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New Greek Inscriptions from Dafyāna in North-East Jordan

Introduction

This article is intended to be a contribution to the corpus of the Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Jordan ('Inscriptions de la Jordanie'). The project is coordinated by Dr. Pierre-Louis Gatier (CNRS Lyon) and Dr. Nabil Bader (Yarmouk University), under the auspices of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA). One of the main goals of the programme, which is shared by the academic team (Nabil Bader and Julien Aliquot) and by the Mafraq Branch of the DoA (Abdulqader Al-Husan), is to complete an epigraphical survey of North-East Jordan. The following study illustrates the first results of a fruitful cooperation in the region. The Greek inscriptions presented here were found in the village of Dafyāna by the Mafraq Branch of the DoA, and are currently preserved in Mafraq. All are simple epitaphs engraved on basalt stelae, similar to previously known inscriptions from the same region. These documents provide new information on settlement history and burial customs in the southern part of Ḥawrān during the Roman Empire (Sartre-Fauriat 2001; Bader 2009). One of them is particularly worthy of note; the inscription records the foundation

of a collective tomb by a junior officer of the Roman army who died in the Black Sea region, but whose body was carried home for burial by his servant in AD 312/313. This inscription is an important addition to the very scant epigraphical evidence of the Tetrarchic province of Diospontus. It also confirms that Dafyāna belonged to the territory of Bostra, the capital of Roman Arabia. While emphasizing the role of this area as a recruitment pool for the Roman army and administration, it also increases the number of documents which provide evidence regarding transportation of dead soldiers' remains to their homeland.

Dafyāna: Current State of Research

Dafyāna (lat. 32.31198 N; long. 36.55995 E; alt. 879 m) is located in southern Ḥawrān, about twenty kilometres east of Umm al-Jimāl, seven kilometres west of Umm al-Quṭṭayn, and thirty kilometres south of Bostra, in neighbouring Syria, slightly away from the ancient Roman road leading from Azraq to Bostra. The archaeological site is integrated within the boundaries of the modern village. It has been explored by several travellers and scholars since

the end of the nineteenth century: H. C. Butler and the Princeton Expedition in 1904-1905 (Butler 1907: 116), N. Glueck (Glueck 1951: 24), G. King (King 1982: 93-94; King, Lenzen and Rollefson 1983: 424), D. Kennedy, H. I. MacAdam and the members of the Southern Ḥawrān Survey in the 1980s and the 1990s (Kennedy, MacAdam and Riley 1986: 150-151; MacAdam and Graf 1989: 177-178). Remains of ancient houses and funerary inscriptions from the Roman period have been found there. N. Bader, who has visited the place in 1991 and 1992, gathered the epigraphical material from Dafyāna in *I. Jordanie* 5.1 (Bader 2009: 307-311, nos. 684-694): eleven inscriptions, all funerary. More recently Dafyāna has become the object of investigation by the Mafraq Branch of the Department of Antiquities, which led to the discovery of previously unknown Roman tombstones in 1996, about 150 m to the west of the village.

Four New Greek Epitaphs

The first three epitaphs are very common. There is no indication of Christian symbols, so must therefore date between the second and the fourth century AD. The majority of the Semitic and Greek names which occur are known in the

Ḥawrān, and on occasion also at Dafyāna. The fourth inscription is much more remarkable (see below for further details).

1. Epitaph of Abgaros, 2nd-4th ca. AD (FIG. 1). Mafraq, DoA Office, inv. no. GI 153. Basalt fragment. Dim.: 35 × 42 × 22 cm. Bibliography: unpublished.

Αβγαρ-
ος Σα-
[- -]

Translation: “Abgaros son of Sa. . .”

Onomastic parallels: *I. Jordanie* 5.1, 383, 423, 530(?), 626, 635, 684 (the last one from Dafyāna).

2. Epitaph of Gomollathe, daughter of Abeibos, 2nd-4th c. AD (FIG. 2). Mafraq, DoA Office. Basalt fragment. Unknown dimensions. Bibliography: unpublished.

Γομολ-
λαθη Αβε-
ιβου.

Translation: “Gomollathe, daughter of Abeibos.”

Onomastic parallels: *I. Jordanie* 5.1, 628 (Αβιβος), 707 (Αβειβος); 6 (Γομολλαθη), 265-269 (Γομολαθη).



