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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 Ṭayyibe there stand two imposing enclosures of Umayyad style and date. These constitute the caravanserai known as Qaṣr el Ḥeir el sharqī, 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 sharqī) must not be confused with another imposing caravanserai to the southwest of Palmyra, the so-called Qaṣr el Ḥeir el gharbī (the western Qaṣr).² It is the eastern site which has recently been excavated under the direction of OLEG 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 ASS'AD, 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 Sharqī*, *Ars Orientalis* 8, 1970, 65–85. The Arabic inscription recording the building of a *madīna* 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 Qaşr. 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 ηρ[υ] ἔτους μηνὶ Ὑπερβερεταίῳ]
 Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα [Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον Ἀντωνεῖνον Σεβαστὸν καὶ]
 Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Λ[ούκιον Αὐρήλιον Οὐῆρον Σεβαστὸν]
 4 θεοῦ Ἀντωνεῖνου υἱοῦς [θεοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ υἱωνοῦς θεοῦ Τραιανοῦ]
 Παρθικοῦ ἐγγόνου[υ]ς θε[οῦ] Νέρονα ἀπογόνους ἀρχιερέας μεγίστους]
 Ἀρμενιακοῦς Μηδικοῦς [Παρθικοῦς μεγίστους -----]
 Συμωνου ἀρχιερεῦς κα[ὶ] συμποσιαρχος ἱερέων μεγίστου θεοῦ Διός]
 8 Βήλου, ἱερεὺς δὲ καὶ τῶν [Σεβαστῶν ἐξ ἰδίων ἀνέστησε -----]
 πρὸς τοὺς Σεβαστοὺς Κα[ί]σαρας -----]
 καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ <τ>ῆς συμ[ποσιαρχίας] αὐτοῦ καιρῷ -----]
 ἐπιστολὴν τῶν αὐτῶ[ν] Σεβαστῶν -----]
 12 προσθέσεος θυμ(ι)ατόρων περ[ὶ] -----]
 τοῖς αὐτοῖς [[πρὸς ρ . . .]] -----]

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. Hyperberetaios 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. 166.³ A comparison of

³ 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. 6 b, 7, 11 a, 12). In *Inv. Palm.* IX. 6 a 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 + ἔτους occurs (rather than ἔτους + 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 epsilon. 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.

Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα 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 ΓHC where THC must have been intended, and in line 13 the words following αὐτοῖς 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 Καίσαρα Λ. Σεπτίμιον Σεουήρον Εὐσεβῆ Περγίνακα Σεβαστὸν Ἀραβικὸν Ἀδιαβηνικὸν Παρθικὸν μέγιστον / κα[ὶ Αὐ]τοκ[ράτορα Καίσαρα Μᾶρκον [Α]ὐ[ρ]ή[λι]ον Ἀντωνεῖνον Εὐσεβῆ Σεβαστὸν [— ras. —] καὶ Ιουλιαν Δό[μν]αν Σεβαστήν μητέρα τῶν [ἐ]ρωῶν στρατοπέδων καὶ [Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Π. Σεπτίμιον Γέτα Σεβαστὸ]ν δεσπότης γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης καὶ / [παντὸς ἀνθρώπων γέ]νους Σά[μης Μα]λίκου τ[οῦ Βω]λιάδου ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ συ[μπο]σίαρχος ἱερῶν μεγίστου θεοῦ Διὸς Βή/[λου] ————— ἐξ ἰδίων ἀνέστησεν ἔτους [δ]ι' μηνὸς Ξανδικοῦ. brbnwt mrzḥwt šlm' br mlkw br blyd' ['bd šlmy]' 'In št' / mn kysh byrh nysn šnt 514. (Palm. text: In the symposiarchy of šlm' 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 *šlm* (statue) or *šlm' 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). ἀνέστησε(ν) is often accurately rendered 'qym, which, as CLERMONT-GANNEAU saw long ago (Journal asiatique 1905, I. 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 Κα]ί[σαρα] Λούκ[ι]ον Σεπτίμιον Σεουήρον Εὐσεβῆ Περγ[ί]νακα Σεβαστὸν καὶ Αὐτοκράτορα / Κα]ί[σαρα] Μᾶρκον Αὐ[ρ]ή[λι]ον [Ἀ]ντωνεῖνον Σεβαστὸν Σεβαστοῦ [ν]ιδ[ὸ]ν καὶ Ἰουλιαν Δόμναν Σεβαστήν μητέρα / τῶ]ν [ἐ]ρωῶν στρατοπέδων — — —]. 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 Bēl, may once have been a lintel for a gate over which 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.⁵ What follows is this: *καὶ Μεζαββ[άνης ---] τοῦ Μαλίχου / τοῦ Ζεβεῖ[δα --- ἀ]ρχιερεὺς κ[αὶ / σ]υμπο-
σίαρχ[ος ἱερέων μεγίστου θεοῦ / Διὸς Βήλ[ου ----- ἔτ]ους δ' Ἄωου. [ʿw]tqrṭwr
qs[r--- / ---] dy ʿqym lh mlk[w] / mtqrʾ mzbñʾ br b[-----] / b[----- brbnwt]
/ mrzhwth dy km[ryʾ dy bl lyqr]h byrh ʾb šnt 50[4].* (Palm. text: Autokrator Kaiser
... which mlkw called mzbñʾ son of ... set up, in his symposiarchy of the priests
of Bēl to honour him [emperor] in the month Ab of the year 504.) The opening of
the Palmyrene text [ʿw]tqrṭwr qs[r shows by its unusual but not unexamined
omission of *šlm* or *šlmʾ* *dy* that it is a particularly close copy of the Greek. It
therefore guarantees that the Greek began *Ἀὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα*. *ʿqym* cor-
responds 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 *ἀρχιερεῖ[ος καὶ συμπο[σίαρχος]* moved CANTINEAU justly to ask,
«S'agit-il encore d'une statue honorifique?»⁶

