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from Pen Sieri, Llanfaelog,  
to Tre Castell**

**GAT Report No.420**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust  
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

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Prepared for The Bodorgan Estate  
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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust  
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

# **The Removal of the MAILISI stone from Pen Sieri, Llanfaelog, to Trecastell**

## **Summary**

*A stone slab inscribed with the single word MAILISI was recorded in 1802, in the wall of a barn on Pen Sieri Farm, Llanfaelog. The stone, a funerary memorial of the 5th- or 6th-century, would originally have stood upright as a monolithic pillar, marking the grave of the person commemorated by name in the inscription. It is no longer known where the stone was found or precisely when it was moved to Pen Sieri. In August 2001 preparations were made to demolish the barn on account of its unsafe condition. An archaeological record was made of the stone, by photograph and measured drawing during the course of this work. The stone is now housed at Trecastell farm, Llangwyfan.*

*The archaeological recording was commissioned by the Bodorgan Estate, the owners of the land on which the stone lay, with grant aided assistance from Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.*

## **Introduction**

This report concerns the archaeological record of the removal of an Early Medieval Inscribed Stone from Pen Sieri Farm (SH3335 7270) to Trecastell Farm (SH3346 7068), Anglesey. The stone of probable 5th- or 6th-century AD date lay horizontally in use as the lintel of a small window in the west wall of a small stone-walled barn on the Bodorgan Estate, 200m west of Pen Sieri Farm and 800 SSW of the village of Llanfaelog.

It had been proposed that the barn, judged unsafe, should be demolished. The stone is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and, in order to meet the requirements of Cadw, a programme of monitoring and recording of the removal of the stone from the barn to the new location was commissioned by the Bodorgan estate. This recording was undertaken by the Gwynedd Archaeological trust on 1st August 2001. During observation of the stone's removal and its recording, the Trust was provided with every facility by the representatives of the Bodorgan Estate and we would wish, in particular to record our appreciation of the Estate Manager, Mr. Campion's efforts in this respect.

## **The methodology for removing the stone**

The stone lay horizontally, as a lintel, across the top of a small window on the inside face of the west wall of the barn above head height at approximately 2.4m above the interior ground surface. Only one face of the stone was visible, that displaying the inscription. The interior of the barn was approximately one-quarter full of hay. The slate roof of the barn was in very poor condition, letting in a considerable amount of light. The existence of the stone was not recognisable from the outside.

For the security of the inscribed stone it had been determined that the stone should be removed from the wall before any mechanical demolition of the building was initiated. The procedure involved three stages. First, an area of the slate roof was removed adjacent to the length of wall that housed the stone. Second, the stones in the rubble wall above the stone were removed by hand, along a length sufficient to expose the stone. Third, the stone was undermined to allow webbing straps to be threaded under it.

A mechanical excavator was brought into position and the webbing straps were attached to its extended hydraulic bucket arm. At the same time a flat trailer was brought into position adjacent to the barn. The trailer was equipped with a wooden pallet and carpeting material, as padded protection, in preparation for receiving the stone.

The stone was carefully hoisted from the wall, using the hydraulic arm of the excavator and lowered onto the trailer where it was protected for the journey to its new location. Trecastell Farm is 1600m south of the Pen Sieri barn. The stone was removed from the trailer at Trecastell, on its pallet, using a forklift truck, where it was made available for further observation and recording by photograph and measured drawing.

### **Recording the stone**

The stone was first recorded by Skinner, in 1802, where it was described, in use, as the lintel of a barn at Llanfaelog (Skinner, 1802, 46). Skinner presented two alternative readings of the inscription on the stone. One, a sketch, has MAILIS- (with horizontal final I); the other, in his text, has MALIS. The sketch is more nearly correct although the significance of the horizontal I appears not to have been recognised. In 1937 the stone was described by Williams as lost, although a suggested 5th-century date was proposed, on the basis of the lettering as drawn by Skinner, although again the final I appears not to have been recognised as such. The etymology of the name was discussed (Williams, 1937, cxvii).

In 1950, Nash-Williams commented briefly on the stone (Nash-Williams, 1950, 55), regarding it as still lost, unable to take account of the, then, recently published notice in the *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society* for 1945 of its 'discovery' (Transactions Angl. Antiq. Soc., 1945, 24). The location of the re-discovery is described as the wall of a barn at Pen Seri Bach where, presumably, it had lain since Skinner's description and where it continued to rest until its present removal. The inscription was drawn to scale by R. B. White in the 1970s (GAT SMR PRN 3033 FI files) and the stone has recently been photographed *in situ* by Jean Williamson for the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales) for inclusion in a revised publication of Nash-Williams' *corpus*.

