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The church of Saint John the Baptist in Riḥāb (Jordan): epigraphy and history

Julien Aliquot, Abdul Qader Al-Husan

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The Church of Saint John the Baptist in Riḥāb (Jordan): epigraphy and history

Julien Aliquot* and Abdul Qader Al-Husan**

Abstract

A large number of inscriptions were discovered during the excavations of the ecclesiastical complex of St. John the Baptist at Riḥāb in northeast Jordan. This article presents the whole dossier and shows its contribution to the history of a community established in the civic territory of Bostra in Roman Provincia Arabia.

Keywords Riḥāb, Greek epigraphy, Roman Provincia Arabia, Bostra, kastron, late antiquity

The excavation of the ecclesiastical complex of St. John the Baptist at Riḥāb in northeast Jordan (32.323529, 36.093906; Figures 1–3) has uncovered thirty Greek inscriptions in two twin churches. There are two main sets of texts. The first group, on mosaic floors, deals with the laying of pavements in the late sixth and early seventh centuries AD. The second group includes a series of epitaphs from the Roman period engraved on the many blocks reused in the building. All these inscriptions were examined on the spot in 2016 within the framework of a close partnership between the Mafraq Branch of the Department of Antiquities and the Jordanian–French team of the “Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Jordan” (“Inscriptions de la Jordanie”). This article will show their contribution to the history of a community established in the civic territory of Bostra (modern Buṣrā) in Roman Provincia Arabia (on the archaeology and history of Riḥāb, see Al-Husan 2001, 2002 and 2018; Bauzou 2009; Gatier 1998; Michel 2001: 212–22; Piccirillo 1980, 1981 and 1993).

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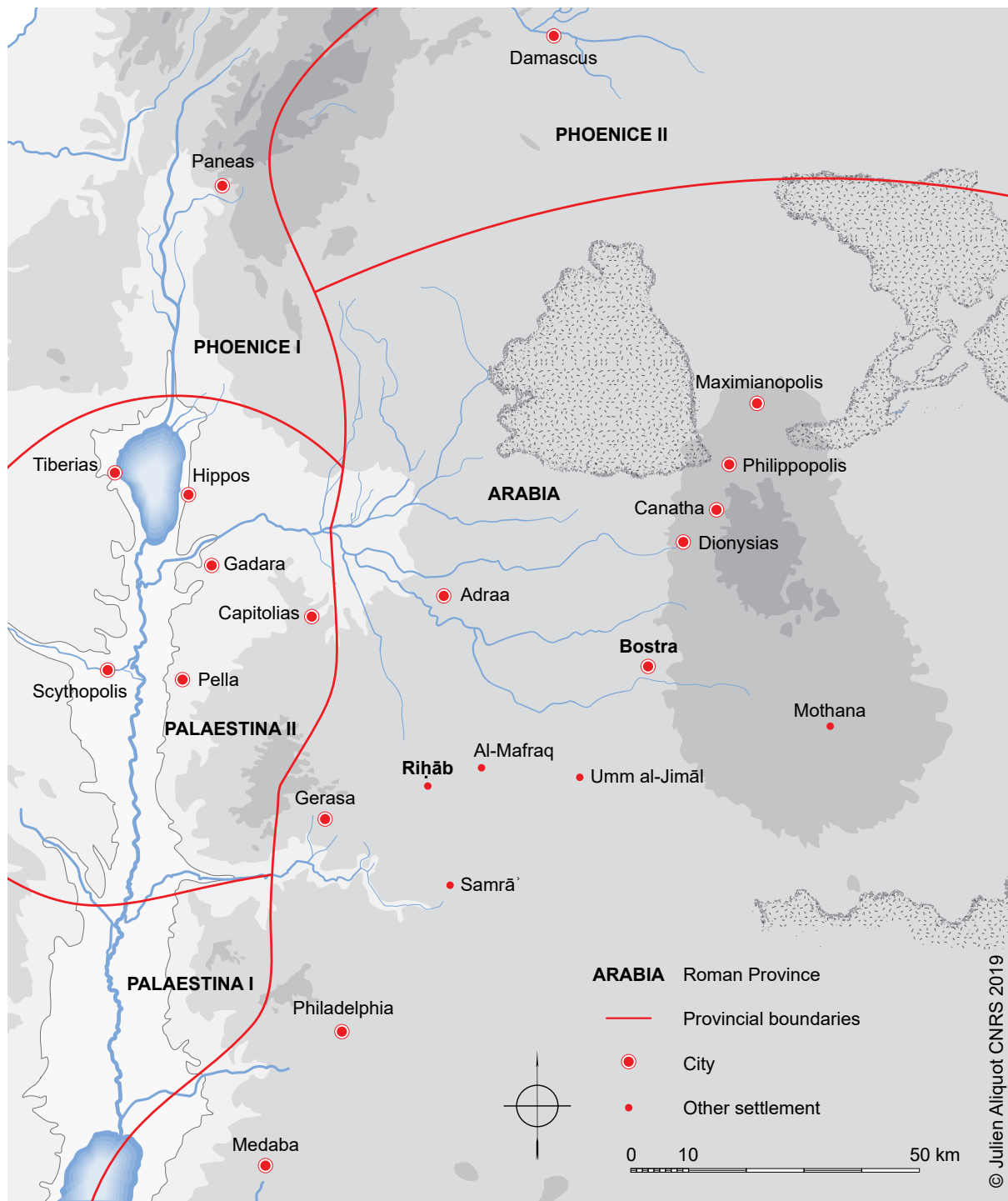


