

The Material and Meaning of the Emperor Titus' Post-Vesuvius Rebuilding Inscription in Naples

The rebuilding inscription of the Roman emperor Titus from Naples (*CIL* 10.1481) stands out in two notable ways from among the group of eight similar imperial rebuilding inscriptions erected in Campanian communities in the wake of the eruption of Vesuvius. One is its unique bilingual text, in both Greek and Latin. The second is the material; it is the only one of these imperial rebuilding inscriptions carved on basalt. This paper takes this inscription as its subject and explores what that language presentation and material selection might tell us about the inscription, its original placement, and its role in Titus' rebuilding plan after the eruption of Vesuvius.

The fact that the Greek text is first and longer than the Latin indicates its primacy. This is probably evidence of the continuing influence of the Greek culture at Naples as seen in other bilingual inscriptions from Naples such as *AE* 1913.134. It suggests the major audience is that component of Neapolitan society that is Greek literate, probably more affluent, and the imperial government's desire to encourage knowledge of imperial efforts to support their community.

The reason behind the unique use of basalt is less clear. Basalt is a 6 on the Mohs hardness scale, while marble is much, much softer, having a hardness of 3. There's no obvious practical advantage of using this much harder, more expensive, imported material instead of the more commonly used and readily available white marble.

If basalt was not selected for a practical reason, it could have been for a symbolic one. This inscription might have been carved on basalt to integrate with an Egyptian themed complex. Pliny the Elder (*HN* 36.55–58) establishes an association between basalt as a material and Egyptian subjects. That association seems an almost an exclusive relationship, a pattern seen in

the solely basalt Egyptianizing sculptures from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli and in the Domitianic period materials from the Iseum in Rome. It seems probable to me that the inscription was placed in an Iseum or similar sanctuary. The idea of an Egyptian sanctuary at Naples is plausible. In the surrounding area, certainly both Pompeii and Cumae hosted such sanctuaries; a number of basalt materials were excavated from the Iseum at Cumae. The conclusion that the inscription marked an Egyptian sanctuary might be also supported by its findspot, about 500 feet from where it is currently displayed, where it was discovered in 1538, along a road named the via Egiziaca. It seems possible that the name of the road preserves the earlier identity of the major building here, an Egyptian sanctuary, a pattern seen in innumerable examples in Italian cities.

Because of a break in the text we do not know what buildings Titus was claiming to have rebuilt. But the form and material suggest it was a component of an Egyptian complex, perhaps dedicated to Isis and of particular interest to the Greek-reading population of Naples. If so, that fills in a blank in the list of rebuilt or improved structures after the eruption of Vesuvius and provides an example of what structures were thought worthy of imperial intervention.