

LEAH DI SEGNI

ON A DATED INSCRIPTION FROM RAKHLE AND THE ERAS USED ON THE
HERMON RANGE

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In discussing the identity of Julia Crispina, the Roman lady who acted as guardian of an orphan in two documents of the Babatha archive, Tal Ilan suggested that she was princess Berenice's granddaughter, based on the supposed rarity of Crispina's father's name, Berenicianus.¹ This name would have come into existence when the Herodian princess named her son after herself. In order to prove her point, Ilan considered the occurrence of the name Berenicianus in dated inscriptions. One, discovered at Rakhle on Mount Hermon, mentions a Βερνικιανὸς ἱερεὺς and its dating formula was read by Renan ἔτους δμτ' Ξανδικοῦ ἐπὶ ἀρχῆς Ἀβιλάνου.² In the computerized information of the Oxford *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* the inscription was dated 32 CE, on the assumption that the era used was the Seleucid era of 312 BCE.³

The date 32 CE was in contrast with Ilan's contention that the son of Berenice was the first man to bear the name Berenicianus; therefore she proceeded to correct the date by pointing out that ἐπὶ ἀρχῆς Ἀβιλανοῦ would mean 'in the time of the sovereignty of Abila', i.e., according to the era of Abila. This would be Abila in Transjordan (Abila of the Decapolis) which had a Pompeian era of 63 BCE, known through coins.⁴ Therefore Ilan dated the inscription to 281/2 CE.

Two objections, however, must be raised. First, ἐπὶ ἀρχῆς Ἀβιλανοῦ cannot possibly mean 'in the time of the sovereignty of Abila': this well-known formula indicates the tenure of an eponym magistrate and Ἀβιλανός (or perhaps Ἀβιδανός, according to Fossey's edition?) must be a personal name. Second, even if a reference to the city of Abila should be taken for granted, the only Abila than can be logically meant in this area would be not Abila of the Decapolis, but Abila of Lysanias (Suk el-Barada in Lebanon), whose era is not known. In any case, there is no imaginable reason for Abila of Lysanias for having had a Pompeian era.⁵ Therefore, we are left with two possible eras for this inscription: the Seleucid era, used in Damascus and in several dated inscriptions around Rakhle – some further away from Damascus – or the era of Sidon (111 or 110 BCE), used in Rakhle, Kafr Kuk and other sites in the Hermon Range (see below).

¹ T. Ilan, "Julia Crispina, Daughter of Berenicianus, a Herodian Princess in the Babatha Archive: A Case Study in Historical Identification", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 82, 3-4, 1992, 361-381. The documents in question were published by N. Lewis, *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of the Letters: Greek Papyri*, Jerusalem 1989, 90-91, 108-110, nos. 20 and 25.

² The inscription was first published in W. H. Waddington and P. Le Bas, *Voyage archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure: Inscriptions et explications* II, Paris, 1870, no. 2557 c. Waddington did not copy the date, the reading of which was uncertain. Later Renan tentatively read the figure ΔΜΤ (E. Renan, "Note additionnelle à la page 81", *Mémoires de l'Institut Impérial de France: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 26, 1870, 559-560). As we shall see below, it was published again with some corrections by C. Fossey, "Inscriptions de Syrie", *BCH* 21, 1897, 64-65, no. 75, followed by S. Applebaum, "A Selection of Inscriptions from the Temples and Villages of Mount Hermon", in S. Dar, ed., *The Settlements of Mount Hermon in Antiquity*, Tel Aviv, 1988, 37, no. 8 (Hebrew).

³ Ilan, art. cit., 376; cf. *SEG* 42, 1783

⁴ Or rather at any time between autumn 64 and autumn 62 BCE: see A. Stein, *Studies in Greek and Latin Inscriptions on the Palestinian coinage under the Principate*, PhD Diss., University of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, 1990, 30-33.

⁵ See A. Alt, "Die Zeitrechnung der Tempelinschriften des Hermongebiets", *ZDPV* 62, 1939, 209-220; Id., "Neues über die Zeitrechnung der Inschriften des Hermongebiets", *ZDPV* 70, 1954, 142-146. Leucas, mistakenly identified by some scholars with Abila Lysaniae, has a Caesarian era: *BMC Syria*, LXXVIII-IX, 296-297.