Figure 1: Bostra, Riḥāb and the Provincia Arabia in the sixth and seventh centuries AD.
 © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2019.



Figure 2: Aerial photograph showing the location of the ecclesiastical complex of St. John the Baptist in Rihāb. © Mat Dalton APAAME 2011.



Figure 3: Aerial photograph of the church complex after the excavation. © Mat Dalton APAAME 2011.

North church

The inscribed mosaics from the north church were published in preliminary form in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* (Al-Husan 2001, 2002 and 2018). A revised edition of these pavements will be provided here. The most important mosaic inscription (1) that was already known reveals the name of the church (Al-Husan 2001: 11; *BE* 2002, no. 481, “analyse provisoire, nécessairement incomplète”; Al-Husan 2002: 83; *SEG* 51.2040; cf. Piccirillo 2011: 104–5, for a translation). Designed on a white background in black letters, 9–11 cm high, with S-shaped abbreviation marks and a horizontal stroke above numerals in line 4, it was displayed in the nave at the entrance of the apse in a tabula ansata of 50 cm high by c. 386 cm wide (Figures 4–7):

Ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου καὶ μακαριωτάτου Πολυ[ε]ύκτου ἀρχιεπισκόπου (καὶ) μητροπολ(ίτου) |
ἐψηφώθη ὁ ναὸς οὗτος τοῦ ἁγίου (καὶ) βαπτιστοῦ Ἰωάννου ἐκ τῶν τοῦ [κοι]νοῦ τοῦ κάστρου
(καὶ) | τοῦ ἁγίου τόπου, ἐκ σπουδῆς Γεωργίου πρεσβ(υτέρου) (καὶ) περιοδευτοῦ καὶ Σευήρου
οἰκονόμου, |⁴ ἐν μηνὶ Ἀπελλαίῳ, χρόνων ὀγδόης ἰνδικτιῶνος, τοῦ ἔτους φιδ' τῆς ἐπαρχίας.

The dedication was still poorly established in previous editions, especially on its right half. Although correct for the date, Piccirillo’s translation remains flawed. Line 1. [ἀρχιεπισκ(όπου)] (*SEG*). Line 2. At the beginning, ἐψηφώθη (*SEG*). In the end, ἐκ [τῶν προσόδων?] (*SEG*); “this temple of Saint John the Baptist of *Neon Kastron* [?]” (Piccirillo). Line 3. After περιοδευτοῦ: [---] (*SEG*). Line 4. τ[οῦ . . . ἔτους] (*SEG*). Note the spelling of ἐψηφώθη for ἐψηφώθη and ἰνδικτιῶνος for ἰνδικτιῶνος.



Figure 4: Mosaic pavement in the nave of the north church of St. John the Baptist.
© Abdul Qader Al-Husan 2012.



Figure 5: Mosaic pavement with the first dedication (1), month names (2) and river names (3).
© Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.



Figure 6: Mosaic pavement with the left side of the first dedication (1), month names (2) and river names (3).
© Abdul Qader Al-Husan 2012.



Figure 7: Mosaic pavement with the right side of the first dedication (1), month names (2) and river names (3).
© Abdul Qader Al-Husan 2012.

Translation: “Under the most holy and blessed Polyeuktos, archbishop and metropolitēs, this church of St. John the Baptist was paved with mosaics at the expenses of the common fund of the *kastron* and the holy place, by the zeal of George, priest and *periodeutes*, and of Severos, steward, in the month of *Apellaios*, at the time of the eighth indiction, in the year 514 of the province (= AD 17 November/16 December 619).”

The work carried out in the church was supervised by three church officials. As a *periodeutes* (περιοδευτής), the itinerant priest George was entrusted with visiting and supervising one or several country districts (Meimaris 1986: 255–6). Next to him, Severos was acting as a steward (οἰκονόμος). Higher up the hierarchy, Polyeuktos was an archbishop of Bostra known to have held this position from AD 594 to 624. He appears at Rihāb in no less than five other inscriptions (Meimaris 1992: 268–89, nos. 404, 411, 445, 474, 480). The mosaic from the church of St. John the Baptist is more precisely dated during his time in office between AD 17 November and 16 December, 619. It is thus one of the few pieces of evidence of the installation or renewal of mosaics in a Christian building during the time of the Persian occupation of the Near East, between AD 613–14 and 629–30 (Piccirillo 2011; cf. *SEG* 61.1476). Two dedications from the same period are known in Rihāb (Meimaris 1992: 288–9, nos. 474 and 480).

