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FRAGMENTA ALEXANDRINA I

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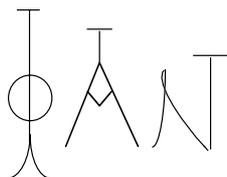
## Fragmenta Alexandrina I

### Some Inscriptions from the Roman Baths at Kom el Dikka

The following remarks are intended to be part of a preliminary publication of inscriptions found at the excavation site of Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria. Most of the items are fragments. For that reason they are introduced here as “Alexandrine fragments”. Before these texts appear in a final publication, they shall be thus available for discussion. The detailed archaeological context will be given in the final publication which will deal more precisely with the topography of the site.

(1)

An Ionic capital was found northwards from the complex of the baths. It belonged to an adjacent portico. The stylistic features of the capital indicate the Hadrianic or post-Hadrianic period. On the surface which matched the κιών (nor lost) there is an inscription engraved not too deeply in the marble (cf. Tafel IIa):



The horizontal extension of the inscription is 40,5 cm., the height at the highest point 28,5 cm. The probable solution of the abbreviated text seems to be the following:

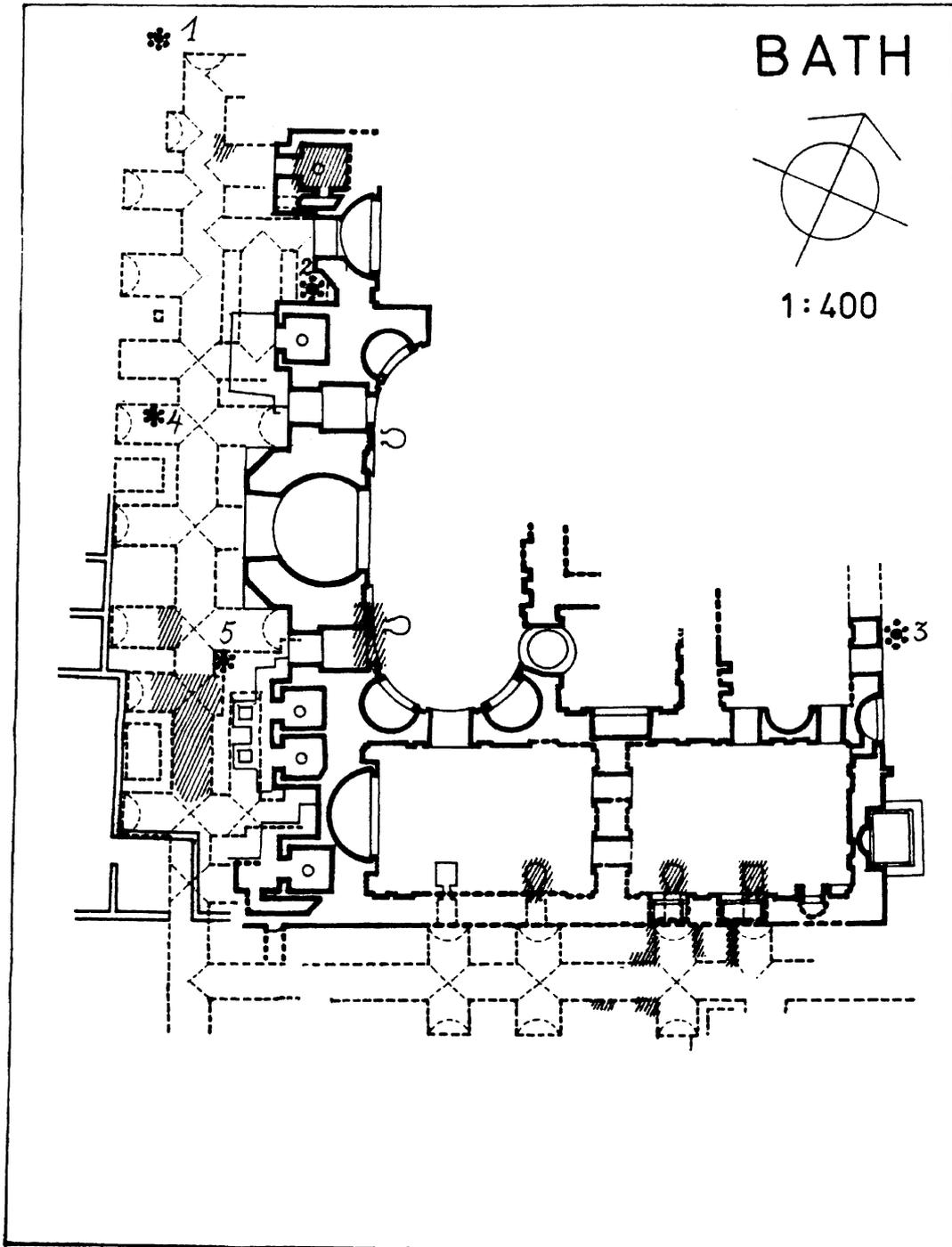
Φλ(άουϊος) Ἀντ(ωνίνος?)