But a third and more important point must be made. Neither the editors of the Oxford *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* nor Ilan are apparently aware that the inscription was copied again and re-published in a corrected form by Fossey.⁶ His reading is as follows:

	ΕΤΟΥΣΔΡΤ	Ἔτους δρτ'
	ΞΑΝΔΙΚΟΥΕΠ	Ξανδικού ἐπ-
	ΙΑΡΧΗCΑΒΙΔ	ὶ ἀρχῆς Ἀβιδ-
4	ΑΑΝΟΥΒΕΕΛΙΑΒΟΥ	αανού Βεελιάβου
	ΑΜCΑΙΟΥΙΕΡΟΤΑΜΙΑ	[C]αμσαίου ἱεροταμία
	ΚΑΙΒΕΡΝΙΚΙΑΝΟΥ	καὶ Βερνικιανού
	ΙΕΡΕΥCΑΝΕΝΕΩΘ	ἱερέως ἀνενεώθ-
8	ΗΕΚΠΕΡΙCΕΙΩΝ	ἡ ἐκ περι(σ)είων
	CΥΝCΤΥ	σὺν στύ-
	ΛΟΙC	λοις.

Fossey thus read the date 394 and reckoned it – mistakenly, as we have already pointed out – according to a Pompeian era of 64. Having inadvertently made his calculation on the basis of the figure 392, instead of 394 which appears in the inscription, he reached AD 328/9 (instead of 330/1). However, the date should be reckoned by the era of Sidon, which would give AD 283/4 or 284/5, or by the Seleucid era, in which case the inscription would be dated 82/3 AD. It is impossible to choose between the two options without an examination of the palaeographic appearance of the inscription. Neither date is incompatible with Ilan's theory about the originality of the name given by Berenice to her son, for even if the earlier date is accepted, the priest Berenicianus may well have been a contemporary of the princess's son.

It may be useful to list here some dated inscriptions found in the Hermon region. The eras used in the vicinity are: the Seleucid era in the territory of Damascus, the era of Sidon, the era of Paneas, represented in the southern part of Mount Hermon, where the city of Caesarea-Paneas was founded by Herod Philip in 2 BCE, and two different regnal eras of King Agrippa II (56 and 61 AD) which appear on coins and in inscriptions within the boundaries of his reign.⁷ In some uncertain cases, other eras – the Tyrian eras of 274 and 126 BCE, and the era of Beyrut of 81 BCE – must also be considered. Here follows a list of dated inscriptions from the Hermon range (from north to south).

1. Deir el-'Ashayir: Ἔτους βμσ'.⁸ Fossey, followed by Applebaum, converted AE 242 into AD 178/9, according to a Pompeian era of 64 BCE. But there is no reason why a Pompeian era should be used in this area: the nearest cities with such an era are in the northern Decapolis: Hippos in southern Golan, Dium and Canatha in southern Hauran.⁹ Therefore Alt¹⁰ suggested that the era used in this inscription, as well as in others from Rahle and Kafr Kuk, was the era of Sidon, 111 or 110 BCE, which would date this text to AD 131/2 or 132/3.

⁶ See above, n. 2. Fossey observed that the copy made by Girald de Rialle and used by Waddington was 'incomplète et inexacte'. Applebaum, loc. cit., follows Fossey's reading and dating.

⁷ E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, A new English version revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Black, Edinburgh 1973-1987, I, 473, n. 8; 481, n. 45.

⁸ C. Warren, *PEF* 1872, 329; C. Fossey, *BCH* 21, 1897, 64, no. 74; S. Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 33, no. 1. Applebaum's copy has βομ', a misprint for βμσ'.

⁹ Cf. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People* II, 130-136, 140-142, 148-149. The mistake may have originated from a false identification of Abila of the Decapolis (Abila east of Gadara: Schürer II, 136-137) with Abila-Abel Beth Ma'achah near Paneas or with Abila of Lysanias.

¹⁰ See n. 5.

2. Kafr Kuk: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΙΤ'.¹¹ Fossey read 'Year 300', taking the mark before T for a word-divider, which is unlikely. He converted the date by the Pompeian era of 64, to AD 236/7. Alt on the other hand suggested the era of Sidon. The unexplained mark might be a *qoppa*, in which case the Seleucid era is also an option.

