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► **To cite this version:**

Pierre-Louis Gatier, Nabil Bader, Julien Aliquot, Maurice Sartre, Jean-Baptiste Yon. Greek inscriptions in the Jordan Museum. *Ḥawliyyat dā irat al-ātār al-’ammaṭ* = Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 2017, 58, pp.341-350. halshs-01708618

HAL Id: halshs-01708618

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01708618>

Submitted on 31 Jan 2020

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GREEK INSCRIPTIONS IN THE JORDAN MUSEUM

Pierre-Louis Gatier, Nabil Bader, Julien Aliquot, Maurice Sartre and Jean-Baptiste Yon

Recently built in the new downtown area of Ras al-Ayn in Amman, the Jordan Museum houses a selection of Greek inscriptions discovered at different sites, from Gadara in the north to Petra in the south. Some of these texts are well known to specialists. Others are unpublished. The aim of this article is to present researchers and visitors to the museum with a collection that reflects the wealth of Jordanian epigraphical heritage. Our work is also a contribution to the Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Jordan programme (*Inscriptions de la Jordanie*), which has received renewed accreditation with the DoA and is part of the IGLS project (*Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, ‘Syrie’ being understood here in its ancient meaning of ‘Near East’ <http://www.hisoma.mom.fr/recherche-et-activites/inscriptions-grecques-et>).

Our team studied the inscribed objects in the museum in 2013 and 2015. The inscriptions are presented in geographical order, from north to south. Each of them is described, transcribed, translated and illustrated by one or several photos. Short comments detail their historical and archaeological context.

1. Building Inscription, 3rd century AD (After 212 AD)

Jordan Museum, inv. UQ 360; formerly in the museum of Umm Qays. From Umm Qays, ancient Gadara; reused in a wall near the ‘podium building’ (Weber 2002: 332-334, no BD 10). Marble base bearing traces of the lower part of an animal statuette; on the lateral sides, two mortices with remains of a metallic tenon. Dim.: 21 x 38 x 25 cm. Height of the block with the statue: 36 cm. Height of letters: 2 - 3 cm (**Fig. 1**).

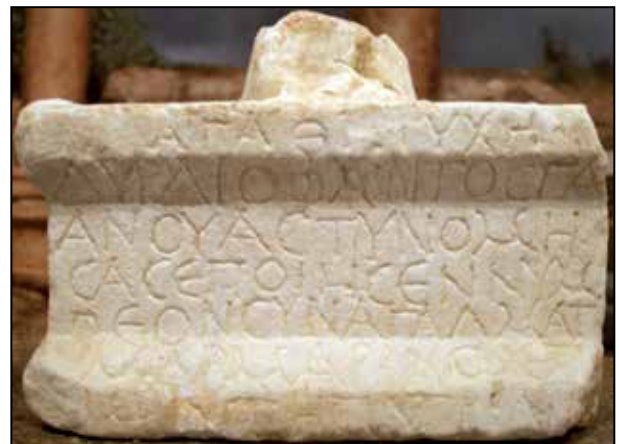
Bibliography: Weber 2002: 286-287, no IS 14 (P.-L. Gatier, *AE* 2002, no 1548; *SEG* 52, no 1622). Cf. P.-L. Gatier, *Bull. ép.* 2003, no 585.

Ἀγαθῆ Τύχη ·
Αὐρ(ήλιος) Διόφαντος Γα[ι]-
ανοῦ ἀστυνομή-
4 σας ἐποίησεν νυμ-
φέον σὺν ἀγάλματι
μαρμαρίνω ἐξ ἰ-
δίων τῆ πατρίδι.

Translation: “Good Fortune, Aurelius Diophantos, son of Gaianos, being *astynomos*, made the nymphaeum with the marble statue at his own expense for the fatherland.”

The inscription reminds the reader of the offering of a monumental fountain by a rich magistrate. The building was partially cleared north of the Gadara decumanus near the market basilica (Weber 2002: 145, no BD 11).

