

SIX BASES, FIVE PILLARS, AND FOUR INSCRIPTIONS IN THE VICINITY OF APHRODITE'S TEMPLE IN ISTROS

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Abstract: Six rectangular bases made of spolia were discovered several metres east of Aphrodite's temple in Istros. Four of these bases were originally free-standing pillars carrying inscriptions, probably not unlike another fragmentary pillar, whose stump was still standing at the time of their discovery. Based on the letter forms, the inscriptions can be dated to the 4th century BC, or even the late 5th century, and appear to contain names and epithets of gods or heroes. Comparisons with similarly engraved blocks found in Greek sanctuaries suggest that these pillars either served as small altars or were connected to nearby monuments, possibly also altars.

Rezumat: Şase baze dreptunghiulare din spolia au fost descoperite la câţiva metri est de templul Afroditei din Istros. Patru dintre ele au fost iniţial stâlpi inscripţionaţi, probabil asemănători cu alt stâlp păstrat doar parţial, al cărui trunchi încă stătea vertical în momentul descoperirii. Pe baza formelor literelor, inscripţiile pot fi datate în secolul al IV-lea î.Hr., sau chiar la finele secolului al V-lea, şi par a conţine nume şi epitete ale unor zei sau eroi. Comparaţia cu blocuri asemănătoare cu inscripţii, din alte sanctuare greceşti, sugerează că aceşti stâlpi au funcţionat fie ca mici altare, fie în legătură cu monumentele din apropiere, posibil tot altare.

Six rectangular stelae bases made of Turonian drab limestone,¹ all of comparable size, were discovered in the vicinity of Aphrodite's temple in Istros. Five of them were uncovered in 1972, located several metres east of the temple and south of monument D (Fig. 1),² and were labelled with the Greek letters ο, π, ρ, σ, and φ, from north to south.³ Their use was dated to the Hellenistic period, although the stratigraphic context is somewhat unclear.⁴ The sixth base was seemingly discovered in 1979 during excavations in the same sector, but the circumstances are completely unknown.⁵ For consistency, I will refer to it as ƒ.

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¹ This type of limestone was brought from quarries near Cape Dolojman, north of the city. For details, see Histria VII, pp. 453-454; Bîrzescu, Baltreş 2013.

² It was initially identified as an altar to Zeus Polieus (Pippidi *et al* 1959, pp. 268-269, pl. II; Pippidi *et al* 1962, pp. 386-387, pl. II), but subsequent excavations revealed a platform resembling those of other Istrian temples (Zimmermann 1991, pp. 148-149). The identification of monument D as the temple of the enigmatic Theos Megas by P. Alexandrescu and A. Sion, facing east (Histria VII, pp. 174-186), has been met with justified scepticism (Mărgineanu Cârstoiu 2006, p. 453, n. 1235; Avram *et al* 2013, p. 48, n. 56).

³ Still *in situ* (with φ only partly uncovered) when photographed and drawn for Histria VII, the bases are now kept in the storage of the T sector. For description of the blocks, see Histria VII, pp. 201, 214, 460-461, cat. P33, P34, P36, pl. 41.2-3, 125. For their original position, see Histria VII, pl. 1.1, 2.2, 4.1, 38.1-2, 42.1, fold-out 1. Bases ρ and φ are preserved as they were at the time of their discovery, along with two joining fragments of σ, forming the half with the inscription. Other fragments of the same type of limestone and fitting dimensions must belong to ο, π and σ, although I was not able to find them all. I am most grateful to Iulian and Florina Bîrzescu for their unwavering support during my investigations. These bases were identified with the letters ο, π, ρ, σ, τ in Zimmermann 1981, p. 463 and fold-out plan; π, ρ, σ, τ, φ in Alexandrescu 1993, pp. 235-236, 238, fig. 1-2.

⁴ Base φ was covered by pavement 2+1, but the stratigraphic position of bases ο, π, ρ, σ was reported as either above the same pavement (Alexandrescu 1993, p. 235, fig. 1, pp. 238, 241-243; Alexandrescu 1994, pp. 183, 205, fig. 3) or between pavements 3 and 2+1 (Histria VII, p. 214). Along with other structures located east of Aphrodite's temple and south of monument D, they were understood as part of a cultic nucleus (Zimmermann 1991, pp. 153-154). A street discovered further south, following the alignment of π, ρ, σ and φ, and flanked by several other bases made of spolia, was interpreted as a *via sacra* (ιεροπλατεία), cf. ιεροπλατεῖται in ISM I 57, l. 32 (Histria VII, pp. 126-127; Avram, Bîrzescu, Mărgineanu Cârstoiu, Zimmermann 2007, pp. 246-247; Avram, Bîrzescu 2012, pp. 285-286, 301-302; Avram *et al* 2013, pp. 60, 63-65, 92, fig. XXIa). It remains unclear why base ο was separated in Histria VII, p. 201 as belonging to a distinct sacred enclosure, the *temenos* of Aphrodite's temple.

⁵ Today in the storage of the T sector. A photo of the inscription was inadvertently published instead of that of ISM I 254. The base was filed in Histria VII, p. 458, cat. P19, although it was not illustrated, nor included in discussions. Perhaps it was once placed between ρ and σ, completing a line of equidistant monuments – a hypothesis that unfortunately cannot be verified with the available information.