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AN INSCRIBED LEAD WEIGHT FROM ASHDOD: A RECONSIDERATION

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The weight discussed below was first published in 1971 in the archaeological report on the excavations at Ashdod.¹ It is square in shape and bears a five-line inscription on one side; the reverse side is decorated with an anchor in a wreath. The editors of the report considered the inscription illegible;² however, they provided a photograph and drawing of the letters they could discern. Shortly afterwards, B.Lifshitz suggested a decipherment of the entire text which ran:³

Ἀγορανομ[μ]ο[υ]- ντ[οc] Ἡρω- δου ἔ[τ]οϋc β' Οὐηπαcη- αν (οῦ) Καίc(αροc)	"Herodes being agoranomos, in the year two of Vespasianus Caesar"
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This reading, reproduced without further comment in a number of subsequent publications,⁴ appears to have been accepted as final. At first glance, it may indeed look to be so, although the mention of the agoranomos before, rather than after, a date by the regnal year is somewhat unusual.⁵ Difficulties arise, however, when one attempts to reconcile the suggested reading with the drawing and the photograph in the report. There is a major problem in the very first line which, according to both drawing and photograph, contained no more than eight letters, but in the restoration by Lifshitz would have had ten. The sixth letter of the line is shown as a rounded sigma (C) in the drawing and is of similar form on the photograph also, so that the nu (N) appears to be absent altogether; nor there is a space at the end of the line for inserting the final upsilon (Y). Thus the first line can be read as ΑΓΟΡΑΟ[M]Ο at best. In a similar fashion, there does not seem to be enough space in the third line for ΕΤΟΥC, nor in the fourth line for the final ΑCΗ.

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¹ M.Dothan (ed.), *Ashdod II-III. The Second and Third Seasons of Excavations*, (Atiqot, Eng. ser. IX-X), Jerusalem 1971, pp. 68, 72, pl. XXV: 7, fig. 30:6. The find measures 6,5 x 6,45 cm and weighs 290 gm.

² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³ B.Lifshitz, *Varia Epigraphica*, IV: Deux poids trouvés à Azotos, *Euphrosyne* NS 6, 1973/4, 34 (no. 2).

⁴ SEG XXVI 1976/7, 1665; J. and L.Robert, *Bulletin Épigraphique* 1976, no. 43; Y.E.Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia. The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions*, Athens 1992, pp. 363-364 (no. 49).

⁵ Weights dated by a regnal year and mentioning an agoranomos are rare; on the few known, the dating formula comes first: SEG XXVIII 1978, 1590; XXXI 1981, 1410; XXXVIII 1988, 1646-1647; XXXIX 1989, 1342, 1753bis.

The weight is presently kept in Jerusalem, in the Romema branch of the Israel Antiquities Authority.⁶ Examination reveals that the drawing in the report, although it is not entirely free of errors, shows most of the inscription correctly. Fig. 1 reproduces the drawing as it appears in the report. A recent photograph of the weight may be seen in Plate X b,c.⁷



Fig. 1

The necessary corrections to the drawing are as follows:

Line 1. a) The first letter, shown as delta (Δ), is in fact beta (B); this can be verified on the photograph here as well as on that of the report; a comparison with the delta of the third line also shows that it is not the same letter. b) After the beta there is the beginning of a diagonal line which goes from the lower left to the right. c) The existence of a horizontal bar in the alpha (fifth letter) is dubious.

Line 2. The vertical line preserved from the fourth letter (preceding the eta) has a short horizontal bar at the top towards the right.

Line 3. Two short horizontal lines (belonging to either a sigma or an epsilon) are preserved from the last letter.

Line 4. a) The oblique line between the sixth and eighth letters is not part of the inscription; it marks the edge of a cavity in the surface. Under this line, close to the preceding letter, there is an upright bar not shown by the drawing. b) The right vertical bar of the last letter should be eliminated, since it represents a sunken line, while the inscription is in relief.

⁶ Inv. no. 63/2231.

⁷ Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The photograph is by Mariana Salzberger.



Fig. 2

After these changes, the drawing would look like Fig. 2. The reading of it as ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΝΤΟΣ ΗΡΩΔΟΥ ΕΥΣΕΒΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣ(ΑΡΟΣ) seems unescapable. The final restoration would be as follows:

Βασιλε[ύ]ο-
ντ[ο]ς Ἡρω-
δου Εὐσε-
βῶς καὶ Φι-
λοκαίς(αρος)

The inscription thus meant "in the time of King Herod, Pious and Friend of Caesar". Two client Roman rulers named ΗΡΩΔΗΣ had the title of king - Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.) and his grandson, Herod of Chalcis (41-48 A.D.). The provenance of the weight would imply that it belongs to the reign of the former. Ashdod was under the dominion of Herod the Great from c. 30 B.C. until the king's death.⁸ Since the title ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ cannot be earlier than 30 B.C., the weight may be assigned to the period between this date and 4 B.C. There is no sure way of telling whether it was manufactured in Ashdod itself.

A limestone weight of unknown provenance, published in 1970, bears the inscription ΛΒ ΒΑΚ ΗΡ ΕΥ ΦΙΛΟΚ ΑΓΟΡ ΜΝΑ ΤΡ. The inscription has been completed as ΛΒ ΒΑΚ(ΙΛΕΩΣ) ΗΡ(ΩΔΟΥ) ΕΥ(ΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ?) ΦΙΛΟΚ(ΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ) ΑΓΟΡ(ΑΝΟΜΟΥ) ΜΝΑ ΤΡ(ΙΑ), and translated "Year 32 of King Herod, the Benefactor, Loyal to Caesar. Inspector

⁸ After Herod's death the city passed to his sister Salome; its further history is obscure: E.Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, (revised and edited by G.Vermes, F.Millar and M.Black), vol. II, Edinburgh 1979, p. 92 note 22, p. 109.

of Markets. Three minas".⁹ The weight from Ashdod would argue for the restoration of the first title of the king as EY(CEBOYC), "Pious".¹⁰ It also further confirms that an inscription from Athens mentioning "King Herod, Pious and Friend of Caesar" (OGIS 427) refers to Herod the Great rather than Herod of Chalcis, as was suggested by some earlier scholars.¹¹

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⁹ Y.Meshorer, A Stone Weight from the Reign of Herod, *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, 1970, 97-98, pl. 27 A. The find is 11,6 cm in diameter, 4,5 cm thick and weighs 1233 gm.

¹⁰ One may also suggest ΑΓΟΡ(ΑΙΑ) instead of ΑΓΟΡ(ΑΝΟΜΟΥ).

¹¹ OGIS 427 (lemma); Schürer (note 8), vol. I, Edinburgh 1973, p. 572, note 64; M.E.Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, Leiden 1976, p. 71, note 34.



Inscribed Lead Weight from Ashdod