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Inscriptions in the necropolis of Zeugma

Jean-Baptiste Yon

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Oturum Programı
Sonuç Bildirgesi
Drtak Basın Açıklaması
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Resimler

INSCRIPTIONS IN THE NECROPOLIS OF ZEUGMA

J. Baphiste YON

This paper will focus on Greek inscriptions which were still *in situ* in the necropolis of Zeugma, before the completion of the Birecik dam. While working on the publication of the epigraphical remains found during the work of the French Mission (in collaboration with Prof.-Dr. R. Ergeç), I had the opportunity to study some of these inscriptions engraved on the walls of rock-tombs found around the city¹. Whereas most of the stelae have been found out of context, mostly reused in the modern village of Belkis, the rockcut reliefs are, despite their limited number, good evidence of the way tombs were actually built and dug by their owners. By this study, we shall try to define what kind of conclusions can be drawn on the society of Zeugma during the Roman period. The most famous of these monuments is the tomb of Zenon : in a kind of entrance-hall, members of the family are represented. An inscription, unique of its kind in Zeugma, defines the ownership of the tomb and restricts its use to the family. Some other examples were still visible at the end of the last century, before the area was transformed into a lake. Study of the necropolis and of its tombs will be concerned as well with the topography of the tombs, with the buildings associated with them, or with their orientation. Of special importance is their relationships with the city itself and its buildings, the main routes, and maybe with other kinds of tombs.

Thanks to these examples, it may be possible to study the tombs and their sculpture, as they were devised and laid out, and not only in isolation, out of their original contexts, as must be done for the stelae. By the study of these documents, of the onomastic, of the vocabulary of the inscriptions, their reliefs and representations, it may be possible to better understand who were the inhabitants of Zeugma and to underscore social structures.

Among some 170 inscriptions- or reliefs-groups in the inventory of J. Wagner, only seven are rock-cut². One of these groups has to be singled out, that of the tomb of Zenon, where 12 inscriptions and 14 rock-cut reliefs were found (W 45)³. Among new texts found or studied again by the French Mission, 13 out of 70 belong to rock-cut monuments.

It is true that some stelae were discovered inside tombs, but most of the time they were not exactly *in situ*, as they had been moved either by tomb-looters or by erosion. In tomb E 27, where several stelae were found, these were not in their original position, even if they probably belonged to the same tomb⁴. Most likely, the stelae were in general set down in a kind of hall or corridor (a sort of *dromos*), before the tomb itself, like the rock-cut reliefs. A recently published tomb, south of Belkis, above the Selte Deresi stream, is a very good example : eight stelae were standing on a sort of terrace, along the wall, on the right-hand side of the entrance proper⁵.

¹ On the epigraphy of Zeugma : IGLS I, 1929, n° 93-124 ; J. Wagner, *Seleukeia am Euphrat/Zeugma*, TAVO B10, Wiesbaden, 1976 ; D. Kennedy et D. Graf (« Inscriptions on stone, ceramic and mosaic », in *The Twin Towns of Zeugma on the Euphrates. Rescue Work and Historical Studies* (éd. D. Kennedy), JRA suppl. 27, 1998, p. 92-108 : see p. 92, on the history of research). For the funerary stelae, and the Syrian context, see K. Parlasca, *Syrische Grabreliefs hellenistischer und römischer Zeit*, Trierer Winckelmannsprogramme, Heft 3, Mayence, 1982 and I. Skupnska-Løvset, *Portraiture in Roman Syria. A Study in Social and Regional Differentiation within the Art of Portraiture*, Lodz, 1999.

² See J. Wagner, *Seleukeia am Euphrat/Zeugma*, p. 254-261, *Felsreliefs und -inschriften*, n° 140-147.

³ See L. Jalabert et R. Mouterde, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* [IGLS] I, Paris, 1929, IGLS I, 94-105 (voir SEG VII, 50) ; Wagner, n° 140a-o, p. 254-259.

⁴ *Anat. Ant.* VIII, 2000, p. 310-311, fig. 55-57 et IX, 2001.

⁵ R. Ergeç, dans *The Twin Towns of Zeugma on the Euphrates. Rescue Work and Historical Studies*, JRA suppl. 27 (éd. D. Kennedy), p. 90, fig. 5. 14.