Perhaps a genitive form of the name should be restored. While “Flavius” seems to be a satisfactory solution of what is likely to be a combination of superposed Φ and Λ, the restoration “Antoninus” remains conjectural, although perhaps more probable than Ἀντώνιος *vel sim.*

The essential question is the purpose of the inscription. Usually letters engraved in the joining places of columns were numerals written for the purpose of identification. Matching columns, bases and capitals were marked with the same numeral in order to make possible the proper mounting at the building place. Examples of such construction marks are frequent in Greco-Roman works, also in Alexandria including Kom el Dikka. The inscription under discussion, however, must be of a different nature.

The only possible explanation is founded on the fact, known from ancient sources, that private persons often founded columns in public buildings. Thus, our column might have been a private contribution to the building of the *thermae* or rather to their external portico. The column has certainly been re-used. We may suppose that a private person had bought the column from a dismantled building. The column, provided with the proprietor's mark, was later transported to the new place where it had to be re-erected.

Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why a name should be regarded as a mark for the correct mounting of the column. If columns erected by a single person were more than one, marking them with the same name would not be sufficient for proper identification of the elements at the building place.



For a contract of sale of column-drums with bases and capitals (A.D. 176-180) see P.Hib.II 217. Significant evidence of re-use of columns in late Roman Egypt can be found in P.Lond. III 755 (early IV century A.D.).

## (2)

A huge block of nummulithic limestone was found in the vaulted substruction of the Roman baths. The dimensions of the stone are 70 x 44 cm. It cannot be ultimately decided whether the block originally belonged to a corner of a structure or not. Anyway, it was re-used in the baths. The place where the block was found, only roughly indicates the original position of the stone in the structure of the baths. Probably it had been situated in the superstructure and only later fell down to the level where it was found.

One of the surfaces of the block has a Greek inscription which apparently belongs to the period when the block was used for the first time. At present the surface is very rough and corroded which results in the bad visibility of the text. In part the text is illegible. The following text can, however, be read with some certainty (cf. Tafel IIIb):

. . . . . δεξιός  
ἀρχιτέκτων

The writing points to the later II<sup>nd</sup> or III<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. The letters were engraved carefully.

At the present state of the inscription, the name of the ἀρχιτέκτων cannot be restored. The right part of the surface which originally might have been covered with a lost portion of the text is so much damaged that no traces of writing exist. We must, therefore, conclude with an observation which is scarcely satisfactory, that the inscription commemorated an architect of an unknown building of Roman Alexandria. The block, together with many others, was re-used in the IV<sup>th</sup> century A.D. at the construction of the complex of the baths of Kom el-Dikka.

## (3)

In the north-eastern corner of the baths complex a huge limestone block was found with remnants of two extremely big letters (cf. Tafel IIIa): TA.

The dimensions of the letters (height 52,5 cm.) point to a monumental inscription, almost surely an *inscriptio operis publici*. Such a text could not have been very long and was certainly composed of standard elements, among which the name of the emperor was surely the essential one. The attribution of scarcely two letters to a definite word and especially to a name is surely very uncertain. Since, however, we take for granted that the original inscription contained as the essential element the name of an emperor, we must take into consideration all possibilities resulting from such a hypothesis. A review of imperial names points to Constantine, Constantius or Constans as the only possibilities. (Tacitus in view of his short reign must be excluded). Apparently also the *cognomina ex virtute* and other standard words which could be used in an *inscriptio operis publici* are not fitting. The name of Constantine must therefore be considered a proposal worthy of regard. Obviously, until further fragments of the same inscription are found, there is no possibility of a definitive confirmation. The above conjecture fits, however, the archaeological evidence, as interpreted by W. Kořataj,<sup>1</sup> which shows that the first half of the IV<sup>th</sup> century is most probably the time when the first phase of the baths at Kom el-Dikka should be situated. On the other hand, there are some hints in the papyrological evidence which show that Alexandria in the Constantinian or post-Constantinian period was a place of activity of persons

<sup>1</sup> W. Kořataj, The Imperial Thermae at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria (manuscript).

connected with the court at Constantinople.<sup>2</sup> The 1st half of the IVth century may be certainly regarded as a time when realization of building projects ordered by the emperor himself was quite possible in Alexandria.

## (4)

The vaulted structures under the baths have a very solid masonry of limestone blocks. On the walls there are some graffiti, either connected with the period of erection (or re-building) of the edifice, or made much later.

