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## Dhaifallah Al-Talhi – Mohammad Al-Daire Roman Presence in the Desert: A New Inscription from Hegra

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## Roman Presence in the Desert: A New Inscription from Hegra

### *The Exploration of Hegra*

Ancient Hegra (modern Madā'in Šāliḥ in north-western Saudi Arabia) has to date been only partially explored.<sup>1</sup> At present, the most visible remains are the 138 tombs carved into the sandstone hills around the presumed settlement area.<sup>2</sup> The 36 tombs with dated inscriptions are all of the Nabataean period (AD 1 – or 1 BC – to 74/75). They are the most visible signs of the support given by the Nabataean kings, and especially Aretas IV, to one of the most southern settlements in their kingdom.<sup>3</sup> After the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom by the Roman Empire, Hegra<sup>4</sup> became part of the province of Arabia, although it lay at a distance of more than 800 kilometres from the capital Bostra. By this period, it has been supposed, «the golden era of Hegra seems to have passed».<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used: BOWERSOCK, Arabia = G. W. BOWERSOCK, Roman Arabia, 1983; BOWSHER, Post = J. BOWSHER, The Frontier Post of Medain Saleh, in: PH. FREEMAN – D. KENNEDY, The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East I, 1986, 23–29; HEALEY, Inscriptions = J. F. HEALEY, The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih, 1993; KAJANTO, Cognomina = I. KAJANTO, The Latin Cognomina, 1965; KIENAST, Kaisertabelle = D. KIENAST, Römische Kaisertabelle, <sup>2</sup>1996. The authors wish to express their profound thanks and appreciation to Priv.-Doz. Dr. RUDOLF HAENSCH, Director of the Kommission für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik in Munich, Germany, for his help and assistance in editing this inscription. It was he who read the inscription and drew our attention to its importance. Sincere thanks go to Prof. Dr. RICARDO EICHMANN for his valuable comments. We also extend our thanks to Dr. MAJED KHAN for editing the text of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For details see A. JAUSSEN – R. SAVIGNAC, Mission Archéologique en Arabie I, 1909; II, 1914; HEALEY, Inscriptions; D. AL-TALHI, Mada'in Salih, a Nabataean Town in North-West Arabia. Analysis and Interpretation of the Excavations, 1986–1990. Ph.D thesis, University of Southampton 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See BOWERSOCK, Arabia 60, 73f.

<sup>4</sup> For the Latin form of the name see Plin. Nat. hist. 6, 157 (with the variants in the manuscripts), and now our inscription; cf. Ptol. 6, 7, 29.

<sup>5</sup> BOWERSOCK, Arabia 88; contra BOWSHER, Post 24f.

Although the earliest excavations at Madā'in Šāliḥ<sup>6</sup> date back to 1986,<sup>7</sup> there is still much work to do, and this means that new excavations are likely to produce important results. In the summer of 2003, the Deputy Ministry of Antiquities and Museums entered upon a fifth season of excavations at the site, with the north-eastern part of the settlement area being chosen for exploration and excavation. The chosen area is near a small hill with a chamber, numbered 130 by the Institut Géographique National (Paris), carved in the rock.

To the west of the hill is a large archaeological mound (Tell) with exposed stone foundations, column bases, stone basins and a large number of pottery sherds. The Tell has a gradual westward slope at the site of the previous excavations, and in the light of the earlier finds this area was chosen for further investigation (Fig. 1). A grid was laid out on the site and nine squares were selected for excavation. It was in one of these squares – W1–28 – that the inscription published here was discovered (Fig. 2).

### *The findspot*

As the inscription was found in a largely undamaged state – only a portion of the upper layers of the sandstone had been chipped off – it may be presumed that it was found at or near its original location (in situ), but we do not know enough about the findspot and its surroundings to be certain. In order to clarify this, it is necessary to provide some details of the excavation. Several phases of occupation could be seen in the square in question:

*Phase I:* This is represented by locus 5, which consists of loose soil laid directly on the yellow bedrock. The soil was laid to act as a level base for foundations. Several fallen stones were found in this layer which might have formed parts of structures. The lack of artefacts suggests that occupation was only for a short period.