Contrary to what Piccirillo (2011: 105) assumed, the dedication does not mention the ancient name of Rihāb at the end of line 2. The text simply refers to the site as a *kastron*, i.e., a “fortified place” (κάστρον, from Latin *castrum*, “fort”, “fortress”, “military camp”). Other epigraphic documents mention an “estate” (κτημα) or a “village” (κώμη) instead, as will be shown below. So far the presence of Roman soldiers in Rihāb had only been suspected for the time of the early Empire on the basis of the Latin dedication addressed by a junior officer (*beneficiarius*) of the governor of Provincia Arabia to the god Jupiter Heliopolitanus (Gatier 1998, no. 84, with this comment: “le village aurait-il abrité une *statio* du *cursus publicus* confiée à un bénéficiaire ?”); see also his nos. 103 and 108, two Greek epitaphs of Roman soldiers; cf. Kennedy 2004: 108). The military nature of the site now seems even more likely. In late antiquity it was a common feature of large villages located along the steppe in the Roman provinces of the Near East and exposed to the threat of nomadic raids (Gatier 2005: 109–10, who refers in particular to Umm al-Jimāl and Samrā’ in the territory of Bostra and to the site of *Kastron Mephaa* in the territory of Madaba; see also the case of Imtān, the ancient *kastron* of Mothana in the territory of Bostra, recently studied by Sartre-Fauriat 2016, cf. *BE* 2017, no. 609).

Given the current state of knowledge, it is still impossible to specify how the ancient settlement of Rihāb was fortified and when it was granted the title of *kastron*. Just like the building of an enclosure wall, this status was one of the possible prerequisites for claiming the status of a city. The emergence of a collective social organization on a local scale was surely another. In this respect, it is worth emphasizing that the AD 619 dedication, as it can be today restored, mentions the existence of a common fund managed by a local community and ecclesiastical authorities, at least with regard to the funding of religious buildings. This point will be discussed in detail below, because a new mosaic inscription (6) provides similar information.

The other mosaic floors found in the north church have much shorter inscriptions (Figures 4–7). These are Greek month and river names (Al-Husan 2001: 11; 2002: 80 and 83; *SEG* 51.2041), designed on a white background in 7–8 cm high black letters. Twelve month names are indicated by labels in rectangular frames (H. 98 × W. 447 cm) below the previous inscription and at the entrance of the nave (2), starting in *Audnaios* (January) and ending in *Apellaios* (December):

Αὐδναῖος, Περίτ[ι]ος, Δύστρος, Ξανθικός, Ἀρτεμέσιο[ς], Δαί[σι]ος.
[Πάνημος, Λῶος], Γορπιῆος, Ὑπερβηρετῆος, Δ[ῖ]ος, Ἀπελλαῖος.

Line 1. Ἀρτεμῆσιο[ς] for Ἀρτεμῖσιος. Line 2. Γορπιῆος for Γορπιαῖος, Ὑπερβερετῆος for Ὑπερβερεταῖος. Translation: “Audnaios, Peritios, Dystros, Xanthikos, Artemisios, Daisios, Panemos, Loos, Gorpiaios, Hyperberetaios, Dios, Apellaios.”

These names are those of the Macedonian calendar widely used in Bostra and in Provincia Arabia up to the seventh century AD (Meimaris 1992: 148).

The names of the four rivers of Paradise appear in pairs below each of both six-month series (3):

Γιόν, [Τίγρ]ις,
Εὐφράτις, Φισόν.

Lines 1–2. Γιόν for Γήων, Εὐφράτις for Εὐφράτης and Φισόν for Φισών.

Translation: “Phison, Geon, Tigris, Euphrates.”

In early Byzantine art and literature, the four rivers of Paradise usually symbolized either the salutary waters that have their source in Christ or the four gospels, and consequently the evangelists and other apostles (Février 1956; Marrou 1978; Shilling 2016; for the rivers of Paradise in the mosaics of Arabia and Palestine, see Hachlili 2009: 180–2; Piccirillo 1993: 39–40; Talgam 2014: 216–8). Both interpretations complement more than they oppose each other, while being perfectly adapted to the imagery of baptism and the cult of St. John the Baptist.

In the central part of the nave, the name of a donor called Anastasios also appears inside a 71 cm diameter medallion bounded by a vine scroll (Figure 8). The text is 32 cm long; the letters are 6–7 cm high (4):

Ἀναστάσις.

Line 1. Ἀναστάσις for Ἀναστάσιος.

Translation: “Anastasios.”