In the following, I shall take only a few examples, to show what kind of conclusions may be drawn on the society of Zeugma during the Roman period ; but it must be borne in mind that other texts and documents from Zeugma, or from other places of the Eastern Roman Empire may lead to conclusions of a very similar nature.

I. The family tomb of Zenon

The most impressive collection of reliefs and inscriptions to be found was that of the tomb of Zenon (W 45) in the Bahçe Dere, before it was savagely defaced by looters, then flooded by the dam. In what is to be looked upon as a hall or an anteroom⁶, portraits or symbolical representation of each member of the family are cut in the rock (*Fig. 1*). It seems that in the first years of the discovery (in the 1890's and early 1900's), a vaulted gallery built with bricks was still well preserved above the reliefs (of the sort known elsewhere in the necropolis). These reliefs are most probably a sort of list of people who had the right to be buried there, at the time of construction at least.

We have in Palmyra interesting parallels to the same situation : in the hall of the famous tower-tomb of Elahbel, in the so-called 'valley of the tombs' (western necropolis of Palmyra), members of the eponym family of Elahbel are shown on reliefs. We know that on the second floor of the tower, the epitaph of one of them is inscribed on a lintel, proving that the inscription of the hall relating to the same person is not itself an epitaph, but a sort of proof that he belonged to people having a right to be buried there⁷.

In both cases, it is not known where exactly each deceased was put inside or whether another inscription was cut or painted next to the dead. The funerary phrase *Chaire* (with or without *alupe*) is not written systematically in Zeugma ; likewise, in the hall of the tower of Elahbel, names are not followed by the usual Aramaic phrase for the deceased (*hbl* = « alas ! »). It should mean that they were not dead at the time of the construction and the engraving of the inscriptions.

The longest inscription of the tomb (a) is as well the most interesting: it reserves the tomb (except its left side) to the family of Zenon. It is the only explicit evidence that we have in Zeugma for a phenomenon well known elsewhere (as in Palmyra or in other places) of division of tombs between people who can thus share the expenses of the building of monumental tombs. In some cases, it appears as if concessions permitted the owner and builder to make their investement profitable.

Despite mistakes in spelling, the general meaning of the text is clear, but the details are not. As it happens sometimes in Palmyra, the family of the founder had perhaps only built the main room, and the concessionary had to build himself his own part of the tomb. The total destruction of the inside room makes it impossible to decide if there were more rooms to be constructed.

It is difficult as well to understand precisely who was who, among the persons mentioned in the inscriptions ; one may even think that the texts c-f (on the left-hand side of the hall) do not deal with Zenon's family. As the kinship vocabulary is only used for some of them, it is not very easy to reconstruct the family ; one can perhaps suggest the following :

⁶. Described in *JGLS* I, p. 74 as : « Le caveau est précédé d'une galerie voûtée de briques dont les parois sont couvertes de sculpture. »

⁷. Cf. J.-B. Yon, *Les notables de Palmyre*, Beyrouth, 2002, p. 204-206.

Zenon is the *paterfamilias*, with his son, Damis, and two women (one of them being the mother of Damis). As it is not very likely in a Greek city that we should be faced with a case of polygamy, one can think that they were not married to Zenon at the same time. For example, Aththaia could be the mother of Damis only, and this Damis may be the heir of the family, a fact which would give a prominent status to Aththaia (and would explain why the text underlines that she is the mother of Damis). After her death, Zenon may have married Phaladônia, mother of the other three children. These, as Soualaia, are shown on the lower level, and it can correspond to their position in the family. The fact, that, among the boys, they, and they only, have semitic names (Phalados and Zoôras) is to be underlined. Beneath, two children (already dead ?) seem to be younger. They are shown with their sister and their grandmother (or nurse ?). the sense is disputed, but it seems that the name Soualaia or Soumaia (less probably) is followed by the word *mamme* which has the well-attested sense grand-mother in papyri.

As is obvious, most of these is only hypothetical. One last remark should be done : only few members of the family have Greek or Latin names (f, g, h), and they are always male. Other examples of collective burial are known around Zeugma and are worth looking at, for comparison purpose at least.

