

An unpublished funerary inscription with bichrome painted relief lettering from Hellenistic Syracuse (*I.Sicily* 3387)

In 2012, work began to catalogue the lapidary inscriptions of the Museo archeologico regionale “Paolo Orsi”, in Siracusa, Sicily.¹ The intention is to produce a stand-alone catalogue of the museum’s material, but also to incorporate and publish online all of the material within the larger *I.Sicily* corpus.² To date some 400 inscriptions have been autopsied and recorded (the final total will be significantly higher), and several ‘lost’ texts have been re-discovered. A number of unpublished texts (many no more than fragments) has also been identified, and this paper publishes one of the more significant of those discoveries, together with some appropriate comparanda, in anticipation of the larger work.³

The stone in question (*I.Sicily* 3387) is one of several recovered from material stored outside in the grounds of the Villa Landolina where the modern museum is situated. We have been unable to identify a record for it in the museum’s inventory, and it has now been assigned the inventory number 104851. Formally, its provenance must remain uncertain, although there are no good grounds for doubting its origin as being either Siracusa or the immediate territory of Siracusa: the epigraphic collection of the museum contains remarkably little imported material (only a single Greek inscription from outside Sicily, to my knowledge) and the stone itself is undoubtedly a local limestone.⁴

A slightly tapering rectangular block of yellow grey limestone (fig. 1): height 440 mm (the front face is preserved to a maximum height of 435 mm); width 305 mm at the top, 320 mm at the base (measured across the front); depth 275 mm. All four faces are finished, although the left face is somewhat less well finished than the others. The base is rough and unfinished (fig. 2); the top has a roughly worked surface set back from the edge on all four sides (fig. 3),

¹ The project to catalogue the inscriptions of Siracusa museum was formalised while dott.ssa Beatrice Basile was director of the museum; her predecessor, dott.ssa Concetta Ciurcina was very supportive of the preliminary work, and her successors, dott.sse Gioconda Lamagna and Maria Musumeci have in turn championed the project, and I am greatly indebted to all four. Dott.ssa Angela-Maria Manenti, funzionario at the museum, has been a constant support since my first visit in 2006, long before the project became a reality, and none of this work would have been possible without her.

² *I.Sicily* is online at <http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk>. Online publication of the museum collection was authorised by the Assessorato Beni Culturali Regione Siciliana under protocol no.10681 of 06.03.2014. For more information on the *I.Sicily* project see <https://isicily.wordpress.com/about/> and Prag, Chartrand and Cummings (forthcoming).

³ The stones published here (inv. 104851, 6849, 16109, 33613) are part of the collections of the Polo Regionale di Siracusa per i siti e i musei archeologici – Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi and are published with the permission of the Assessorato dei Beni Culturali e dell’identità Siciliana, through the kind offices of the director, dott.ssa Musumeci (prot. 1365, 12.10.2016). The images may not be reproduced or duplicated in any medium.

⁴ The only import of note, present already in Siracusa in the mid-19th century, is a third-century BC Attic honorific base, Museo archeologico regionale “Paolo Orsi” Siracusa inv. no. 5 = *IG II*².2855 (forthcoming as *IG II/III*³.4.99, for which I thank Prof. Dr. Klaus Hallof).

which implies either that a continuation of the stone was subsequently removed from the upper part of the block, or that another stone was previously attached to the top of the block. A painted red band 85 mm high and slightly proud of the surface, begins some 40 mm below the top of the stone and runs horizontally across the front and right faces of the stone (but there is no trace of this on the rear or left sides). On the front face, below the red band, there is a very lightly recessed field, 205 mm high. This field contains two lines of Greek letters in very light relief (fig.4). The inscribed field is bordered below by a series of uneven horizontal striations, and there is blank space below this to the base of the stone (the lower edge of the front face is damaged and irregular). There is light damage to all the edges of the stone, including a significant chip to the left margin of the front face and two substantial gouges in the upper left of the front face of the stone, extending from the red band into the inscribed field.