1. Epitaph of Abgaros (Photo Credit: Julien Aliquot).



2. Epitaph of Gomollathe, Daughter of Abeibos (Photo Credit: Abdulqader Al-Husan).

3. Epitaph of Theodoros, son of Somenos, 2nd-4th c. AD (FIG. 3). Mafraq, DoA Office. Basalt stele in two fragments. Dim.: 108 × 43 × 18. Height of the letters: 5-7.5 cm. Bibliography: unpublished.

Θεόδ-
ωρος
Σομε-

4 νου

ἔτ(ῶν) κδ´.

Translation: “Theodoros, son of Somenos, 24 years old.”

Onomastic parallels: *I. Jordanie* 5.1, 8, 308, 629 (Θεόδωρος); *PAES* 3A, 685 (Σομενος).

4. Epitaph of Bennios, son of Germanos, AD 312/313 (FIG. 4). Mafraq, DoA Office, inv. no. GI 159. Basalt stele in two fragments. Dim.: 130 × 70 × 20 cm. Height of the letters: 5-6 cm (lines 1-8); 10 cm (line 9). Bibliography: Al-Husan and Aliquot 2015; Tybout 2016: 420 (mention).

Ἐνθάδε πρῶτος
ἐτάφη Βέννις Γερ-
μανοῦ β(ενε)φ(ικιάριος) ἡγεμ(όνος)

