

Legal Documents from Ancient Greece



*In this article, **Andrew Lyons** takes us on a journey back in time to Ancient Greece and, in particular, to the legal 'documents' of the day.*



Archaeological work in Greece has exposed samples of legal documents used by the ancients. These include documents engraved on stone tablets. The extant record shows that documents so engraved were used for both public and private transactions.

An illustration of a public document is in the first photograph that shows two damaged tablets mounted one upon the other. This document records an alliance between Macedonian King Philip V (238-179 BC) and the citizens of Lysimacheia in Thrace. It was found in the Sanctuary of Zeus at Dion, northern Greece and is now exhibited in the Archaeological Museum near that site.

Illustrations of private documents are in the other two photographs which are of exhibits in the Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki, Greece.

The second photograph shows a contract for the sale of a house. It is from Aphytis, Chalkidiki, northern Greece and dates to 357/6-349BC. The stone is approximately 3ft high and 15inches wide. Such deeds were erected in front of the relevant house.

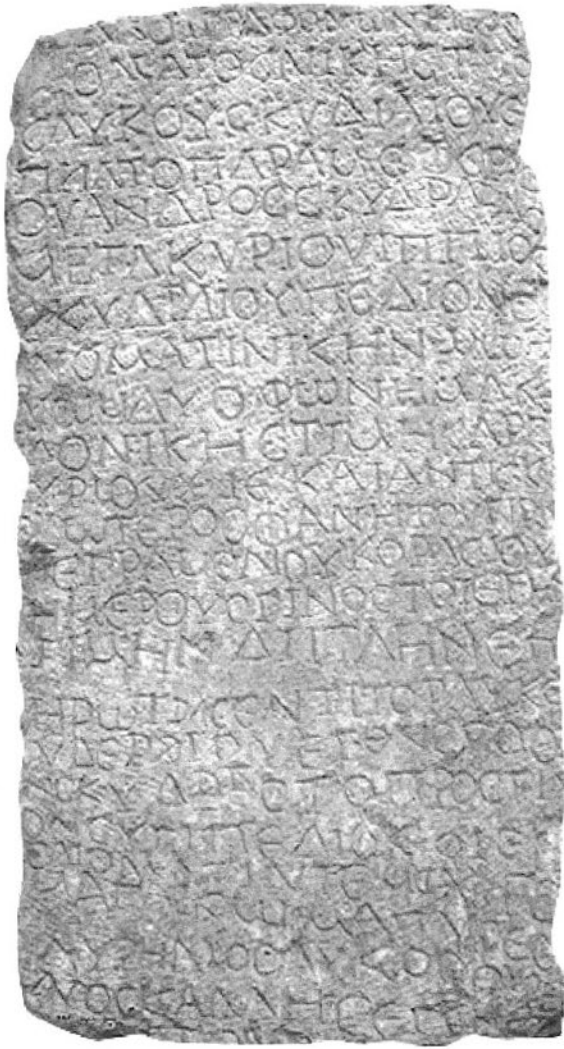
To place this land contract in the time line of prominent historical events, it is dated after the Persian wars (490 - 479 BC), after Socrates' suicide (399 BC) and during the time of Aristotle (384 - 322 BC) and Macedonian King Phillip II (392 - 336 BC), the father of Alexander the Great.



Photograph 1 - Treaty Philip V with Lysimacheia



Photograph 2 - Land contract Macedon



Photograph 3 - Slave sale contract

By the use of writing on stone for a land dealing, the ancients show that they were capable of fulfilling, in a novel way, at least one of the requirements of the *Statute of Frauds*! One might think that the engrossing fee was substantial! However, the writer speculates that the production of such a document may not have been as expensive as we might think. A basis for this is that in Attica (the region around Athens) stone, including marble and limestone, was abundant and cheaper than the scarcer commodity, wood. This explains the widespread use of stone as a building material and the consequent survival of many buildings. Limestone is relatively soft and, thus, easily worked or engraved.

Treaties and land dealings were not the only transactions that might merit an engraved stone tablet. The third photograph shows a contract for the sale of a slave. It was made much later than the above samples and dates from the 3rdC AD when Greece was under Roman domination. The transaction documented is the sale by Amphotera to Titos, son

of Lykos, of Amphotera, a two month old slave girl named Nike, for 15 silver pieces.
Standing more than three feet high, it is from Skydra, Edessa, northern Greece.

Andrew Lyons