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FRAGMENTS OF A LATIN BUILDING INSCRIPTION FROM AQABA, JORDAN

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Seven fragments of one or more Latin building inscriptions (plaques) were found in the port city of Aqaba on the Red Sea coast of Jordan during the spring of 1987. The discovery was made during clearance of debris on the surface in front of, and within a tower beside, the northwest gate (the Bab al-Misr or Egyptian Gate) of the medieval (7th to 12 cent.) city called Ayla.

Dr. Donald S. Whitcomb (Director of the excavation) and a joint University of Chicago/ Department of Antiquities team recovered six fragments (locus no. E8a-2 a-f in the drawing) directly in front of the gate. The seventh fragment (E8d-5) was found within a tower abutting the gate to the left as one enters.

At the conclusion of that season's work Dr. Whitcomb contacted me for a preliminary reading of the text. He has since kindly asked me to make the initial publication of the fragments so far recovered and has agreed to allow Prof. Maurice Sartre (Université François Rabelais, Tours) to include them in the latter's forthcoming *Inscriptions de la Jordanie* Vol. IV (southern Jordan). Brief announcements of this discovery were made by Dr. Whitcomb at a conference on the history of Bilad al-Sham held in Amman, Jordan in October 1987 and in a recent publication.¹ Dr. Whitcomb is to be thanked for the drawing (traced from the stones) and the photograph (see Plate IX [Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago]) which accompanies this presentation. I have not seen the fragments.

All seven fragments are wholly or partially inscribed. Portions of the surface of fragments a-d have been chiseled away. The work of erasure was quite thorough so that neither the tops or bottoms of letters, nor an underlying outline of letters in the stone, is visible. That information was made available by Dr. David Kennedy, who autopsied the fragments in June, 1988. The letters that do remain on the stone were inscribed with neatness and precision, are "V"-shaped in cross-section and were found to be filled with red paint.

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¹ Aqaba: 'Port of Palestine on the China Sea', 1988, 16. The name *Aelana* will be used below to distinguish the Nabataean/Roman settlement from the Islamic town of *Ayla*.



The six fragments discovered together are clearly part of one plaque inscription. In spite of damage to the inscribed side the back surface of the stones shows that each and every piece joins perfectly in the position indicated. Fragment E8d-5 cannot be joined anywhere although its letter heights and shapes match closely those of the other fragments. It also (as will be shown) appears to be "odd" contextually and therefore should be set aside. It may be part of a second, matching inscription with slight variations in the text.

The blank but unchiseled space at the top of fragment c, and at the bottom of fragments e and f, indicate that the original text was probably no more than five lines. It is presently impossible to know how much text is missing to the left and right. Letters in the top line are 8 cm. in height, those in the remaining lines are 7,5 cm. The plaque is marble, measures 73,5 cm. from top to bottom, and is 2.7 - 2.9 cm. in thickness. No other Latin or Greek inscription has been recorded at Aqaba. The following observations may be offered:

1. SEMPER in line 1 as an element of imperial titulature does not appear until the time of the first Tetrarchy (293-305) and is far more common in the Constantinian period (312-337). The -NVS preceding *semper* cannot be restored as *aeter]nus* since that term is never found in conjunction with *semper*. If we are to restore the names of two emperors before -NVS then DD NN IMP CAES DIOCLETIANVS ET MAXIMIA]NVS SEMPER [AVGG] would be likely. Constantine and Licinius cannot be candidates for a similar restoration in line 1 since Licinius' name invariably follows that of Constantine in the epigraphy and papyri.

2. The extant portion of line 2 was completely erased, and the erasure would appear to extend farther left and right (into missing segments of the text). It is possible that the name of a second emperor, e.g. Maximianus or Licinius, followed the titulature of the first and was later chiseled out. While this would make sense of the erasure, it would also mean that that second emperor's titulature and the names of several Caesars would have to be restored between the erasure and what remains of line 3. This would indicate that a far greater amount of text is missing than seems probable for a plaque.

3. It is more likely that the name of one or more Caesars had been erased from line 2. For the first Tetrarchy that would be Galerius, for the Constantinian period Licinius the Younger, Crispus, Constans or Dalmatius.