II. Other examples

1. Tomb TS 1

Tomb TS 1 in the southern necropolis of Zeugma has been published by D. Kennedy and D. Graf⁸. The tomb is on the northern slope of the Kırkbayır hill, east of the ancient road to Nizip, near the pass between the Belkis Tepe and Kırkbayır hill. In a room, six reliefs are cut into the rock : five on the left (b-f : from left to right, two eagles (b-c), two basket (d-e) one eagle (f)). Opposite, there is one masculine bust (a).

I will not deal extensively either with the inscriptions, but suffice to say that the family relationships (if any) are not mentioned in the texts. It is difficult to know if the difference between symbolical representations (eagle or basket) and busts (as for the man on the right who is named Chrestos) had any meaning for the ancient on-looker. It is important here to underline that at least as far as they can be understood, all the names are Greek or Latin : Chrestos, Augustus (?), Valeria, Zoille, Eutychia.

Even if the figures have been damaged, it seems that the quality, for the sculpture, as for the engraving of inscriptions, was not very high (as in the tomb of Zenon) and it is perhaps even a common feature of all the rock-cut reliefs of Zeugma. On the contrary, some stelae are of a much better quality, from the artistical point of view. This distinction has to be taken into account when dealing with sculptures in Zeugma, but is hard to explain. One has to be reminded as well that the number of known rock-cut reliefs is not very high, and that most of them have been utterly defaced or destroyed very soon after their discovery, making it more difficult to judge their quality.

One last example can serve to show that, despite the number of funerary stelae with only names and funerary formulae of the *alupe chaire* type, there were in the necropolis of Zeugma texts of a different nature, which may hint at more complex relationships between inhabitants of the city, and their relation to the outside world.

⁸. D. Kennedy et D. Graf, « Inscriptions on stone... », p. 101-103, n° 18-23.

2. Bahce Dere, tombe W 04

On the lintel of two inside rooms ⁹ (fig. 2).

« Year 373 according to the old reckoning (?), ????, to Antipatra, daughter of (?) Antipatros ».

According to the Seleucid comput, the year would be thus 61-62 AD and it is difficult to see which other era could be called « old reckoning », with a number as 373. Nor the script, neither the style and the formulation permit to give a date after the third century AD. Besides, no era of the Commagenian kings is known so far, leaving us only with possibility of a Seleucid era date. In 61-62 AD, Zeugma was most probably under Roman domination, even if Commagena was still independent. So, the other era (in the lacuna or implied ?) should be a Roman era. But, as has been shown very convincingly by Kevin Butcher, there has never been any Actium era used in Zeugma ¹⁰.

What is more important is that the formulation, with reference to two different computs, makes it very likely that we are dealing here with an official act of some sort, perhaps an extract of the archives of the city. It may be an inscription relating the construction or the concession of a part of the tomb. It is the only example known in Zeugma where there is an inscription on an inside lintel, as if a part of the tomb was differentiated. Much more formally than in the tomb of Zenon, it seems, we have here a reference to general practices of division of tombs, and perhaps their registration in an official way, giving evidence about part of the administration of the city we would not know otherwise.

III. General conclusions

From those inscriptions of various contents, different by their subject matter, as well as by their state of preservation or length, one may draw some conclusion about the epigraphy of the necropolis of Zeugma. In the epitaphs, the formulation is very repetitive, as it is all over the region. Only some words and phrases (participle and adjective as *philoumene* (IGLS I, 106 = Wagner, p. 259, n° 141), mentions of a date (text referred to above) or of the age of the deceased (Wagner, p. 261, n° 147) are exceptions to the norm. Formulation with *aôre* or *alupe* seem to fit with the probable age of the deceased. So, in a text published by J. Wagner, *aôre* is used for a girl who was five years old (Wagner, p. 261, n° 147 : « *Longeina aôre chere zesasa ete 5, men(a) 1, kai hem(eras) 28* »). The fact that there are no epithet before *chaire* (texts n° 1g-h, 3) has most likely no special meaning. Kinship terminology is represented only in the tomb of Zenon, but, still, it is difficult to reconstruct the genealogy, as we saw.