The donator, Aurelius Diophantos, was a Roman citizen. His father, Gaianos, had a common Latin



1. Building inscription from Umm Qays, ancient Gadara, 3rd century AD (after 212 AD).

name, derived from the *praenomen* Gaius. If he was not a Roman citizen himself, he was at least Romanised. The *nomen* Aurelius implies a date in the 3rd century AD (after 212 AD).

Astynomoi were civic officials responsible for the repair and maintenance of buildings and roads. They were in charge of tasks such as boundary disputes, waste collection, house-planning or street repairs. There are few other examples in the Near East: three in Bostra (Sartre 1982, nos 9008-9009, 9028) and one in Gerasa (*AE* 2008, no 1564 = *SEG* 58, no 1772). The latter is very similar to Diophantos' offering, since it is a dedication of a statue of the god Dionysos intended for a fountain.

2. Mosaic Dedication from al-Husn Church, 535 AD

Jordan Museum, inv. IR 36. From al-Husn (1995), south of Irbid. Rectangular panel; inscription in a tabula ansata designed with red, brown and black *tesselae*. Black letters on white background; red cross at the beginning, small *omicron*, abbreviation marks (two small red letters, S-shaped signs), horizontal strokes above numerals. Frame: 32 x 237 cm. Height of letters: 4 - 8 cm (**Fig. 2**).

Bibliography: Al-Muheisen and TARRIER 1997: 493, text in capital letters, with an additional commentary by M. Piccirillo on page 494 (Michel 2001: 422; *SEG* 47, no 2064).

Cf. D. Feissel, *Bull. ép.* 1999, no 577 (= Feissel 2006, no 862); Piccirillo 2005: 385-386.

† Θεία χάριτι ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁσ (ιωτάτου) Ἰωάννου ἀρχιεπισκ(όπου)σπου|δῆ Κυριακοῦθεοσ(εβεστάτου) πρε(σβυτέρου) (καὶ) παραμο(ναρίου) ἐψηφώθη ὁ ναὸς| οὗτος μη(νι) Ἀρτεμησίου ἀ', χρ(ονοῖς) ιγ', τοῦ υλ' ἔ[τ]ους Ἡλίας στρατ(ῶν).

L. 3. τοῦ υλ'ε', translated "year 430" (edd. pr.). The letters CTPAT followed by an abbreviation mark could be the beginning of the word στρατ(ηγός), στρατ(ιώτης) or στρατ(ηλάτης). Previous editors have opted for the reading στρατ(ηγός), but see commentary below.

Translation: "By divine grace, under the most pious archbishop John, by the zeal of the pious priest and *paramonarios* Kyriakos, this church was paved with mosaics, on the 1st of the month Artemisios, in the time of the 13th indiction, in the year 430 (= 21 April 535 AD); Elias, strat—."

The invocation to the divine grace is well attested on mosaics from the same region (see Gatier 1986, no 74, from Mount Nebo, dated 531 AD).

John, archbishop of Bostra, is mentioned in *ca* 539 / 540 AD (Sartre 1982, nos 9128-9134, dated 434 or 435 of the provincial era, beginning on 22 March 106 AD; see Feissel 1989: 821-822). The name of the archbishop, the order of the alphanumerical signs and the date according to the computation of the *Provincia Arabia* fit well together and clearly show that al-Husn belonged to the territory of Bostra, metropolis of the province. It shows the large size of the territory of Bostra, which extended far to the south and the west.