The preserved text reads:

[-.]ΚΑΣΙΣ
ΑΡΙΣΤΟΚΡΑΤΕΟΣ

The letters of line 1 are 35 mm high and widely spaced. The letters of line 2 are 32-33 mm high (although *omicron* is much smaller, mid-line) and much more tightly spaced. The letters preserve traces of paint, and appear to have been painted alternately blue and red (on which see below). The letters are extremely neatly carved, regular, elegant and thin, in a light but full relief (on which see below). Letter forms of note include the *kappa* (arms are symmetrical and do not extend to the top and bottom of the line); *alpha* (very broad and straight); *sigma* (consistently formed with open upper and lower bars); *omicron* (small and mid-line); *epsilon* (shorter middle-bar).

In addition to the damage to the upper left edge of the inscribed field, it is also clear from line 2 that the left edge of the text is more heavily weathered and therefore fainter (the initial alpha is visible in strongly raking light, but very faint). In line 1, the lower portion of a vertical stroke can be made out before the *kappa*, but nothing more. The spacing of line 1 makes it effectively certain that two letters are missing before the *kappa*. The most plausible restoration is Νικασις, of which a dozen instances are known, predominantly of the Hellenistic period and including examples from Rhodes and western Greece (which puts it in the broader Sicilian orbit).⁵ The form Νικασις is not attested in Sicily itself, but the more common name Νικαστων is well attested in Sicily, with one instance at Adranon, two at Akrai, one at Henna, two at Lipara, and one at Tauromenion.⁶ The patronym, Αριστοκράτης, is extremely common, including ten instances in Sicily.⁷

⁵ http://clas-igpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/igpn_search.cgi?namenoaccents=NIKΑΣΙΣ (accessed 31.08.2016).

⁶ http://clas-igpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/igpn_search.cgi?region=sicily;namenoaccents=NIKΑΣΙΩΝ (accessed 31.08.2016).

⁷ http://clas-igpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/igpn_search.cgi?region=sicily;namenoaccents=ΑΡΙΣΤΟΚΡΑΤΗΣ (accessed 31.08.2016).

In the absence of any other criterion for dating, letter forms offer the only guide. Sicilian letter forms are extremely difficult to date with any precision, due to the lack both of independently dated examples and of local concentrations of material.⁸ Hieronian Syracuse offers almost the only material of use in this regard, and the substantial honorific bases for Hieron II (*Syll.*³ 427, between c.265 and 215 BC, fig. 5) and his son Gelon (*Syll.*³ 428, between c.241 and c.216 BC, fig.6), also in the Siracusa museum, offer the closest comparanda, suggesting that a date in the third century BC is most likely (perhaps in the first half of the century, given the open sigma). Although both texts were published over 100 years ago, no image of either has ever been published.⁹

A further comparison can be made with the epitaph for Xenokritos of Massalia, from the Canalicchio necropolis of Siracusa, published by Orsi in 1915 (fig. 7).¹⁰ Orsi noted the ‘Hieronian’ form of the letters, and the similarities are immediately apparent. The stone was lost at some point after Orsi’s initial publication, but it is one of those which we have rediscovered in the museum stores in the course of working on the catalogue, and so we take the opportunity, with the museum’s permission, to republish it with an image. It is a grey limestone block, seemingly intact and finished on left, right, and reverse, but uneven along the top (here too, it appears that something originally stood on top) and broken across the base. Maximum height 312 mm, width (across face) 363 mm, depth 290 mm. Three lines of Greek letters (line 1 = 35mm, *omicron* 21mm; line 2 = 35-37 mm, *omicron* unmeasurable; line 3 c.30mm, *omega* 28 mm), damaged at left margin and across the lower part of line 3: Ξενόκριτος | Ἡφαιστοκλέου | [Μ]ασσαλιώτης. When Orsi saw the stone in 1915 the final letters of line 2 were still visible. It is worth noting that the *sigma*, which is quite open in lines 2 and 3, has horizontal top and bottom bars in line 1. The patronym Ἡφαιστοκλής is rare: *LGPN* records two instances from Athens, one from Kolophon in Ionia, one from Istros in Scythia, and four from Lycia (Myra and Olympos).¹¹ The name perhaps supports the observations of L. Robert regarding the presence of Ionian elements among Massaliote names, and especially the prevalence of theophoric compound names.¹² The name Ξενόκριτος on the other hand is very common, but principally in Delphi and Thessaly, with only a single western instance attested, from Lokroi Epizephyrioi in the archaic period.

⁸ The unpublished doctoral thesis of Alessia Dimartino, *Indagini paleografiche e prospettive storiche sulle iscrizioni greche di Sicilia (IV-I sec. a.C.)*, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, 2009 is the only detailed study of the subject.