4. If we are to restore the name of only one emperor it must be Constantine. Depending, on the date, he may be associated with two, three or four Caesars. In line 3 NO]BILISS. ÇAËSS implies only two but it could represent more. Fragment E8d-5, restored as N]QBB, is the first element of another version of this abbreviation. It would not be unusual to have it occur twice in the same inscription, but in one as short as this it seems out of place. It is perhaps best understood as part of a smaller plaque with essentially the same text and inscribed by the same hand.

5. What follows CAESS is also uncertain. There is sufficient space for two letters before the word-divider. The top of the first is rather flat and elongated compared to the top of an E. This is likely to be an F or a T. Only the tip of the foot of the second letter is visible in the upper left-hand corner of fragment e. This could belong to any number of letters but is probably an L or an I. After the word-divider one may read CON-, COM- or (less likely) COA-. Taken together it must be the beginning of another personal name rather than the start of a phrase.

6. IVSS[ERVUNT] and either DE]DICAṼ[ERVNT] or DE]DICAṼ[IT] are the likely restorations of the verbs in lines 4 and 5. Though the order or command may be seen as imperial, it is quite possible -- even probable -- that the dedication itself was not. *Iubeo* normally requires a complementary infinitive, sometimes two or more. The Q preceding IVSS[ERVNT] must therefore be the enclitic abbreviation Q[VE] rather than a pronoun, and was itself preceded by verbs of building or restoration such as *renovo*, *restauro*, *reficio*, *perficio*. *Dedico* usually terminates a building or rebuilding inscription unless the work was overseen and brought to completion by another official, in which case *curante* and that person's name would follow. This is unlikely here, but, it would be logical to assume that the name of the provincial governor (or dux) -- in this case of newly-expanded *provincia Palaestina* -- precedes DE]DICAṼ[IT].

7. The internal evidence of the plaque points to the reign of Constantine the Great for its creation. One clue is to consider the name following CAESS in line 3. The traces of letters strongly suggest FL CON[STANTIVS] or FL CON[STANTINVS] as a logical restoration. The prosopography of the period includes Flavius Constantius (PLRE I.225), *praefectus praetorio* of the East under Constantine (to whom he was probably related) from at least 16 December 324 (CTh 15.14.1) until he returned to Rome with the Emperor in 326.² The editors of PLRE (I.224) suggest this is the same Constantius who served in 315/316 as Constantine's envoy to Licinius the Elder. The only epigraphic attestation of Constantius is CIL III 6751 from Ancyra. In it he is *v(ir) c(larissimus) praefectus pretorii (sic)* in association with Constantine. The Emperor had then already taken the title of *victor*, which makes the terminus post of the Ancyra inscription the defeat and abdication of Licinius the Elder in September 324.³ The latest attestation of Flavius Constantius is 11 June 327 (CTh 2.24.2), the year of his consulate. T.D.Barnes believes Constantius was one of two praetorian prefects who "operated independently of an emperor" and surmises that he was resident at Antioch from 324 to 326.⁴ All of this argues for restoration of his name, but in the context of this inscription doing so also presents some difficulties. Prof.Eck has pointed out (in correspondence) the inherent peculiarities of an inscription "in dem der Kaiser und

² See also T.D.Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 1982, 131.

³ Barnes, *ibid.* 24 following A.Chastagnol, *Latomus* 25, 1966, 543-550.

⁴ Barnes, *ibid.* 139.

seine Söhne und ein pref. praetorio gemeinsam etwas anordnen." I am aware of no parallel example and it may well be that some other member of the imperial family was attested instead. The matter is best left open for further discussion.

8. We must next consider the name or names erased in line 2. On 1 March 317 Constantine and Licinius the Elder established their joint rule with three Caesars (Crispus, Licinius the Younger and Constantinus the Younger). This lasted until 19 September 324. Constantine then ruled as sole emperor until his death in 337. For just under two months (19.Sept.-8.Nov. 324) he was associated with two sons as Caesars, Crispus and Constantinus (AE [1977] 602; AE [1975] 135). From at least 8 November 324 until May 326 his Caesars were Crispus, Constantinus and Constantius, and from then until 333 only the latter two. From 25.Dec. 333 Constans joined his brothers as Caesar, and from 18 Sept. 335 Constantine's half-brother Dalmatius was a fourth Caesar. As noted above neither NO]BILISS CAESS in line 3 nor the redundant fragment N]OBB should limit the number of Caesars to just two. There are instances where similar abbreviations are clearly mistakes. In ILS 714 Crispus, Licinius and Constantinus are recorded as DD NN and NOBB CAESS (see Dessau's comment on the error). In AE (1978) 727 the same three are again Nobb. Caess; in AE (1978) 283 Crispus, Constantinus and Constantius are Nobb. Caesar. and in AE (1934) 158 all *four* Caesars are Nobb. Caess.

