

Misthos, apophora, or something else? A fresh look at SEG XXXV 134

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In 1985 Alan Johnston published a fascinating and enigmatic text found in the Kerameikos at Athens and dating to *c.* 350 BC ('A Fourth Century Graffito from the Kerameikos' *MDAI(A)* 100: 293-307). Written on an ostrakon (the bottom of a plate, to be precise), the text provides a list of names and figures. The onomastics themselves are of great interest due to the frequency of foreign names, which taken individually prove nothing, but in such a concentration make it virtually certain that we are dealing with a number of non-citizens or at the very least a mixture of statuses. As for the figures, Johnston put forward two suggestions: they were figures recording either *misthos* or *apophora* payments relating to the named individuals, who were slaves. In other words, the figures represented either (i) payments made to a slaveholder by a third party who had rented the slave, or (ii) a fixed fee paid by slaves to their owners (usually in the circumstance of the slave working relatively independently, unsupervised by the owner; any income above and beyond the *apophora* would be retained in the slave's possession and saved towards his or her manumission. Cf. the link between *apophora* and manumission stated in [Xen.] *Ath.Pol.* 1.11). Since Johnston's *editio princeps*, little work has been done on this document, and the two scenarios suggested by him have not been challenged (cf. R. Thomas, 'Reading, Writing, Public and Private "Literacies" in W.A. Johnson & H.N. Parker, *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Writing in Greece and Rome*. Oxford 2011: 13-45, at 29-30).

However, there are major problems with both suggestions. We possess reasonable information on slave prices and wages from Athens in the fourth century, as well as limited information on *apophora* payments. If we compare the figures on our ostrakon to these data, it is obvious that they are far too small to be credibly either *apophora* or *misthos* payments relating to slaves. In this paper, I will provide a close study of the document and test it for 'goodness of fit' against other kinds of scenario known from Athens in this period. I aim to elucidate and delimit a range of possible circumstances other than the two hypotheses suggested by Johnston that might form plausible contexts in which to understand this document.