⁹ Much of the Hieronian material is discussed by Dimartino 2006 (esp. p.711 with fig. 422 for a synoptic table of letter forms), but imagery of these two bases was unfortunately not available for that study. Autopsy reveals that some revision of Dimartino’s conclusions is necessary since, e.g., *Syll.*³ 428 (base for Gelon) includes broken-bar alpha which cannot therefore be treated as a second-century development. Images of both will shortly be online in *I.Sicily: Syll.*³ 427 (*IG XIV.2*) = Siracusa museum inv. no. 6489 = *I.Sicily* 823; *Syll.*³ 428 = Siracusa museum inv. no. 16109 = *I.Sicily* 3331.

¹⁰ Siracusa museum inv. no. 33613 = *I.Sicily* 3334; P. Orsi, *NSA* (1915), 185-186; cf. Manganaro 1992 and 1994.

¹¹ http://clas-lgpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/lgnp_search.cgi?namenoaccents=ΗΦΑΙΣΤΟΚΛΗΣ (accessed 18.10.2016).

¹² Robert 1968, cf. Mullen 2013: 137-143.

Returning to the epitaph of [Νυ]κάσις, two features of this inscription stand out as rare and unusual, and deserve further comment: the use of relief lettering; and the bichromatic use of paint on the letters.

Full relief lettering (i.e., letters where the background is fully removed leaving the letters themselves proud of the surface, as opposed to partial relief where only the outline of the letters is cut away) is not a widespread phenomenon in lapidary epigraphy.¹³ The technique has rarely been discussed in the modern literature and the only substantive discussion was by Peter Fraser and Tullia Rönne.¹⁴ It should be emphasised that the Syracusan stone is an exceptionally fine example, one of the best from antiquity. The technique's rarity undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is technically more challenging and significantly more time-consuming; furthermore, mistakes are essentially fatal to the execution of the text and not easily concealed. Fraser and Rönne (1955: 157) suggested three reasons why the technique might be preferred: (1) as a contributing element within a larger design of relief decoration; (2) greater durability and resistance to weathering; (3) greater legibility. It is interesting to note that Ivan di Stefano Manzella in his own brief consideration of the technique took a diametrically opposite view on points (2) and (3), and both points depend upon a number of ambient factors.¹⁵ Lehner offers a supplementary practical consideration, that in cases of a panel with relief sculpture, the rear of the panel may have been reduced to a depth where engraving a text risks fracturing the stone.¹⁶ Most commentators agree on the importance of point (1).¹⁷ It is therefore quite striking that the Syracusan example appears without any associated relief work, placing all the emphasis upon the artistry of the text itself (I leave aside, as unanswerable, the question of what may have stood on top of the block).

There are two main groups of relief texts on stone from classical antiquity, both of which belong to the same chronological timeframe, the third and second centuries BC. On the one hand, the technique is most common in the Greek funerary epigraphy of north-western Greece (Acarmania, Aetolia, Epirus, the islands of the Ionian sea), with occasional outliers in

¹³ Hübner 1885: XL-XLI no.VII describes the form as 'litterae prominentes'; the preferred term in recent volumes of *IG* is 'litteris elatis'; the two instances recorded in *CIL* VI (below) are described as 'litteris extantibus'.

¹⁴ Fraser and Rönne 1957: 155-158 (cf. Fraser and Rönne-Linders 1971: 65); cf. Jacobsthal 1911: 459-464, Lehner 1923: 93-94; Robert 1955a: 266; Guarducci 1967: 460-461; Gasperini 1992: 309; Maggiani 1994: 68-71; von Hesberg 2005. Generally those publishing individual inscriptions do little more than note the technique and some parallels, e.g. Möbius 1968: 66-68; Courby and Picard 1924: 112 n.1.

¹⁵ Di Stefano Manzella 1987: 141 §13.2.4 (no reference to Fraser and Rönne); von Hesberg 2005: 301 is similarly sceptical as to whether the technique increased visibility.

¹⁶ Lehner 1923: 93, who in turn emphasised the greater visibility of such a text.