4 τελευτήσας ἐν

Διοσπόντῳ κο-
μισθὲν ὑπὸ Σισι-

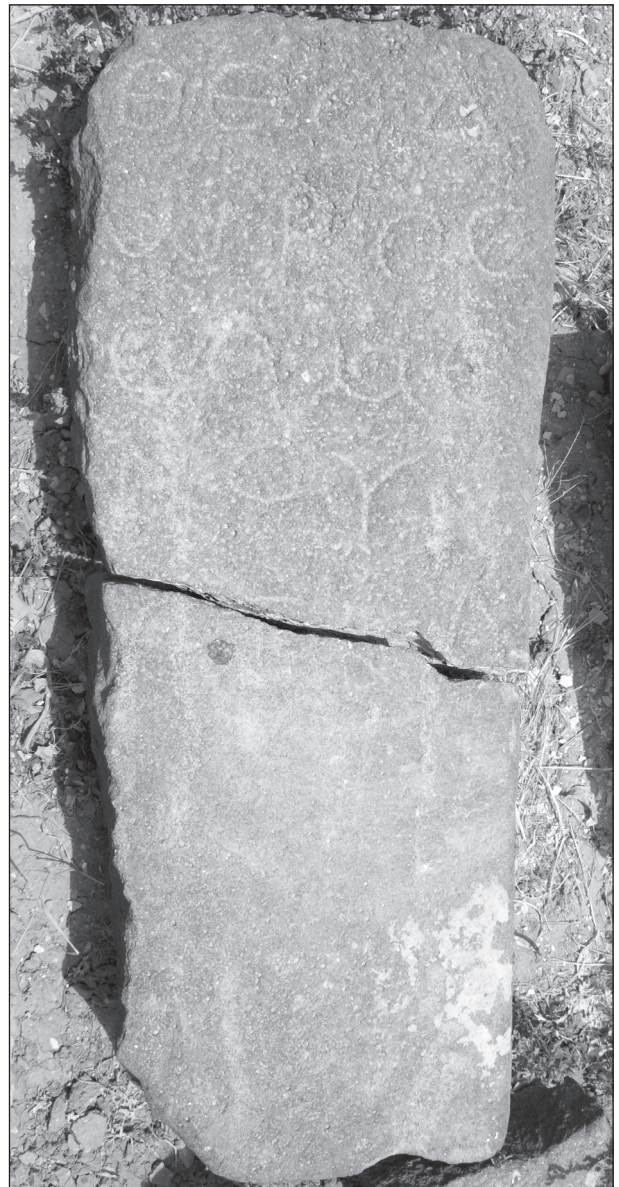
ννίου οἰκέτου

8 ἔτι σζ´ βιώσας

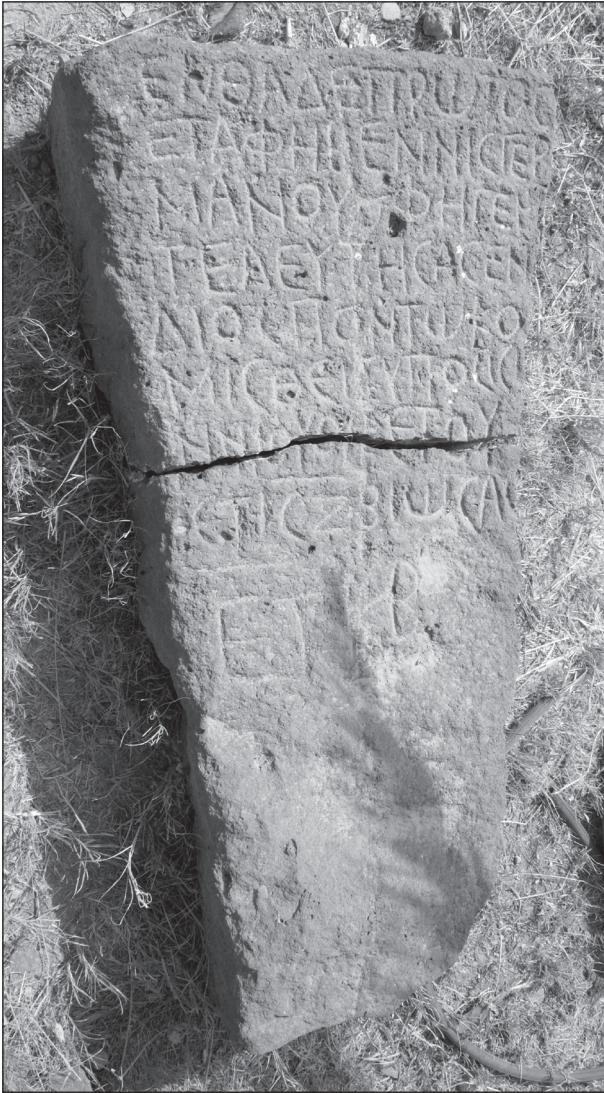
ἔτ(η) κβ´.

Line 3: The reading of β(ενε)φ(ικιάριος) is sure, since the first letter is a beta crossed by an oblique stroke; ὀφ(φικιάλιος) must be rejected, as well as Tybout’s translation (*officialis*).

Translation: “Here first was buried Bennios, son of Germanos, *beneficiarius* of the governor, dead in Diospontus, who was carried home by Sisinnios his servant, in the year 207 (= AD 312/313), and who lived for 22 years.”



3. Epitaph of Theodoros, son of Somenos (Photo Credit: Julien Aliquot).



4. Epitaph of Bennios, son of Germanos (Photo Credit: Julien Aliquot).

This inscription reminds of the foundation of the tomb. The use of the chronological era of Provincia Arabia (beginning on the 22nd of March, AD 106) confirms that Dafyāna belonged to the territory of Bostra, the capital of the province. Although he came from this area, Bennios died far away, in the Black Sea region, while serving the Roman governor of Diospontus, a province created between AD 305/306 and 309/310, with Amasia as its capital (Loriot 2006: 412-414, on the Roman province of Diospontus and its governors). As a *beneficiarius*, he was a junior officer in the Roman army, just below the rank of centurion, and owed his promotion to the

favour (*beneficium*) of a commander for whom he performed administrative duties (Nelis-Clément 2000).

Onomastics indicates the places where Bennios died and was buried respectively, that is, on the one hand, Pontus, where he died, with his body then transferred by his servant, and, on the other hand, Dafyāna and the Roman province of Arabia, where he was obviously born. The name Βέννιος (for Βέννιος) is a transliteration of the Latin *gentilicium* *Benius/Bennius* (Solin and Salomies 1988: 33), in this case a unique name, rather than the Phrygian name Βεννιος/Βενιος (Vassileva 1999: 175). His patronymic Γερμανός corresponds to the Latin *cognomen* *Germanus*, but it was also a very popular name in Arabia, where it is suspected of being a Greek transliteration of Semitic names (Sartre 2007: 211-214). The name of his servant, Σισίννιος, belongs to a series of Hellenized Iranian names which are well known in the East, chiefly in Asia Minor, and which are consistent with the trend for the *signa* in *-ιος* from the third century onwards (Justi 1895: 304; Zgusta 1964: 468-469; *LGPN*, s.v.). Sisinnios may have joined Bennios after his master's assignment in Diospontus.