The same kind of phrases are used in Hierapolis-Membidj, but more generally, in all the region between the Euphrates and the Syro-Phoenician coast (Sidon, Berytos), including Antiochene and Emesene. Many characteristics are common, the phrase *alupe chaire* or slight variations, absence of kinship terminology and often even of patronyms. The documentary evidence from Zeugma gives the opportunity to focus on a population with very different ethnic components (as far as one can trust onomastic), even if Greek names are majoritary. This is another common feature with other cities of the same region, and at the least, it can be said that people who write have mostly Greek names, and that they write in Greek, as Latin or Syriac are rather rare.

⁹. Published in *Anatolia Antiqua* IX, 2001, n° 1.

¹⁰. See K. Butcher, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7, 1994, p. 449-450 with note 5.

Most of the texts from Zeugma, and all of those mentioned above, are dated of the Roman period, and mostly of the first three century AD, as it is in the necropolis of Palmyra, which is among the most well-known of the Eastern Roman Empire. And the necropolis of Zeugma have indeed common features with those of Palmyra. It is clear, from numerous examples, that the location of the tombs in the necropolis was carefully planned by their founders. The proximity of a road was very often in Antiquity cause of the development of a necropolis, and the location of the Western necropolis of Zeugma belongs to the same tradition. Nevertheless, in Zeugma, the monuments were not as lavishly build as in Palmyra. The constructions in bricks ('halls') were less visible than funerary towers (*fig. 3*). One should note anyway that hypogea are very frequent in Palmyra and that their entry were not very visible either. Even there, there were two different categories, on the first hand, buildings made to be seen, which were the result of competition inside society and among leading families ; on the other hand, tombs more unassuming, like hypogea. It does not mean either that those hypogea were not lavishly decorated, inside.

In Palmyra, the visibility of the tombs in relation with the public monuments can explain some locations and the orientation of several tombs. Likewise, in Zeugma, many tombs have their entrance opening towards the Belkis tepe and, one may assume, towards the temple which was at its top. Was it because they could be seen from the center of the city, or on the contrary because they were in a certain manner under the protection of the civic divinity ? Both hypothesis are tenable.

Some tombs do not have façade opening on the outside (as hypogea with long dromos or gallery), which may incite to prefer the second hypothesis. Some other tombs had obviously very monumental façade, as the tombs TS 2-3 at the foot of the Belkis tepe (south and south-east). Most of the time, the remaining inscriptions are either engraved on the façade, either on free-standing stelas and they could not be seen, as it is the case for the tomb of Zenon. But in other cases, as for the tomb excavated by the Museum of Gaziantep, above the village of Belkis, the standing stelas on a terrace were in a perfect position to be seen and could have been used to draw the attention to a family. As R. Ergeç wrote, one is reminded of the sacred area in front of the royal tombs on the Nemrud Dag.

If the evidence from the necropolis is to be believed, the social structure of the population of Zeugma could have been more homogeneous than that of Palmyra, and most likely less wealthy. Necropolis of Zeugma, as they have been under scrutiny here, permit to conclude to the existence of, at least, a part of the population numerous enough to build so many tombs and rich enough. Some of those tombs belonged to rather wealthy people, but on the whole, it seems obvious that it could not be enough for the entire population of Zeugma. It is not to be excluded that, during the Commagenian period, the aristocracy of the kingdom was using monumental tombs like those of their kings and princes, and some of them could have lived around Zeugma. One can think to several tumuli found in the region. That must remain hypothetical, as long as they have not been properly studied, but the comparison with Emesa, not so far away to the south-west, is obvious. There, the difference between the famous tomb of Sampsigeramos and the rich royal necropolis on one side ¹¹, and, on the other side, the great majority of plain funerary stelas, may reveal a lot about the society of Emesa during the period. In Zeugma, during the Roman period, there may have been an aristocracy or some sort of civic elite. Those people may have wanted to show their prominence on the society by building monumental tombs. But we have only evidence for rock-cut tombs and funerary stelas, and no monumental tombs are preserved, neither in Zeugma, nor in Antioch or Emesa. But there were

¹¹ See H. Seyrig, « Antiquités de la nécropole d'Émèse », *Syria* 29, 1952, p. 204-250 and 30, 1953, p. 12-24 (= *Antiquités syriennes V*, Paris, 1958, p. 1-60).

other strategies of differentiation, and the wealthy villas decorated with mosaïcs discovered in Zeugma or in Antioch were a perfect opportunity to do so.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3