Figure 8: Mosaic medallion with the name of a donor (4). © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

The presence of tools (double axes or hammers) inside the inscribed medallion may indicate that Anastasios was a craftsman (*cf.* Piccirillo 1981: 83, plate 75, photos 39a–b, for similar images in the church of St. Mary at Riḥāb). The tools must have been associated with the representation of the donor himself. Unfortunately, all the images formerly related to the labels of the months, the rivers of Paradise, and Anastasios are lost. In all the mosaics of the church, the animated figures were almost systematically destroyed by iconophobes in the seventh or eighth century AD before being replaced by geometric, Nilotic and other plant motifs (Figure 9; for parallels, see Gatier 2012; Hachlili 2009: 209–17; Piccirillo 1998). At least it proves that Christian worship was still celebrated in this church in the Umayyad-Abbasid period.



Figure 9: Animated images exceptionally spared by iconophobes in the northern aisle of the north church.
© Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

South church

The excavation conducted at the site between 2008 and 2014 revealed a second, much larger basilica with three aisles adjoining the first church on its southern side, according to a pattern that was common in the provinces of Arabia and Palestine (Duval 2003; Michel 2001). Among the new epigraphic discoveries was a crowning block (H. 66 × W. 69 × D. 25 cm; Figure 10) decorated with a circled cross above the Greek letters omega and alpha (Ω), which refer to the passages of the Scriptures where Jesus is called the first and the last, i.e., the beginning and the end (see, e.g., Apocalypse 1.8: ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ). Above all, a mosaic inscription was found in the nave of the south church, in front of the apse, inside a tabula ansata of 55 cm high by 207 cm wide (Figure 11). The text is drawn in 9 cm high black letters on a white background with S-shaped abbreviation marks and horizontal strokes above numerals (6):



Figure 10: Block with a circled cross and Greek letters omega and alpha (5). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.



Figure 11: Greek dedication (6) on the mosaic pavement in the south church. © Abdul Qader Al-Husan 2012.

Ἐψηφώθη ἡ ἀγιωτάτ(η) ἐκκλησία ἐκ τῶν
 τοῦ κοινοῦ τοῦ κτήματος (καὶ) τῆς ἐκκλησίας,
 ἐπὶ τῶν θεοφιλλ(εστάτων) Προκωπίου (καὶ) Σεργίου
 4 πρεσββ(υτέρων) κ(αὶ) Κωμιτᾶ διακ(όνου) κ(αὶ) οἰκονόμου,
 ἐν ἔτι υπε΄ τῆς ἐπαρχ(ίας), χρό(νων) ἀρχ(ῆς) θ΄ ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος).

Lines 3–4. The repetition of lambda and beta in θεοφιλλ(εστάτων) and πρεσββ(υτέρων) indicates that these abbreviated words are in the plural. Line 5. ἔτι for ἔτει.

Translation: “The most holy church was paved with mosaics at the expenses of the common fund of the estate/village and the church, under the authority of the most God-beloved Prokopios and Sergios, priests, and of Komitas, deacon and steward, in the year 485 of the province, at the time of the beginning of the 9th indiction (= AD 1st September 590).”

Work had therefore taken place on the spot some thirty years before the first dedication published above. It would be difficult to draw any conclusion from this observation about the relative chronology of the twin churches, because mosaic dedications usually only give the date of the laying of the pavements instead of the date of the buildings they decorate. Apart from this issue, which will have to be addressed by an in-depth architectural and archaeological study of both buildings, the most remarkable aspect of the new inscription lies again in the mention of the ancient settlement of Rihāb and in the care taken in describing the funding of the mosaics.

Here the site is described by means of a word whose primary meaning was “estate”, but which also referred to villages in late antiquity (for κτήμα as “estate” and consequently “village”, see Renan 1864–1874: 613–6, *cf.* *BE* 1990, no. 936, territory of Tyre; *I. Jordanie* 2, no. 52, territory of Philadelphia; *SEG* 57.1829, territory of Jerusalem). Later, in the north church, the settlement was identified with a *kastron* (1). On another inscribed mosaic found in Rihāb and undated because of its fragmentary state, it is more commonly referred to as a κώμη, i.e., a “village” (see *SEG* 51.2044, where [ἀπὸ/ἐκ προσ]φορᾶς τῆς κώμη[ς] has to be restored in the end). In all cases, the same community was meant, despite the fluctuations in vocabulary. In the same way, the principle—rarely mentioned in epigraphy—of a joint contribution of both a community and the ecclesiastical authorities was highlighted. All this implies that the twin churches of St. John the Baptist were not mere private oratories, built by a single family of the village like some of the other churches at Rihāb, but rather an ecclesiastical complex built by and for the entire local community at public expense.

The role of the community in funding the mosaic floors of the twin churches of St. John the Baptist may partly explain the reuse of a series of Roman tombstones in the Byzantine construction (see below, Appendix). At least six inscribed funerary stelae are still visible inside the walls of the north church (10, 16, 22, 24, 26, 27). Eighteen other inscribed blocks found during the excavation are stored next to the ecclesiastical complex. With perhaps one exception (30), all belong to the group of local limestone funerary stelae from the second to fourth centuries AD (Gatier 1998). Two stelae are dated from AD 211/212 (8) and AD 271/272 (21). Another one was the tombstone of a member of the city council of Bostra (11). One may assume that in late antiquity the decision to reuse grave markers from a local cemetery was the responsibility of the Rihāb community, in agreement with the civic authorities of Bostra.

