G. W. BOWERSOCK

A New Antonine Inscription
from the Syrian Desert

Some 120 kilometres northeast of Palmyra, not far from the modern villages of Sukhne and Tayyibe there stand two imposing enclosures of Umayyad style and date. These constitute the caravanserai known as Qaṣr el-Ḥeir el sharqi, founded by Hishām in A.D. 729–730 according to an Arabic inscription once seen on the site.¹ This Qaṣr el-Ḥeir to the east (el sharqi) must not be confused with another imposing caravanserai to the southwest of Palmyra, the so-called Qaṣr el-Ḥeir el gharbi (the western Qaṣr).² It is the eastern site which has recently been excavated under the direction of ŌLEGR GRABAR. During the 1972 season a Greek inscription was uncovered in the ledge around the north pool of an Umayyad bath lying eighty metres north of the smaller of the two enclosures. The stone was discovered upside down and plastered over. The excavators left it in place in the pool ledge. Professor GRABAR kindly asked me to publish the inscription in a journal which would be readily accessible to scholars interested in the Roman East, inasmuch as the principal publication of the site will be directed to specialists in Islamic art and archaeology. I began study of the inscription in 1972 on the basis of the excavation’s photographs (pl. 53 fig. 1), but it soon became clear that I could not proceed without visiting the site.

My visit to Syria in 1975 was made particularly pleasant and productive through the kindness of Dr. A. BOUNNI and MR. N. SALIBY of the Department of Antiquities. On 16 April I went to Qaṣr el-Ḥeir with my friend J. F. GILLIAM, for whose helpfulness and critical acumen I am most grateful. We noted at once that there were traces of red paint still visible on the letters of the inscription. More important, it was obvious that the stone did not end at the ground on which it appeared to rest in the photographs. Already on 16 April enough earth had been scraped away to reveal a new line, and I learned through the courtesy of KHALED ASSAD, Director of the Palmyra Museum, that this had been freshly done by J.-C. BALTY, H. J. W.

¹ For a provisional account with bibliography of major earlier discussions of the site, see O. GRABAR, Three Seasons of Excavations at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr Sharqi, Ars Orientalis 8, 1970, 65–85. The Arabic inscription recording the building of a madina in 729–730 was seen in 1808 by the French consul ROUSSEAU but has now disappeared: Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe, Cairo 1931, no. 28.

² The western Qaṣr was excavated under the direction of D. SCHLUMBERGER, whose report may be found in Syria 20, 1939, 362 ff.
Drijvers, and M. Gawlikowski on a recent visit to the Qasr. Professor Gilliam and I managed to determine that there were at least two more lines of text on the stone, but we lacked the implements to clear it safely. Fortunately, Messrs. Drijvers and Gawlikowski returned to the site together and, with the aid of a pick, laid bare the entire text of the inscription. When Mr. Ass'ad informed Dr. Drijvers that I had been entrusted with the publication of this text, he immediately contacted me and sent excellent photographs of the whole inscription (pl. 53 fig. 2).

I have recorded these details as an expression of my gratitude to Messrs. Ass'ad, Balty, Drijvers, and Gawlikowski for their invaluable help and cooperation.

Hard limestone block, 100 cm. long, 72 cm. high, 31 cm. wide; line height 4 cm., interspace 1 cm.

*_vacat_* τοῦ ηπ[υ] ἐτοὺς μηνὶ Ὀχετέρετα[υ]_

Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα [Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον Ἀντωνεινον Σεβαστὸν καὶ]
Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Δ[ούκιον Αὐρήλιον Οὔρον Σεβαστὸν]

4 θεοῦ Ἀντωνεινον υἱὸς [θεοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ υἱὸς θεοῦ Τραίανον]
Παρθικοῦ ἐγκόνοις [θεοῦ Νέρου άκαγόνους ἀρχιερέας μεγάτας]
’Ἀμυνιακοῦς Μιχικοῦς [Παρθικοῦς μεγίστου]
Συμμονοῦ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶι [συμποσίαρχος ἱερέων μεγίστου θεοῦ Διὸς]

