

TWO INSCRIPTIONS FROM PETRA

by
Stephen Tracy

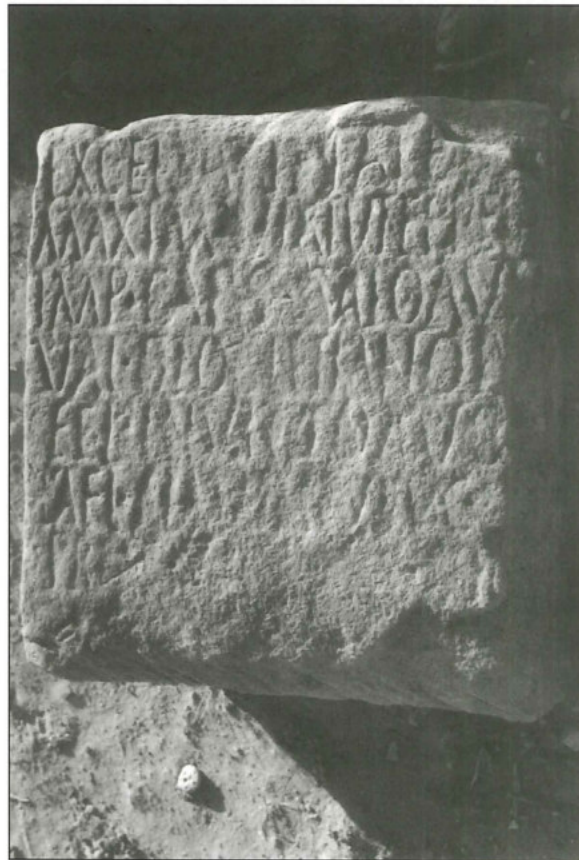
In this report the author presents two texts from Petra, one Latin, and the other Greek; the first has been published (inaccurately) as three inscriptions, namely *IGLJord* IV nos. 40-41, 53; the second has not been published. The publication of these stones was entrusted to J. Strugnell some years ago.¹ He has very generously allowed me to publish them and has shared with me his notes, drawings, and photographs.

1. Dedication to Diocletian (Figs.1 and 2).

Even though Sartre (1993), prints no photograph and even though his text differs markedly from the original, there can be no doubt that the present inscription is the one that he edited. His majuscule text of it on page 70 of *IGLJord* IV reads:

- EXCEPAIITATI
TAMAXIM VIXITANN
3. IMPCAESCAIOAV
VALDIOCLETIANOC
FELINVICTOAVG
6. AEL.IIA NAVG
PII- - - -

Despite the complete uniformity of lettering and spacing on this stone (Fig. 1), Sartre interpreted it as three separate texts – lines 1-2 as a fragmentary funerary inscription, lines 3-5 as a text honoring Diocletian, and lines 6-7 as an inscription mentioning Antoninus Pius. The interpretation is puzzling, and the author is not certain

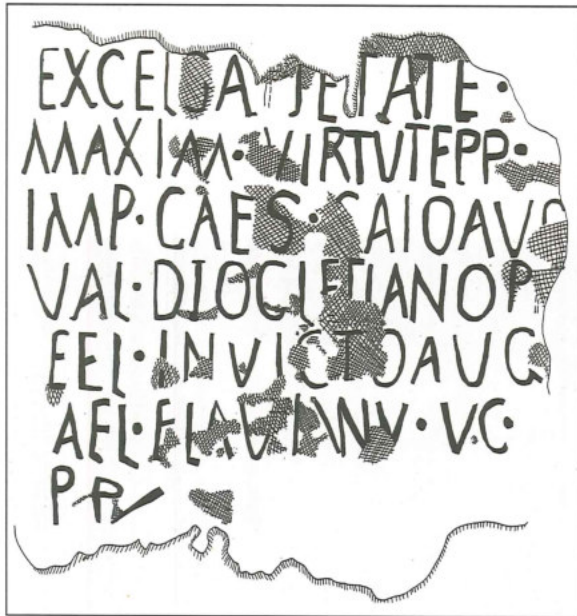


1. Dedication to Diocletian, photograph by the author.

about what is intended. Sartre seems to envision three successive uses with erasure. He describes the block in two different ways – at the bottom of page 69 as “complet mais endommagé en haut et en bas” and on page 88 as seemingly complete “en haut” but perhaps recut. The author infers from this that the first use was as the grave monument. The stone was then reworked, the upper part

