

R. GODFREY TANNER

GREEK EPIGRAPHY IN SOUTH JORDAN

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 83 (1990) 183–193

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

GREEK EPIGRAPHY IN SOUTH JORDAN

As the admirable French publication of the Greek epigraphy of Jordan continues with the 1986 volume on the central region,¹ one awaits with interest the forthcoming volume on the south of the country.

In this region where I have worked under Dr. W.J. Jobling in the University of Sydney's 'Aqaba - Ma'an - Survey, the problems for a hellenist are twofold. First is the geographical division of the region. The coastal region of the ancient Aela and the Ḥisma area inland including the Wadi Ramm constituted the old Ottoman vilayet of 'Aqaba and Ma'an – really a region of the Hejaz. In 1918 it became part of Hussein the Elder's Haschemite kingdom of the Hejaz. With his defeat and expulsion from Mecca by the advances of Abdul Azziz Ibn Saud the king fled to 'Aqaba from Jiddah. Fearing a Saudi conquest Britain deported the old king to the Seychelles and annexed the vilayet to the Transjordan Mandate in 1927. This region is part of Arabia, whilst the lands north of Ma'an – Petra, the hill country north towards Madaba, and the arid plateau east of the Desert Highway – are in essence a sector of the Levant. The second problem is linguistic. The materials at Petra are Greek or Nabataean with some Latin here and there as well, whilst the finds south of Ras en-Naqeb are mainly in Thamudic – a pre Islamic North Arabian dialect related to the Safaitic found in the desert regions of Jordan and in the Hauran, though with morphological features of its own, and written in its own distinct script. This dialect and script are prevalent as far south as Mada'in Salih, the ancient Hegra, which was the frontier station between the ancient Nabataean realm centred on Petra and its southern neighbours.

Of course other linguistic evidence occurs. But though, as Graf has pointed out,² there are some other non-Thamudic graffiti in the Ḥisma, they are intrusive texts introduced by caravan parties from the south on their journeys to Aela, Petra or Palmyra. Certainly Thamudic is the basic script for rock inscriptions and graffiti on rock drawings in the Ḥisma. Next in importance are finds in Nabataean script. This script was used to write the official Semitic language of the Kingdom of Petra and this tongue was related to Aramaic and Hebrew as well as the dialects of Arabia. Translation of Nabataean texts can be done with

¹ *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie xxi, Inscriptions de la Jordanie 2, Region Centrale* (Amman-Hesban- Madaba- Main- Dhiban) (Paris: 1986).

² David Graf, *ADAJ* 27 (1983) pp.555-576.

some confidence, though at our current state of evidence there are numerous controversial issues regarding aspects of their vocalization, morphology, syntax and lexicon. Next comes Greek. Though Nelson Glueck and Lankester Harding insisted that there were numerous Greek graffiti in the Ḥisma and towards the Saudi border, we have found very few so far.³ On the other hand, Petra offers the Greek scholar an *embarras de richesse* likely to be compounded as the British and American teams gradually shift the great hills of massive fallen masonry from the earthquake-felled city.

The Sydney expedition over several seasons has made a large number of finds of splendid rock art, since further examined by an Italian expedition of experts in early art, and so much inscribed Thamudic material – often as labels on rock art – as to permit considerable progress in orthography and lexicography. Thus, Jobling has shown that one symbol represents Hebrew *gimel* or Arabic *jim*, not as thought previously, on S. Arabian analogies, Arabic *tha* or *dhal*, or *zā*. Two *abecedaria* on rock faces which place this in the *gimel* position, and a label on a rock drawing of a CAMEL which must read GAMAL rather than THAMAL, appear conclusive.⁴

So far as the Greek material is concerned, I mean to confine myself to three inscriptions with which I have personally been involved.