Elias must have been the donator of the mosaic. His function is not well defined. If he was *strategos*, he may have been governor of the province (cf. e.g. *SEG* 37, no 1271: epigram in honour of a *strategos*, Mousaios, who was probably the provincial governor of Cilicia). Both *strategos* and *stratelates* translate the Latin title *magister militum*, which refers to senior military officers (Landelle 2014). One Elias was for instance *magister militum* in Egypt in 539 AD (*PLRE* 2, p. 437, Elias 3). However, for a person of distinction, we would expect a clearer description. A modest dedication at a secondary



2. Mosaic dedication from al-Husn church, 535 AD.

site like al-Husn may rather point to another function, that of *stratiôtes* or “soldier”. We know of a good parallel at Jericho, where another soldier, Μαγνιανός στρατιώτ(ης) (*SEG* 37, no 1492), gave a mosaic to the church of Saint Andrew. Another solution would be to consider *strategos* as a translation of *duumvir*, referring to the leading magistrate of the Roman colony of Bostra. However, it would be a little late for such an occurrence (for a late example at Heliopolis Baalbek in 430 / 431 AD see Rey-Coquais 1967, no 2831, with D. Feissel, *Bull. ép.* 1994, no 645). Without further information, it may be better to leave the abbreviation as it stands.

The personal name, Elias, was very common in the Byzantine period. See below, no7.

3. Mosaic from Khirbat Daraiyya Church, Byzantine Period

Jordan Museum, inv. JMA 215 (formerly IR 11). From Khirbat Daraiyya. Mosaic pavement from the church of SS Kosmas and Damianos (also partly preserved in the Irbid Museum). Height of letters: 7 - 8 cm (**Fig. 3**).

Bibliography: Karasneh 1997: 21-36 (*SEG* 57, nos 1841-1846, with further references and comments by L. Di Segni).

Cf. Michel 2001: 135-136.

Name of a donor (*SEG* 57, no 1843): Δανιήλ, i.e. “Daniel”.

The standing figures of four donors have been badly defaced, most probably during the iconophobic crisis.

4. Dedication from Jarash, Roman Imperial Period

Jordan Museum, inv. G. 1196. From Jarash, ancient Gerasa. Small horned limestone altar. Dim.: 22 x 13.5 x 13.5 cm. Dice: 6.5 x 11 x 11 cm. Height of letters: 1.5 cm (**Fig. 4**).

Unpublished.

Ἀρτεμι-
δώρα ἄ-
νέθη-

4 κεν.



3. Mosaic from Khirbat Daraiyya church, Byzantine period.



4. Dedication from Jarash, ancient Gerasa, Roman imperial period.

Translation: “Artemidora consecrated (this).”

This very simple votive altar is an example of the small offerings that lower class individuals were accustomed to dedicating to the gods. The offering was paid for by Artemidora, whose name means “gift of Artemis”. At Gerasa, personal names paying honour to Artemis, one of the two main divinities of the city, are relatively scarce. The absence of her father’s name is an indication of the low status of Artemidora.

5. Signature of the Alexandrian Sculptor Antoninus on A Statue, Roman Imperial Period

Jordan Museum. From Jarash, ancient Gerasa; found in the northern courtyard of the Eastern Baths compound. White marble fragment. Lower portion of a statue of a figure standing on a rock, very likely Apollo Kitharoidos or a Muse. ‘Oval alphabet’ (Welles 1938: 363). Dim.: 37 x 38 x 57 cm. Height of letters: 1.5 - 2 cm (Fig. 5a-c).

Bibliography: Donderer 2001: 178, no 6 (*SEG* 51, no 2047); Friedland 2001: 468-471, Greek text in capital letters, photo, fig. 9-11; Weber 2002: 487-488, no C 6; Friedland 2003: 439-442, no 3, capital letters, photo, fig. 3; Weber 2004: 225-226, capital letters, photo, fig. 6a-b.

Cf. Weber 1990: 50, mention (*SEG* 40, no 1392).

Ἀντωνεῖ-
 νος Ἄντι-
 όχου Ἀλε-
 4 ξανδρεὺς,
 ό αὐτός ἐποίηι.

L. 5. The two words ό αὐτός, “hi mself”,

seem to be a later addition carved by the sculptor on the left side of the panel.

Translation: “Antoninus, son of Antiochos, from Alexandria: he made (this) himself.”

