



[Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae 817](#) [1]

Possible tribute to a Christian martyr

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Epitaph

Original Location/Place: Dorla, Turkey

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Dorla, Turkey

Date: 4th CE

Physical Characteristics:

This inscription on this epitaph is carved within an image of a structure consisting of an arched *aedicula* (small shrine) flanked by two *aediculae* with pointed gables. Four pillars support the structure. Under the central arch there is a bow-shaped wreath containing an inner circle, which itself contains a cross. The inscription is underneath this bow. Under the left-hand gable, where the stone is quite badly damaged, there is a decorative swastika, accompanied by some sort of tool. Under the right-hand gable there is another swastika, with a slightly complicated and unusual shape, accompanied by a sickle.

Material: Stone

Measurements: Height: 0.74 metres; Width: 0.84 metres; Depth: 0.15 metres

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Christian

Publications: Laminger-Pascher, Gertrud, *Die Kaiserzeitlichen Inschriften Lykaoniens: Faszikel I: Der Süden. Ergänzungsbände zu den Tituli Asiae Minoris* 15 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 232-233, number 413; Ramsay, A. Margaret, "The Early Christian Art of Isaura Nova," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 24 (1904), p. 279-280; Kaufmann, Carl M., *Handbuch der altchristlichen Epigraphik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1917), p. 67; Calder, William M., and Cormack, James M. R., *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua, Vol. 8: Monuments from Lycaonia, the Pisido-Phrygian Borderland, Aphrodisias* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), p. 31, number 168; Ramsay, A. Margaret, *Studies in the History and Art of the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire Written for the Quartercentenary of the University of Aberdeen by Seven of its Graduates* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1906), p. 39, number 14.

Commentary:

This epitaph, with an inscription dedicating it to a certain Rufus, bears decorative features very common to other fourth-century epitaphs from Asia Minor, including the wreath, cross, swastikas, and tools, and Ramsay suggests that this epitaph is likely from the same workshop as two other Christian tombs of Bishop Mammars and Deacon Tabeis, all three dating to the second half of the fourth-century CE (for several other examples of similar epitaphs, with illustrative figures, see Ramsay, "The Early Christian Art of Isaura Nova" and *Studies in the History and Art*, p. 34-42).

Contrary to Ramsay, Stephen Mitchell has suggested that the inscription comes from earlier in the fourth century, and belongs to the time of the so-called Great persecution of Christians under Diocletian, which commenced in 303 CE (for a brief discussion in relation to a piece of Christian graffiti arguably witnessing martyrs who died in the arena at Thessaloniki during this persecution, see [ICG 3621](#) [2]) (see Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods*, p. 59). According to Mitchell's line of thought, then, the epitaph belongs to a martyr. The argument essentially hinges on the interpretation of the word ????? (athlios), which most commonly means "unhappy/wretched," but can also mean "victorious/winner of the prize." Mitchell argues that in the present inscription it should be directly connected with the related term ???????? (athlophoros), which was used almost exclusively for victims of persecution, and understood in terms of victory in the arena (in the sense of winning the prize of eternal life after the physical struggle of martyrdom). However, when ????? (athlios) is used to indicate victory, the spelling is usually ????? (aethlios; see the entry in the *LSJ*, available here: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=%E1%BC%80%CE%AD%CE%B8%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%82&la=greek#lexicon> [3]). This is not entirely damning, but does make the identification of this inscription with the persecution of Diocletian more uncertain. Mitchell supports his argument for an earlier dating by stating that the simple cross in a circle, such as we find on the present epitaph, was very common to the early fourth-century CE, in contrast to epitaphs of the later fourth-century, which tended to feature more Christograms (a symbol combining the Greek letters Chi and Rho, the first two letters of "Christ"). Ramsay in fact noted that such crosses were often



placed inconspicuously as decorative items, which would not draw excessive attention, but had additional meaning for Christians who knew their significance ("The Early Christian Art of Isaura Nova," p. 270).

Ultimately, the question remains open as to whether this inscription witnesses a Christian martyr, as the language and dating is somewhat ambiguous, and has divided the few scholars who have worked on this source. If it does, then just as with ICG 3621, we potentially have here a physical monument that not only ensures the continued memory of one who has died, but also offers us a very real example of the way in which Christians conceived of and presented their deaths at the hands of Rome—as an opportunity to emerge victorious, and claim the ultimate soteriological reward.

Images are available at:

http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/upload/figures/Suedlyk_413.2.jpg [4]

http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/upload/figures/Suedlyk_413.1.jpg [5]

Keywords in the original language:

- [??????](#) [6]
- [?????](#) [7]
- [?????](#) [8]

Thematic keywords:

- [martyr](#) [9]
- [Diocletian](#) [10]
- [persecution](#) [11]
- [athlete](#) [12]
- [swastika](#) [13]
- [victory](#) [14]
- [Christogram](#) [15]
- [wreath](#) [16]
- [tools](#) [17]

Bibliographical references:

[Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Volume 2: The Rise of the Church](#) [18]

Mitchell, Stephenbook *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Volume 2: The Rise of the Church* OxfordOxford University Press1993

[“The Early Christian Art of Isaura Nova”](#) [19]

Ramsay, A. Margaretarticle-in-a-journal262-29224“The Early Christian Art of Isaura Nova”Journal of Hellenic Studies1904

[Studies in the History and Art of the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire Written for the Quartercentenary of the University of Aberdeen by Seven of its Graduates](#) [20]

Ramsay, A. Margaretbook *Studies in the History and Art of the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire Written for*



the Quartercentenary of the University of Aberdeen by Seven of its Graduates Aberdeen Aberdeen University Press 1906

Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae 3621 \[21\]](#)

Graffiti from the persecution under Diocletian?

- [Read more about Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae 3621 \[21\]](#)

Realized by:

[Kimberley Fowler \[22\]](#)



Source URL: <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/inscriptiones-christianae-graecae-817>

Links

- [1] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/inscriptiones-christianae-graecae-817>
- [2] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/inscriptiones-christianae-graecae-3621>
- [3] <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=%E1%BC%80%CE%AD%CE%B8%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%82&la=greek#lexicon>
- [4] http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/upload/figures/Suedlyk_413.2.jpg
- [5] http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/upload/figures/Suedlyk_413.1.jpg
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/%E1%BC%84%CE%B8%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%82>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/%CF%87%CE%AC%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%82>
- [8] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/%CE%BC%CE%BD%CE%AE%CE%BC%CE%B7>
- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/martyr>
- [10] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/diocletian>
- [11] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/persecution>
- [12] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/athlete>
- [13] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/swastika>
- [14] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/victory>
- [15] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/chistogram>
- [16] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/wreath>
- [17] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/tools>
- [18] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/anatolia-land-men-and-gods-asia-minor-volume-2-rise-church>
- [19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Cearly-christian-art-isaura-nova%E2%80%9D>
- [20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/studies-history-and-art-eastern-provinces-roman-empire-written-quartercentenary-university-aberdeen>
- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/inscriptiones-christianae-graecae-3621>
- [22] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/kimberley-fowler>