter type.

The iconography on this stone probably should not be related to the Danubian tradition of *Reiter* monuments. The Danubian group of (nevertheless similar) horse and rider images dates from the first to third centuries AD, and, even though they share some iconographic features with the Thracian horsemen, they seem to be part of a separate and later tradition which also spoke to Celtic iconography. In origin, στῆλαι of this variety came from Dacia, Moesia Inferior, and Pannonia, and their type gradually moved westwards throughout the Rhineland and into Britain, where a handful have been discovered in primary military contexts. The most recent discovery of this sort was made in Lancaster in 2005.[13] However, given that the South Shields rider was not found in primary context, we do not have to account for his arrival in Britain in these terms; indeed, there is no evidence that our stone ever actually came to Britain in antiquity. Iconographically, our stone is also different from standard *Reiter* types: we note in particular the billowing of the chlamys and the presence of Greek text, both features common among the Thracian horsemen, but rare among the *Reiter*.[14] Therefore, rather than seeing our rider as a somewhat 'exceptional' Danubian *Reiter* who was dedicated in South Shields in antiquity, we believe that this is a more 'standard' Thracian horseman originally set up in Thrace.

On the basis of onomastics, choice of language, and iconography we conclude that the South Shields rider monument is a funerary monument originally from Thrace and possibly dates to the second century AD. As suggested in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, the stone was probably brought post-antiquity 'from the Mediterranean' (either directly from Bulgaria or via some intermediary salesperson) and carried by ship to the South Shields stonemason's yard. In the stores of the Great North Museum, this stone has long kept hidden the story of its origins, but our interpretation would suggest that this horseman is now very far away from home. The manner of, and reasons for, his travel from Thrace have yet to be uncovered.[15]

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[12] Oppermann, M. 2006. *Der thrakische Reiter des Ostbalkanraumes im Spannungsfeld von Graecitas, Romanitas und lokalen Traditionen*. Langenweißbach.

[13] Bull, S. 2007. *Triumphant Rider: the Lancaster Roman Cavalry Tombstone*. Lancaster. See pp. 39–51 of this volume for an overview of other *Reiter* tombstones and fragments found in Britain.

[14] Sixteen cloaks are attested in the reliefs published within *CMRED* (Tudor, D. 1969–76. *Corpus monumentorum religionis equitum Danuvinorum*. Leiden). However, only *CMRED*: 1 is a compositionally similar piece to our South Shields rider, and even then the iconography of the scene is stylistically different. There are seven attestations of Greek within *CMRED*, but all inscriptions comprise either single words or simple phrases of two words – there are no inscriptions of length comparable to the typical Thracian dedicatory formulae.

[15] There are of course numerous Greek inscriptions in private and museum collections across the UK, which made their way from their homelands via various routes, for example, the numerous Greek inscriptions from the Arundel collection, collected by Thomas Howard, 21st Earl of Arundel (1586–1646), which were almost entirely donated to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. For a discussion of some of the routes that Graeco-Roman antiquities took, see Michaelis, A. (trans. C. A. M. Fennell) 1882. *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*. Cambridge.