¹⁷ Fraser and Rönne-Linders 1971: 65 observed that good examples 'emphasize the extent to which the relief inscription was conceived as an organic part of the decoration'; Guarducci 1950: 138 notes the 'innegabile ricerca di eleganza', and the conjunction with other relief elements; Robert 1955a: 266 likewise noted the conjunction with other relief elements; and this is the overall thrust of Jacobsthal's 1911 study (noted by Lehner 1923: 93).

e.g. Locris, Boeotia, Thessaly, Thrace, and the Peloponnese; on the other, it is also found on a number of instances of engraved river stones ('ciottolo' in Italian – the common English translation of 'pebble' is inadequate for the size of most of these), all found within the Italian peninsula or on the island of Sicily.

The Hellenistic funerary epigraphy of north-western Greece is a relatively coherent and distinctive body of material, which has been the subject of a number of studies.¹⁸ The epitaphs commonly take the form of a stele, often with tympanon or in the form of a *naiskos*, usually with elements of relief decoration, and with a brief text, often no more than the name of the deceased. The names are regularly picked out, whether in relief or not, by means of a cartouche, a raised or depressed horizontal band, or a *tabula ansata*. The relief inscriptions, which occur with some frequency, are most frequently found within a cartouche, or else on a narrow band on the stone, with the direct technical consequence that only a very limited amount of stone has to be removed from around the letters to create the relief effect. The letters generally stand c.2 mm proud of a rough-picked background; as Fraser and Rönne noted, 'the letters are all very much fatter than the engraved equivalents' and this deviation from more typical forms has obvious practical motives, since the thinner the letter, the greater the risk of damage.¹⁹ The repeatedly republished example from Tanagra is probably the most elegant, and the only instance that comes close to the Syracusan example in fineness.²⁰ More typical is the variety to be seen in the recent *IG IX.1².4* (see n.19). From a broader perspective, there is little difficulty in finding connections between western / Adriatic Greek practices and Hellenistic Syracuse: the ties go back to the colonial period (from Corinth via Ambracia, Corcyra, Apollonia, etc.) and were strongly developed through the fourth and third centuries BC.²¹ Nonetheless, the Syracusan text stands apart, firstly because the rectangular form of the monument is different from these funerary stelai, secondly because the inscription stands in a large open field, not in a recessed panel, thirdly because it appears to lack any accompanying decoration, and fourthly because the lettering is quite simply of a much greater refinement.

The other relatively coherent body of material, internally similar in form although disparate in language and precise function and rather widely scattered geographically, is a group of at least eight naturally rounded riverine stones (between c.5 and 20 cm in diameter), all of Hellenistic date, located at Paestum (Greek), Fiesole (Latin), Napoli (Oscan), Chieti (Oscan),

¹⁸ See especially Fraser and Rönne 1955, Fraser and Rönne-Linders 1971; Mela *et al.* 1998 (who propose a typology; relief example at no.26, comments on relief at 282 n.9), all of which are extensively illustrated; examples with relief texts can also be found in the recent volume *IG IX.1².4* with photographs (e.g. nos. 920, 1506, 1507, 1524, 1597, 1654, 1703, 1706).

¹⁹ Fraser and Rönne 1955: 155-156.

²⁰ National Museum of Athens no.1984 = *IG VII.985* = Fraser and Rönne 1955: Tanagra 1, plate 1.1 = Guarducci 1967: fig.237 = Jacobsthal 1911: pl. I.4.

²¹ See especially the papers in *Hesperia* 15 (2002) = *I greci in Adriatico, I*, ed. L. Braccisi and M. Luni, for the fourth century and Millino 2003 for the Hieronian period; Miše and Touloumtzidou 2015 recently on Issa.

Arezzo (Etruscan), Camarina (Greek), Termini Imerese (Greek), and Agrigento (Greek).²² These are most frequently discussed within the context of oracular activities, and several appear to have divinatory functions; others however, are more obviously dedications (e.g. the Agrigento example), and one appears to be funerary (the Paestum example).²³ What they all have in common is the use of relief carving, whether they carry text alone, or text with decorative elements (the Termini and Agrigento examples). Most are relatively crude, but the Agrigento example in particular is a skilled and rather bravura piece.²⁴ Maggiani singles out the unusual use of relief carving in these objects, and suggests that it is to be linked to a period of crisis for oracular traditions in the mid-Hellenistic period, and that these texts aim to emphasise the inscribed verdict in divinatory contexts, so that the words seem to ‘emerge dalla roccia stessa’.²⁵ However, given the variety between these objects, the fact that some of them at least belong within a larger set of normally incised ‘ciottoli’, and that they are by no means all divinatory in their function, this can only be a very partial explanation at best.²⁶ Nonetheless, the geographic concentration of these objects within Italy and Sicily is notable.