This inscription is one of the very rare



5(a)



5(b)



5(c)

5. Signature of the Alexandrian sculptor Antoninus on a statue from Jarash, ancient Gerasa, Roman imperial period: (a) front; (b) right side; (c) left side.

sculptor's signatures in the Near East. The white marble was quarried on the island of Thasos, according to an analysis (Friedland 2001: 471). Another inscription shows the signature of the same sculptor on a base that probably supported the statue. Donderer (2001: 178-179, no 7 [SEG 51, no 2048]) published the last two lines: Ἀντονῖνος Ἀντιόχου Ἀλεξανδρεὺς | ἠργάσατο. The full text of this second inscription was published in capital letters by Weber (2004: 226). It is a dedication of a statue offered by a Gerasene, Lysias, son of Ariston, to the city of Gerasa, his homeland, in the year 181 or 281 of the Gerasene era (118 / 119 or 218 / 219 AD). According to Weber (2004), the first date would fit more accurately with the slight remains of the hundreds digit. Without knowing of the second inscription, and based only on stylistic comparanda of the statue and of the shape of the letters, Friedland (2001, 2003) suggested that the statue was sculpted in the late second or early third century AD. The personal names of the donor, devoid of Roman influence, are more consistent with Weber's hypothesis.



6. Epitaph of the slave Eutyches, from Jarash, ancient Gerasa, early 2nd century AD.

6. Epitaph of the Slave Eutyches, Early 2nd Century AD

Jordan Museum, inv. G 1232. From Jarash, ancient Gerasa. Gabled white limestone stele with a triangular tympanum. On the tympanum, a rosette in low relief; text inside a square moulded panel. Punctuation: *hedera* (L. 6). Dim.: 64 x 44 x 10.5 cm. Height of letters: 1 - 3 cm (Fig. 6).

Unpublished.

Χαῖρε σοὶ καὶ ὁ
ἀναγινώσκων ·
Μ(ἄρκος) Οὐλπίος Σώφρων
4 Σεβ(αστοῦ) ἀπελευθέρως ἐποίη-
σεν Εὐτύχη τῆ ἰδίῳ δούλῳ
ἀξίῳ γενομῶ
ζήσαντι ἔτη
8 ιθ'.

L. 1. ἀναγινώσκων for ἀναγιννώσκων. L. 5. τῆ for τῷ. L. 6. γενομῶ for γενομένῳ.

Translation: “Farewell, to you and to the reader, Marcus Ulpus Sophron, imperial freedman, made (this) for Eutyches, his own slave, who was worthy of it and who lived 19 years.”

This fine and well-carved tombstone is a good example of the bonds that linked some slaves and their masters. Marcus Ulpus Sophron, the master, was one of several imperial freedmen and slaves who held a position in the financial office of *Provincia Arabia*, under the authority of the equestrian procurator at Gerasa. This province is remarkable because the two heads of the Roman administration were located in two different towns: the governor at Bostra and the procurator at Gerasa. When he was a slave, Sophron had a simple Greek name (“Wise”, “Temperate”), very appropriate for his function of clerk. He was certainly freed by the Emperor Trajan (Marcus Ulpus Trajanus), whose *cognomen* and *nomen* he obtained while becoming a freedman and Roman citizen.

Eutyches (“Well-chanced”, “Fortunate”) is a name frequently given to slaves. At Gerasa, an altar was dedicated by Parthenios, son of another Eutyches, in 158 AD (Welles 1938, no 124); both father and son have names which look servile. The Latin inscription on the funerary altar of a third Eutyches, “freedman of the emperors”, points to the same social milieu of Greek- and Latin-speaking slaves or ex-slaves with strong financial skills (Welles 1938, no 210).

7. Christian Dedication by Elias, Byzantine Period

Jordan Museum. From Kfayr Abu Sarbut (al-Khattabiyya), 4 km north of Madaba. Mosaic floor of one of the two Byzantine churches discovered in this village. The pavement is partly destroyed: a tree with a bird in the branches and a ram on the left are the only remains under the two short lines of the inscription. Inscribed part: 18 x 96 cm. Height of letters: 8 cm (Fig. 7).