A photographic record was made of the stone, in context, before and during its removal on 1 August 2001. Additional record photographs of the stone were taken after its arrival at Tre Castell Farm, where a scale drawing was made of the face and cross-section of the stone.

### **The MAILISI Inscribed Stone**

The stone is a golden brown quartzite, irregularly trapezoidal and nearly triangular in cross-section. There is one smooth face and this was chosen for the inscription. This inscribed face is of generally regular width (300-350mm) although slightly narrower and damaged at the top end and slightly broader at the lower end. The total length of the stone is 1.75m; the maximum width of the stone, in the same plane as the face on which the inscription lies, is 430mm; the maximum depth of the stone is 420mm. There is some relatively recent damage to the rear of the stone at the lower end, possible caused when the stone was set into the barn sometime before 1802.

The stone would originally have stood upright as a monolith with the broader, basal end, bedded in the ground up to as much as one-quarter to one-third of its length (fig. 9). The inscription is disposed vertically on the smooth face of the stone at a point approximately central to what we take to represent the above-ground portion.

The inscription reads MAILISI in Roman capitals. The letters are neatly formed by incision, rather than pocking, exhibiting a V profile. The letter M and A are ligatured; the A has a straight bar, the third and fifth letters, I, are shorter strokes than the other capitals; the L has an inclined basal stem which overlaps the base of the second I; the S is a tall letter with a first curve which extends beyond the line of the other capitals as if to balance the dropping stem of the L; the last letter, I, is disposed, at right angles to the alignment of the other letters.

### **The name on the stone**

The name on the stone is the genitive or possessive form of what may have been a Latinised name such as Mailisus. The identifiable root of this name is Mail, which Williams hinted might be related to, or derived from Irish names such as Mail Isu ('servant of Jesus') or Mail Brigit (Williams, 1937, cxvii). The element Mail in these names is cognate with the Welsh *moel* (bald). A bald or shaven head indicated a slave. In a religious context, taken literally, such a name would carry the meaning 'the tonsured servant of – so and so (usually a saint)'. If this derivation is correct, while it is possible that the individual commemorated on the Mailisi stone may have been a cleric there is, however, no requirement that this should be so. Other factors such as local fashion or family preferences are as likely to have applied.

Williams further points to the currency of *Mail* in Welsh personal names of the 8th- to 10th-centuries (Williams, 1937, cxvii). In later Welsh this element would be spelt *Mael*. It seems reasonable to allow the possibility of an association between the 5th- or 6th century memorial bearing the name *Mailisi* and the dedication of the church (*Maelog*), which later came to serve the parish (*Llanfaelog*) within which the stone may originally have stood. A similar association has been proposed for *Llansadwrn* church, in the eastern part of the Island, and its 6th-century memorial to Saturninus, and for the *Cunogusi* stone at *Bodfeddan* and the medieval community of *Conysiog* (which, incidentally, was the medieval *tref* within which lay *Llanfaelog* church) (Williams, 1937, cxv-cxvii).

### **General Considerations**

Fourteen inscribed stones of Nash Williams' Group 1 are known from Anglesey. (Nash-Williams, 1950, for classification) This classification describes rough pillar stones or slabs in their natural state or only roughly prepared, carrying inscriptions using Roman lettering. The inscriptions carry a meaning that can generally be understood to be funerary or commemorative. With very few exceptions, all fall within the chronological bracket of 5th- to 7th-centuries. The classification, in addition, includes the epigraphic style of linear strokes disposed in relation to a base line, called *Ogham*, developed in Ireland and using the Irish language. *Ogham* stones, where they are known from mainland Britain, invariably carry both *Ogham*-Irish and Roman-Latin scripts bilingually. While there are no *Ogham* stones from Anglesey, the Irish tradition is likely to have influenced the mainland British series and the implications of this, for the Anglesey stones are discussed further below.

Many permutations of layout and inscriptional formulae are employed on the stones. Two principal traditions, however, may be isolated. Both demonstrate external influences although the source and character of each is very different.