In addition to these two groups of material, there are several isolated texts which employ the same technique and offer further indications of likely motives and inspiration for the practice. Within the western Greek orbit, there is a single non-funerary use of the technique at Phoenike in Epirus;²⁷ this example sits easily within the larger body of funerary material already noted from the region, even if its function must have been different. In Greek epigraphy, one other significant example comes from Lysimachia in the Chersonesos.²⁸ This is a broken marble disc, with a relief of a club across the centre, and underneath the name Φιλίππου (the trace of what is probably [Βασιλέω]ς above) in moderately refined relief letters. The stone presumably belongs to the period 202-199 BC when Philip V seized the city. Robert noted that, as in the western Greek examples, the relief text is clearly intended to accompany the relief sculpture; but he also noted the very obvious parallels with coinage, not

²² Maggiani 1994 gathers all but the last two examples, with earlier bibliography and illustrations in figs.1-8; Sclafani 2007 republishes the Termini Imerese example with excellent images and earlier bibliography. For the Agrigento example (*SEG* 28.761, Boston Museum of Fine Arts), see <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/sicilian-greek-artists-votive-disc-151092>, which includes an excellent image (accessed 01/09/2016); the piece is said to have been found at Porto Empedocle (Manganaro 1977: 150 n.15, publication of the Camarina example).

²³ See Maggiani 1994 and Sclafani 2007 for these objects in relation to divinatory practice; for the Agrigento example, Comstock and Vermeule 1976: 57 no.89 (and previous note); for the Paestum example, Guarducci 1950.

²⁴ Comstock and Vermeule 1976: 57 no.89 speculate that the artist (the text is a signature) might have been a die-cutter for the coinage of Syracuse.

²⁵ Maggiani 1994: 68-71.

²⁶ Sclafani 2007 discusses the Termini example within the context of other normally incised stones from Termini; cf, e.g. Mancini and Prosdociami 1975 for normally incised Venetic examples.

²⁷ Ugolini 1932: 150-151 no.4 fig.83 (*SEG* 23.480): a metre-wide block reading: 'AMBΠ[A]-|KIQ[TAN], in a sunken field.

²⁸ Robert 1955a.

simply for the artistic combination of relief text and image, albeit on a smaller scale, but in this specific instance also the very direct parallels with contemporary coinage for the form and type of the imagery.

Returning to the Italian peninsula, there are two exceptional instances of the use of relief within the Etruscan funerary tradition: a relief text running along the long edge of the lid of a sarcophagus from Vetralla, below a high relief sculpture of the deceased (the overall form is a typical Etruscan type, but not the use of relief for the lettering). The text in line 2, which runs over the curve of the lid, shifts into the rather less time-consuming partial relief rather than full relief. The association of relief sculpture on the lid and relief frieze on the side panel of the sarcophagus below the text makes the artistic intent behind the use of relief apparent (Herbig merely notes the unusual technique).²⁹ The same rationale appears to lie behind the second Etruscan example, a funerary stele from Etruscan Felsine.³⁰ The text appears on a relief band between two of the three relief panels on one side of the stele (the other side also carries a scene carved in relief). The overall form of the stele is typical of the material from Felsine, but this is the only example to develop the use of relief to include an associated text. Again it is apparent that the emphasis upon relief decoration provides the inspiration.

Finally, in addition to the Latin *sors* stone of the third century BC in the museum at Fiesole noted above, there are four further Latin examples, all of the first or second century AD. Firstly, a short funerary text from Sardinia, where the name of the deceased is in relief, followed by a second line of normally incised text; the stone is otherwise unadorned.³¹ This text echoes practices found in the funerary texts of western Greece, but is obviously well removed in time and space, and relatively crude in execution. Secondly, from Rome, a relief text surrounding a relief of a temple on a statue base in the Vatican Museums.³² This unusual example can, like the Etruscan examples, best be understood within the general framework of a relief text being produced deliberately as a conscious part of the overall relief work (it was for this example that Lehner offered the additional consideration that engraving a text on the thin background of the relief might be problematic). Thirdly, a monumental funerary epigram for one Cassius Agrippinus from Rome.³³ Until recently, this piece lacked any clear parallels within the surviving Roman tradition, although, as Henner von Hesberg has noted, the framing within a *tabula ansata* has parallels in the western Greek tradition discussed above. However, the publication of two small fragments of a relief text from the area of Domitian's palace near Castel Gandolfo by von Hesberg in 2005 at least serve to show that the practice had some currency with the Urban environment of the high empire (although Gasparri has argued that the unusual technique is one reason for thinking the Vatican relief statue base in

²⁹ Herbig 1952: 73-4 no.188 tav. 21d-e.