(1) The Ḥisma Greek inscription (now at last in print in Italy),⁵ drawn to our attention in 1987 by the British Ambassador who came across it on a picnic in the Ḥisma. Taken with a Nabataean find a few miles away by Jobling and Mrs Crystal-Bennett in 1981,⁶ which reads SLM. ZYNWN. BR. QYMT. KLYRK. BTB. L'LM, or, in English, “Greetings. Zenon, son of QYMT, Tribune, with (the) good, for ever”, it appears to vindicate Mommsen’s century-old assumption that there was a Roman tribune based at Aela after the province of Arabia was incorporated by Trajan in AD 107.⁷ The Greek text was cut on the front of a flat slab lying at the foot of a hill and facing a smooth sheltered area.⁸

³ G. Lankester Harding, *The Antiquities of Jordan*² (London: 1967) p.140.

⁴ W.J. Jobling, *ADAJ* 30 (1986) p.262.

⁵ *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 6 (1989) 135-142.

⁶ *ADAJ* 26 (1982) pp. 199-209.

⁷ T. Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire* (trans. Dickson) ii (Chicago: 1974) p.151 n. 1.

⁸ See Plate V.1 (photograph and text to appear in *ADAJ* 32 [1988]).

THE HĪSMA INSCRIPTION
(see Plate v.1)

Natural undressed sandstone slab at foot of a jebel. The surface had not been prepared and the text arrangement is constrained by the state of the rock face. Uncial forms are used for omega, sigma, epsilon and mu. Some letters are compressed to fit the spaces restricted by cracks in the rock, examples being the final syllable of Λαυρίκιος with its tiny omicron and the cramped last letters of Ζήνων. Under the final nu of νικῶσιν we find a *paragraphos* mark, and this break of sense is emphasized by the long tailed lambda of Lauricius. No breathings are marked.

Total length of text: upper line 1.92 m.; lower line 1.44 m.

Combined height of inscription: 0.36 m.

Average letter height: 9.5 cm.; average letter breadth: 6.9 cm.

ΡΩΜΕΟΙΑΕΙΝΙΚΩCIN, ΛΑΥΡΙΚΙΟC
ΕΓΡΑΨΑΧΑΙΡΕΖΗΝΩΝ
Ῥωμέοι ἀεὶ νικῶσιν, Λαυρίκιος
ἔγραψα χαίρει Ζήνων

We may translate:

Romans always win. I, Lauricius,
wrote “Hail Zenon”

Left unsupported, the first text – the Hedeib el-Fala Nabataean inscription – might equally refer to a chiliarch of the Nabataean Royal Army in the era between Augustus and Trajan when the leading classes were highly hellenized.⁹ But if the two seem on other grounds coeval, then it is likely that both texts refer to the same man and the same victory, probably achieved by an auxiliary *cohors millaria equitata* under his command as a tribune of auxiliaries. So the date of the Greek inscription is of prime importance. First the external evidence. The name Zenon for a Semite proves nothing: it is a strong tradition that the Stoic founder in 306 BC, Zenon of Citium, was a Phoenician. However, the patronymic in the Hedeib el-Fala inscription is attested from Nabataean inscriptions found at Madāʿīn Sālīh. These Cantineau was disposed to date to the second century of our era,¹⁰ but recent work now has dated many of the monuments on which they are inscribed to the first century.

⁹ G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1983) p.7.

¹⁰ J. Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen* ii (Paris: 1930) p.141.

Significantly, too, Waddington cites a Greek inscription from Taymā – regarding the ownership of a structure by a certain Γαδυος Καλαμαθου.¹¹ Of this phrase the second word is a genitive of paternity which renders perfectly the Nabataean phrase BR. QYMT. Thus we seem to be dealing with a wealthy Nabataean family centred on the Hegra-Taymā region in the far south of the country attested there from the last century of independence and evidently hellenized.