1. The discovery of the first was announced by D. Kirkbride, the excavator see *ADAJ* 4-5, 1960: 121. In addition to Professor Strugnell, I owe thanks to D. Kirkbride and the Jordanian authorities for the privilege of studying these inscriptions. A grant from the College of Humanities at the Ohio State University made it possible in June of 1998 to

spend a week at Petra studying the inscriptions. There, thanks to the kindness of Professor Martha Joukowsky, I joined the Brown University Excavations at the site of the Great Temple. I am also much indebted to Professors Ch. Habicht, J. Bodet, and Ph. Forsythe for advice on a preliminary version of this paper.



2. Facsimile drawing of the dedication to Diocletian by J. Strugnell.

cut off, and reused for a text mentioning Antoninus Pius, and then much later used again for a dedication to Diocletian. This does not seem possible. First of all, careful examination of the inscribed surface revealed no evidence of erasure. Second, the text of the dedication to Diocletian ought to be complete. It does not seem to be, unless the person/entity making the dedication was understood. Lastly and most importantly, the correct reading of this text does not support it. Sartre's text is manifestly wrong at the beginning and end of line 2 and one suspects that in making his transcription he repeated the end of line 5 as the end of line 6.

The present text is based on autopsy and on a facsimile drawing made by Strugnell at the time of discovery.²

ca. 286 CE

EXCELSA PIETATE V
MAXIM. VIRTUTE PPF

3. IMP. CAES. CAIO AVR
VAL. DIOCLETIANO P[O]
FEL. INVICTO AVG

6. AEL. FLAVIANV. VC.
PRP[R]

excelsa pietate
maxim(a) virtute p(atri)? p(iissimo)?
f(ecit)?

3. Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) Caio Aur(elio)
Val(erio) Diocletiano p[ro]
fel(ici) invicto Aug(usto)
6. Ael(ius) Flavianu(s) v(ir) c(la-
rissimus)
Pr(aeses) P[ro]v(inciae)

For the location, brief description, and dimensions of this stone, see Sartre (1993: 69 nos. 40-41) For further description, see also *Ibid.* p. 88 no. 53. The description is neither entirely accurate nor does it mention some important features. There are, for example, remains of a small rounded moulding at the top of the inscribed surface just above the letters TAT in line 1. The top too is preserved in places and reveals rough chisel marks. There is no trace of any cutting for a dedication. Both sides are preserved (smooth); the bottom is broken. The inscription is lying on its back and could not be raised to determine whether the original back is preserved. The inscribed surface has suffered, but not greatly, since Strugnell made his drawing more than 40 years ago.

A study of the stone, the photograph (Fig. 1), and the facsimile drawing (Fig. 2) enables us to see what should never have been doubted, i.e. that this is a single text, although not without its problems. The ablatives in the first two lines are probably intended to express some kind of attendant circumstances, i.e. out of the highest *pietas*, out of the maximum of *virtus* Aelius Flavianus has made this dedication to his emperor. It would hardly be flattering to an emperor to say because of *his* highest *pietas*, etc. The possession of these qualities by the emperor is, after all, a given. The end of

2. Its accuracy can be judged by examining the photograph and facsimile drawing he made of the second

inscription here published (Figs. 3 and 4). Strugnell appears to be quite a trustworthy draftsman.

line 1 is partially broken away. Strugnell recorded a mark of punctuation that I can not see, and although there are some marks, I can discern no certain letter stroke and think this area was left blank.

