

## ROMAN INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE SIQ OF PETRA

### Remarks on the Initial Garrison of Arabia

by

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In 1979-80, the clearance of accumulated debris from the Siq of Petra was undertaken by the Jerash-Petra Tourist Project, under the supervision of Muḥammed Murshed. This operation led to the discovery or rediscovery of several Greek inscriptions. The most significant are engraved on the southern cliff of the Siq, about 400 m. from the Khazneh. At this point where the two kilometer gorge narrows, nine cultic niches have been recorded by Dalman (Nos 148-161)<sup>1</sup>. The most remarkable cult monuments are Nos 149-150, which represent a deity standing between two animals, dedicated by Sabinus Alexandrus and the hemispheric baetyle of Adraa (Der'a in the Hauran).

#### I. The Initials of the IIIrd Cyrenaica:

(Fig. 1)

This short inscription has been noticed by Brünnow and von Domaszewski in *Die Provincia Arabia*, I, p.221, who refer to previous explorers, but it was erroneously interpreted. Dalman records it under No. 157, to the right of the Adraa Baetyle, without interpretation. Recently, the inscription has been brought to public attention by F. Zayadine,<sup>1bis</sup>. Although it is short and contains only the name of the military unit, it is significant because of the

shortage of military inscriptions in Petra.

The approximate dimensions of the inscription are : 43 cm. in length and 10 cm. in maximum height (*rho*). It reads Γ ΚΥΡ to be interpreted: τρίτη Κυρηναϊκή] (Legio III Cyr (enaica).

To our knowledge, it is the first dedication of the legion written in Greek at Petra. A funerary plaque in Latin, previously found in the vicinity of Petra mentioned C. Antoninus Valens, an *eques* of the IIIrd Cyrenaica, and was dated by the authors of publication to approximately the first half of the second century A.D.<sup>2</sup> The abbreviated Greek form used here is not unknown, and the best comparative examples come from Bostra,<sup>3</sup> which was the legionary headquarters throughout the history of the province.

Although no precise date can be established for the inscription from Petra, an attempt can be made to offer an approximate chronological appreciation through the reconsideration of the early military history of Arabia.

The examination of the Papyri Michigan 465, 466, 562<sup>4</sup> in recent years led to the assumption that it was the IIIrd Cyrenaica which formed the core of the first garrison of Arabia<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the military

1. *Petra und seine Felsheiligtümer*, Leipzig, 1908, p. 145-147.

1bis. F. Zayadine, 'Tempei. Gräber, Töpferöfen'. In: *Petra. Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen*. Ed. by Manfred Lindner. Delp Verlag, München 1986. Reference to the inscription is on page 224.

2. C.M. Bennett and D.L. Kennedy, A New Roman Military Inscription from Petra. *Levant* X, 1978, p.164.

3. M. Sartre, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie. Tome XIII, Fasc 1. Bostra*. Paris: Geuthner 1982. Inscriptions: 9452 (Γ ΚΥΡ) 9396 (Γ ΚΥΡ) dated for A.D. 320-21; 9182 ( ΕΓ III ΚΥΡ ); 9089(ΑΕΓ ΚΥΡ); 9002 (ΑΕΓΓ ΚΥ..)

4. Herbert Ch. Youtie and John G. Winter. *Pa-*

*pyri and Ostraca from Karanis*. Michigan Papyri, Vol VIII. Ann Arbor - London 1951: Papyri 465 and 466. Elinor M. Husselman. *Papyri from Karanis*. Michigan Papyri vol. IX. The American Philological Association 1971: Papyrus 562.

5. Glen W. Bowersock. *Roman Arabia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1983, 81; 'Nabataeans and Romans in the Wadi Sirhan,' *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, vol. II, King Saud University Press, 1984, p. 134; Michael Speidel. Arabia's First Garrison, *ADAJ* XVI, 1971, 112; The Roman Army in Arabia, ANRW II.8, 1977: 693-94; David L. Kennedy. Legio VI Ferrata: The Annexation and Early Garrison of Arabia, *HSCP* 84, 1980 : 282-309.