The first derives from Early Christian usage in the Late Roman Western Empire. Initially Christian epitaphs might not be distinguishable from contemporary Pagan memorials. From the 3rd-century, in Rome, and from the 4th century more widely in the West, however, distinctive verbal and adverbial phrases may be seen to complement the name and age of the deceased. These memorials, on the continent, are invariably set horizontally on prepared slabs of stone. The epigraphic style is derived from provincial monumental alphabets with borrowing from book hands and regional variants such as Greek letter forms. Classical punctuation, ligatures and contraction marks are sometimes used. More elaborate inscriptional formulae are employed during the 5th- and 6th centuries. Typical phrases include *Hic iacit* (here lies), *In Hoc Tumulo* (in this tomb), *Requiescit in Pace* (rest in peace) and so on. Elements of this tradition are well represented in north-west-Wales and on Anglesey. The most likely direct source of influence is southern and western Gaul.

The second tradition may derive from Ireland. Knight has proposed the primary existence of a commemorative tradition which, in Ireland, made use of *ogham* as an epigraphic script (Knight, 1992, 45-50). The nature of *ogham* requires a baseline along which the linear characters are disposed. Tall stones with a recognisable edge provide a suitable datum. Traditionally, *ogham* inscriptions run up the left hand edge of such a stone and if necessary continue across the top and down the right hand side. On mainland Britain, bilingual, *Ogham*/Latin, memorials are known. It has been suggested that Latin inscriptions which run vertically down the face of a stone, whether with an *ogham* counterpart or not, are developments of a convention established by such translations. The components of this tradition include the vertically downward disposition of the inscription; a single name memorial, often in the genitive case (originally mirroring the *ogham* usage) implying possession, so that 'the stone of so and so' is implied; and a name with the addition of a statement of filiation or descent (an important consideration in respect of landholding, community and status). It should be noted, however, that a statement of parental relationship is also a common accompaniment of the mainstream Latin epitaphs of the continent.

In contrast, those examples which stand closest to the continental tradition would be expected to display horizontal memorial inscriptions with the name in the nominative case and with the inclusion of a stock formula of continental derivation. In practice there is considerable hybridisation.

The *MAILISI* stone from *Pen Sieri* is a name-only inscription in the genitive case running vertically downwards, a stereotypical example of the non-continental tradition. In north-west-Wales such memorials are rare. Stones comprising all three characteristics account for only 15% of all



inscriptions, although on Anglesey the proportion is higher at 30%. The two other classic examples of name-only, genitive case, vertically-disposed inscriptions of this class, on Anglesey, are the ERCAGNI memorial from Arfryn, Bodedern, and the lost DEVORIGI stone from Capel Eithin, Llanfihangel Ysceifiog (Simms-Williams, 1999, 146-9). A hybrid form, incorporating the continentally derived *Hic iacit* formula, still stands in situ locally, at Bodfeddan, Llanfaelog. The epitaph employs a name-only, genitive case, vertically-disposed inscription. This stone commemorates Cunogusus, who is thought to have given his name to the medieval settlement of Conysio, which later became Pencarnisio. The inscription reads CUNOGUSI HIC IACIT (The grave of Conigusus, he lies here).

The other supposedly stereotypical Irish combination of name in the genitive case disposed vertically, with the addition of a statement of filiation is not represented at all on Anglesey. However, without reference to content but simply in contrast to horizontal alignment, vertically disposed inscriptions are very well represented accounting for 75% of the total. The hybridisation of many of these inscriptional forms is furthermore demonstrated by the statistic that the 'continental' *iacit* formula occurs more commonly in association with genitive name forms than with nominative.

Horizontally disposed inscriptions are generally rare, as is the use of the nominative case (33% and 42% respectively for these categories on Anglesey). On the other hand, continentally derived inscriptional formulae, in their hybrid form, are everywhere well represented, and particularly so on Anglesey (77% on Anglesey, 65% overall). There are two memorials from Anglesey which may be considered to be particularly close to the continental exemplars - in the wording of the formula in combination with a horizontally set inscription and the use of the nominative case for the deceased. It is notable that both refer to priests or the wives of priests. The first is the very long and complex inscription commemorating the wife of Bivatigirnus, a priest. It has been suggested that Bivatigirnus himself may have originated in the area around Angers, on the Loire (Foster, 1965, 216). The stone was found in the early 18th-century within a circular earthwork known as Capel Bronwen, near the estuary of the Alaw. The second stone remembers Saturninus and his wife. Radford's conjectural reading of the inscription also identified Saturninus as a priest (Radford, 1937, cix). The formula is of continental derivation and the epigraphy employs classical punctuation and ligatures. This stone was found sometime before 1742 at Llansadwrn church, a dedication which appears to derive from a diminutive usage of the deceased's name.