Bibliography: Gatier 1986, no 114, photo, pl. 23 (Michel 2001: 363).

Κ(ύρι)ε, πρόσδεξε τὴν
προσφ(ορὰν) τοῦ δούλου Ἐλίου.

Translation: “Lord, receive the gift of your servant Elias.”

Elias was one of the most popular names in the Madaba region and in the whole Near East during the Byzantine period. See above, no 2.



7. Mosaic dedication from Kfayr Abu Sarbut church (al-Khattabiyya), near Madaba, Byzantine period.

8. Christian Prayer Addressed to Saint Sergios, Byzantine Period

Jordan Museum, inv. M 4875. From Umm al-Rsas, ancient *Kastron Mephaa*; discovered by the Swiss mission inside the northern church of the Byzantine fortress (*castrum*). Candelabra (*polycandelon*) in cast brass. Diameter: 21 cm. Thickness: 0.4 cm. Height of letters: 1 cm (Fig. 8).

Bibliography: Rey 1992 (D. Feissel, *Bull. ép.* 1993, no 646; *SEG* 42, no 1494; Michel 2001: 415).

† Ἅγιε Σέργι βοήθι Θωμᾶ, ἀμίν.

Translation: “Saint Sergios, help Thomas, amen.”

This object belongs to a well-known series of lamp-bearers, common in Near Eastern Byzantine churches. The so-called ‘church of the rivers’, where it was discovered, must have been dedicated to Saint Sergios. The cult of Saint Sergios, martyr in Sergiopolis (Resafa in Syria), was widespread in the Byzantine provinces of Arabia and Syria. Thomas donated the object.



8. Christian Inocation addressed to Saint Sergios on a polycandelon, from Umm ar-Rasas, ancient *Kastron Mephaa*, Byzantine period (photo courtesy of the Jordan Museum).

9. Christian Epitaph of Esdou, Son of the lector Georgios, 661 AD

Jordan Museum, inv. K 239. Karak region. Rectangular tombstone, made of light whiteish-yellow limestone with brownish-yellow patina; intact, apart from some modern breaks and scratches. Rear side slightly convex. Decoration of crosses, mouldings and ripples on the upper part of the monument and below the text. The text is well engraved inside a recessed frame, rounded on top. S-shaped abbreviation marks (L. 5 - 7), horizontal strokes above numerals (L. 7 - 9). Dim.: 56x 30x 16 cm. Inscribed frame: 39x 22 cm. Height of letters: 1.5 - 3.5 cm (**Fig. 9**).

Unpublished.

† Ἐνθά-
 δε κῆτε
 Εσδου Γε-
 4 ωργίου, ἀνα-
 γ(νόστου),
 ζήσας ἔτη
 8 ζ', τελ(ευτήσας) ἐν
 μ(ηνὶ) Δίῳ τοῦ
 ἔτους φνς'.

Translation: “Here lies Esdou, son of the lector Georgios, who lived 7 years and died in the month Dios, in the year 556 (= October / November 661 AD).”

Most of the inscriptions from the Karak plateau (ancient Moab) are short Late Antique Greek epitaphs engraved on rectangular tombstones made of local limestone and adorned with Christian symbols (Canova 1954; Aliquot, Weber and Shdaifat 2014, with bibliography). Their features, the shape of their letters, abbreviations and ligatures are generally characteristic of the period ranging from the mid-fourth to the mid-seventh centuries AD. Their dates have to be calculated according to the provincial era of Arabia, which was used in the land of Moab as everywhere else in Palaestina Tertia (formerly the southern part of *Provincia Arabia*) in Byzantine times. The tombstone in the Jordan