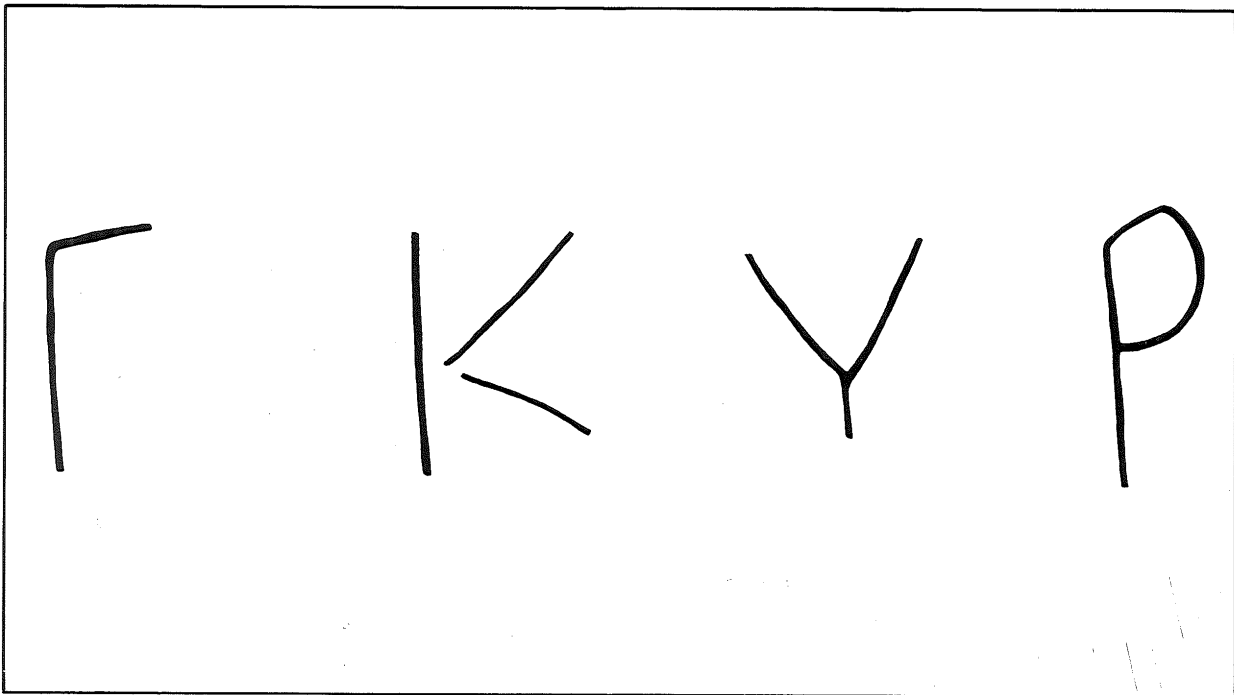


Fig. 1. The initials of the IIIrd Cyrenaica (after Z. T. Fiema)

membership of Julius Appolinarius, an Egyptian N.C.O. and the author of letters sent to Egypt from Petra in A.D. 107 seems to be reasonably well established. The whole assumption has been considerably strengthened in an article by D. Kennedy whose attractive hypothesis presents the reconstruction of movements and transfers of the Eastern legions during the Trajanic-early Hadrianic period.<sup>6</sup>

However, the questions about the annexation forces and the initial garrison of Arabia may need to be re-addressed. It has been already voiced that the Roman invasion may have been in fact a two-pronged operation, with the troops from the North (with Cornelius Palma, the governor of Syria) and the South involved.<sup>7</sup> Palma had been granted the *ornamenta triumphalia* by Trajan for his Arabian exploits<sup>8</sup> and apparently the Syrian forces from his "im-

perium" were present in the annexation army as well as additional, supportive troops. It would be unreasonable to assume that the governor of Syria commanded the forces from Egypt only during the operations in Arabia. Thus in A.D. 106 Arabia possessed the occupation garrison consisting apparently of Syrian legionary forces, and the legio VI Ferrata had been for long voiced as the best candidate.<sup>9</sup> Since the whereabouts of the VIth Ferrata in the first decade after the annexation is not precisely known<sup>10</sup> and the inscriptions of that legion, found in Jerash and Amman are dated probably to the early Hadrianic period,<sup>11</sup> the first question emerges: when the Syrian legionary forces left Arabia; immediately with Palma or sometime later?