The Anglesey series of 5th-7th-century inscribed stones, therefore, displays clear evidence of the two distinct epigraphic traditions. The continental memorial tradition of western Latin Christianity is clearly represented by the Llantrisant and Llansadwrn stones, both, interestingly referring to priests and their wives, one of which may have been a native of Gaul. The 'Irish' tradition is equally clearly seen in the Pen Sieri, Capel Eithin and Arfryn stones. The impression created by the remaining monuments is one of hybridisation. It is notable that two of the Anglesey stones (Capel Eithin and Arfryn) are known to have come from extensive cemeteries. In general however, the inscribed stone series are not commonly associated with known cemetery sites. They clearly mark individual burials. Certain of the stones may always have stood on or close to the sites where churches were subsequently built and where burial grounds developed around a specially marked grave, whether or not a church was present. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the inscribed stone series, within Britain, may mark a distinctively different burial tradition to that of formal contemporary cemeteries. Some have linked the conspicuous burial of important and powerful individuals in this way to the definition of ancestral lands and the protection of boundaries.

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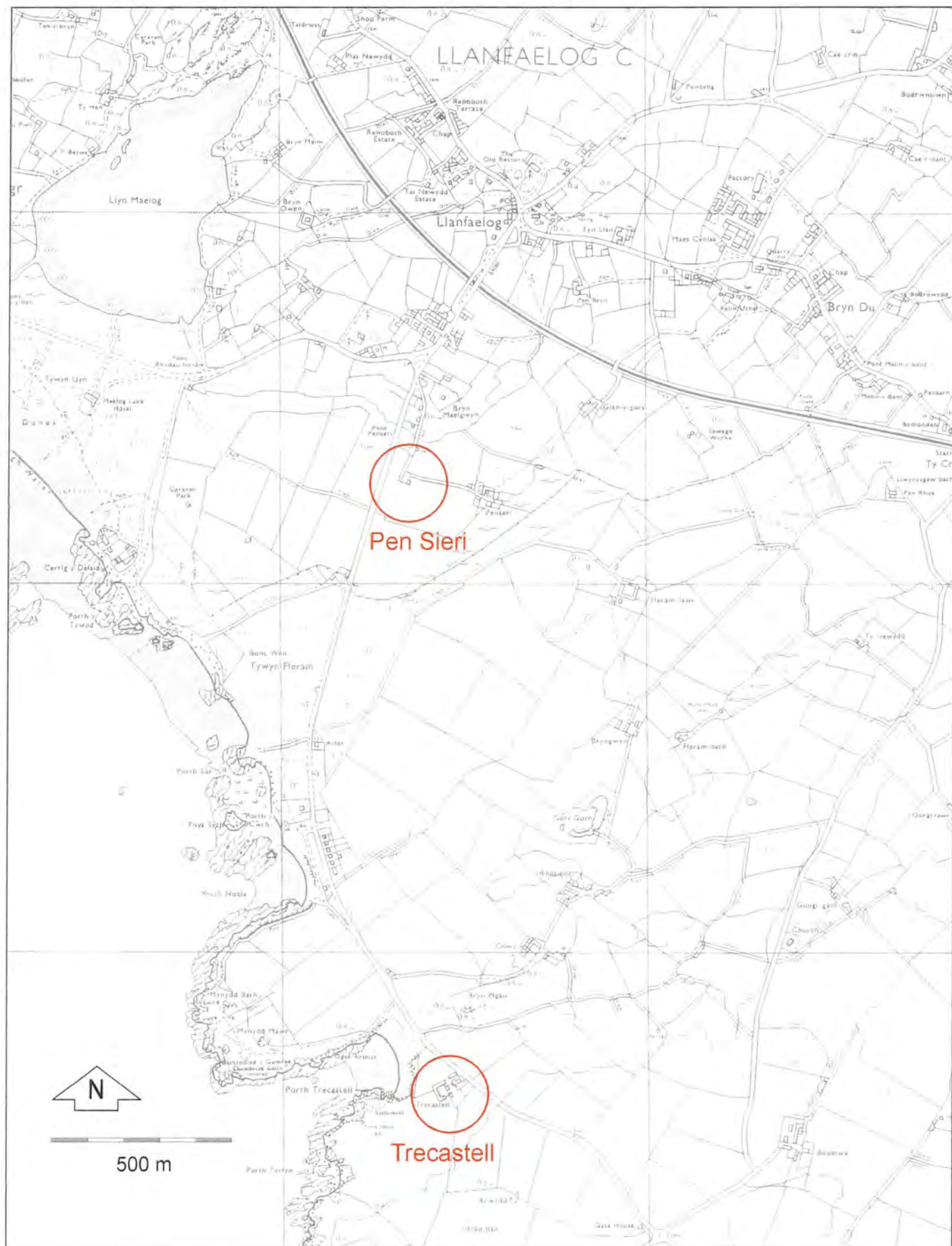


Fig. 1: Location of Pen Sieri and Trecastell.