The abbreviation at the end of line 2 is difficult to read with certainty. There appears to be three letters. The first two letters are almost certainly PP and only the top left part of the third is preserved. It is squared and resembles this cutter's F or E, but, it may also be a somewhat squared P. This abbreviation, if deciphered correctly, can most probably be filled out as *patri piissimo* or *patrono perpetuo* followed by *fecit* or perhaps *posuit*. Of course, the letters PP most commonly in imperial titlature abbreviate the phrase *pater patriae*. These letters always come after the emperor's name and usually last among his offices and titles. However, in this case they first appear before the emperor's name, i.e. not in the proper place for that abbreviation. The abbreviation in the last line is difficult to make out as well, where the first two letters seem to be PR. After these letters, there is a very worn area of two letter-spaces in length, followed by what appears to be a leaf. A vertical and part of the loop of pi seems to be preserved in the first of these two spaces, but I can certainly discern no letter stroke in the second. The slanting mark that begins at the bottom of the vertical of the second pi and extends up towards the right to about the middle of this second space conforms to no letter stroke and is not weathered. It is therefore a recent mark or scratch.

Since this dedication is made to Diocletian alone, it probably belongs to the first part of his reign, around the years 285 to 288, and certainly before he established the "tetrarchy" in March 293. Aelius Flavianus, the governor of Arabia around the year 286

CE, is not attested elsewhere.³ He is certainly to be differentiated from the soldier of the same name who died at 30 years of age ca. 250 (*L'Année épigraphique* 1941:10) and from C. Ael. Flavianus Sulpicius who twice served as *Galatarches* (*L'Année épigraphique* 1924: 91; *Cagnat* 1906: 196-197).

2. Metrical Epitaph (Figs.3 and 4).

This is a rectangular limestone plaque with traces of plaster adhering to its back. The exact provenance of the plaque is unknown, but it was apparently found during Kirkbride's excavations of 1955/6.⁴

H. 0.25 m., W. 0.309 m., Th. 0.042 m.
L.H. ca. 0.025 m.

saec. IV-V CE?

Ἀλφίοιο τὸ σῆμα

ὃν εἵνεκεν

3. εὐσεβιαῶν (sic)

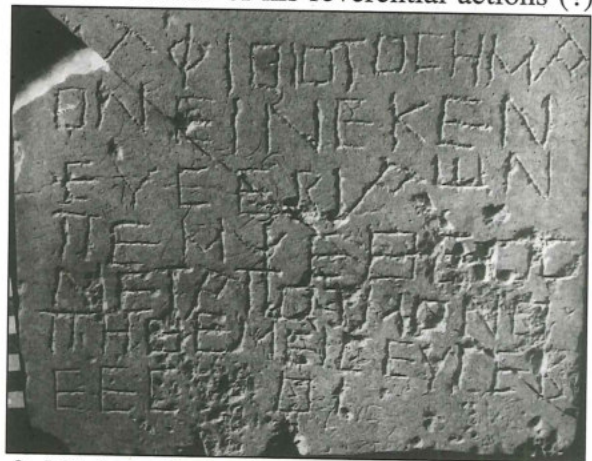
πέμψε θεὸς

μετὰ πότμον ὄ-

6. πη θ' ἐμεῖς εὐσεβ-

έες. υἱοί. vac.

Translation: "Here is the memorial of Alphios whom after meeting his fate god conducted because of his reverential actions (?)"