Conclusion

In conclusion it should be stressed that Rihāb was no exception in late antiquity. The early Byzantine period indeed saw the spectacular development of large villages with an embryonic community organization around Christian places of worship, especially in sites located at the interface of the countryside and the steppe, on the margins of the territories of cities in Roman Arabia (Gatier 2005). This phenomenon is particularly well documented in northern Jordan through the famous examples of Umm al-Jimāl and Samrā’ in the territory of Bostra. By contrast, the case of Rihāb, whose status of late antique *kastron* is now firmly established, remains to be dealt with in detail.

Appendix: Greek inscriptions from the Roman period reused in the church complex

This section presents the Greek epitaphs from the Roman period discovered in the ecclesiastical complex of St. John the Baptist at Rihāb. The texts are arranged in alphabetical order of the names of the deceased or their fathers as they are written in Greek. Their numbering follows that of the inscriptions published above. Remarks on onomastics will be kept to a minimum.

7. Greek epitaph of Amos. Upper part of a limestone funerary stele in the shape of a horned altar; setting lines. H. 38 × W. 51 × D. 25 cm. H. of the letters: 7–8 cm (Figure 12).

Θάρσι
 Αμος

Translation: “Be courageous, Amos...”

Αμος: Hellenized Semitic name, common in Arabia; *cf.*, e.g., *I. Jordanie* 5/1, nos. 641, 650, 660 (Ṣabḥā, territory of Bostra), with Harding 1971: 434 s.v. ‘m, “entire”, “perfect”.



Figure 12: Tombstone of Amos (7). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

8. Greek epitaph of Anemos son of Ausos. Limestone funerary stele. H. 59 × W. 53 × D. 25 cm. H. of the letters: 9 cm (Figure 13).

Θάρσει
 Ανεμος
 Αυσου,
 4 ἔτους ςρ’.

Translation: “Be courageous, Anemos son of Ausos, in the year 106 (= AD 211/212).”

Ανεμος, Αυσος: two Hellenized Semitic names, both common in Arabia and already recorded in Rihāb; *cf.*, e.g., *I. Jordanie* 5/1, nos. 3, 196, 197, 198, 318, 359, 366, 380, 425, 479, 683, 697(?), 710 (Αναμος), 367 (Ανεμος), 152, 378, 432, 467, 522, 572, 661, 666 (Αυσος), with Gatier 1998: 415 (Rihāb) and Sartre 2007: 217–24 (on Αναμος/Ανεμος). For Αυσος, see also below, 19.



Figure 13: Tombstone of Anemos son of Ausos (8). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

9. Greek epitaph of Annianos. Limestone funerary stele; palm in the bottom left at the level of line 5. H. 55 × W. 38 × D. 26 cm. H. of the letters: 5–8 cm (Figure 14).

Θάρσι
 Ἄννι-
 ανέ, ἐ-
 4 τῶν
 μ΄.

Translation: “Be courageous, Annianos, 40 years old.”

Ἄννιανός: Latin *Annianus*, common in Arabia; cf., e.g., *I. Jordanie* 5/1, nos. 2 and 26 (territory of Bostra).



Figure 14: Tombstone of Annianos (9).
 © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

10. Greek epitaph of Badaros. Funerary stele in limestone, still in the north church of St. John the Baptist, reused in the west wall of the nave; setting lines, palm to the right of the last two letters in line 4. H. 78 × W. 47 × D. 27 cm. H. of the letters: 7–10 cm (Figure 15).

Θάρσι
 Βαδ[α]ρ[ε],
 ἐτῶν
 4 ις΄.

Translation: “Be courageous, Badaros, 16 years old.”

Βαδαρος: Hellenized Semitic name, very common in the northern part of Provincia Arabia; cf. Gatier 1998: 415.



Figure 15: Tombstone of Badaros (10).
 © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

11. Greek epitaph of Gados son of Onainos. Funerary stele in limestone; setting line. H. 101 × W. 37 × D. 18 cm. H. of the letters: 5.5–10 cm (Figure 16).

[Θάρσι]
 Γαδος
 [Ο]ναινου,
 4 [ἔ]τῶν ἐν-
 [ε]νήκο[ν]-
 [τ]α,
 β(ουλευτή)ς Β(οστρηνῶν).

Translation: “Be courageous, Gados son of Onainos, 90 years old, member of the city council of Bostra.”

Γαδος, Οναινος: two Hellenized Semitic names, both common in Arabia. Only the first one was already recorded in Rihāb; cf. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, no. 700 (Γαδδος in Umm al-Quttayn), Gatier 1998: 416 (Rihāb) and below, **20**. For the second, see, e.g., *I. Jordanie* 5/1, nos. 13 (female Οναινα), 413, 454 (Ονενος), 610 (Ονηνος), with Sartre 1985: 222 and Yon 2018: 53.