Divorcing ourselves here from the discussion concerning the early capital of Arabia, it should be stated that the choice of

6. Kennedy, *Legio VI Ferrata*... pp. 282-309.

7. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 81; Bengt E. Thomasson. *The One-Legion Provinces of the Roman Empire during the Principate. Opuscula Romana IX: 7*, 1974 pp. 64, 66.

8. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) VI. 1386 = Dessau: *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 1023.

9. Ritterling, 'Legio'. In: *Paulys Real Encyclopädie* (begonnen von G. Wissowa) = P-W

24. 1486, 1510, 1591. Recently, the hypothesis of the VI Ferrata as the initial garrison is supported by M. Sartre (see bibliography).

10. Ritterling, 'Legio VI Ferrata' in: *P-W* 1590. Besides very fragmentary inscription of that legion from Rhapsaneae, nothing is known definitely about its whereabouts in the beginnings of the II<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

11. Kennedy, 'Legio VI Ferrata'.. pp 299, 302.

Bostra as the legionary headquarters of Arabia had in fact larger strategical importance than the security of Arabia alone. J. C. Mann expressed the opinion that the place had been selected as far North as possible, so a legion stationed there could concentrate rapidly with the main strategical forces of Syria if a military deployment on the Parthian border was necessary<sup>12</sup>. The stationing of a Syrian legion in Bostra would thus satisfy strategically the military needs of both Syria and Arabia.

The presence of an Egyptian soldier in Petra in A.D. 107 supports an assumption of a two-pronged invasion. Second question however concerns the problem if the IIIrd Cyrenaica was present in Arabia in its full strength or only as a separate detachment. On the basis of the Appolinarius' letters, M. Sartre argued that the headquarters of the IIIrd Cyrenaica was still in Nicopolis that time. Furthermore discussing the rank of Claudius Severus, Sartre argued that only the Syrian legion could be considered as Arabia's first garrison, with vexillatio(nes) of the IIIrd Cyrenaica as supportive troops<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, the title of Severus (ὐπατικός; ὐπατικός τῆς λεγεῶνος) mentioned in Pap. Mich 466 caused a confusion, but it was most plausibly explained as a "governor"<sup>14</sup>. However, if we accept that in A.D. 107, the garrison of Arabia consisted only of legio III Cyrenaica (in its full strength), some other assumptions will have to be taken into consideration as well, namely:

- a. Claudius Severus would have been appointed *ad hoc* as the commander of the occupation legion (since of senatorial rank, he could not have commanded that legion while still in Egypt) and the first governor. If he were originally on

Palma's staff, possibly he had commanded one of the Syrian legions, the command of which he must have now handed over to someone else.

- b. an officer commanding the IIIrd Cyrenaica in Egypt up to now (either a *praefectus* or *primipilaris*<sup>15</sup>) would have to be relieved of his command or made a subordinate of Claudius Severus.
- c. if the *whole* legion participated in the Parthian War, thus in 115 there must have been a successive rapid change in command (knight or senator?). In 116 a *vexillatio* of legio III Cyrenaica was in Jerusalem, probably subduing Jewish revolt<sup>16</sup>. Finally, according to hypothesis presented by D. Kennedy, the legion was transferred back to its old headquarters in Nicopolis<sup>17</sup>, where it is attested in A.D. 119. Again, if in Mesopotamia the legion was led by a senator, there would be another change in command necessary now.

One may wonder, if it would not be safer to assume, that instead of continuous transferring of the *whole* legion including the rapid changes in command, legio III Cyrenaica during Trajanic period operated at large in shape of independent vexillationes being detached to particular forces according to the needs occurring, and its permanent camp throughout the period was still in Nicopolis at least till A.D. 123.

