



“ἀναγράψαι εἰς τὴν παραστάδα τοῦ ναοῦ” The presence of inscriptions in the pronaos of temples in Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor

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Fig. 1: Geographical distribution of pronaos inscriptions. © E. Roels



Fig. 2: Temple of Athena Latmia in Herakleia under Latmos, seen from the southeast. Photo: E. Roels.



Fig. 3: Temple of Hecate in the sanctuary of Lagina, seen from the east. Photo: E. Roels.



Fig. 4: Temple of Zeus in Aizanoi, seen from the northeast. Photo: E. Roels.

Introduction

The phrase ‘To inscribe on the *parastas* of the temple’ found in several inscriptions from Asia Minor hints at an ancient epigraphic practice, that, although long noticed by scholars, has not yet been extensively discussed, namely: **the display of inscriptions in the pronaos.**

This poster presents the first results of an ongoing dissertation project on the phenomenon of epigraphic collections in general, and that of temple inscriptions in particular, carried out at the University of Heidelberg under the supervision of prof. dr. Christian Witschel and dr. Ludwig Meier within the Heidelberg Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 933 “Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies”.

Chronological and geographical range

The display of inscriptions in the pronaos (as well as on temples) seems to be a phenomenon that applies specifically to sanctuaries in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor. Most of the pronaos inscriptions that have survived were found in the region of Caria and, to a lesser extent, Ionia (see fig. 1). They first occur at **the beginning of the 3rd cent. BC** in Priene at the temple of Athena Polias; the latest date to **the 2nd cent. AD** (e.g. temple of Zeus, Aizanoi (fig. 4)).

The phenomenon of pronaos inscriptions shows remarkable regional differences both in the number of documents published and in the duration of the practice to display inscriptions in a specific pronaos. One may therefor wonder if pronaos inscriptions can be considered as a single connected practice.

Type of documents

The predominant type of document found on the

pronaos walls are **royal or imperial letters**. To name a few examples: the temple of Athena in Priene displayed letters from Alexander the Great and king Lysimachos; the temple of Zeus in Aizanoi (fig. 4) showcased the letters of Hadrian and the proconsul of Asia in the pronaos; and the temple of Athena Latmia in Herakleia under Latmos even boasted three letters from important political protagonists of the time, i.e. Antiochus III and Lucius Cornelius Scipio (fig. 2). Comparable to this category are the *Res gestae divi Augusti* in Ancyra, which were also written by a ruler.

The common feature of these documents is that they bear witness to the confirmation or establishment of rules, regulations, and privileges for the city, while simultaneously advertising each city’s good relations with the ruler. As such, they were vital elements in the construction of civic memory and identity of the city that chose to publish them. The fact that temples with pronaos inscriptions all functioned as the main civic sanctuary must have played an important role in choosing these specific temples as location for publication.

Other types of documents that tend to be published in the pronaos, though to a lesser extent, are **civic decrees related to the cult or the venerated deity**. A final category is formed by **priest lists**, such as those published in the pronaos of the temples in Lagina (fig. 3), Herakleia, and Ancyra.

The ancient temple as *Schriftträger*

The ancient preference to put up civic inscriptions inside a sanctuary has long been explained with the argument that the sanctity of the area protected the documents and guaranteed the inviolability of their regulations. This neatly explains the wish to publish important documents within the boundaries of a sanctuary, but does not provide an explanation for the fact that they were inscribed on the temple walls

instead of freestanding *stelai*. In my opinion, an examination of documents published in the pronaos or on the temple walls shows that this was **one of the places for some cities to publish very valuable and important documents for the civic community**. Apart from being a highly valued publication place in its quality as dwelling of the gods, the temple, because of its enduring character, might have been considered a far more secure publication place than freestanding blocks of marble, which stood a greater risk of being cleared away.

In general, the documents in the pronaos constitute the oldest among those published on the temple walls. Consequently, the pronaos can be seen as the (first) preferred place of publication. This can be explained by the arrangement of the pronaos’ surroundings, since the altar was located in front of the pronaos and the main cultic activities took place there. Furthermore, the pronaos was intersected with the visual axis between the altar and the cult statue in the cella, the viewing of which formed part of ritual praxis. **Thus, apart from the altar, it was the most visible, looked at and visited area within the sacred precinct.** Accordingly, the inscriptions published here were likely to have been the most effective in terms of communication. By virtue of its location, the pronaos was, so to say, one of the *episemotatoi topoi* in the sanctuary.

Unfortunately, we do not possess any ancient reflections on ideas about the durability and safety of particular publication places. Hence, it is impossible to answer the question whether pronaos inscriptions were perceived as more valuable than the ones published on *stelai*.

Temple as civic landmark

The ancient perception of the royal letters as valuable testimonies to a city’s history and achievements was enhanced by their publication place, the temple. The

temple itself was an object of prestige and its presence distinguished a sanctuary and the city responsible for its construction. This lead to the temple’s function as civic landmark, testified by the numismatic sources that show many cities depicting the temple of the main civic sanctuary on their coins. **The display of royal letters on the temple (of all buildings in town) underlines and enhances the temple’s function as civic landmark and resulted in its perception as important civic monument.**

Conclusion

Ancient visitors of temples in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor encountered a large variety of documents on the pronaos walls. What all these records have in common is their aspiration to publicly display the mentioned events, privileges, rights and individuals publicly on the walls of the temple. Consequently, the fate of the documents’ availability in the public space was thus intertwined with the fate of the temple.

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List of temples with inscriptions in the pronaos

Temple of Athena Polias, Priene	Temple of Zeus, Labraunda	Temple of Apollo, Delphi
Temple of Athena Latmia, Herakleia u. L.	Temple of Eleuthera, Muskar	Temple of Dionysos, Teos
Temple of Zeus, Magnesia on the M.	Temple of Apollo, Tyberissos	Metroon, Sardis
Temple of Apollo Termintheus, Myous	Temple of Artemis, Amyzon	Temple of Hecate, Lagina
Temple of Roma and Augustus, Ancyra	Temple of Zeus Megistos, Iasos	Temple of Zeus, Aizanoi

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