From Texts on Walls to Walls of Text: The Layout of Late Antique Greek Documents Inscribed on Architecture

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1. A Break with Classical Layout at Mylasa

To those trained in classical Greek epigraphy, the *forma generalis* of the praetorian prefect Flavius Illus Pusaeus Dionysios (*I.Mylasa* 613) perhaps comes as something of a surprise. This lengthy document, dating to 480 and inscribed at Mylasa (Milas, Turkey) presumably shortly thereafter, settles a tax dispute in the province of Caria.[1] But it is not the content of the inscription that strikes the viewer. It is the inscription's visual aspects: its *mise en page*, that is, the layout of its twenty lines on its stone medium, as well as the irregularity of the script itself (Fig. 91).[2] The document stretches across the podium wall of the first century BCE Temple of Augustus and Roma in lines 4.50 m in length, *without* division into columns or sections.[3] No reading aids are provided. The letter size of some lines is larger than others; some lines are squeezed in before or after horizontal block breaks (Fig. 92). The text ends with a flourish at odds with the rest of its angular Greek script: a *kalends* date in cursive Latin (Fig. 93). In short, the *forma generalis* at Mylasa presents itself as a sizeable

[1] The inscription was first copied down by Richard Pococke in the eighteenth century and rediscovered by Louis Robert in 1934: Robert 1935, 158; Robert 1937, 542-546. The latest edition of the text and discussion of its context and material qualities is Feissel 1994. The *forma generalis* joined an earlier fifth century dossier on the podium of this temple: letters between Theodosios II and his *comes sacrarum largitionum* concerning the financial benefits for Mylasa's harbor (427-429; *I.Mylasa* 611 and 612). Unless otherwise stated, all dates in this chapter are CE. I wish to thank the volume editors for many stimulating comments and corrections on this essay, as well as the other participants in the original conference session for their important questions and insights. Wang Banban and I had a productive discussion of the material, and Denis Feissel and David Hendrix kindly made photographs of inscriptions available to me.

[2] For terms including *mise en page* and layout, see Ast *et al*. 2015; Chang *et al*. 2021, 1-5 (these editors also propose "impagination" as a term to capture different levels of arranging the text on a writing bearer, including dynamic, constantly changing layouts, as on digital screens or graffiti walls).

[3] Feissel 1994, 269. For the Temple of Augustus and Roma at Mylasa, see Rumscheid 2004.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)
Anna M. Sitz, *From Texts on Walls to Walls of Text: The Layout of Late Antique Greek Documents Inscribed on Architecture*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0456-9.18, in Davide Amendola, Cristina Carusi, Francesca Maltomini, Emilio Rosamilia (edited by), *Text, Layout, and Medium. Documents from the Greco-Roman World between Epigraphy and Papyrology*, pp. 305-315, 2024, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0456-9, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0456-9

wall of irregularly inscribed text. It is these material qualities (layout, letterforms, mixed styles, and sheer monumentality without divisions) that surprises the viewer trained on the neat and tidy inscribed public documents of the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman Imperial periods.

The visual characteristics of this late antique document at Mylasa indeed represent a substantial departure from the *mise en page* and visual features of earlier Greek inscriptions. As seen in other contributions in this volume, in Asia Minor documents in Greek were often inscribed in neatly-ordered columns stretching across a wall space. Lines as long as those at Mylasa are uncommon in earlier documentary inscriptions (excluding here dedications, which frequently interact with their writing bearer differently than decrees, laws, and letters did). If the document to be inscribed was particularly long and the inscribing field was wider than high (as was usually the case with wall space), cutters generally preferred to inscribe the text in columns, as was already the case with the archaic law code at Gortyn.[4] The tendency to inscribe long Greek documents, or dossiers of documents, in columns on walls was especially prevalent in Hellenistic-period Asia Minor: see, for example, the dossier on the stoa of the agora at Magnesia on the Maeander (208/7 BCE and later), the lengthy royal letter on the wall of the Temple of Athena at Pergamon (second century BCE), and the dossier on the west wall of the stoa of the sanctuary of Athena at Priene (130 BCE and later), to name a few.[5] Various Roman Imperial-era inscriptions in Greek likewise exhibit this layout. These documents were added to the walls of already-standing temples or stoas, sometimes centuries after the original construction of the monument.[6] Although the visual effects of these *mise en page* choices are not always articulated by present-day epigraphers, these Hellenistic and Roman inscriptions project the concepts of "order", "control", and "exclusivity" through their material characteristics, even to the illiterate.[7] These texts harnessed the regularity of their columnar layouts to add weight to decrees, letters, and other official documents.