The internal evidence in the Greek text is not conclusive, but suggestive. The spelling Ῥωμέοι for Ῥωμαῖοι cannot really help us. Though it exhibits the modern Greek pronunciation of ε/αι as the same sound, this spelling confusion has already become irritatingly common in Egyptian Greek papyri from the first century *BC* offering us forms like δέχεσθε where the text clearly requires the meaning of δέχεσθαί.¹² Again, the epigraphic forms of lambda, omega and sigma cut into this stone are already apparent in texts from Augustan times in the Greek east, whilst the rounded epsilon actually occurs in a roughly cut Attic inscription of the fourth century *BC*.¹³ However, the lettering resembles a good uncial bookhand of the middle second century *AD* or later. A relevant example is the Hawara Homer of the second century. Resemblance is also strong with some cursive Greek hands of the second and third centuries.¹⁴

On balance, stylistic factors seem to suggest second to third century *AD*. As Plate V.1 shows, the surface is interesting. The rock face is natural, not dressed. The writing shows very little rock weathering damage and was constrained by the existing cracks and fractures which were evidently in the same state in Roman times. This surface condition obliges the man who cut this superior graffito to put Lauricius on the same line as the boastful slogan rather than with the verb about his own activity on the following line, where there just is not enough smooth surface for the purpose available. Hence the otherwise puzzling mark, which is clearly a Roman rather than Greek *ms. paragraphos* inserted to tell us that Lauricius actually belongs in the next line.¹⁵

¹¹ W.H. Waddington, *Inscriptions de la Syrie* (Paris: 1870 [repr. Rome: 19681] no.2202.

¹² M. David & B.A. Van Groningen, *Papyrological Primer* (Leyden: 1965) p.17.

¹³ A.G. Woodhead, *The Study of Greek Inscriptions*² (Cambridge: 1981) pp.64-65.

¹⁴ Sir E. Maunde Thompson, *Introduction to Greek & Latin Palaeography* (Oxford: 1912) pp. 142 and 192-195; cf. Stanley Morison, *Politics and Script* (Lyell lectures, 1957) (Oxford: 1972) p.19.

¹⁵ On *paragraphos* see Maunde Thompson, *op.cit.* p.59.

The name is no help. Dessau quotes the cognomen Lauricius only once, as found in an inscription of AD 359 referring to Bassidius Lauricius, then *comes* and *praeses* of Illyria long after the Diocletianic withdrawal from the Ḥisma.¹⁶ Jones and Martindale's *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* offers us nothing earlier, but the junior officer of auxiliaries here could have been a humble ancestor. The literary *nu ephelkustikon* may favour second century.

General historical factors also seem inconclusive. Historically all Roman operations in this region have a *terminus post quem* in Trajan's forward policy of annexing the Nabataean kingdom in AD 106-107.¹⁷ However, no milestones were cut on the *limes*-line of the Via Traiana Nova until AD 111, the year of the first commemorative coins.¹⁸ Bowersock points to the immediate employment of Nabataean auxiliaries in the early days of the province;¹⁹ but it seems a little early for Nabataean nobles to become enfranchised and boast of being Roman officers until the date of Hadrian's eastern tour and visit to Arabia in AD 130. Then also the Jewish War of AD 132-135 may well have prompted some Arab tribes outside the Empire to attempt an incursion into the Ḥisma towards the *limes*. This seems the earliest possible date for Zenon's victory. Of course our *terminus ante quem* is another problem. The apparent good order of the province during the revolt of Avidius Cassius in AD 171 need not preclude *razzias* across the Ḥisma by tribes linked with his conspiracy. The same considerations must apply to possible raids during Septimius Severus' war against Parthia and his reorganisation of the East between AD 193 and 201. On the other hand, the rising importance of the Lakhmid kings in Arabia and their known hostility to Palmyra renders large tribal forays into the Ḥisma after the capture of Valerian in AD 259 highly unlikely.²⁰ So on strategic and epigraphic grounds any date between AD 111 and 260 seems possible. But if one wished to link Zenon with Madā'in Sālīh and the first century tombs of its military families who would be prime candidates for early grants of Roman *civitas* (or before that *ius Latinum*), then a Hadrianic date at the time of the Jewish War seemed most seductive when we first found this

¹⁶ Dessau, *ILS* 740: cf. A.H.M. Jones & J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: 1971) p. 497.