Thus, it is perhaps not out of place to suggest that legio VI Ferrata was the initial garrison of Arabia, with some supportive troops of the IIIrd Cyrenaica. In such a case, Claudius Severus, most probably a commanding officer of the Syrian legion was the first governor of the province and simultaneously the commander of all milit-

12. John C. Mann. 'The Frontiers of the Principate.' *ANRW* 11.1.1974, p 552.

13. M. Sartre. *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine*. Collection Latomus vol 178. Bruxelles 1982, p. 79; M. Sartre. *Inscriptions grecques et latines...* pp. 234-36.

14. Bowersock. 'A Report on Arabia Provincia', *JRS* 61, 1971, 232.

15. A praefectus of equestrian order (*praefectus exercitus qui est in Aegypto*) see Ritterling, P-W, 1510, 1513. The actual commanding and administrative duties rested probably with a *primipilaris*, see Valerie Maxfield. *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army*. University of California Press, L.A. & Berkeley 1981, p. 24.

16. See references and discussion in Speidel, 'The Roman Army..' 693.

17. Kennedy, 'Legio VI Ferrata'.. p. 307.

ary forces in Arabia.

In such a light, the affair of Iulius Appolinarius may be differently interpreted. By calling Severus as ὑπατικός τῆς λεγεῶνος, Appolinarius refers actually to the rank of Severus as the commander of the VI Ferrata the most powerful and in its full strength, military unit stationed in Arabia.

Although there is no clear indication of Appolinarius' transfer to another legion (in such a case, a headquarters cohort of the VIth Ferrata in Bostra), such an interpretation is not impossible either and was already discussed elsewhere<sup>18</sup>.

The remarks presented above are highly hypothetical, however an example of similar situation from neighbouring province can be cited here. Having conquered Jerusalem, Titus, the supreme commander of the Roman army had left the task of final pacification of the country to Sex. Vettulenus Cerialis, the commander of legio X Fretensis stationed there and simultaneously the first governor of the post-war Judaea.<sup>19</sup>

The short discussion presented above shows that whereas the idea of the presence of the IIIrd Cyrenaica in Arabia, from the beginning of the province (with eventual interval of A.D. 115-123) seems to be hypothetically more attractive, the doubts about the presence of the *whole* legion are still existent, until a new epigraphic evidence emerges. Meanwhile, it would be safer to date the new military inscription from Petra to the post-Hadrianic period for which the final establishment of that legion in Arabia is well attested. The Latin dedication of L. Velinna Firmus, a centurion of the IIIrd Cyrenaica, recently discovered at Madaba and dated by P-L. Gatier<sup>20</sup> to the

mid second century A.D., together with another dedication of the same legion discovered at Jebel Qu'eis in Southern Hauran,<sup>21</sup> tend to confirm this opinion.

## II. Sabinus Panegyriarches:

This Greek dedication is chiselled in a *tabula ansata*, under the relief of a standing god, flanked by two antithetic animals. It has been deciphered by Dalman, under no. 149 (*Petra*, p. 145). Length of the inscription: 75 cm; H. of B: 6,5 cm.; Omega: 3 cm.

*Text* : (Pl. XXVIII)

- |                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. CABEINOC ΑΛΕΞΑ | Σαβεῖνος Ἀλέσα   |
| 2. ΝΑΡΟC ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡ  | νόρος πανηγυρ(ι) |
| 3. ΑΡΧΗC ΑΔΡΑΗΝΩΝ | ἀρχης Ἀδραηνῶν   |
| 4. ΕΥCΕΒΩΝ ΑΝΕ    | εὐσεβῶν ἀνέ      |
| 5. ΕΗΚΕΝ          | (θ)ηκεν          |

*Translation*:

Sabinus Ale(x)andros, panegyriarches of Adraa, in piety dedicated.

*Commentary*:

Some Greek misspelling occur in the inscription:

Line 1: Alesandros for Alexandros; line 2: *panegyriarches* for *panegyriarches*; line 5: *epison* for *theta*.