So, then: the development of this columnar layout for the inscribing of documents on architectural writing space in the Archaic and early Classical period and its progression into the Hellenistic and Roman periods are clear, as are the reasons for it: *poleis*, kings, and emperors were all eager to visually demonstrate their own control over the forces of disorder through these orderly texts on walls. But the eventual dissolution of this practice in Late Antiquity – the partial abandonment of the

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[4] For the development and earlier use of columnar formatting, especially on stelae, see Meyer 2016, 2017; Berti and Kató 2017; Faraguna 2020.

[5] Magnesia on the Maeander: *I.Magnesia* 16-87. Pergamon: *I.Pergamon* 163. Priene: *I.Priene B - M* 63-70. See von Hesberg 2009; Roels 2018a; 2018b. Cf. also F. Santini's chapter in this volume.

[6] Sitz 2017.

[7] Dietrich *et al.* 2023.

tendency to inscribe lengthy documents or dossiers in columns – has received little attention, despite the exceptional scholarly interest in the "materiality of texts" over the past decade. The result of this dissolution was the *forma generalis* on the temple podium at Mylasa: a wall of text, without columns, without divisions, irregular.

What led to this dramatic shift in layout, from clean-cut Hellenistic documents carefully organized as discrete columns of text on walls to Mylasa's wall of text? Some scholars of an earlier generation might perhaps have given a one-word answer: "decline". In this view, stonemasons had lost the skills and patience of earlier inscription cutters, and instead simply replicated what they saw on a papyrus original on the wall, right down to the Latin cursive date. But was it really easier for the stone cutter to carve the lengthy lines of the Mylasa text instead of breaking them down into units? Did the Latin date not require skill and patience to replicate on stone at several times the size of the original? And was this prominent epigraphic commission on one of Mylasa's historic monuments really cutting corners, that is, inscribing in an easy, even lazy, manner?

Instead of assuming "decline" as a simplistic explanation for any visual features that do not correspond with classical epigraphic ideals, I here chart the shifts in layout and conception of what a document on a wall was *supposed* to look like from the Early Imperial period to Late Antiquity. I am primarily focused on the Greek inscriptions of Asia Minor. By considering the changing layout of Greek inscriptions in these periods as elements of style rather than "decline", I offer a clearer articulation of the visual strategies at play on Mylasa's inscribed temple and a more comprehensive view of the aestheticization of inscriptions in Late Antiquity.

2. The Roman Period: Texts on Walls

As already stated, many inscribed Greek documents in the Roman Imperial era continued to use a columnar layout for inscribing texts on walls. But the relationship between inscribed documents and the walls on which they appeared evolved. Above the Greek version of the *Res Gestae divi Augusti* at Ankara, a heading in large letters runs across several meters of wall space, above the neat and orderly columns of the *Res Gestae* itself. This heading imparted important information to the reader (*I.Ancyra* 1, heading): "The deeds and gifts of the god Augustus, which he left behind engraved on two bronze stelae at Rome, translated and written below".[8] Although headings in larger letters were used in Greek documents on stelae in earlier periods,[9] the length of the heading at Ancyra (which would have required both the stone cutter, and anyone reading the text, to physically move along the side of the temple as they carved/read) was unusual: it signaled a new integration of the in-

[8] Translation after Cooley 2009, 28-29.

[9] Rosamilia 2020, 134-136.

scribed document within its architectural context, highlighting through its extended length the expansiveness of both the document and the temple wall. In short, the layout of this heading complemented the wall space on which it was inscribed.

We see a similar phenomenon at Aizanoi, where a consular letter of 12 BCE was inscribed with an opening line declaring that the letter had been sent "from Pergamon" (*MAMA* IX 13, l. 1). This paratext was not written in larger letters than the rest of the inscription, but it was set apart above the text of the letter itself, centered and separated from it by blank space. The explicit framing of both the *Res Gestae* and this letter from Aizanoi as merely copies of an original touches upon the conceptualization of inscriptions in this period and the way that they constructed authority, but I will not consider that subject here. Instead, I note that the use of headings and paratexts not only made these inscriptions more user friendly: it changed their aesthetics. Select parts of the inscription were given a visual prominence beyond other parts, simultaneously drawing attention to themselves and unifying the remainder of the text.[10]