9. We may dismiss the date of 326-333 for the plaque, since the names of Constantinus and Constantius were never erased. Any date later than 333 is improbable for two reasons. One is that Constans' name would appear last in a listing of three Caesars (333-335) and therefore immediately precede NO]BILISS in line 3. His *damnatio* did not occur until January 350 and even if his full formal name had been inscribed here the erasure of it would not have extended back to the extant portion of line 2. We might conjecture that the erasure included Dalmatius as well as Constans. In that case the plaque would have been inscribed no earlier than Sept. 335. But if the restoration of F] Co[n]stantius in line 3 is correct, and if this refers to the known PPO, it is highly unlikely that his name would appear in an inscription of 335-337 given his last attestation in 327.

10. The date of this plaque is therefore likely to be 317-326 when two sets of three Caesars, or two Caesars briefly, were associated with Constantine. Given the bits of the inscription so far available it is possible to offer three plausible restorations:

(a) In inscriptions of 1 March 317-19 Sept. 324 we would expect to find mention of both Constantine and Licinius the elder. For reasons given above this seems to be impossible here. It is worth noting in addition that when Constantine and Licinius appear together in inscriptions of Oct. 312-Sept- 324 the title *maximus* invariably distinguishes Constantine as the senior emperor. Its absence here following Constantine's name and before the term *semper* is significant.

I have not yet found an inscription of this date in which Constantine alone is attested with all three Caesars. There is a revised milestone text (AE [1969/70] 375b) in which only Constantine and Licinius the Younger are named. But milestone inscriptions are notoriously laconic and hardly to be taken as standards of epigraphy. ILS 8940, however, is a dedicatory text in which only Licinius and his son are mentioned, and Dessau was quick to point out the oddity of it. In light of that the Aqaba inscription would seem less unusual. If we accept that the elder Licinius' name was simply omitted it obviates the necessity of a labored restoration involving his name and titlature and the name of his son. Allowing that Constantine alone is associated here with Crispus, Licinius the Younger and Constantinus in that usual order, a text is easily restorable in which the erasure could embrace the names of both Crispus and Licinius the Younger:

[D N IMP CAES FL VAL CONSTANTI]NVS SEMPER [AVGVSTVS]
 [ET FL IVL CRISPVS ET VAL LICINIANVS LICINIVS IVN ET
 [FL CL CONSTANTINVS NO]BILISS CAEISS FL CON[STANTIVS ?]
 [V C PRAEF PRAETORIO PERFICI ? REFICI ?]Q IVSS[ERVNT]
 [. . . . ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? DE]DICA[V]IT[?]

This restoration inevitably associates Fl. Constantius with Licinius the Younger. If correct it would provide a new *terminus ante* for Constantius' elevation to the post of praetorian prefect, i.e. sometime prior to Sept. 324 (only three praetorian prefects are attested with certainty between 1 March 317 and 19 Sept. 324).

(b) If this inscription is from the period immediately following the fall of the elder and younger Licinius (late Sept. to early Nov. 324) the date is attractive for several reasons. One is that we would expect only Constantine to be mentioned. Another is that the names of only two Caesars need be restored. The name of Crispus would appear first and its erasure would be typical; in AE (1975) 135 (noted above) of precisely this date it was chiseled out. Restored thus the text would read:

[D N IMP CAES FL VAL CONSTANTI]NVS SEMPER [AVGVSTVS]
 [PONTIFEX MAXIMVS ET DD NN FL IVLIVS CRISPVS ET FL CLA
 [VDIVS CONSTANTINVS IVN NO]BILISS CAEISS FL CON[STANTIVS ?]
 [VC PRAEFECTVS PRAETORIO PERFICI ? REFICI ?]Q IVSS[ERVNT]
 [. . . . ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? DE]DICA[V]IT[?]