3. Rakhle: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΔΦΤ' Ξανδικοῦ is the inscription discussed above.

4. Rakhle: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΔΥ' Πανήμου,¹² is either 92/3, by the Seleucid era, or 292/3 or 293/4 by the era of Sidon.

5. Rakhle: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΖΥ', on a funeral bust. Mouterde dates the inscription to 296/7 or 297/8 by the era of Sidon.¹³

6. Rakhle: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΟΦ' ΜΗΝΟΣ Λώου. Mouterde dates this 258/9, by the Seleucid era.¹⁴

7. Ayeha: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΒΣ', building inscription of a temple.¹⁵ A dating by the Seleucid era would bring us to 111/10 BCE, much too early for the palaeographic appearance of the script. On the other hand, the era of Sidon gives AD 91/2 or 92/3, which is consistent with the shape of the letters.

8. Burqush: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΖΟΥ'. Mouterde dates this epitaph AD 185/6 by the Seleucid era, since in his opinion the era of Sidon would bring us to the late 4th century, too late for the palaeography of the script.¹⁶ Again, the lack of a good reproduction prevents us from taking a stand on the question.

9. 'Ein Horsha: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΚΚΥ', a dedication 'to the ancestral god'. Mouterde dated it AD 114/5 by the Seleucid era, because a dating by the era of Sidon would fall in the 4th century, too late for the appearance and wording of the inscription.¹⁷ Recently a dating by the old Tyrian era of 274 BCE has been suggested, giving AD 152/3.¹⁸ Since there is no evidence of the use of this era in the Hermon region, this option does not seem very likely.

10. 'Ein 'Ata: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΓΛΜ according to Applebaum, who interpreted 'Year 73', or AD 9, by the Pompeian era.¹⁹ This manner of rendering the figure 70 would be very strange indeed; however, a good photograph of the inscription, kindly provided by S. Dar, clearly shows ΓΛC, with a square *sigma*. Year 233 is probably 122/3 or 123/4 by the era of Sidon.

11. 'Ein 'Ata: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΕΟΤ'. Mouterde dated this epitaph 63/4 by the Seleucid era, since in his opinion a dating by the era of Sidon (AD 264-265) was too late for the palaeographic appearance of the script.²⁰ Without a reproduction of the inscription, we are in no position to dispute the point.

12. Buday near 'Ein 'Ata: Ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) γ' ἔτους ων'.²¹ Year 850 of the Seleucid era corresponds to AD 538/9; the 3rd indiction began on September 1, 539.

13. Qal'at Jendal: ἜΤΟΥΣ ΔΦΦ', dedication of a sacred niche to Zeus by a pagan priest.²² The date can only be 282/3 by the Seleucid era.

¹¹ Waddington, no. 2557d; Fossey, *BCH* 21, 1897, 65, no. 76.

¹² Waddington, no. 2557 b.

¹³ R. Mouterde, "Antiquités de l'Hermon et de la Beqâ'", *MUSJ* 29, 1951-1952, 35, no. 5.

¹⁴ R. Mouterde, "Cultes antiques de la Syrie et du Liban, V. Sanctuaires de l'Hermon", *MUSJ* 36, 1959, 78-81, no. 17; *SEG* 18, 612; Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 36, no. 6.

¹⁵ C. Warren, *PEF* 1869-1870, 328; Mouterde, *MUSJ* 29, 1951-1952, 33, no. 4.

¹⁶ Mouterde, *MUSJ* 29, 1951-1952, 36, no. 6.

¹⁷ Mouterde, *MUSJ* 29, 1951-1952, 30, no. 2.

¹⁸ S. Dar and N. Kokkinos, "The Greek Inscriptions from Senaim on Mount Hermon", *PEQ* 124, 1992, 16. The authors mistakenly give the date of the inscription as 429, AD 156/7 by the old Tyrian era.

¹⁹ Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 38, no. 10.

²⁰ Mouterde, *MUSJ* 29, 1951-1952, 24, no. 1.

²¹ Mouterde, *MUSJ* 36, 1959, 66, no. 9; *SEG* 18, 607.

²² Fossey, *BCH* 21, 1897, 61-63, no. 72; Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 41, no. 18.