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Fig. 2: The barn at Pensieri, before demolition. August 2001



Fig. 3: The interior of the barn. The location of the Mailisi stone in the west wall is circled

Figs 2 and 3





Fig. 4: The stone is exposed in preparation for attaching the hoist



Fig. 5: The hoist is attached and the machine begins to lift the stone

Figs 4 and 5





Fig. 6: The stone is lowered gently onto the waiting pallette and trailer



Fig. 7: The Mailisi stone in transit from the barn wall to the trailer

Figs 6 and 7



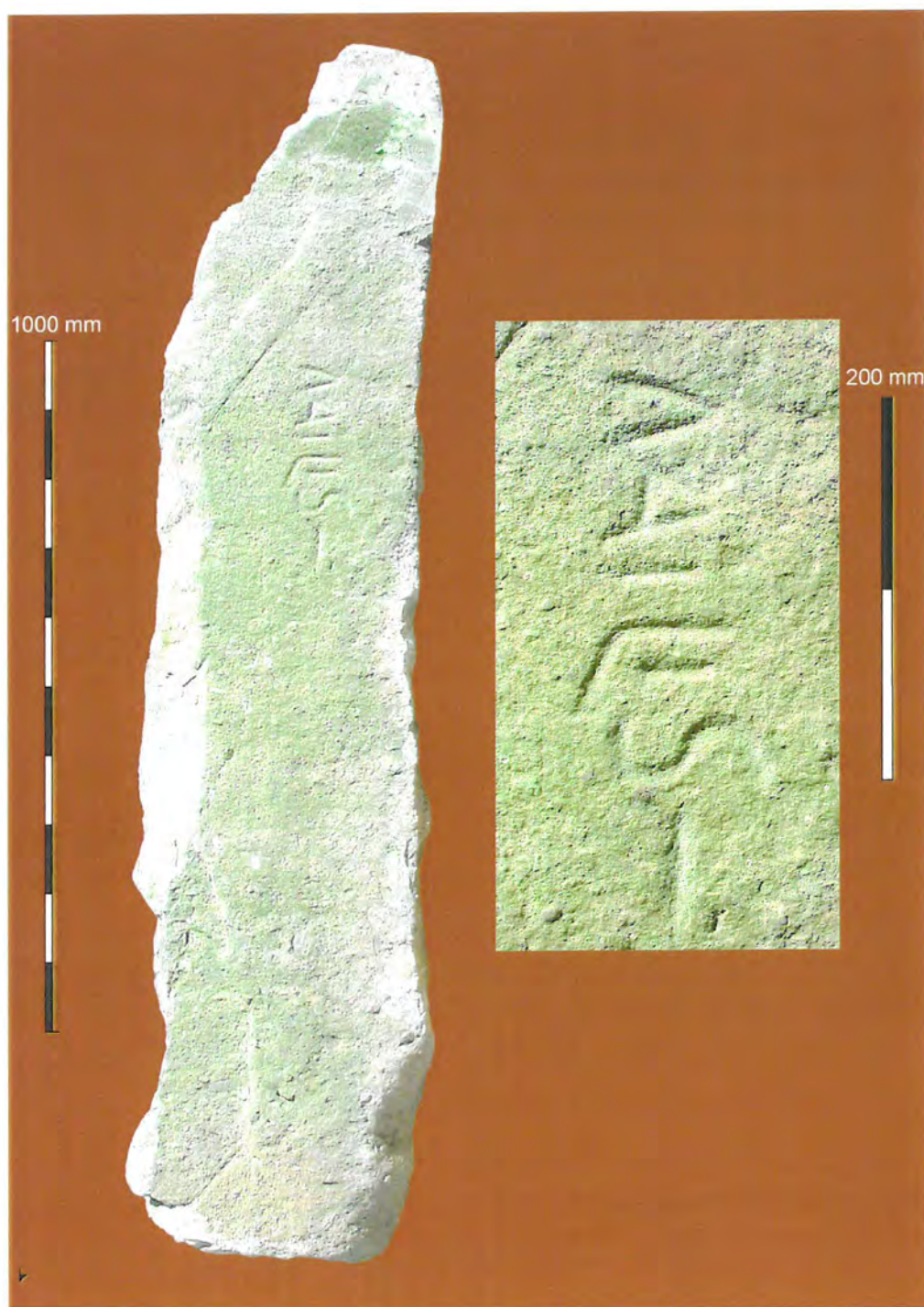


Fig. 8: The Malisi stone after removal from the Pen Sieri barn, showing the inscription in detail.