Sabinus Alexandrus was a *panegyriarches* (president of festivals) of Adraa (Der'a). He arrived in Petra to participate, as suggested by J. Starcky,<sup>22</sup> in a religious festival. Every four years, the Nabataeans of Petra and Bostra celebrated the "*actia dusaria*", a festival of games in honour of Dusares. A coin of Bostra minted under Decius (249-251)<sup>23</sup> bears on the obverse: "*actia dusaria*" with the repre-

18. Thomasson, 'The One-Legion Provinces' ..., p. 64.

19. Josephus. *De bello iudaico* VII, 163. Bengt E. Thomasson. *Laterculi Praesidium*, vol I, Göteborg: Radius, 1984, p 324. The whole area was still apparently under the "imperium" of the governor of Syria L. Caesennius Paetus, however the responsibility of final pacification and reorganisation of the

province lay with the commander of the legion (X Fretensis) stationed in Jerusalem.

20. Cf. *Liber Annuus*, 37 (1987) forthcoming.

21. D. Kennedy and H.I. MacAdam, 'Southern Hauran Survey', 1985 in this issue, p. 136;

22. *Dict. Bible Sup.* VII, 1964, col. 990.

23. *Idem.*, col. 689 & Fig. 695, 13.

sensation of an altar supporting three baetyles with offerings. According to St. Hieronymus<sup>24</sup> (4th century A.D.), an annual festival assembled the bedouins of the Negev in honour of Venus-al-'Uzza, the goddess of Elusa.

As indicated above, Sabinus Alexandrus carved the image of his god, standing between two squat animals. The relief has been unfortunately erased in later periods (probably Byzantine or Arab). It is possible, however, to recognise a god with a large tunic, standing between two opposed bulls. The statue of Qaus found at Khirbet Tannur,<sup>25</sup> now in the Cincinnati Art Museum, depicts the god seated between two bulls. Both of these sculptures can be compared to the Jupiter Heliopolitanus of Baalbek,<sup>26</sup> flanked by two bulls. It is likely in this case that the standing relief of the Siq represents a Zeus-Dusares (Pl. XXIX, 1).

The hemispheric baetyle of Adraa which is set on a moulded pedestal, has been carved to the right of Sabinus' dedication (Pl. XXIX, 2). The word *panegyriarches* is engraved, once again, underneath. A similar baetyle is reproduced on the coins of the city dated 174 and 177 A.D. with the inscription: "*Dusares theos Adraenon*" (Dusares god of Adraa).<sup>27</sup>

The pedestal on which the baetyle rests is called in Nabataean: "*motab*" (in Greek *basis*), and derives from the root *yib*, to sit down, to settle ... It appears for the first time on a pedestal found at Teima<sup>28</sup> in Arabia and dated to the 6th century B.C. Another pedestal measuring 90 cm. by 40 cm. and bearing the word *motab* in Hatraean, was discovered at Sari in Mesopotamia.<sup>29</sup> At Petra, in the Turkmanyeh Nabataean inscription, the *motab* of Dusares is personified and called Ḥarisha.<sup>30</sup> It

is evident from all these inscriptions that the *motab* is specifically the seat of the god which can be personified and receive a cult. It is in some cases empty<sup>31</sup> and can be the symbol of the god's presence.

Both the dedication of Sabinus and the baetyle of Adraa can be tentatively dated to the second half of the second century A.D.

### III. Victorinus beneficiarius: (Fig. 2, Pl. XXX, 2)

It is useful to reproduce in this context an inscribed altar, published by F. Zayadine.<sup>32</sup> The Greek dedication is engraved on a sandstone altar 0.66 high and 0.33 wide at its base. It is provided on its top with a cup for incense burning and was discovered in 1979 about 500 m. from the Khazneh, opposite the niche which shelters ten baetyles. At this place, the water channel runs behind a rock platform (Pl. XXX, 1) and the altar was engaged in a later period, probably Byzantine, between the rock platform and the channel (Pl. XXX, 3). Since the water channel cuts the base of the arched gate, at the mouth of the Siq, it could be dated to the Byzantine period.

#### Text:

Θεῶι Ἀγίωι  
Ἐπηκόωι \*  
Οὐκτωρῖνος  
β(ενε)φ(ικιάριος) εὐξάμενος ἀνέθηκεν

#### Translation:

To the saint god, who hears prayers, Victorinus, b(ene)f(iciarius), as an ex-voto dedicated.