9. Epitaph of Esdou, son of the lector Georgios, from Karak region, 661 AD.

Museum is one of the latest monuments of its kind, since it was engraved in the Islamic period (Gatier 2012: 8, with an updated list of a handful of comparable documents from the same area, at most between six and fourteen epitaphs). The name of the child, Esdou, is an undeclined Greek transliteration of a Semitic name (comparable to Esdaos at Umm al-Jimal, cf. Bader 2009: 146, no 229). However, his father's name is extremely common and reminds us of the popularity of the soldier-martyr Saint George amongst the Christian population. More remarkable is the profession of the deceased's father: Georgios was a lector, i.e. an ecclesiastical reader, who read scripture and lessons in church services. This adds to the evidence for continuity of Christian rites in the land of Moab under the Umayyads.

10. Epitaph of Theodoros, Son of Alphios, 2nd / 3rd Century AD

Jordan Museum, inv. JMA 1092 (formerly JP 5839). Found along the Ayl - Tayyiba road, south-east of Petra. Tombstone of reddish sandstone, worn on top and scratched on the surface; rough-hewn base. Inscription inside a

hatched frame. Abbreviation mark < (L. 4). The narrow letters BOY were seemingly added at the end of L. 5 and topped by a small lambda. Dim.: 80 x 23 x 26 cm. Height of letters: 2 - 4 cm (**Fig. 10**).

Unpublished.

[- - -]
 Θεοδώρ-
 ου Ἀλφί-
 4 ου ἐτ(ῶν)
 κη΄ βουλ(ευτοῦ).

Translation: “. . . of Theodoros, son of Alphios, 28 years old, member of the city council.”

The Greek name Theodoros is as common in



10. Epitaph of Theodoros, son of Alphios, from Petra region, ca 2nd / 3rd century AD.

the Near East as in the other Hellenised regions of the Roman world. However, the father’s name is a local one, especially widespread in the southern part of *Provincia Arabia* (Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005: 93-94). It has been suggested that it was the Greek transcription of a common Nabataean name, ḥlfw / ḥlfy / ḥlf, which means “successor”, like the Arabic *khalaf*, “caliph” (for its origin and parallels in various Semitic languages, see Sartre 1985: 172-173, 1993: 127, no 99; cf. Negev 1991: 29-30 with another possible etymology). The spelling ἄλφιός may be influenced by that of the genuine Greek name Ἀλφειός.

The first words of the inscription are lost. We may restore for instance μνημεῖον, “tomb” or “funerary monument”, but an epitaph with the name of the deceased man in the genitive case is also possible. If our understanding βουλ(ευτοῦ) at the end is correct, then the inscription relates to a *bouleutes*, a member of the local *boule*, i.e. the city council of Petra, and it must be dated to after the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom (106 AD). Another epitaph of a *bouleutes* of Petra was found long ago in al-Ji, not far from the area where the present text was discovered (Sartre 1993: 104-105, no 68). As elsewhere, the richest citizens and landowners chose to be buried on their estates rather than on the outskirts of the city.

Acknowledgements

We thank His Excellency Engineer Mr Ihab Amareen (Director of the Jordan Museum), Her Royal Highness Sharifa Nofa Bint Nasser (former Director of the Jordan Museum), Dr Khairieh Amr (Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Technical Affairs) and Dr Yosha al-Amri (Curator) for their enthusiastic support and help in the exhibition halls and store-rooms of the museum.

Pierre-Louis Gatier
 CNRS, UMR 5189 HiSoMA
 Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée
 Lyon, France

pierre-louis.gatier@mom.fr
Nabil Bader
Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology
Yarmuk University
Irbid, Jordan
nabilt@yu.edu.jo

Julien Aliquot
CNRS, UMR 5189 HiSoMA
Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée
Lyon, France
julien.aliquot@mom.fr

Maurice Sartre
Institut universitaire de France
Université François-Rabelais
Tours, France
msartre37@gmail.com

Jean-Baptiste Yon
CNRS, UMR 5189 HiSoMA
Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée
Lyon, France
jean-baptiste.yon@mom.fr

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