8 Βήλου, ἐγεῖς δὲ καὶ τῶν [Σεβαστὸν ἔς ἱδον ἄνεστησε]_

πρὸς τοὺς Σεβαστοὺς Καίσαρας

καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ τῆς συμποσίαρχας αὐτοῦ καιρῷ_

ἐπιστολὴν τῶν αὐτῶν[ν Σεβαστὸν]

12 προσθῆκος θυμ[ί]ατόρον περί[]_

tοῖς αὐτοῖς [πρε . . . ὃ . . ]

The *vacat* in line 1 indicates that the date was centred in relation to the rest of the text, of which the approximate length of line is fixed at ca. 50 letters by the certain supplement of line 4. Hyperberetaitos is the only month-name of sufficient length, by virtue of number and breadth of letters, to be restored in the dating formula. For the Seleucid year 478 this is October, A.D. 166.\(^a\) A comparison of

\(^a\) In the epigraphy of Palmyra the date occurs more often at the end of texts in Greek, but sometimes at the beginning; in Palmyrene the date occurs more frequently at the beginning (cf. Inv. Palm. IX. 6b, 7, 11a, 12). In Inv. Palm. IX. 6a it is evident that the date occurred at the beginning of the Greek just as it does in the Palmyrene. When the formula τοῦ + numeral + ἕτος occurs (rather than ἕτος + numeral) the month is usually given in the dative, not the genitive: e.g. Inv. Palm. X. 85, 96, 124 (but 24 is an exception). On the names of the months at Palmyra, cf. A. E. Samuel, Greek and Roman Chronology, Munich 1972, 178–180. The photograph of the full text of the new inscription (pl. 59 fig. 2) shows that the reading of line 1 is complicated by the horizontal break in the stone just at the tops of the last visible letters and also by the gouge after the hasta of the upsilon. This latter mark, a pointed curve with a scratch upward, bears no resemblance to the letters of this inscription and must be discounted in study of the photograph. Similarly a gouge on the stone runs across the last visible letter of line 3 to make the lambda look at first like an alpha.
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Aυτοκράτορα Καύσαρα at the beginning of both lines 2 and 3 shows the degree of flexibility in letter-spacing. Both the titulature in line 6 and the fragments of imperial ancestry are exactly right to designate the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus from A.D. 166 to 169. In line 10 the stone has θθθ where θθθ must have been intended; and in line 13 the words following αὐτοῦς have been deliberately erased. The erasure itself seems beyond elucidation. Slight traces of a fourteenth line are visible on the stone, and it is probable that there was also a Palmyrene text, not necessarily reproducing all the Greek.

The form of the text, with the honorands in the accusative and the dedicant in the nominative, shows that above this stone, originally more than twice its present length, stood statues of the two emperors. CIS II. 3970 provides a close parallel at Palmyra: Αὐτοκράτορα Καύσαρα Λ. Σεπτίμιον Σεουήρον Εὔσεβη Περτίνακα Σεβαστόν Άραβικόν Ἀδιαβρικόν Παρφύκων μέγιστον / καὶ Αὐτοκράτορα Καύσαρα Μᾶρκον [Α]υρῆ[λα]ίον Αὐτονωνείων Εὔσεβη Σεβαστόν [ ras. --- ] καὶ [ 

Ιουλίαν Δόκιμ[α]ν] Σεβαστῆν μητέρα τῶν Ιερὸν στρατουκόπουδον καὶ [Αὐτοκράτορα Καύσαρα Π. Σεπτίμιον Γέτα Σεβαστόν] δεσπότας γῆς καὶ κυριότητος καὶ [παντὸς ἀνθρώπων γένους Σάλπης Μαίληου τὰ ὑπὸ Βασιλείδος ἀρχηγέως καὶ συμποσίαν] ἱεράν μεγίστου θεοῦ Δόκιμος Βῆθ[λεου] ——— ξιδόν ἀνέστησεν ξένους ἔλεγε Μωνή Ξάνθεοα. βραβεῖται τιμιώτατοι Σίλμη βραβεῖται βλύδι. [bd Σιμγύ] 'In stī tem nkysh byrh nysn stnt 514. (Palm. Text: In the symposiarch's of Σίλμη' son of mlkw 'son of blyd' he built these six statues at his own expense in the month Nisan of the year 514.)