The stone on which the Greek inscription at Qaṣr el Ḥeir 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.⁷
Although the offices of the dedicant are continued in line 8 *ἱερεὺς δὲ καὶ τῶν . . .*,
line 9 seems to belong to a new and unparalleled part of the inscription. Accord-
ingly line 8 must be supplemented with the necessary verb, *ἀνέστησε*, in all prob-
ability preceded, as normally at Palmyra, by *ἐξ ἰδίων* (rather than *ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων*).
Observe *ἐξ ἰδίων ἀνέστησεν* in CIS II. 3970.

The identity of the high priest and symposiarch cannot be established, but two
points may be made: 1) *Συμῶνος* is apparently a Greek form of *šmʿwn*, which is
customarily *Συμέων* or *Σιμέων*. While the *ʿayn* usually has some effect on a trans-
literation, it can also simply disappear, as presumably here.⁸ Similarly STARCKY
has connected the name *Σημαναῖος*, found at Palmyra, with *šmʿwn*.⁹ 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 *μεγίστους*
contained the dedicant's name in the nominative, his father's name in the genitive

⁵ As in the restorations of J. T. MILIK, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux*, Paris 1972, 254. Cf. for the Palmyrene text M. GAULIKOWSKI, *Le temple palmyrénien: étude d'épigraphie et de topographie historique*, Warsaw 1973, 75.

⁶ Inv. Palm. IX, p. 40.

⁷ On the basis of CIS II. 3970 I have restored *συμποσίαρχος*, although *συμποσίαρχης* would obviously do as well. In Inv. Palm. IX. 26 and 27, the end of the word for symposiarch does not survive. It scarcely matters.

⁸ Cf. F. ROSENTHAL, *Die Sprache der palmyrenischen Inschriften*, Mitt. d. Vorderas.-ägypt. Gesellschaft 41, 1936, 32-34.

⁹ On Inv. Palm. X. 55.

(without the article), and finally τοῦ introducing the grandfather's name.¹⁰ Space precludes the mention of a generation still further back.

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.¹¹ (Possibly δεδεγμένην 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.¹² 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 altars.¹³ For θυματοῶν 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(ι)ατόρων. 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 Καισαρείῳ,¹⁴ the other (dated A.D. 272), with the words [να]ὸν τῶν Σεβαστῶν.¹⁵ Another Palmyrene text, though fragmentary, clearly alludes to the imperial cult: αἰωνίου δ[ιαμονῆς τῶν κυρίῳ]ν αὐτοκρατόρων.¹⁶ The αὐτοκράτορες 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 Vologesias from one of the inscriptions in honour of Soados, the great protector and helper

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 magistratuum romanorum, Lille 1902, 70–72.

¹³ Inv. Palm. IX. 8 honours Mokeimos for gifts to the cult of Bēl including a θυμιατήριον (i.e. θυμιατήριον), 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 ἐφ' ἕπιον in line 3 which should be ἔφιπτον.

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.¹⁷ Centers of the imperial cult elsewhere along the caravan routes controlled by Palmyra are imaginable.¹⁸ However, since the dedicant of the Qaşr el Ĥeir inscription was a priest of Bēl, 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 Qaşr el Ĥeir was brought there from Palmyra when the Umayyads built their caravanserai.

Naturally the discovery of this stone at the Qaşr raises the intriguing possibility that the site may have been settled before Islam by the Romans or Palmyrenes or both.¹⁹ Without any warrant MUSIL had assumed this to be the location of a fort in the *limes* network of Syria.²⁰ So far no trace of a Roman castellum has been seen here, and it is salutary to remember that the Qaşr 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 Ba'alshamīn built into a mosque wall and observed by PIETRO DELLA VALLE in 1616.²¹ They must have been brought from the ruins of Palmyra for use in construction.