¹⁷ Bowersock, *op.cit.* p.79 n.12.

¹⁸ Bowersock, *ibid.* p.83.

¹⁹ Bowersock, *ibid.* p.157.

²⁰ Bowersock, *ibid.* pp. 138-142.

inscription. However, the question was given a new form by the report on the photographs of the Hedeib el-Fala inscription which the late doyen of Nabataean studies, Abbé Starcky of Paris, sent to Jobling shortly before he died. In his report Starcky quite firmly (and independently) dated the Nabataean Zenon text to between AD 125 and 150. As Starcky had come to a date of the Nabataean so close to that which I had separately formulated for the Greek, the probability that both refer to the same man and the same event in AD 132-135 becomes high, as does the likelihood that Mommsen was right about the stationing of a tribune with an auxiliary cohort at Aela, the modern 'Aqaba.

(2) The second text of interest was the only Greek discovery of the 1988 season. It was a single word 30 m. above ground on a smooth face of an outlying *jebel* at the intersection of two wide valleys about five miles east of the town of Humeima on the line of the Via Nova Traiana, for which it may have served as an *excubiae* post for sending visible fire signal warnings of approaching raiders to the town and forts. The text reads simply XOTAIBOC.

This represents a hellenized form of the Nabataean personal name KWTBH. The transliteration calls for some explanation. The use of initial chi (X) rather than kappa (K) is parallel with the treatment of χιλίαρχης as KLYRK and contrasts with the treatment of κοιαμοθος as QYMT. Presumably chi was used to represent *kaf* and kappa to replace *qaf* in transliteration. Like unpointed Hebrew *beth* our beta here would possibly express the pronunciation "V", but as Avi-Yonah points out,²¹ this spelling does not appear until AD 117; all earlier texts expressing the "V" value by omicron with upsilon as a diphthong. So if our beta here has a "V" value, then the text belongs to the Roman second century rather than the Nabataean first century. The use of omicron to render the Nabataean W is natural, as it renders the Greek omega in Zenon at Hedeib al-Fala, and the *waw* of Hebrew can vocalise either as "O" or as "U". More in the square epigraphic capital tradition than our Zenon victory text, it may not date from any more than twenty years before or after our first example.

(3) The one result of my visit to Jordan in 1989, when circumstances confined us to Library and Museum work. In the last phase of the 1988 season our Antiquities Liaison Officer, Dr. Suleiman Farajat, Director of the Petra Forum Museum, drew to my attention the left half of a funerary inscription from the early Byzantine Christian cemetery at Wadi Musa, about two miles from Petra, which had been turned up during the digging of foundations for a new house. When I returned in 1989 the other half had been recovered, so

²¹ M. Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions* (Chicago: 1974) pp.42-43.

I was able to work on it in the Petra Museum (see Plate V.2). The line of fracture had damaged and lost letters from the middle of each line, but most of these gaps were not difficult to fill. The script has one principal oddity, the cursive form of alpha, found also in Syria.²² However, several other letters show that uncial forms have been squared to assist the stonecutter in his work on a hard slab surface. So epsilon reverts to normal, and the uncial sigma becomes three straight lines, whilst uncial upsilon is made more angular, as is uncial mu also in some places. Byzantine orthographic combinations of letters also occur. Thus in line 5 we find tau combining with epsilon. The most striking instance is in line 6, with ΕΠΑΡΧΙΑΣ exhibiting a combined epsilon and pi and concluding with a trailing ligature iota-alpha-sigma. Probable Pagan divine names are given similar correptions, perhaps on analogy with suspended or contracted Christian divine names. So in line 3 ΠΗΛΟΥ has ligature of pi-eta-lambda-omicron, whilst in line 4 we have ΓΗΣ with ligature of eta-sigma.