#### Commentary:

Line 1: The epithet *saint* which is of orien-

24. *Vita Sancti Hilarionis Eremitae*, P.L. XXIII, 41 (quoted by J. Starcky, *op. cit.* col. 1004).

25. N. Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, New York, 1965, p. 195 & Pl. 42.

26. H. Seyrig, 'La triade heliopolitaine et les temples de Baalbek,' *Scripta Varia*, Paris, 1985 p. 3ff and 91 ff.

27. J. Starcky *DBS*, VII, col. 990.

28. *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, II, 114.

29. B. Aggoula, *Semitica*, 32 (1982) p. 102-103.

30. J. Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen*, II, Paris 1952, p. 4-5, line 3.

31. For example the throne of Astarte at Eshmun, M. Dunand, *Bul. Musée Bey*, 24 (1971) p. 19-26.

32. *ADAJ*, 26 (1982) p. 365.



Fig. 2. The inscription of Victorinus (facsimile by Z. T. Fiema)

tal origin is attached to Zeus in the Phoenician cities of Tripoli, Sidon and Baetocece (Qal'at el-Husn). At Petra, an altar with the Greek inscription "To saint Zeus Dusares" was discovered by the Horsfields,<sup>33</sup> on the hill north of Qasr el-Bint temple. Another dedication to saint Zeus Dusares was noticed by J. T. Milik<sup>34</sup> at Umm el Biyarah chapel.

Line 2 : "epikoos" "who listens, who hears prayers" is another epithet applied to Zeus. It is likely that the dedication is in this inscription to Zeus-Dusares.

Line 3 : Victorinus is a Roman *cognomen*, well known in Central Italy and Gaule. At Bostra, it appears in a military list of the 3rd century A. D.<sup>35</sup>

Line 4 : The b(ene)f(iciarius) of the Roman army was a non-commissioned officer attached to the staff of senior (high-ranking) officer as an aide/orderly and serving various administrative duties (clerk) or being entrusted with special missions.<sup>36</sup>

A considerable number of *beneficarii* would be attached to the staff of a provincial governor (in case of Arabia, a simultaneous commander of the provincial legion). It has been also observed that the number of *beneficarii* in the provincial *officia* increases during the Roman period and by the late second century, the *beneficiarius* is found often associated with

places where customs could be collected<sup>36a</sup>. In our case, the function of Victorinus is not further specified (*beneficiarius consularis* or not) neither is his status.

The script together with the many ligatures suggest a date in the third century A. D.

#### General conclusion

It is evidence from the Roman inscriptions which have been surveyed in this note that the Siq of Petra continued to play the role of a sacred way in the Roman period.

On the other hand, the old capital of the Nabataean kings remained a military centre as late as the 3rd century A. D. In the second century A. D., Petra was still an administrative centre, since the Roman governor, Julius Julianus, held his assises in the city.<sup>37</sup> Sextius Florentinus, a legate under Hadrian, acquired a tomb between the Nabataean royalties. In a recent article about Wadi es-Sirhan, G. Bowersock<sup>38</sup> expressed the opinion that the Roman Emperors reoccupied the Nabataean forts for the defense of the limes. They could certainly not afford to neglect Petra as a major strategic point for the protection of the trade routes between Arabia, Egypt and Syria.

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33. *PEQ*, 89 (1957) p.13-14.

34. Cf. C-M. Bennett, *ADAJ*, XXIV (1980) p.211.

35. M. Sartre, *IGLS*, XIII, *Bostra*, Paris, 1982, p. 225 col.2.

36. G. Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army* (London 1974), p. 121.; Maxfield, *The mi-*

*litary decorations*, p. 31. *IGLS*, VI, Paris, 1967, p.125.

36a. G. Webster, *idem*, p. 263-64.

37. G. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, Harvard, 1983, p. 86 & 161.

38. *Ibid.* 'Nabataeans and Romans in the Wadi Sirhan', *art. cit.* especially p. 134.

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