(c) In inscriptions of Nov. 324-May 326 Crispus' name also appears first and it alone was erased (e.g. ILS 708; 710). This date is attractive for the same reasons given in (b) above, though the name of a third Caesar must be added. We might also note that an attestation of Fl. Constantius (PPO) would be especially appropriate at this time:

[D N IMP CAES FL VAL CONSTANTI]NVS SEMPER [AVGVSTVS]
 [PONTIFEX MAXIMVS PATER PATRIAE FL IVL CRISPVS FL CL CONSTA]

[NTINVS FL IVL CONSTANTIVS NO]BILISS ÇAESS FL CON[STANTIVS ?]
[VC PRAEFECTVS PRAETORIO PERFICI ? REFI CI ?]Q IVSS[ERVNT]
[. . . . ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?] [DE]DICA V[IT?]

11. It is of course possible to present variations of each of the above. The absence of *victor* in the titulature of Constantine is no reason for supposing that the inscription is prior to the the defeat of Licinius the Elder; its absence here means no more than it does in AE (1978) 283 of Nov. 324-May 326. I have found no certain example of *victor* ever following the title Augustus, though the editors of AE (1984) 434 have accepted G.Alföldy's restoration of *victor* following AVG. in CIL V 8269 of A.D. 326-?337.

If we are to assess what circumstantial evidence there is, it points to a date between late Sept. 324 (when Licinius abdicated) and May 326 (when Crispus was executed) for the creation of this inscription.

12. This plaque (and -- probably -- another like it) were removed from the Romano-Byzantine town of Aelana (like Ayla, now within the modern port of Aqaba) during the occupation of the Islamic settlement or some time thereafter. Presumably the inscription(s) commemorated a building project involving the military, perhaps reconstruction work. Qasr Azraq in eastern Jordan has produced a number of Constantinian building inscriptions, all associated with the Roman fort established there most probably in the Severan period and restructured during a major military buildup in the early fourth century.⁵ One such inscription (AE [1974] 661) of A.D. 326-333 seems to describe the kind of rebuilding that the Aqaba inscription might commemorate:

[C]onsta[nt]ino M[a]xi[m]o | pio uicto[re] ac triumphatore se[m]per | Augusto e[st]
Constantino et | [Consta]ntio nn(o)bb(ilissimis) Caess(aribus) | [aedem (?) inc]uriam
vetustate | [parietu]m ruina conlapsam | [refici (?) iu]ssit et [...].

D.L.Kennedy (1982: 91) read the final line as [refici ? iu]ssit Fl [Şeyerinuş], the personal name being that of "either the garrison commander or the provincial governor."

13. The Nabataean/Roman town of Aelana has been identified just a few hundred meters to the north-west of Islamic Ayla. Exploratory trenches are to be dug there in the autumn of 1988, but for the present the focus of the excavations will continue to be the Islamic city. Dr. Whitcomb has informed me (personal communication) that he saw at Aqaba in March, 1988 two marble column capitals exposed on the beach by winter storms. The opposing finished edge of each indicates that this is a matched pair, originally placed on pilasters at either side of a monumental gate. Though they may have been reused in the Byzantine or Islamic period Whitcomb has tentatively assigned them to the second century A.D. by

⁵ D.L.Kennedy in *Roman Frontier Studies*, 1979 (BAR Int. Ser. 71, 1980), 879-888; idem, *Archaeological Explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan* (BAR Int. Ser. 134, 1982), 75-96.

analogy with nearly identical stylistic features of monumental column capitals at Jerash in northwest Jordan.

14. Aelana stood at the southern terminus of the *via nova Traiana* which connected that Red Sea port with Petra, Philadelphia/Amman and Bostra. We know nothing of its history in that early period but the town must have served as the base for some as yet unattested military unit stationed there when the *via nova* was built (106-114) after the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom. That unit undoubtedly became the garrison of the port thereafter. There was no need to strengthen that garrison until at least the time of the Palmyrene revolt of 270-273.

15. Renewed military activity on the eastern frontier began with Aurelian, was augmented by Diocletian and continued under Constantine. At some point in the last quarter of the third century or the first quarter of the fourth a decision was made to transfer the *legio X Fretensis* from its former base in Jerusalem⁶ to new headquarters in Aelana. The only record of that is a laconic and chronologically vague statement in Eusebius' *Onomasticon*,⁷ s.v. Αἰλάμ (Gen. 14.1) ... νῦν [i.e. in Eusebius' lifetime] Ἰαῖλά ... ἐγκάθηται δὲ αὐτοῦθι τάγμα Ῥωμαίων τὸ δέκατον.