Figure 16: Tombstone of Gados son of Onainos (11). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

12. Greek epitaph of Dousarios. Funerary stele in limestone, broken down; setting lines. H. 61 × W. 40 × D. 28 cm. H. of the letters: 5–8 cm (Figure 17).

Θάρσει
 Δουσ-
 άριο-
 4 ς [---]

Line 1. The final iota has been engraved at the end of line 2.

Translation: “Be courageous, Dousarios...”

The pagan theophoric name Δουσαριος, derived from the name of the great Nabataean god Dushara (*dwsr*'), was very popular in Roman Arabia. See, e.g., Sartre 1985: 198–9 and Gatier 1998: 416 (Δουσαρις in Rihāb).



Figure 17: Tombstone of Dousarios (12). © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

13. Greek epitaph of Hektor. Limestone funerary stele, broken down; setting lines. H. 65 × W. 34 × D. 29 cm. H. of the letters: 8–11 cm (Figure 18).

Θάρ-
 σι Ἐκ-
 [τ]ωρ,
 4 ἐτ(ῶν) θ΄.

Translation: “Be courageous, Hektor, 9 years old.”

The heroic Greek name Ἐκτωρ is extremely rare in the Near East, but it has already been recorded twice in southern Syria, not far from Rihāb. See *IGLS* 14, no. 558 (Şanamayn); 15, no. 296 (Jrayn).



Figure 18: Tombstone of Hektor (13).
 © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

14. Greek epitaph of Ianouarios. Limestone funerary stele. H. 66 × W. 30 × D. 30 cm. H. of the letters: 5 cm (Figure 19).

Θάρσ[ι]
 Ἴαν[ου]-
 άριος,
 4 ἡτῶ-
 ν π΄.

Lines 4–5. ἡτῶ|ν for ἐτῶν.

Translation: “Be courageous, Ianouarios, 80 years old.”

Ἴανουάριος; Latin *Januarius*. See Gatier 1998: 417.



Figure 19: Tombstone of Ianouarios (14).
 © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

15. Greek epitaph of Mileichos son of Theodoros. Funerary stele in porous limestone, reshaped on the right and left sides; horizontal stroke above numerals in line 5. H. 57 × W. 36 × D. 18 cm. H. of the letters: 5–8 cm (Figure 20).

Θάρσι
Μιλει-
χος Θε-
4 οδώρο-
[υ], ἔτων ιη΄.

Translation: “Be courageous, Mileichos son of Theodoros, 18 years old.”

Although it looks like the Greek *Μείλιχος*, *Μιλειχος* is most probably a Hellenized Semitic name which is derived either from the root *mlk*, ‘to rule’, or from the Aramaic *ml’k*, ‘messenger’, ‘angel’. It is commonly found in Arabia and Palestine under various spellings (*Μειλιχος*, *Μιλιχος*, *Μιλχος*). See Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005: 193. The Greek name *Θεόδωρος* is common in the whole Near East.



Figure 20: Tombstone of Mileichos son of Theodoros (15). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

16. Greek epitaph of Porphyrios. Funerary stele in limestone, still in the north church of St. John the Baptist, reused in the northwest pillar of the nave, after being resized on its right and left sides. H. 75 × W. 35 × D. 23 cm. H. of the letters: 10–17 cm (Figure 21).

Θάρσ-
ει Πο-
ρφύρ[ι]-
4 [ε], ἔτων-
ν κγ΄.

Translation: “Be courageous, Porphyrios, 23 years old.”

Πορφύριος: Greek name, commonly found in Byzantine Arabia and Palestine, but already recorded twice at Rihāb in its feminine form in Greek epitaphs from the Roman period. See Gatier 1998: 419, who reminds us that it can correspond to the translation of a Semitic name such as *mlk*, after the example of the philosopher Porphyrios/Malchos.



Figure 21: Tombstone of Porphyrios (16). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

17. Greek epitaph of Severos. Funerary stele in limestone; stylized palm crown at the top, frame, setting lines. H. 124 × W. 38 × D. 21 cm. H. of the letters: 9–11 cm (Figure 22).

Θάρσ[ι]
 Σεο-
 υῆρε,
 4 ἔτει
 λεί.

Line 4. ἔτει for ἔτη.

Translation: “Be courageous, Severos, 35 years old.”

Σεουῆρος: Latin *Severus*, which maybe owed its success in Roman Arabia to the reputation of the first governor of the province Claudius Severus, to the prestige of the Severan emperors or to the fact that it might transcribe phonetically close Semitic names. See, e.g., *I. Jordanie* 5/1, nos. 121, 243, 268, 328, 365, 441, 443, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 524, 728, with Sartre 1985: 237; below, 18.