It is normal for a Greek name in the accusative to be rendered in Palmyrene by Σίλμη (statuette) or ςίλμη' dy followed by the name. In this case the names of the six persons honoured with statues are omitted (and only four are recoverable from the Greek). Αὐτοκράτος(ς) is often accurately rendered 'γυμ, which, as Clermont-Ganneau saw long ago (Journal asiatique 1905, L. 405), would be a better restoration in the Palmyrene (although 'bd is possible). CIS II. 3970 was inscribed on a lintel over a door, and the six statues were on top. The practice of placing statues above door or gate lintels is illustrated in the Palmyrene agora by Inv. Palm. X. 64 for three of the very persons honoured in CIS II. 3970: [Αὐτοκράτορα Καύσαρα] Δούκι[ου] Σεπτίμιον Σεουήρου Εὔσεβη Περτίνακα Σεβαστον καὶ Αὐτοκράτορα / Καύσαρα Μᾶρκου Αὐρήλιου [Α]γενωνείων Σεβαστῶν Σεβαστόν [υ]λόν καὶ [Ιουλίαν Δόκιμαν Σεβαστῆν μητέρα / τού] [Ιερὸν στραταπέδων --- ---]. This inscription belongs to the lintel of one of the agora gates.

Another Palmyrene text, Inv. Palm. IX. 26, inscribed on a long block (145 cm) now built into the wall of the propylaea of the Temple of Bel, may once have been a lintel for a gate which is a statue or statues stood.4 It is identical in form to the other texts. The first two lines, which were erased and cannot be read, need

4 In his comment on Inv. Palm. IX. 26 Cantineau noted «on ne voit où était placée la statue du titulaire de l'inscription. Le mur ne présente en cet endroit ni console ni socle apte à recevoir une statue.»
not have contained the name and titles of Pescennius Niger. What follows is this: καὶ Μακεδονίας ἔπειτα τῶν Μαλίκου / τοῦ Ζεβδέ / ἰσχυρὰς κ.σ. / ἰσχυρὰς κ.σ. / ἀνεύς ὑμάντων. / Διονυσίου / Θεοῦ / Νίκης. / Ἰωάννου Ἰωάννου διὰ τὰς Δώδεκα. [w]τητωρ qς[τ]---------/-----] dy 'γυμν ἱλ [w] / mtq'r mzb'n br b[-----] / b[-----] brbwnt / μρωθωθ ὄψιν ἰγκρατ [w] ἰβή οἱ βρχτ ὑμιν ἵσιν 50[4]. (Palm. text: Autokrator Kaisar ... which mlkw called mzb'n son of ... set up, in his symposiarch of the priests of Bēl to honour him [emperor] in the month Ab of the year 504.) The opening of the Palmyrene text [w]τητωρ ὑμιν shows by its unusual but-not unexampled omission of Ἰωάννου διὰ τὰς Δώδεκα that it is a particularly close copy of the Greek. It therefore guarantees that the Greek began Αὐτωκράτουρ Καίσαρ. "'γυμν corresponds exactly with ἀνέστησε, which has now disappeared from our Greek text. Inv. Palm. IX. 27, still the lintel of a gate in the Bēl propylaea, is very fragmentary, but the words ἀνέστησε καὶ Σμυρνηστικὸς moved CANTINEAU justly to ask, "S'agit-il encore d'une statue honorifique?" The stone on which the Greek inscription at Qasr el-Heir was cut is thus proved to be a lintel which supported the statues of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. With the exception of Inv. Palm. X. 64, where the dedicant's name and office are missing, the foregoing parallels show the dedicant to be a high priest and symposiarch of Bēl. The regular formulation of the title, as it appears in CIS II. 3970 and Inv. Palm. IX. 26, fits perfectly in the available space of line 7 of the new text. Although the offices of the dedicant are continued in line 8 ἵσιν ἦν τῶν ..., line 9 seems to belong to a new and unparalleled part of the inscription. Accordingly, line 8 must be supplemented with the necessary verb, ἀνέστησε, in all probability preceded, as normally at Palmyra, by έξ ἰδιων (rather than ἐκ τῶν ἰδιων). Observe έξ ἰδιων ἀνέστησεν in CIS II. 3970. The identity of the high priest and symposiarch cannot be established; but two points may be made: 1) Σμύρνης is apparently a Greek form of Ἰστρυς, which is customarily Σμύρνης or Σμύρνης. While the 'γυμν usually has some effect on a transliteration, it can also simply disappear, as presumably here. Similarly STARKY has connected the name Σμύρνης, φέουα at Palmyra, with Ἰστρυς. 2) In view of the Palmyrene custom of regularly naming at least father and grandfather of dedicants, we should assume that the space available, in line 6 after ἰσχυρὰς contained the dedicant's name in the nominative, his father's name in the genitive.
(without the article), and finally τοῦ introducing the grandfather's name.  