At Qaşr el Ĥeir not one of the thousands of sherds discovered in the recent excavation is pre-Islamic. There are, it is true, some sculpted architectural fragments of classical and Palmyrene style.²² And there is one other pre-Islamic inscription: 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 CHR. DUNANT, *Museum Helveticum* 13, 1956, 216–225.

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 Ruşāfa (instead of Ruşāfa-Sergiopolis): *Journal asiatique* 231, 1939, 2–3. SCHLUMBERGER (n. 18) 130, n. 2, also thought there had been a Roman settlement. All of this was, of course, before excavation.

²⁰ A. MUSIL, *Palmyrena*, New York 1928, 77. Cf. the judicious observations of R. DUSAUD, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale*, Paris 1927, 258.

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 fabricaccia, che è tutta, al solito, di terra; e dentro alla Meschita, in un muro, murata da' Mori, e tenuta con riverenza (per non saper essi, 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 inscription is now in the British Museum.

²² Cf. GRABAR (n. 1) 69; also the references above in n. 19.

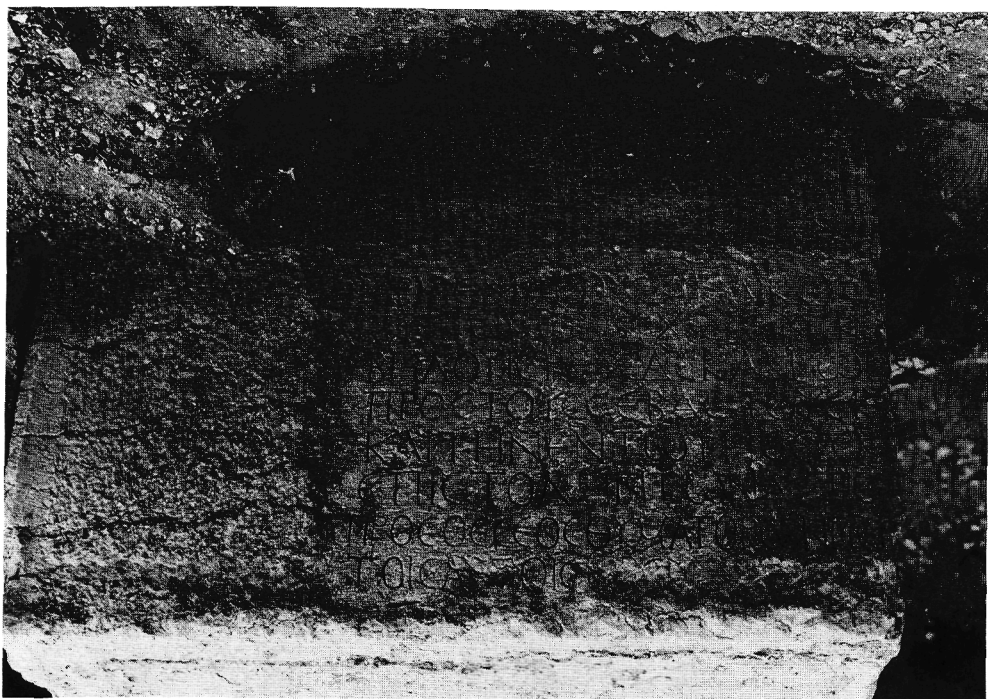
He reads a date of A.D. 111 and suggests that funerary busts were sculpted above the lintel. Like the Greek inscription, the Palmyrene one seems also to have come originally from Palmyra. Without support from the only known inscriptions at Qaṣr el Ḥeir, the sculpted fragments, which are not abundant, 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 Qaṣr el Ḥeir. 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 Ruwwāfa 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 (*νίκη*) in the Ruwwāfa text that the Parthian war of Lucius Verus provided the background to the worship accorded the monarchs in the Ḥejāz. The Qaṣr el Ḥeir inscription now reveals at Palmyra a comparable gratitude and zeal.

²³ J. T. MILIK, *Bulletin No. 10 of the Institute of Archaeology in London*, 1972, 54–57; and G. W. BOWERSOCK, *The Greek-Nabataean Bilingual Inscription at Ruwwāfa, Saudi Arabia*, in: *Le monde grec: Hommages à Claire Préaux*, Brussels 1975, 513–522.



Antonine inscription from Qaşr el Heir, as uncovered in 1972. Photograph: O. Grabar.



Antonine inscription from Qaşr el Heir after the uncovering in 1975 of lines formerly underground. Photograph: H. J. W. Drijvers. See pp. 349 ff.