³⁰ Ducati 1911: 370-372 no.10 (the text is Rix, *Etruskische Texte*, Fe.1.9, but with no mention of the technique); also in Morigi Govi 2009: 95, and described in Sassatelli 1985: 241 no.8.15.

³¹ Gasperini 1992: 307-310 text A fig.9.

³² *CIL* VI.29816; online as EDR115514 (with image); Guarducci 1961-1962, with brief discussion of the technique at 97; Gasparri 1979: 23-25 no.5 fig.7.

³³ *CIL* VI.1372 with *CIL* VI.viii.3, p.4688; *CLE* 426; Di Stefano Manzella 1987: 302 fig.161.

fact originates from southern Italy).³⁴ Von Hesberg concludes that these fragments came from a showy, monumental text, perhaps intended to be mounted at height. He also argues that the use of colour would have been likely, in order to increase visibility. Given the obvious parallelism with the common Roman technique of applying relief metal letters for monumental public Latin texts, which Guarducci and others had previously noted, von Hesberg suggests that this text might have been intended to achieve the same effect within a private context, and so that the use of bronze letters was reserved for public monuments (this latter point an inference from surviving practice).

Within the Roman/Latin context, relief texts in other media, principally metal and ceramic, are of course relatively common.³⁵ The majority of such texts occur on *instrumenta*, in texts produced by stamps or moulds, and are on a small scale: the recent bronze *rostra* recovered from area of the Egadi islands offer a larger scale example (again alongside relief imagery), and illustrate the ability to choose between relief and negative text even when casting, but the difference in technique is still the same.³⁶ In Greek epigraphy the most direct parallel comes from coinage, as is well illustrated by the stone example from Lysimachia noted above;³⁷ but relief texts occur widely also on sling bullets, whether of ceramic or lead.³⁸ However, while all of these produce the visual effect of relief letters, they have little in common technically with lapidary relief, generally being incised in a mould or stamp.

Fraser and Rönne instead looked to the echoes to be found in bronze epigraphy, from a similar geographical range as the western Greek relief funerary material.³⁹ They noted the relatively common phenomenon of texts where the letters were struck from the reverse on thin sheets of metal, to produce a relief effect.⁴⁰ In particular, they pointed to the well known set of bronze *proxenia* decrees from Corcyra, where the foot of the text in several cases includes a couple of lines of cast relief letters.⁴¹ They further suggested that, because stone relief texts do not seem to occur before the third century BC, the practice should be seen as an imitative development from techniques found earlier in other materials such as metal (this chronological claim holds true not only for the western Greek material, but appears also to be

³⁴ von Hesberg 2005, esp. 299 and 300-301; Gasparri 1979: 23-25.

³⁵ This point has been made repeatedly in past discussion, e.g. Guarducci 1950: 138 (observations which she repeats in her other later discussions of various of these texts); Maggiani 1994: 70 rejects Guarducci's suggestion that it is in imitation of terracotta techniques, considering it to emerge independently as a technique for specific reasons in relation to divinatory practice and significance.

³⁶ For the *rostra*, see Prag 2014 (compare groups I and II).

³⁷ Robert 1955a: 266; observed also by Jacobsthal 1911: 461-462.

³⁸ See conveniently Guarducci 1969: 516-524, and recently Ma 2010 with earlier bibliography.

³⁹ See Eck 2015 for recent discussion of bronze epigraphy as a western phenomenon in the Roman era; Sicily has a notable preference for epigraphy on metal in the Greek period, a subject to which I shall return.

⁴⁰ They offer many examples (1955: 156 n.8), such as material from Lusoi, in Reichel and Wilhelm 1901.