This manipulation of visual prominence was taken to a new level by the stone carvers at Aphrodisias. The so-called Archive Wall at the entrance into the city's theater displays select documents epitomizing Aphrodisias' long and fruitful collaboration with the Roman senate and emperors, inscribed in the early third century, with later additions in the middle of the same century. Until recently, the focus of researchers has been on the substantial historical importance of these letters and decrees. But taking a step back from the texts and taking in the monument as a whole reveals it to be spectacularly innovative in its layout.[11] Here the columnar formatting on the wall – so familiar to viewers in Asia Minor – has been adjusted to conform to visual aims. Many of the individual documents organized into six broad columns are inscribed with a greater focus on horizontality: that is, the documents are wider than they are tall. Although not all blocks are fully preserved (due to the fact that many blocks were later taken and reused in Aphrodisias' defensive walls), it appears that the entire face of the nearly eleven-meter wide wall, above the level of the orthostates, was *covered* in text. What is more, the headings of select letters are much larger than surrounding text and stand out visually on the wall.

As Christina Kokkinia demonstrated, the layout of the wall was carefully planned to feature the most important texts at its center, in the fourth column. In particular, ΑΓΑΘΗ ΤΥΧΗ ("to good fortune") is written in huge, 8-cm letters at the wall's upper center, opening the letter of Augustus to Stephanos in which he declares (*I.Aphrodisias 2007* 8.29, ll. 3-4): "This one city [Aphrodisias] I have taken for mine out of

[10] Cf. Graham 2013 on Roman inscriptions at Ephesos.

[11] Kokkinia 2016; Graham 2021.

all of Asia".[12] It is obvious why this text would receive pride of place in the Aphrodisian dossier. In another letter from Augustus, his glowing praise for Aphrodisias is highlighted by star decorations framing the relevant line (*I.Aphrodisias 2007* 8.32, l. 7), while a letter from Trajan, like those of Augustus, is laid out with ample blank space around its opening and closing (*I.Aphrodisias* 2007 8.33). The other texts of the dossier frame these most significant imperial letters, and the wall makes use of a number of cognitive aides to draw the eye to these important documents, as convincingly argued by Abigail Graham.[13] The Archive Wall at Aphrodisias is still in the tradition of older inscribed walls with columns of text in Asia Minor, with its emphasis on neat and orderly carving and the use of columns as a macro-organizing unit. But the overall impression is very different from its Hellenistic and earlier Imperial Roman predecessors: not texts on a wall, but a wall of text, impressing the viewer both through its regularity and order *and* through its sheer scope and connection with its writing bearer.

3. Late Antiquity: Walls of Texts

The evolution of the layout of inscribed Greek documents continued in Late Antiquity.[14] A columnar format was still sometimes used: at Magnesia on the Maeander, a census probably dating to the mid-fourth century was inscribed across seven meters of the wall of the Temple of Zeus, organized into columns.[15] This inscription took its place in the same agora that housed the old Hellenistic dossier on the stoa, mentioned above. Was there an intentional visual echo of these older inscriptions in the census document, or was a columnar format simply the easiest and most intuitive way to organize this information (a list of properties, individuals, and tax obligations)?

As we have already seen with the *forma generalis* of the praetorian prefect Dionysios at Mylasa, however, the columnar format was completely abandoned in other inscribed documents, resulting in inscriptions that are visually quite distinct from Hellenistic and Roman examples. So too did reading aids and spacing intended to subdivide the text fall by the wayside.[16] The visual staging of the *forma generalis* was not the idiosyncratic decision of a stone carver at Mylasa: we have two other inscribed copies of the same document from other Carian cities, Keramos and Stratonikeia.[17] Dionysios had commanded that his decision on this tax dispute be put up for every-

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[12] Translation by J.M. Reynolds in *I.Aphrodisias 2007*.

[13] Cf. A. Graham's chapter in this volume.

[14] Wang Banban is preparing a study of the agents behind the inscribing of documents in Late Antiquity and their display locations within late antique cities: Wang in preparation.

[15] *I.Magnesia* 122. Harper 2008, 86-88; Huttner 2018, 3-5. See also Agosti 2015 for the continued use of columns to organize poetry in Late Antiquity.

[16] Cf. L. Del Corso's chapter in this volume.

[17] *I.Keramos* 65 and *I.Stratonikeia* 1019.

one to see, "on stone or on bronze".[18] As Denis Feissel noted, these three copies of the *forma generalis* are similar in their layouts: in each case, the stone carver carved Dionysios' prefectoral titles as the opening of the document, allowing the length of this first line to determine the length of the remaining lines.[19] The three inscriptions therefore had similar, elongated formats well-suited to monumental writing bearers: presumably walls (although the copies from Keramos and Stratonikeia are fragmentary and their original contexts unclear).