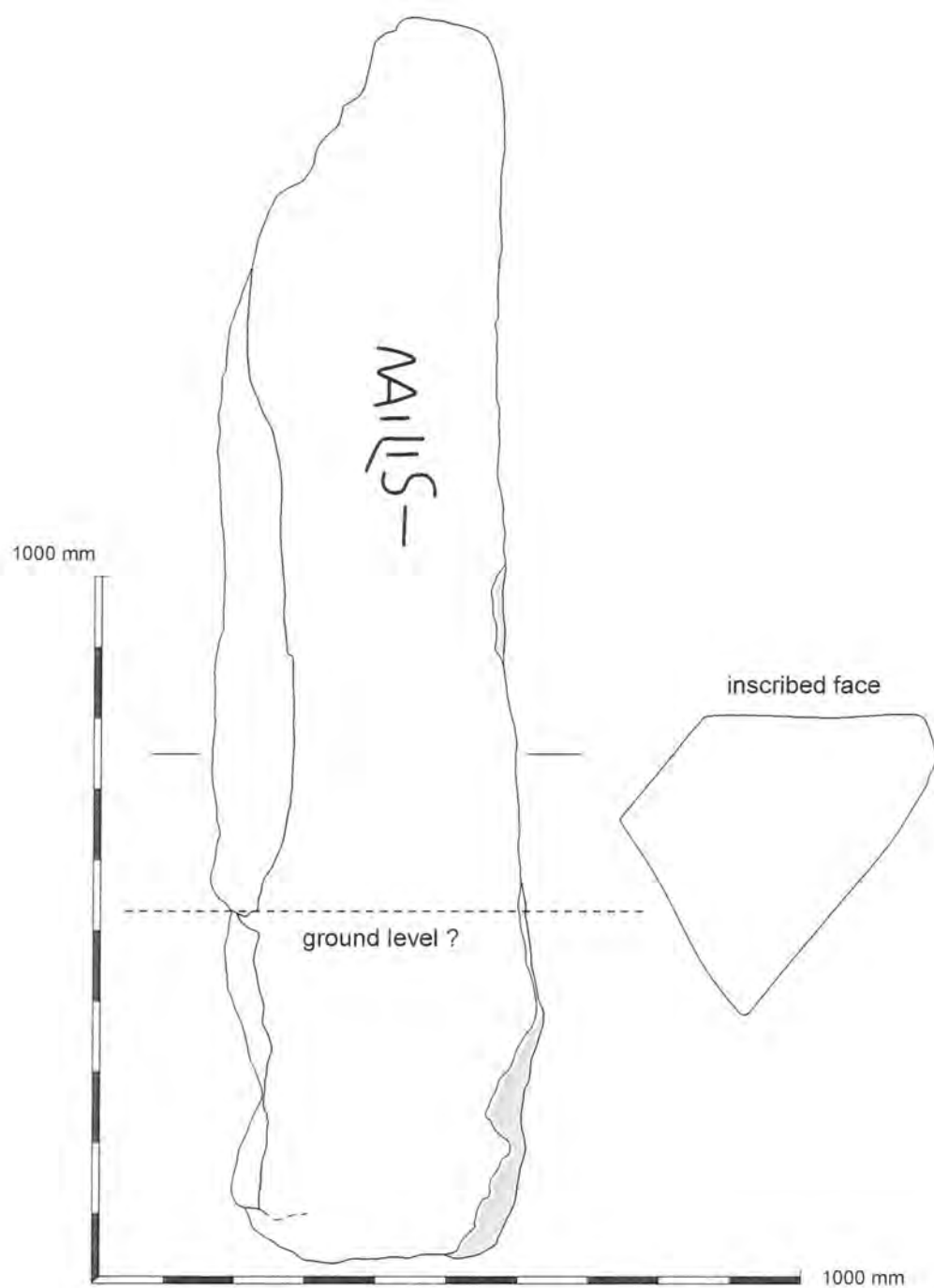


Fig. 9: The Mailisi stone, showing positioning of inscription