14. el-Burj near Qal'at Jendal: a dedication to the goddess Leucothea, for the preservation of Trajan: based on the emperor's titulature, the date falls between 103 and 116.²³ This inscription bears no evidence about the question of eras, but indicates that, as early as the beginning of the 2nd century, even in the most remote areas of Mount Hermon acculturation kept pace with other more Romanized regions.

15. Rime: "ΕΤΟΥΣ ιϕ',²⁴ AD 198/9 by the Seleucid era.

16. 'Arne: "ΕΤΟΥΣ αμχ',²⁵ AD 329/30 by the Seleucid era.

17. Nebi Ham: "ΕΤΟΥΣ δπυ', dedication to 'the Lord Mercurius'.²⁶ AD 172/3 by the Seleucid era.

18. Har Senaim: "ΕΤΟΥΣ ΜΓ, fragment of altar from the lower temple.²⁷ This, as the other inscriptions from Har Senaim, was read by Kokkinos from a photograph. Supposing the reading of the date to be correct, he excluded the Seleucid era, the two eras of Tyre and the era of Sidon as giving too early a date for the palaeography. Year 43 by the era of Agrippa would give AD 97/8, according to a new chronology of the king proposed by Kokkinos, or 98/9 by the era of 56. However, the palaeography of the inscription suggests a later period. Therefore Kokkinos proposes the era of Bostra as the best alternative, giving a date between March 22, 148 and March 21, 149. He argues that, although Mount Hermon was outside the Arabian borders, this era was extensively used at the time, and its occurrence at Senaim may only mean that the dedicator of the altar came to visit the cult place from Arabia.

The dating by the regnal year of Agrippa is not impossible, if we can believe Photius' date of Agrippa's death, in the third year of Trajan, AD 100.²⁸ But the palaeography of the inscription does not fit either the first or the second half of the 1st century, and both a dating by the era of Paneas (AD 41/2), or by the regnal era of Agrippa II (ca. 98) must in all likelihood be rejected. However, the palaeography does not fit the mid-2nd century any better: in fact, it rather suggests a late 3rd or even better an early 4th century date. Judging by a good original photo kindly provided by S. Dar, the figure could be read MT instead of ΜΓ: this would give AD 338/9 by the era of Paneas, in whose territory the sanctuary of Senaim was located. Judging from the ceramic and numismatic finds, the temple was still fully active in this period.²⁹

19. Paneas: several inscription dated by the era of the city (2 BCE).³⁰

This list shows that different eras were used in the area of Mount Hermon. The Seleucid era is prevalent, but the era of Paneas is also represented on the southern slopes, and the era of Sidon on the western slopes; on the contrary, there is no reason to suspect the presence of a Pompeian era or of the era of *provincia Arabia*. The occurrence of two different eras in some sites (Rakhle, 'Ein 'Ata) shows that the choice was due rather to cultural and/or economic influence than to political borders.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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²³ Fossey, *BCH* 19, 1985, 383-386; C. Clermont Ganneau, *RAO* 2, 1898, 64; Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 41, no. 18 A.

²⁴ Mouterde, *MUSJ* 36, 1959, 82-83, no. 19; *SEG* 18, 614.

²⁵ Fossey, *BCH* 21, 1897, 63-64, no. 73; Mouterde, *MUSJ* 36, 1959, 83-84, no. 20; *SEG* 18, 615; Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 37, no. 9.

²⁶ D. Krencker and W. Zschietzschmann, *Römische Tempel in Syrien*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1938, 249; Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 44, no. 23.

²⁷ Applebaum, "Inscr. Hermon", 45, no. 24; S. Dar and N. Kokkinos, *PEQ* 124, 1992, 16-17, no. 3, fig. 6; P.-L. Gatier, *BE* 1993, 629; *SEG* 42, 1410.

²⁸ Photius, *Bibl.* 33, citing Justus of Tiberias. Photius' statement is considered unreliable by modern historians, who predominantly fix the king's death about 92/3. For a negative evaluation of Photius' statement, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People* I, 481-483, n. 47. But a recently published weight bears the date: ("ΕΤΟΥΣ) μγ' βασιλέως μεγάλου 'Αγρίππα: *SEG* 38, 1647.

²⁹ On the lower temple of Mount Senaim, see S. Dar, *Settlements and Cult Sites on Mount Hermon, Israel*, BAR International Series 589, Oxford, 1993, 56-62.

³⁰ Waddington, nos. 1891, 1893, 1894.