Bennios' return to Dafyāna is a typical example of the so-called *translatio cadaveris* or *translatio corporum* (both modern terms), which refer to two kinds of operation; either the transportation of the remains of a deceased person to the grave, or transference from one grave to another (Laubry 2007: review of legal sources and Latin inscriptions, with 21 texts from the Roman West, mostly epitaphs of soldiers and imperial freedmen; Tybout 2016, with a catalogue of Greek inscriptions recording or implying the repatriation of mortal remains). In Roman law, the transportation of bodies was considered an integral part of the funeral (*Funus*) and a legal obligation (*Necessitas*), whatever the distance and however many provinces will be crossed. This kind of operation was sometimes very expensive, especially because

of tolls. The cost was nevertheless included in the normal funerary expenses. In most cases, the deceased person will not have already received a permanent burial (*Perpetua Sepultura*) as their remains are going to be transferred. These costs and requirements partly explain the phenomenon of remote commemorations for dead soldiers (Hope 2003; *AE* 1993, 1572, for a remarkable example at Apamea in Syria; not far from Dafyāna, at Najran in southern Syria, see *IGLS* 15, 367, with Al-Husan and Aliquot 2015: 499: building inscription of the monumental tomb of a lady “who was deprived of her four sons Annius, Claudianus, Magnus, and Meilichos, taken at the camp”). Exceptions were envisaged under certain extraordinary and deemed as legitimate conditions which involved the executor (for example, in the case of natural disasters threatening the tomb of destruction of a tomb). In this case, the location of a temporary grave remained a *locus profanus*, as opposed to the *locus religiosus* of the final burial. Transfer required a prior consent from competent authorities, that is the pontifical colleges of Rome and Italy, governors in the provinces, and possibly the emperor himself as a *pontifex maximus*. As a servant of a *beneficiarius* assigned to a provincial governor (on soldiers’ servants: Speidel 1989), Sisinnios was well placed to obtain permission to return his master’s remains to his place of birth. The mention of such transfers in epigraphy not only has a commemorative value: “it shows to the community that the executor acted correctly within the legal framework, according to the law and before the gods” (Laubry 2007: 176, “elle certifie à la communauté que l’auteur du transfert a agi dans la légalité la plus complète, face au droit et face aux dieux”).

Two Greek epitaphs from the Ḥawrān also refer to the return of dead bodies to their native land. The first was discovered at Eeitha, modern Hīt (Waddington 1870, no. 2121). After a lacuna, we learn that a rider, “back from Germany and dead in the *ala Agrippiana*, was

returned to his children.” (The *ala I Flavia Agrippiana sagittariorum* was in Syria from the time of Trajan’s Parthian campaigns onwards, according to several military diplomas reported in *AE* 2006, 1845-1851. The same auxiliary unit must be recognized in the epitaph of a rider at Worms in Germania Superior, *CIL* 13, 6235, as well as in the epitaph of a *duplicarius* at Palmyra, *IGLS* 17, 484.) The second relevant document is a funerary epigram in two elegiac couplets for a man named Silvanus, from Adraha, modern Dar‘ā (Wetzstein 1864: 293, no. 98 = *IGLS* 14, 177, with some corrections in Al-Husan and Aliquot 2015: 500-501): “Look at these ashes which came from a foreign land to this tomb, these remains of a funeral pyre are those of the unfortunate Silvanus; sea and earth shared me, then fire thirdly; heart water . . .” So, it appears that Silvanus had drowned at sea, and his body would have been either found on the shore or buried in a temporary grave, before his remains were incinerated, probably to facilitate their repatriation to Adraha. The association of a Latin name with cremation and the theme of returning ashes to an original homeland suggests that he was a Roman soldier who had joined the navy.

To sum up: While emphasizing the role of Bostra’s territory and Ḥawrān as a whole as a recruitment pool for the Roman army and administration, Bennios’ epitaph increases the number of documents from this area relating to the transportation of the remains of dead Roman soldiers or officers to their homeland. More generally, the study of these new Greek epitaphs from Dafyāna encourages us to pursue our fieldwork in North-East Jordan.

Abbreviations

AE: L’Année épigraphique. Paris.

CIL: Corpus inscriptionum latinarum. Berlin.

I: Jordanie: Inscriptions de la Jordanie (*IGLS* 21). Paris; Beirut.

IGLS: Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie. Paris; Beirut.

LGPN: Lexicon of Greek Personal Names. Oxford.

PAES 3A: Littmann, Magie and Stuart 1921.

SEG: Supplementum epigraphicum graecum. Leiden.

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