It is at line 8 with the second priesthood of the dedicant that the new inscription diverges from the parallel texts. What is this second priesthood? The answer seems indicated by the lines which follow. Someone (or something) has gone to the emperors: an embassy or a letter, or both. Lines 10–11 make reference to a letter which evidently came from the emperors themselves and was received during the term of the dedicant's symposiarchy, an annual office. (Possibly δεδεμένην belongs at the end of line 10.) The content of the imperial letter is missing, but it is very likely to be another of those familiar testimonials by which emperors attested the good works of eminent provincials. In this case the subsequent lines suggest gifts or contributions to a cult on the part of the dedicant. Certainly line 12 refers to a cult in some way, the supplying of censers or alters. For θυματόρου is a hapax, either correctly spelled (which is difficult to credit, since the word is a linguistic barbarism) or incorrectly. If the latter, then θυμ(α)τόρος. In any case we have a cultic context. An approach to the emperors and a letter from them, probably of a testimonial character and with reference to maintaining a cult, make it exceedingly likely that the second priesthood of the dedicant was directly related to these items in the latter part of the inscription. The man must be a priest of the imperial cult.

There was a Caesareum at Palmyra. Its location is unknown, but there is sufficient evidence of its existence. Two inscriptions refer explicitly to it, one (dated A.D. 171) with the words ἐν τῷ Κασαρεῖον, the other (dated A.D. 272), with the words [να]ῶν τῶν Σέβαστῶν. Another Palmyrene text, though fragmentary, clearly alludes to the imperial cult: ἀγώνιον διαμονής τῶν νυσίων στοιχητόρων. The στοιχητόρως of this fragment could well be Marcus and Lucius but, of course, need not. We also know of the imperial cult at the Euphrates city of Volosias from one of the inscriptions in honour of Soados, the great protector and helper.

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10 On the omission of the article with the genitive of the father's name and the appearance of it before the grandfather's name in liaison with the preceding genitive, cf. J. and L. ROBERT, CRAI 1974, 517 n. 25; Bull. épig. 1973, 238 (with further references).
11 On the office and known holders of it, cf. MILIK (n. 5) 219–281. I am grateful to Professor L. ROBERT for helpful proposals on the supplement of line 10.
12 Cf. R. MOUTERDE, Syria 12, 1931, 111, on the testimonial letters of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius for Soados, who protected the Palmyrene caravans. Also, L. LAFOSCADE, De epistulis aliisque titulis imperatorum magistratum romanorum, Lille 1902, 70–72.
13 Inv. Palm. IX. 8 honours Mokeimos for gifts to the cult of Bēl including a θυματήριον (i.e. θυματήριον), which CANTINEAU understood to be a censer. GAWLIKOWSKI (n. 5) argues that it is a portable fire-altar.
14 MILIK (n. 5) 310; GAWLIKOWSKI (n. 5) 26 with an improved text, except for ἐπ’ ἱππῶν in line 3 which should be ἱππῶν.
15 MILIK (n. 5) 315–316; GAWLIKOWSKI (n. 5) 100.
16 H. SEYRIG, Syria 18, 1937, 372; MILIK (n. 5) 7; GAWLIKOWSKI (n. 5) 49.
of the Palmyrene caravans. Centers of the imperial cult elsewhere along the
caravan routes controlled by Palmyra are imaginable. However, since the dedicant
of the Qaṣr el-Ḥeir inscription was a priest of Bel, indisputably at Palmyra, there
is a presumption that his other priesthood was there too. It is striking that Soados,
who did so much for the regio Palmyrena, held no office in the city itself. If it is
correct that the dedicant of the new text was a priest of the emperors at Palmyra,
then the inscription would show no sign of belonging to any other place than
Palmyra. In short, the lintel at Qaṣr el-Ḥeir was brought there from Palmyra when
the Umayyads built their caravan serai.