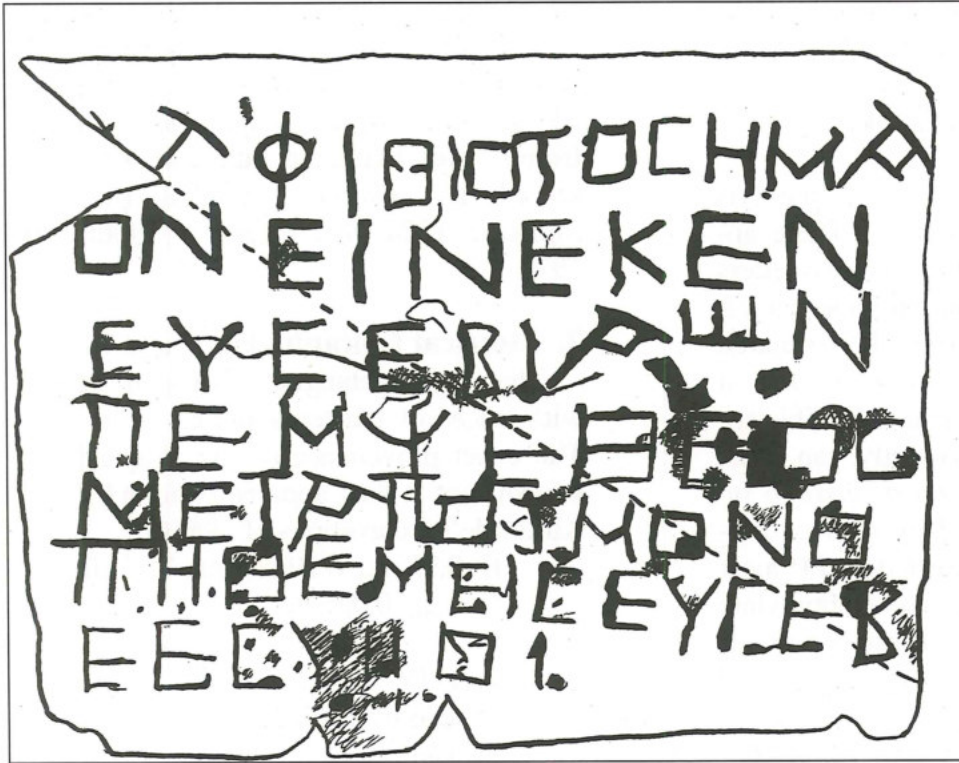


3. Metrical epitaph, photograph by J. Strugnell.

3. Sartre (1982:100) makes brief mention of him based on a report that ultimately derives from this inscription.

4. See the account in *ADAJ* 4-5 1960: 117-122. Its

present whereabouts is unknown. A thorough search of the museum and adjacent storerooms in June of 1998 failed to turn up this gravestone.



4. Facsimile drawing of the metrical epitaph by J. Strugnell.

where we also (if we are) reverent (shall go). His sons (set this up).”

The date is based on the writing which is very similar to the painted inscriptions published as no. 50 (Sartre 1993: no.50). The personal name Alphios is well attested in Arabia (Sartre 1993: nos. 32, 74, 99, 105, 124).

This epitaph is written so that it scans tolerably well for the first five lines as hexameter. The words *σήμα*. *πότμος*. the genitive in *-οιο*. the unaugmented aorist *πέμψε*. and the metrical lengthening of *εἴνεκεν* are all poetic, indeed Homeric. At the same time there is no parallel for the form in line 3. The author seems to intend a genitive plural that depends syntactically on *εἴνεκεν*.⁵ He appears to have taken the word *εὐσεβ(ε)ία*, a collective noun that is not attested in the plural, and simply added the genitive plural ending to it.

In general, this epitaph reflects the com-

monplace idea that no one is immortal, that we too, the readers, will die. That said, there appear to be no close parallels for this particular text, although several of its elements can be found in other texts: for example, *σήμα*. (Peek 1955: nos. 635-640, 1546; Kalinka 1920-1944: 42 line 2; Mitchell 1982: 168 line 1), genitive of the proper name in *-οιο* (Kirchner 1913-1940: 11589 line 4; Peek 1956: 637, 1573), and the phrase *μετὰ πότμον* (Kraeling 1938: no. 300 line 2; Calder 1956: 156 line 4; Roueché 1989: no. 33 line 7).

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5. The lengthened form *εἴνεκεν*. not infrequently is followed by the genitive, which it governs; see, e.g., Heberdey 1941: 907 line 7, 908 line 6; Buck-

ler *et al.* 1933: 133 line 13; Calder 1956: 342 line 3; Levick *et al.* 1993: 60b line 6.

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