Figure 22: Tombstone of Severos (17).
 © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

18. Greek epitaph of Severos. Funerary stele in limestone; setting lines. H. 65 × W. 34 × D. 29 cm. H. of the letters: 8–11 cm (Figure 23).

Θάρσι
 Σεοοι-
 ῆρος,
 4 ἔτῶ-
 [ν] μ’.

Lines 2–3. Σεοοι|ῆρος for Σεουῆρος.

Translation: “Be courageous, Severos, 40 years old.”

See above, 17.



Figure 23: Tombstone of Severos (18).
 © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

19. Greek epitaph of Soaiphos son of Ausos. Funerary stele in limestone. H. 74 × W. 37 × D. 26 cm. H. of the letters: 7–12 cm (Figure 24).

Σοα-
ιφο-
ς Αυ-
4 σου.

Translation: “Soaiphos son of Ausos.”

The Hellenized Semitic name Σοαιφος seemingly appears here for the first time. It is also known in composition in the female theophoric name Σοαιφαθη, which can be found in southern Syria in two Greek epitaphs from the Roman period. See *IGLS* 14, no. 180 (from Adraha) and *SEG* 7.1008 (in Maximianopolis, where Αύρηλί(α) Σοαιφαθη should be read instead of Αύρηλις Οαιφαθη); cf. Harding 1971: 352 s.v. *šfʿtt*. For Αυσος, see above, 8.



Figure 24: Tombstone of Soaiphos son of Ausos (19). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

20. Greek epitaph of ...os son of Gados. Limestone funerary stele, resized at the top, with a vertical hollow on the front face; setting lines. H. 66 × W. 45 × D. 18 cm. H. of the letters: 8 cm (Figure 25).

[---]
[---]μ-
ο[ς] Γαδ-
4 ο[υ], ἐτ(ῶν)
μζ.

Lines 2–3. Maybe [Ανα]μο[ς] or [Ανε]μο[ς].

Translation: “...mos son of Gados, 47 years old.”

On Γαδος, see above, 11.



Figure 25: Tombstone of ...os son of Gados (20). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

21. Greek epitaph of ... son/daughter of Thaimalas(?). Lower part of a limestone funerary stele; setting lines. H. 31 × W. 36 × D. 31 cm. H. of the letters: 3.5–5 cm (Figure 26).

[---]
 [---]MB[---]
 [--- Θ]αιμα[λα?]
 4 [τελ]εϋτέσα[ς]
 [έτων] οά', έν ξτι ζξρ'.

Lines 2–3. Uncertain reading. Line 4.
 [τελ]εϋτέσα[ς] for τελευτήσας.

Translation: "... son/daughter of Thaimalas(?), who died at 71 years of age in the year 166 (= AD 271/272)."

Θαιμαλας/Θαιμαλλας: Hellenized Semitic name, common; cf. Sartre 1985: 204–5, Gatier 1998: 416 and *I. Jordanie* 5/1, nos. 94, 294, 312.



Figure 26: Tombstone of ... son/daughter of Thaimalas(?) (21). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

22. Greek epitaph of ...los son of Ianos. Limestone funerary stele, still in the north church of St. John the Baptist, reused in the southern wall of the nave; setting lines, oblique stroke above numeral in line 4. H. 59 × W. 36 cm. H. of the letters: 3–6 cm (Figure 27).

 [.]Ο[. . .]-
 λος Ια-
 4 νου,
 έτ(ών) μ'.

Translation: "...los son of Ianos, 40 years old."

Ιανος: Hellenized Semitic name, uncommon, but already recorded twice in Riḥāb; cf. Gatier 1998: 417.



Figure 27: Tombstone of ...los son of Ianos (22). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

23. Greek epitaph of ...athe daughter of Kamithos. Limestone funerary stele. H. 76 × W. 48 × D. 21 cm. H. of the letters: 7 cm (Figure 28).

 αθη Κα-
 μιθου,
 4 ἐτ(ῶν) λζ´.

Translation: "...athe daughter of Kamithos, 36 years old."

Καμιθος: Hellenized Semitic name, rare, but known in this form for the father of a high priest of the Temple of Jerusalem under Tiberius. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.34 (Σίμωνι τῷ Καμίθου); *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 408, 14–5 (ὄντος ἀρχιερέως ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ Σίμωνος τοῦ Καμαθεὶ υἱοῦ) and 417, 20 (Σίμωνα τὸν τοῦ Καμαθεὶ). Maybe derived from Aramaic *qmḥ*, *qmḥ*, 'flour'; cf. Yon 2018: 161, about the female names Καμαθ, Καμαθα and Καμαθη in Zeugma.



Figure 28: Tombstone of ...athe daughter of Kamithos (23). © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

24. Greek epitaph of Obd... son of Valens. Limestone funerary stele, still in the north church of St. John the Baptist, reused in the southern aisle of the building; red paint in the letters, setting lines. H. 57 × W. 34 × D. 29 cm. H. of the letters: 6–7 cm (Figure 29).