The visual impression of a "wall of text" is even greater at the site of Kasai in Pamphylia (Asartepe, Gündoğmuş, Turkey). On the apse of the Yazıtlı Kilise (Inscribed Church), letters concerning military matters, exchanged between an emperor (probably Zeno, r. 474–491) and his *magister officiorum*, are carved on the exterior east wall of the church and the apse (Fig. 94).[20] The texts are inscribed in long lines stretching across twenty-three blocks (many now fallen); they flow seamlessly from the flat eastern wall onto the curved apse. These inscriptions work with the architecture and give the impression of being inseparable from it, a quite distinct effect than that of the Hellenistic and Roman columns of text simply laid on top of architectural wall space. The visual effect at Kasai is of an "inscribed skin" wrapping around the church. Here I am modifying Elizabeth Bolman's phrase, "painted skin", which she uses to describe the extremely ornate, polychromous painted programs that wrapped around interiors of late antique churches primarily in Egypt.[21] The "painted skin" in these Egyptian churches added faux marble and faux curtains to their architectural settings, similar to how the inscription discussed here added a certain *text*ure to the wall space it was inscribed upon.[22] At Kasai in Pamphylia, the visual effect of the military letters on the exterior of the apse was heightened by spoliated Roman inscriptions built into the church elsewhere.[23] These were quite literally walls built of texts.

Similar aesthetic effects are visible on other late antique inscriptions. A bilingual rescript of Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, dated between 372 and 378, stretches across three panels of the base of the Octagon on the Embolos at Ephesos; the lines are longer than the text is high.[24] A sixth-century letter of the scribe John to property owners in Kaisareia / Hadrianopolis, Paphlagonia (Boncuklar, Turkey) is carved,

[18] *I.Mylasa* 613, l. 15: λίθῳ ἢ χάλκῳ.

[19] Feissel 1994, 269.

[20] *I.Westkilikien Rep.* Kasai 5. Feissel 2016, 670–684; Onur 2017, 143.

[21] Bolman 2010.

[22] A house at Hierapolis (Pamukkale) provides a fascinating example of a similar phenomenon in the private sphere: a Biblical verse was painted on the interior of a room, wrapping around all four walls in continuous script. Zaccaria Ruggiu 2013.

[23] Bean and Mitford 1970, 51; *I.Westkilikien Rep.* Kasai 16.

[24] *I.Ephesos* 43.

not on a wall, but on a reused rectangular base.[25] The text nonetheless takes up all available space on three faces of the stone (face A was already occupied by a dedication to Commodus), rejecting the orderly layout of a column of text centered on the stone in favor of filling *all* blank surfaces. At Thessalonica, a donation of Justinian II to St. Demetrios in 688/9 was commemorated in a sixteen-line inscription that stretched in elongated lines across three blocks presumably from a wall (found in excavations near the Church of St. Demetrios).[26] The inscription ends in an ornamental scroll; visually it is very close to the *forma generalis* at Mylasa in terms of its overall impression (Fig. 95). Inscriptions like these indicate a departure from earlier Greek inscribing practice and a completely new relation of the text with its writing bearer, primarily walls.

These "walls of text" are best understood within wider late antique epigraphic aesthetics. While ancient Greeks had applied inscriptions to already-standing architectural walls, there is usually no indication that inscriptions were planned for by the architects when they initially designed temples and stoas in the Greek East.[27] At Ankara, the already-finished wall blocks of the Temple of Augustus had to be smoothed in order to receive the *Res Gestae*; the three-fasciae Ionic architraves so popular through the Roman period in Asia Minor make for cramped, visually-unsatisfying writing space. Aesthetic planning in ancient temples extended only to the architecture itself. Rather, temples, stoas, and other monuments bore texts as add-on elements: "texts on walls".

In Late Antiquity this changed. Inscriptions both became particularly ornamental themselves and were at times planned for by the architects and stone carvers in the design-phase of building projects: they took up space previously reserved on or in buildings for architectural decoration. Constantinople provides two magnificent examples of this phenomenon. At the Church of St. Polyeuktos (524-527), a lengthy epigram celebrating the church's founder, Anicia Juliana, undulates its way around the church's interior on the cornice topping niches with peacock conches (Fig. 96).[28] The architectural planning had left this cornice a blank, flat fascia, which was then carved in the negative to create the inscription (i.e., the letters are raised from the surface instead of being carved into it). The time-consuming technique of carving the inscription in the negative (carving away the background field) emphasized that this was an element of the church's decorative program, a messaged intensified by the carefully-planned

[25] Marek, *Pontus-Bithynia Nord-Galatia*, Appendix 6, 10; *SEG* XXXV 1360. Feissel 2010, 223-250.