However, a difficulty was created by the heavy pittings and severe striations on the face of the slab which in places (e.g., left end of line 4) made both the photograph and the actual stone difficult to read. As the surface was very hard and firm I finally resorted to a rubbing rather than a squeeze, and this solved the problem. Thus at the beginning of line 4 the rubbing clearly and unequivocally reads ΗΠΕΡ, ruling out of court some possible abbreviation interpretations. Again at the faint left end of line 7 a very clear lambda (Λ) was revealed. The approach was even more helpful with the right hand stone. The second last letter of line 1 showed as a very clear theta (Θ) offering us a well authenticated Nabataean girl's name, Tetha. In the same line it became clear from the trace of its right edge that the lost letter must be omega, thus giving us ΣΩΜΑ (body) rather than the other possibility, ΣΗΜΑ (tomb). Again, at the end of line 2 the kappa became very clear and the trace of the left edge of an omicron (Ο), entitling one to restore a final sigma (Σ) which had been broken off. In the same line the vertical line after the crack shows traces of a line to the left, which justified reading *upsilon* (Υ). The rubbing also pointed to upsilon-lambda-beta (ΥΛΒ) rather than phi-lambda-beta (ΦΛΒ) in line 7, suggesting AD 432, rather than 532, as the year of the province of Arabia, or 539.

²² *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984-5) p.92 n. 12. This reports a parallel alpha – also of Justinianic date – from Hierapolis (Membig) in Syria. However, the Wadi Musa example is oval rather than open at the top. I am indebted to Professor Graeme Clarke for the Syrian data.

Finally, the text suggests that the stonecutter attempted to mend an embarrassing haplography. The text at first glance reads in line 5 KATΘANEN NEOTH, but the normal idiom requires κατέθανεν ἐν νεότη(τι). However, close examination shows that the final nu of the verb has been made into a nu-epsilon ligature whilst a cut has been made in the nu of NEOTHTI to create an impression of the double nu ligature. So the cutter meant his emended stone to read κατέθανεν ἐν νεότητι.

THE WADI MUSA (TETHA) INSCRIPTION
(see Plate V.2)

In Petra Forum Museum. Left side discovered in 1987 during building over the site of the Byzantine Cemetery at Wadi Musa just outside the Petra *siq*: right portion recovered in 1988. Surface of the tombstone had suffered pitting and striation. Report to appear in *ADAJ* 33 (1989). Overall size of reassembled tombstone: max. breadth 28.5 cm.; height 25 cm. Letter heights vary between 2 and 3 cm.; widths between 1 and 1.5 cm. The style is in essence squared uncial: the alpha, however, has links with both Syriac forms and papyrus bookhands.

1	+Ἐνθάδε σ[ῶ]μα Τεθα+	16 signs
2	Ἄριστονόου γυναικὸς[ς]	18 letters
3	Τῆς Πηλοῦ τῆς μεγάλης[ς]	18 letters
4	ἥπερ χαρίεσσα γῆς λοχ	18 letters
5	-έα κατέθανεν ἐν νεότη	18 letters
6	-τι ἀοίδιμα ἐπαρχίας	17 letters
7	λαχοῦσα τοῦ Λ(ἔτους) ὙΛΒ	14 signs = 18 letters

The form Πηλοῦ constitutes an immediate problem of reference, obviously not being involved with “mire”. By this date beta had the value veta and thus there was no letter to express “B” as a sound (like modern Greek μπ). Arabic had a similar problem when *fa* replaced the NW Semitic *pe*, calling Plato *Afflatun* and Petra *Batra* for lack of a “P” sound. In such a situation it is natural to replace Semitic *beth* with Greek pi. So ἡ πηλός will be the Ba’alat. In this region the great Ba’alat could conceivably be Dushara’s consort Allat.²³ In Palmyra and in South Arabia as well as in old Mesopotamia, captives or slaves were