One of the niches of the vaulted building has on the wall a line of writing carved in a stone (cf. Tafel IIIb):

]οθεω.ων

No entirely satisfactory interpretation can be given at present. Perhaps it is a proper name. The text might also be associated with the shape of the piece in which it was found, if τ]ὸ θεώριον was meant. That would point to a “loge” or “theatre box” (cf. PSI VIII 953.62 of VIth cent. A.D.). This, however, is but a vague idea.

The block with the inscription measures 49 x 26 cm. Letters are ca. 4 cm. in height. The block belongs to the first row of the stones of the vault.

## (5)

A corner stone in another part of the vaulted structures under the baths has at least 4 lines of inscription (cf. Tafel IIIc):

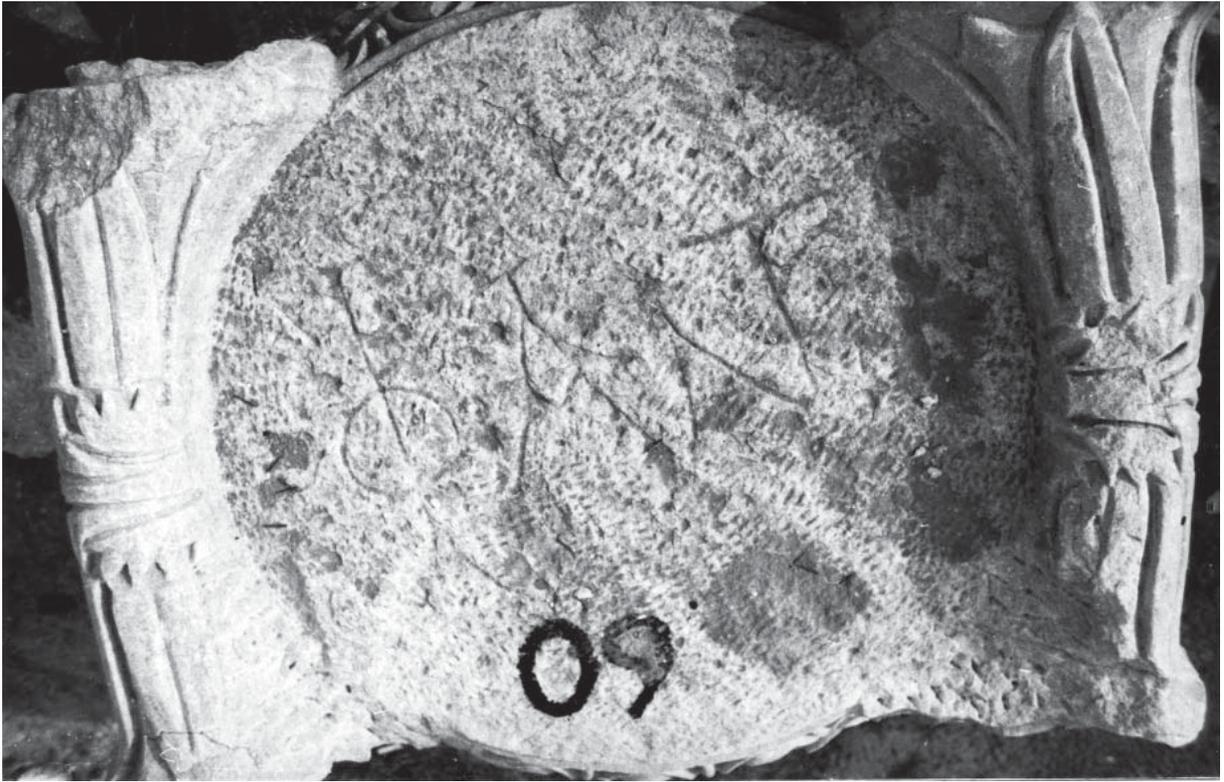
EYT[Y]X..  
AΘAN[..  
TΩ[..  
..[

The dimensions of the block are 44.5 x 25 cm. The average height of the letters is 4 cm. A plausible reconstruction of this damaged text could read:

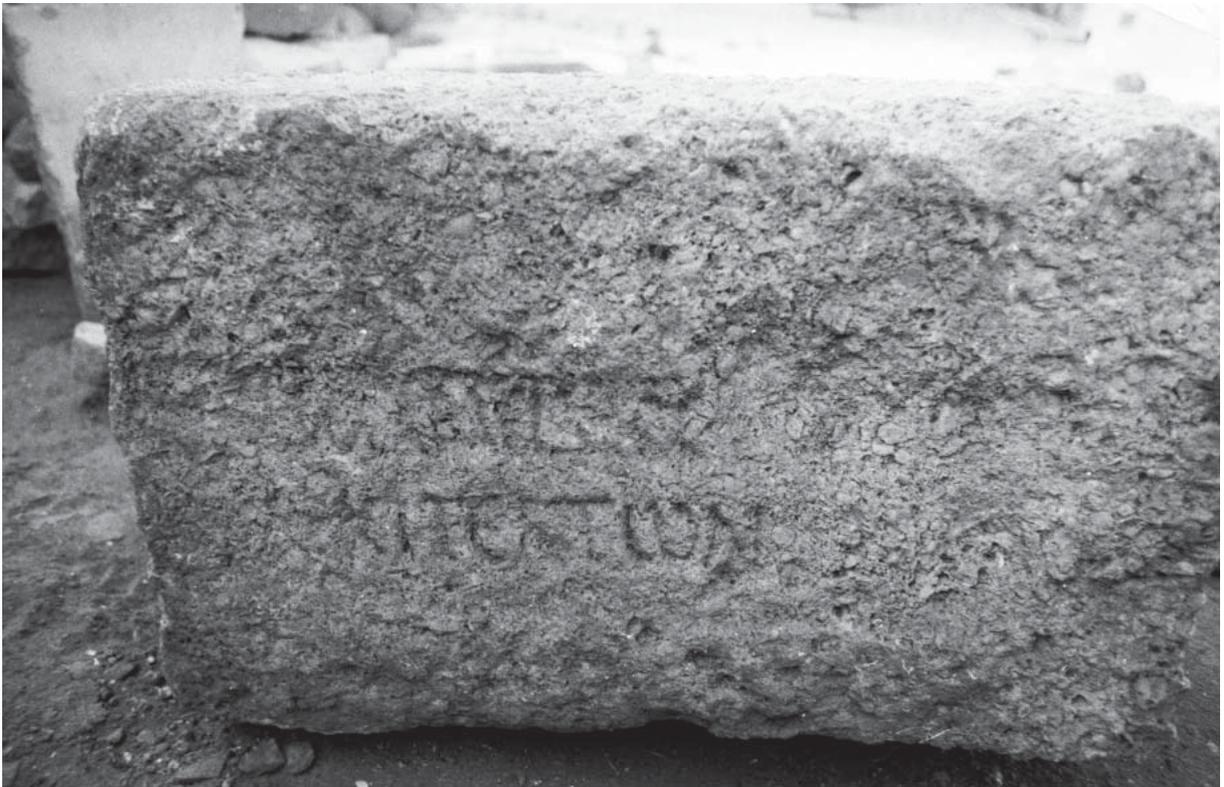
Εὐτ[υ]χίη  
'Αθαν[ασίω  
τω[..  
..[

The possibility of a connection with the person of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria cannot be rejected. Our text might have been a graffito from the times of the Athanasian controversy.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., P.Oxy. LV 3820.

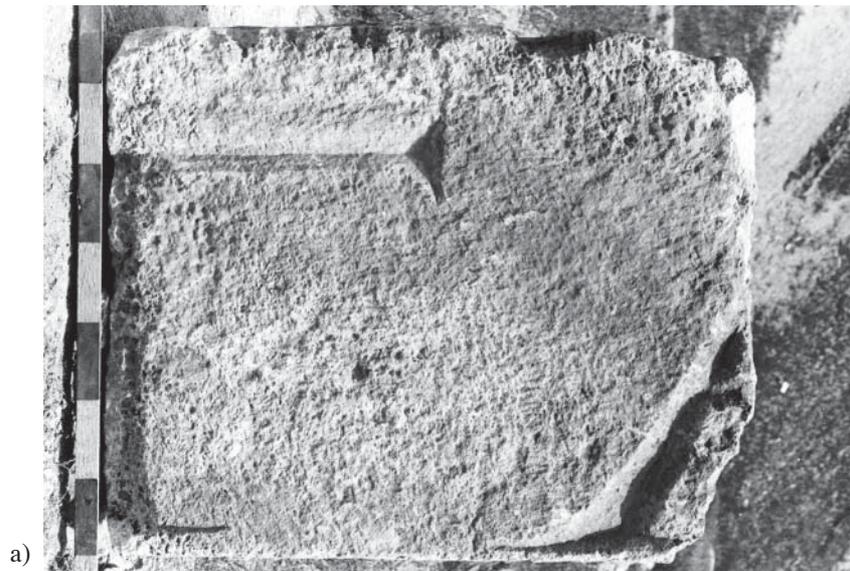


a)



b)

Inschriften aus den römischen Bädern in Alexandrien, Kom el Dikka  
a) Inschrift Nr. 1, b) Nr. 2



Inschriften aus den römischen Bädern in Alexandrien, Kom el Dikka  
a) Inschrift Nr. 3, b) Nr. 4, c) Nr. 5