[26] *IG* X.2.1 24. Vasiliev 1943; Bauer 2013, 247-249.

[27] For an exception, see the Temple of Zeus at Labraunda, completed by the Hekatomnid ruler Idrieus between 351-344 BCE: the Ionic architrave of this building, which should normally have three fasciae, has only two fasciae. This allowed for a dedication in large letters on the spacious upper fascia. The architect had planned for the inscription in his design. See Hellström and Thieme 1982.

[28] Connor 1999; Avagliano 2013.

metrical verses. The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (ca. 530), the private church of Justinian and Theodora, has a similar raised inscription winding around its interior entablature; again, the cornice was left available by the architect and building team for inscribing (Fig. 97).[29] The dedicatory inscription has been carefully composed by a poet to custom-fit the architectural space: the names of Justinian and Theodora, separated by several verses in the epigram as it appears on paper, appear almost exactly across from each other on the south and north walls of the church, respectively.[30]

Meanwhile, monograms, also present at Sergius and Bacchus on the column capitals just below the inscribed cornice, became popular in numerous late antique churches.[31] At Hagia Sophia, these monograms, again of Justinian and Theodora, are carved into the column capitals as integral parts of their ornate, basket-weave carving.[32] These too were planned for by the teams commissioned to create the capitals for the Great Church. Other forms of writing in Late Antiquity, from staurograms and christograms to the *alpha* and *omega* accompanying crosses, took on inherently graphical, aesthetic roles; inscribed texts became decoration in their own right on mosaics, inscriptions, and wall paintings.[33] These graphic signs – simultaneously word and image – were intended to express messages beyond their textual content. Given the interest in variety within the aesthetics of this period, it is perhaps no surprise that documents, such as the *forma generalis* at Mylasa and Justinian's rescript to Didyma (533), incorporate paleographical elements from the papyri original documents: the cursive Latin kalends date at Mylasa; "celestial letters" (*litterae caelestes*) at Didyma.[34] These elements not only served to verify that these were faithful copies of the perishable original text, but also played into this wider late antique trend for epigraphic aesthetics and variety.[35] While the carefully-planned and artistically-carved inscriptions at churches such as St. Polyeuktos and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus may seem quite different from the irregular carving of documents such as the Mylasan *forma generalis*, they do share one important visual strategy in common: in all these cases, the inscribed texts seem to almost melt onto the wall surface, becoming indistinguishable from it as the negative (uninscribed) space in the layout shrinks.

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[29] Bardill 2017, 76.

[30] Ousterhout 2019, 189.

[31] Eastmond 2016; Garipzanov 2018, 131–159.

[32] Stroth 2021, 19–54.

[33] Essays in Eastmond 2015; Leatherbury 2019; 2020. Cf. also L. Del Corso's chapter in this volume.

[34] Didyma: *SEG* LIV 1178. Feissel 2010, 251–324; Manservigi and Mezzetti 2017. Earlier Hellenistic verse inscriptions sometimes already incorporated aspects of "book hands" in their letterforms: see Garulli 2014. For later developments see Orsini 2012.

[35] Given that people in Late Antiquity were viewing, and even reading, the older Greek/Roman-period texts that filled cities in this period (Sitz 2023), this change in epigraphic aesthetics was surely recognizable.

4. Conclusion

The field of late antique studies has acknowledged in recent decades that change does not have to equal decline: late antique architecture, art, and yes, epigraphy must be understood on their own terms, rather than as degenerated versions of classical paradigms. Some aspects of late antique aesthetics only become clear when we consider the preceding Greek and Roman periods. I have here followed the epigraphic habit of inscribing lengthy documents or dossiers on walls in columnar formatting, from its Hellenistic heyday through its subtle evolution in the Roman Imperial period. This evolution culminates in the late Roman period, when inscriptions began to look strikingly different from earlier examples, as we saw at Mylasa. I have argued that these inscribed layouts and *mise en page* reflect a new understanding of the connection between architecture and text and a preference for imposing "walls of text" rather than discrete "texts on walls". One could even talk in this period of a new form of archi*text*ure (the synergy of architecture and text), distinct from its classical predecessors, which continued to flourish in the Middle Ages and beyond.

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