⁴¹ See *IG IX.1*².4.789-792 with Crema 2007; Mela *et al.* 1998: 282 n.9 echo this observation.

more broadly true, with the sole exception of the Etruscan examples: the Felsine stele is fifth century). However, the same limitation applies to this parallel also, namely that all of these examples serve merely as visual inspiration, since these texts originate in engraving, punching, stamping, or casting, whereas essential to the lapidary relief technique is the mason's skill at relief stone-carving, which is distinct from engraving.

In other words, the technique found in the Syracusan text can be paralleled, but it was not extensively used in the classical or Roman period, even though the visual parallels were widely available in metal and ceramic objects.⁴² The technique's rarity may reflect the greater skill required, although a skilled letter cutter should have the necessary ability with a chisel to execute such letters, as would any sculptor. More plausible as an explanation, as suggested by the frequent use of a cartouche or similarly restricted field, is that relief-letters are much more time-consuming, and carry a greater risk of catastrophic error. They are therefore quite simply more expensive. Nonetheless, in the final analysis, the genuine rarity of the technique in surviving material also suggests that the style simply did not appeal to the majority of those commissioning such work, and one should never ignore the importance of fashion, aesthetics and custom. In this respect the Syracusan example is distinctive, since the absence of associated relief decoration and the fineness of the letters implies a deliberate choice that aimed to make a statement and, on the basis of our surviving evidence, to stand apart in the necropolis.⁴³

If the Syracusan text is distinctive for its use of relief lettering, it is also notable for the particular use of colour. The use of paint on inscribed letters, principally red, is in itself unremarkable. The phenomenon is commonly noted, but detailed treatment is rare.⁴⁴ Despite the proliferation of recent studies on the use of colour in antiquity I am not aware of any specific treatment of the application of colour to inscribed text, as opposed to statuary and relief work.⁴⁵ What marks out the Syracusan text is the use of different colours, red and blue, on alternate letters. Wilhelm, Robert and Guarducci all noted that occasional instances are known of different colours on alternate lines, but only Larfeld mentioned examples of alternate colour by letter. Larfeld's examples (1907: 207) are challenging to trace. One, an

⁴² I do not here consider later examples, although for a fuller consideration of the technique in general this would clearly be necessary: Guarducci and others note the existence of late antique parallels in the East, and Philip Perkins reminds me that in Sicily and elsewhere relief work is common in later Arabic lapidary inscriptions, where it can be readily understood as a part of the extensive tradition of relief decoration (foliage and geometric designs) and calligraphy.

⁴³ An interesting modern parallel can be found in the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven, CT (where Rostovtzeff is buried), where a number of the monuments have the family name in distinctive bold relief letters, e.g. http://www.grovestreetcemetery.org/slide_show/Grove_Street_Cemetery_Slide_Show/grove_street_cemetery13.html (accessed 20.10.2016).

⁴⁴ Brief remarks in the standard works, e.g., Guarducci 1967: 457-8; Robert 1955b: 211 (= *OMS* I, 592); Wilhelm 1909: 240 n.5; Larfeld 1907: 205-7.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Brinkmann, Primavesi and Hollein 2010, Descamps-Lequime 2007; von Graeve and Helly 1987.

Athenian inscription, proves in fact to be monochromatic.⁴⁶ For the other, a Lycian inscription, he cites Franz (1844) in the Ersch and Gruber encyclopaedia. Franz in turn alludes to Alexandrian and Athenian examples, which also seem to be monochromatic, and lastly cites Fellows for a recent Lycian example.⁴⁷ Fellows, in his 1841 *Account of discoveries in Lycia* in fact describes multiple examples;⁴⁸ and these and further examples of both red and green and red and blue lettering are reported in *TAM I*.⁴⁹ From Sicily itself, at the western end of the island, there is a remarkable example of similar date, from the necropolis of Lilybaeum (the tomb is dated 280-250 BC). This is a block of limestone, covered in stucco, probably from an *epitymbion* funerary monument, on which the name ΛΕΥΚΑΔΙΟΣ is engraved in letters c.5-7 cm high, and painted alternate blue and red. Traces of a preceding line are visible above, and a second block is reported to bear the letter “L” (actually *lambda*?), painted ‘verdastra’, i.e. a greenish colour.⁵⁰ I would welcome indications of further examples, but at present I know of no others.