Naturally the discovery of this stone at the Qaṣr raises the intriguing possibility
that the site may have been settled before Islam by the Romans or Palmyreans or
both. Without any warrant Musil had assumed this to be the location of a fort
in the limes network of Syria. So far no trace of a Roman castellum has been seen
here, and it is salutary to remember that the Qaṣr lies neither on the road from
Palmyra to Reşāfa and Sura nor on the track to Dura. At Ṭayyibe, which does lie
on the Sura road, no sign of occupation in classical times has emerged beyond
some columns and a dedicatory inscription to Baʿalshamin built into a mosque
wall and observed by Pietro della Valle in 1616. They must have been
brought from the ruins of Palmyra for use in construction.

At Qaṣr el-Ḥeir not one of the thousands of sherds discovered in the recent
calvation is pre-Islamic. There are, it is true, some sculpted architectural frag-
ments of classical and Palmyrene style. And there is one other pre-Islamic in-
scription: it is a lintel inscribed in Palmyrene exclusively with the names and
filiations of members of the well known Palmyrene family of qml (Aqqimal). The
surviving molding shows resemblances to a lintel of the Tomb of the Three
Brothers at Palmyra according to the Abbé Starcky, who will publish this text.

17 R. Mouterde, Syria 12, 1931, 107, line 23; Milik (n. 5) 315. On Soados, see also
18 Observe the many temples in D. Schlumberger, La Palmyrène du nord-ouest, Paris
1951, 13–44 and 93–106.
19 J. Sauvaget not only believed that the Romans had been there but that the Umayyad
site was Hishām's city of Ruṣāfa (instead of Ruṣāfa-Sergiopolis); Journal asiatique 231,
1939, 2–3. Schlumberger (n. 18) 130, n. 2, also thought there had been a Roman settle-
ment. All of this was, of course, before excavation.
20 A. Musil, Palmyrena, New York 1928, 77. Cf. the judicious observations of R. Dus-
21 CIS II. 3970. Cf. Pietro della Valle, Viaggi, for which I have used the Rome
edition of 1662, I, p. 372: «alcune colonne, accommodate poi da' Mori nella lor fabrica-
cia, che è tutta, al solito, di terra; e dentre alla Meschina, in un muro, mirata da' Mori, e
tenuta con rivereza (per non saper casi, che cosa sia) una pietra quadra antica, con una
iscrizione greca, e da piedi due versi di certe altre lettere strane, al mio parere un poco
simili all' Ebraiche, e alle Samaritane, delle quale tutte presi, e tengo copia.» The in-
scription is now in the British Museum.
22 Cf. Grabar (n. 1) 69; also the references above in n. 19.
He reads a date of A.D. 111 and suggests that funerary busts were sculpted above the lintel. Like the Greek inscription, the Palmyrene one seems also to have come originally from Palmyra. Without support from the only known inscriptions at Qasr el Heir, the sculpted fragments, which are not abundant, are insufficient to postulate a settlement in classical times. It may be that not far from the Umayyad enclosures there is a Palmyrene caravanserai or a Roman fort still awaiting discovery. But one thing seems clear: no such establishment stood on the site of the present Qasr el Heir. It should not be a source of wonder that the vast ruins of a city like Palmyra proved an irresistible quarry to later builders in the desert.

The attention shown at Palmyra to the emperors and the imperial cult in 166 finds an arresting resonance in the newly published Greek-Nabataean bilingual inscription at Ruwwafa in northwest Saudi Arabia.23 This belongs to precisely the same period and serves to dedicate a temple to the same two emperors. It is clear from the reference to a victory (veisq) in the Ruwwafa text that the Parthian war of Lucius Verus provided the background to the worship accorded the monarchs in the Hejaz. The Qasr el Heir inscription now reveals at Palmyra a comparable gratitude and zeal.