²³ J Teixidor, *The Pagan God* (Princeton: 1977) pp.68-69.

dedicated to the god or goddess to work that deity's workshops or estates. The date of this inscription is Justinian's reign. In this era many pagan cults were disestablished, and women in their service would become free for normal Christian marriage. Of course it may be held that if a former temple slave married a Christian man after the dissolution of her temple, he would be unlikely to record this origin on her tomb. However, in Jobling's eighth season (January 1988) we found ruins of the Wadi Shireh mosque in a side valley with a kufic inscription dating it to AD 726. All over the ruined village area were pre-Islamic Thamudic inscriptions on stone. To our surprise the *mihrab* stone built into the wall was covered also with an Old Thamudic text.²⁴ Clearly there was no total rejection of the past here with the advent of Islam; and in the days of Justinianic state-fostered Christian conversion the Nabataeans may have been equally pragmatic. On the other hand, Professor Graeme Clarke informs me of a common use of *πηλός* in toponyms in Syria, and this possible interpretation must be taken seriously as well. The syntax is no problem; with the first three lines compare the formula *Δημοσθένης Δημοσθένους ὁ Παιανεύς*. So we may render as follows:

(In Christ). Here (the) body of Tetha,
 Wife of Aristonoos, (from the staff)
 Of the Ba'alat, the great one (*or* from Great Pelos).
 She indeed, gracious on earth, in childbirth
 Perished in her youth, (already)
 Respected, of the Province.
 Having attained as her lot the year 432.

In conclusion, then, we have a few unusual forms such as *λοχέα* for the normal *λοχεία* or dialectal *λοχία*, whilst *λαχοῦσα* is used in *LSJ* sense II. However, in general the Greek of this inscription is very normal. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the lady's presumably Nabataean husband Aristonoos has, like Zenon the chiiarch, a Greek name, whilst she herself has the Nabataean name Tetha.

These three specimen inscriptions serve to illustrate how far epigraphic styles are constrained by the resources and the circumstances of the stonemason, or the amateur stonecutter. Working urgently and in haste Lauricius has scratched and scored out the *Hisma* inscription on the natural rock face, giving us some distinctly uncial-type letters fitted into an irregular surface area for our first example; indeed, perhaps our earliest one. The second text is fairly close in dating, but inscribed with more formality and elegance. Pitted or scored rather than cut, it is able to be expressed with the traditional square capitals because

²⁴ Report to appear in *ADAJ* 32 (1988).

it makes use of a quite beautifully smooth natural cliff face. Finally, in our third and latest example, the Byzantine era stonemason has squared the uncial forms to give balance, regularity and dignity to this Christian tombstone so characteristic of the sixth Christian century. Formal criteria of script need to be used with great care in sequence dating. Unless reinforced by detailed knowledge of the site and surface conditions, and of the purpose and circumstances of the inscription, such stylistic features can be misleading in isolation.

Although Greek texts are rare out in the field in far south Jordan, they are of considerable significance when they occur.

GODFREY TANNER

The University of Newcastle (NSW)

APPENDIX I

The stichometry of the Tetha inscription shows a regular 18 letters in lines 2-5 against 17 in line 6. However, there are only 14 apart from the cross in line 1. I doubt that there were any other letters (such as an article) where the stone has broken away on the right, but a cross *seems* to survive above the right margin to balance the one at the left, as in most Byzantine funerary inscriptions.

APPENDIX II

In considering the Hedeib al-Fala text, it should be noted that if it were in fact contemporaneous with the Hīisma Greek inscription, then it could well represent a Nabataean version of a familiar Latin formula.

Either:

Salve, Zeno, Caiamati fili, Tribune felix semper!

Or:

Salutem dat Zeno, Caiamati filius, Tribunus felix semper.

SLM. ZYNWN. BR. QYMT. KLYRK. BTB. L'LM.



1)



2)

1) The Hisma Greek inscription
2) The Wadi Musa (Tetha) inscription