Two examples is hardly sufficient to suggest a distinctive Sicilian practice, even if both examples are contemporary and funerary; at the same time, the strong concentration of examples in Lycia very much suggests a local fashion in that region. Lehner, Di Stefano Manzella, and von Hesberg have all noted that the addition of colour would serve to render relief letters more visible, but the Syracusan text is the first attested example of the combination.⁵¹ It is therefore particularly striking that in addition to being a bravura example of the stone mason’s art, it also adopts a rather striking and unusual colour scheme.

⁴⁶ *CIA IV*^{1c} p.185 n.422¹⁴, i.e. *IG I*, suppl, p.185 no.422¹⁴ = *IG I*² no.1019 = *IG I*³ 1393, marble disc from Piraeus, now in the Athens National Museum (no.93); refuted by Dragendorff 1897: 1-2 n.2 (although unfortunately no colour photograph has been published).

⁴⁷ Franz 1844: 340 citing Franz 1840: 36 n.2 for examples, where he references Fauvel 1812: 93 for Athenian examples. Fauvel reports a series of inscriptions excavated in 1811, and states that ‘les lettres sont alternativement noires et rouges’. These texts are *IG II*² 2581a and b = *Agora XIX*, nos. H68 (Meritt 1948, no.19) and H69, on which the letters only show red paint; *IG II*² 8541 (no colour recorded); *IG I*³ 1139 = *Agora XIX*, no. H72 = Meritt 1939: 77-79 no.24 (no colour recorded); and *IG II/III*² 4870 (no colour recorded). I am grateful to Prof. G. Petzl for help in resolving the reference to Fauvel.

⁴⁸ Fellows 1841: 468, appendix B (specifically Tab.36 nos. 1, 2, 4 and 13); and descriptions at p.198 (Myra) and 206 (Limyra).

⁴⁹ *TAM I*, no.86 (Myra) alternate red and green letters, Lycian; 101 (Limyra), Lycian, lines alternately red and green; 110 (Limyra), Lycian text, alternate red and blue letters; 115 (Limyra), letters alternately red and blue; 120 (Limyra) Lycian text, line 1 in green, line 2 in red; 122 (Limyra), letters alternately green and red; 139 (Limyra), letters alternately green and red.

⁵⁰ See Bechtold 1999: 321 t.131 with tav.XL no.382; currently on display in the Museo archeologico regionale Lilibeo Marsala - Baglio Anselmi = *I.Sicily* 3662.

⁵¹ Lehner 1923: 93; Di Stefano Manzella 1987: 141; von Hesberg 2005: 301; cf. Jacobsthal 1911: 459.

The funerary epigraphy of Hellenistic Syracuse is in general very poorly preserved, even though it is clear that the necropoleis of the city were very extensive.⁵² In part, this should be attributed to the generally poor quality of the local stone, and the extensive use of stucco, as well as the continuous occupation of the city. The stores of the Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi” contain a very substantial number of poorly published or unpublished epigraphic fragments, of all periods. Although the full publication of these will not radically transform our evidence for the ancient city, they will nonetheless provide a glimpse of the actual extent of the cultural practice of epigraphy. Occasional, exceptional pieces such as the epitaph for [Ni]kasis serve to illustrate the quality and possible extent of what is lost. In this case, the stone also serves to reinforce the frequent sense that ‘Greek’ Sicily followed its own path, often adopting practices and tastes that bear only a partial relationship to what we find in the rest of the Greek world. At the same time, both in its onomastic content and its material form, the piece is a further indication of the strong connections that ran between western Greece, the Adriatic, southern Italy and Sicily. Lastly, the piece is a useful reminder that inscriptions are much more than mere texts, and the material form of inscriptions (and the monuments that host them) constantly deserves further study.

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⁵² See Zirone 2011: 193-204 for an overview of the necropoleis.

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I. Sicily 3387 = Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi di Siracusa inv.104851: detail of text.

Photo: J. Prag



Figure 5

I.Sicily 823 = IG XIV.2 = Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi di Siracusa inv. 6489: front view. Photo: J. Prag.



Figure 6

I.Sicily 3331 = Syll³.428 = Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi di Siracusa inv.16109: front view. Photo: J. Prag.



Figure 7

I. Sicily 3334 = P. Orsi, *NSA* (1915), 185-186 = Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi di Siracusa inv.33613: front view. Photo: J. Prag.