The date of composition of the *Onomasticon* has never been settled. Previous estimates have ranged from c.310 to as late as the 330's. Barnes recently made a strong case for a date of composition in the 290's.⁸ Even if one accepts a date that early, the statement concerning the tenth legion which begins with νῦν could have been inserted during a later revision. *Legio X Fretensis* took part in the Persian campaign under Constantius II in 359 (Ammianus 18.9.3) but is was still attested at Aelana c.400 (*Not. Dig.* 34.30 [Seeck]). Its later history is unknown.

16. It is possible that the *legio VI Ferrata* was transferred from northern Palestine to Udhruh (near Petra) and the newly-raised *legio IV Martia* stationed at Lejjun (near Karak) as part of an orchestrated redeployment of the eastern military.⁹ The motives for and timing of these moves have been discussed by S.T.Parker¹⁰ who credits this major buildup to Diocletian and the first Tetrarchy c.300. The simultaneous stationing of the tenth legion at Aelana, as Parker and others would argue, remains a distinct possibility. Should that hypothesis be proven correct, the Aqaba inscription might then relate to the renovation of a structure or structures already a quarter of a century old.

⁶ The legion is now attested at Jerusalem with a new epithet: l(e)g(io) X Fr(etensis) *Fel(ix)* ; see AE (1985) 831.

⁷ ed. E. Klostermann, 6 line 20.

⁸ Constantine and Eusebius, 1981, 110-111.

⁹ *VI Ferrata* : M.P.Speidel, ZPE 29, 1979, 172; *IV Martia* : J. Lander & S.T. Parker, Byzantinische Forschungen 8, 1982, 185-210.

¹⁰ Romans and Saracans: A History of the Arabian Frontier, 1986, 137-142.

17. Until more of the inscription is found, however, the whole issue remains conjectural. That building activity of any kind was commemorated in this inscription is an assumption based on the two verbs in the text and by analogy with other inscriptions attesting construction work carried out elsewhere in the frontier regions of Roman Palestine and Roman Arabia within the years 324-337:

" . . . there are [epigraphic] indications that the Arabian frontier was still of concern to Constantine. The *castellum* at Azraq may have been repaired between 326 and 333. [A fortified] reservoir [was] built in 334 northwest of Azraq by Roman soldiers for their own use Milestone inscriptions indicate road maintenance in 334-35, including work on the central and southern *via nova Traiana* and roads in Palestine."¹¹

What type of building activity and what official oversaw the work and dedicated its completion cannot be known until more of the Aqaba inscription is found. The restorations suggested here are admittedly quite tentative, especially so regarding the role of the praetorian prefect of the East acting in concert with the Emperor and certain of his Caesars. That raises important questions of imperial protocol. Another matter is the possibility that this plaque is associated with the military base at Aelana. Latin inscriptions from any site along the route of the *via nova* are almost invariably related to the Roman army. Thus it is tempting to connect the arrival of *legio X Fretensis* at Aelana with this new inscription. In that case Eusebius' statement would reflect a revision of the *Onomasticon* c.325. But there is nothing to exclude the possibility of a civilian context for the plaque and whatever it commemorated. The ongoing excavations at Aqaba should eventually clarify some of these issues.

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¹¹ Parker, *ibid.* 145.

POSTSCRIPT

Maurice Sartre has brought to my attention three fragmentary Greek inscriptions from Aqaba. Two are nothing more than proper names (?) carved on the upper edge of sculpted Byzantine capitals; see N.Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine III* (AASOR 18-19 [1937/39]) pp. 1-3 and figs. 1& 2 on p.2. The other is a brief Christian epitaph of A.D. 555; see M.Schwabe, *HTR* 46 (1953) 49-55 (= SEG 13.598). I am grateful to Prof. Sartre for allowing me to see the relevant entries in the typescript of his volume of inscriptions from southern Jordan. Donald Whitcomb has notified me that two inscribed milestones were uncovered near the marina at Aqaba in September, 1988. Both are Trajanic and date to c. 111/112.

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Lateinische Inschrift aus Aqaba, Jordanien