Eleusis. The Inscriptions on Stone: Documents of the Sanctuary of the Two Goddesses and Public Documents of the Deme


Reviewed by 111.1
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For the last 40 or so years, Clinton has been the undisputed authority on the study of Eleusis, Demeter’s sanctuary and cult, and the epigraphical evidence associated with the site. In this monumental collection, he presents the inscribed documents that were set up within or in front of the Sanctuary of the Two Goddesses, as well as inscriptions that were associated with the other public sanctuaries of the deme. The corpus is cohesive in that the latter, smaller group of texts is related in various ways to Demeter’s precinct. The collection excludes epitaphs and private inscriptions, as well as post-Euclidean documents that do not contain significant words or features. The introduction to the book lists some important documents that the author omitted, briefly discussing certain important epigraphical issues that warranted his decision. A valuable history of Eleusinian epigraphy follows, including Clinton’s long and defining involvement with the site.

The bulk of the study (1A: 1–499) consists of the corpus of 686 documents that are arranged in chronological order (with some exceptions), allowing the reader to assess at a glance and draw statistical conclusions on epigraphical production and activity within each period. The importance of a large number of surviving documents pertaining to financial matters led Clinton to arrange these as a separate group (nos. 136–79). Boundary markers and inscriptions associated with the Eleusinian Sanctuary of Asclepius are appended (nos. 675–79, 680–86). Volume IB provides us with high-quality photographs of the material. The author is currently working on a list of documents by type that will be published separately (vol. 2). I expect that volume 2 will also provide the necessary indices that are not part of the study under review.

Clinton’s work is especially timely because it pulls together and updates the publication of a tremendous amount of inscribed documents associated with one of the most important sanctuaries and cults of antiquity. An introduction to each text gives detailed information on the stone itself, lists its various editions, and provides a full bibliography on scholarly discussion. Texts are presented in their most recent improved version, which has been the result of the discovery of new joins, proposed new dates, and of the intense scholarly debate on Eleusis and its epigraphy. Indeed, Demeter’s sanctuary has been blessed with significant studies by the finest epigraphers, whose meticulous and diverse work, including Tracy’s redating of stones based on his pioneering study of letter-cutters, has contributed significantly to our understanding. Nevertheless, all this valuable work had been scattered in literature, and only the few who specialize in Eleusis have been intimately acquainted with it. In addition to pulling together the fruits of this international virtual teamwork, Clinton offers new conjectures of his own in the apparatus. These are followed by a short commentary that involves an evaluation of any epigraphical discussions to date. It includes observations that are the result of his autopsy of each inscription and involve, among other things, the lettering and doubtful readings. Since volume 1 is focused on an epigraphical analysis of the texts, there is no historical commentary or treatment of larger issues that would be beyond its scope. In accordance with convention, a date is generally inserted at the beginning of each inscription, but if its cutter has been treated by Tracy, the range of his career is given in the commentary at
The presentation of the material is thus clear, on good-quality paper, and its copyediting is excellent. In the bibliographical update of the inventory of the epistatae at Eleusis (IG 2158 line 1544), I will add my recent article, “‘Taboo’ Objects in Attic Inventory Lists” (Glotta 79 [2003] 66–83), which appeared too late (early 2005) for Clinton to include.

In conclusion, Clinton’s re-edition of the inscriptions of Eleusis embodies an impressive amount of carefully studied texts. Its impeccable research and concise and thoughtful organization is suggestive of the author’s long, disciplined, and careful work with these documents. Indeed, in reviewing this book, an embroidery metaphor is appropriate in that it resembles elaborate, complicated needlework that our eyes adjust to, letting us see the complexity of the material. This is a model fundamental work that will provide the basis for any study of Eleusis, Athens, epigraphy, social and economic history, and ancient religion.

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