θάρ[σι]
 ΟΒΔ[---]
 [.]ΗCΑ[. ?]
 4 Οὐάλεγ-
 [το]ς, ἐτ(ῶν) μβ´.

Translation: "Be courageous, Obd... son of Valens, 42 years old."

The deceased probably had a Hellenized Semitic name derived from 'bd, "servant". The name of his father, Οὐάλης, is the Greek transcription of the Latin *Valens*. It was very popular in Roman Arabia, probably because of its similarity to Semitic names such as the Safaitic *w'l*. See Sartre 2007: 217–24 with Harding 1971: 645.



Figure 29: Tombstone of Obd... son of Valens (24). © Jean-Baptiste Yon CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

25. Greek epitaph of B... Limestone funerary stele, broken on all sides; red paint in the letters. H. 62 × W. 28 × D. 18 cm. H. of the letters: 5–7 cm (Figure 30).

Θά[ρσι]
 Β[---]
 Θ[---]
 4 Υ[---],
 [ἐ]τῶ-
 ν θ'.

Translation: “Be courageous, B..., 9 years old.”



Figure 30: Tombstone of B... (25).
© Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

26. Greek epitaph. Limestone funerary stele, still in the north church of St. John the Baptist, reshaped and reused in the southern wall of the apse; rosace, setting lines. H. 60 × W. 26 cm. H. of the letters: 7 cm (Figure 31).

[Θ]άρσι
 [---]
 [---]
 4 [---]
 [---]
 [---]Ν

Translation: “Be courageous...”



Figure 31: Tombstone with fragmentary epitaph (26). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

27. Greek epitaph. Limestone funerary stele, still in the north church of St. John the Baptist, reused in the south wall of the nave, on the southwest corner side. H. 63 × W. 40 cm. H. of the letters: 9 cm (Figure 32).

[---]
 [---]ΕΙ[---]
 [---]Υ, ἐτ(ῶν) λ´.

Translation: “..., 30 years old.”

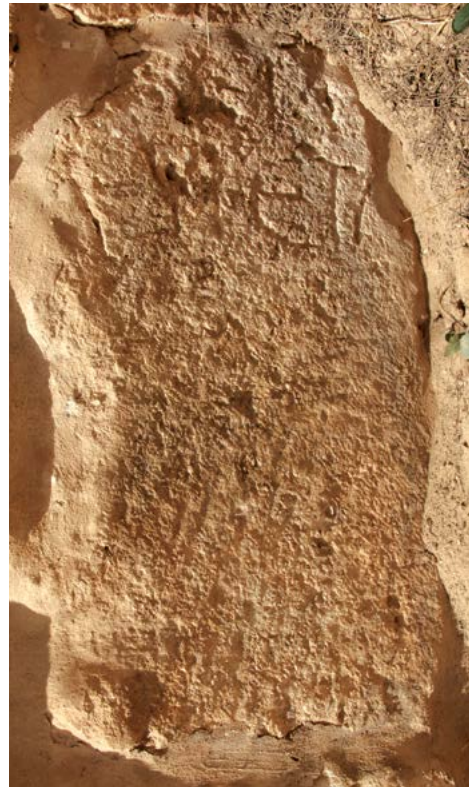


Figure 32: Tombstone with fragmentary epitaph (27). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

28. Greek epitaph. Limestone funerary stele. H. 96 × W. 45 × D. 24 cm. H. of the letters: 6–7 cm (Figure 33).

 ΑΚ[---]
 ΑΛΜ
 4 ΑC[---?]

Line 2–4. Maybe [Π]άλμας, Latin *Palma*, already recorded in Rihāb; Gatier 1998: 419.



Figure 33: Tombstone with fragmentary epitaph (28). © Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

29. Greek epitaph. Limestone funerary stele. H. 58 × W. 27 × D. 22 cm.
H. of the letters: 4 cm (Figure 34).

[.]T
N

Lines 2–3. Maybe ἐτ(ῶν) | ν'.



Figure 34: Tombstone with fragmentary epitaph (29).
© Julien Aliquot CNRS/HiSoMA 2016.

30. Greek epitaph or dedication? Limestone block, broken on all sides, with a few letters visible to the left of the image of a horned altar. H. 48 × W. 57 × D. 20 cm. H. of the letters: 8 cm (Figure 35).

[---]E
[---]Θ
[---]NT

According to its shape and decoration, the block does not belong to the series of funerary stelae. The inscription may be a fragmentary dedication.



Figure 35: Block with fragmentary inscription (30).
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Abbreviations

BE = Bulletin épigraphique. In, *Revue des études grecques* (1888–).

I. Jordanie = *Inscriptions de la Jordanie*. Paris/Beirut: Geuthner/Presses de l'Ifpo (1986–).

IGLS = *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*. Paris/Beirut: Geuthner/Presses de l'Ifpo (1929–).

SEG = *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden: Brill (1923–).

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