*Phase II:* This is represented by a heavy scatter of ashes (locus 4). The ashes are spread through almost all parts of this layer, but their thickness gradually decreases towards the west from a maximum of 7 cm in the east. A few pottery sherds were found along with some pieces of bone. The thickness of the ashes suggests that this layer was probably occupied for a longer period. The debris in this area was probably added later to lay the foundations for other structures (loci 2, 3 and 6).

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<sup>6</sup> For a convenient summary, see HEALEY, *Inscriptions 1ff.* and A. AL-ANSARY – H. ABU AL HASSAN, *The Civilization of Two Cities: Al-Ula and Mada'in Salih*, 2001. The results of the excavations of the Deputy Ministry of Antiquities and Museums of Saudi Arabia are regularly published in *Atlat*, the *Journal of Saudi-Arabian Archaeology*. For the results of the Saudi-French Mission led by J. M. DENTZER and others, see J. M. DENTZER – J. CL. BESSAC – J. P. BRAUN – L. NEHME – H. ABU AL-HASAN, *Report on the 2001 Season of the Saudi-French Archaeological Project at Mada'in Salih, Ancient Hegra*, *Atlat* 17, 2002, 100–130.

<sup>7</sup> D. AL-TALHI – M. AL-IBRAHIM – J. M. MURSI, *Preliminary Report on the Al-Hijr Excavations, first season 1406H/1986*, *Atlat* 11, 1988, 47–8–57.

*Phase III:* This layer represents a longer period of occupation, as several architectural elements have been found:

Locus 2 – This is a stone wall orientated from east to west, located in the northern part of the square and composed of four courses of white sandstones. It is 1.20 m long.

Locus 3 – This is another wall orientated from east to west and attached to the base of a vertical pillar. The base consists of two vertical stones which probably formed part of a jamb of the door. The wall is 2.7 m long and extends towards square W1–27 to the south, and may have some association with the wall inside the square.

Locus 6 – This is a stairway located in the south-western portion of the square and composed of three steps; part of the second step is broken. The first step is 73 cm long, 35 cm wide and 120 cm high. The length of the second step is 66 cm, the width 40 cm and the height 10 cm. The third step is 110 cm long, 20 cm wide and 10 cm high.

It is possible that loci 3 and 6 are associated with other architectural elements in the neighbouring square W1–27. The stairway leads to a courtyard in that square, which is paved with stones of varying size and shape; parts of it are still buried and need further excavation. It is probable that there were stone pillars or columns in the courtyard, of the type found in Roman buildings.

*Phase IV:* This is a hard mud layer, found in all parts of the square. In the layer, which is 80 cm thick, several fallen rocks and pebbles were found, as well as the Latin inscription buried in the soil, lying horizontally, with the inscription on the upper side (Fig. 3). It appears that this layer was formed by the accumulation of mud and rocks under the action of rain and wind when the building had been abandoned for a long time.

### *The Inscription*

The inscription (Fig. 4) was engraved on a piece of the red sandstone which is commonly used in the area. The stone is well cut and smoothed on its front and back. The narrow sides of the stone are rough, while the borders of its front are carefully cut and polished to give a smooth surface. The stone is rectangular, measuring 110.5 cm × 60 cm × 12 cm. It is still in good condition and well preserved, although the letters on its upper right portion are damaged and partly flaked off. A space of 18 cm at the top and bottom, and of 8 cm on both sides of the rock was left to produce a rectangular frame for the inscription. The height of the letters in the first nine lines is identical, with each letter measuring 4.5 cm. The height of the letters in the tenth line is approximately half that of the letters above (2 cm). The spacing between the letters and the lines is almost identical.

Before discussing the reading, supplements and detailed interpretation, we present the whole text, as we supplement and understand it (Fig. 5):

*Pro salute Imp(eratoris) Caesariſ M. Aureli  
Antonini Aug(usti) Armeniaci Parth[ic]i Me-  
dici Germanici Sarmatici Maximi[i] v[al(?)]-  
lum vetustate dilabsum civitas He-  
grenorum suis impendi[s] res[ist]uit sub  
Iulio Firmano leg(ato) Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) instan[tib(us)]  
operi Pomponio Victore (= centurione) leg(ionis) III Cyrenaicae et N[u]-  
misio Clemente collegae (!) eius cur[am]  
agente operarum Amro Haianis pri-  
mo civitatis eorum.*

For the salvation of Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus Armeniacus Parthicus Medicus Germanicus Sarmaticus Maximus, the community of the Hegreni restored the wall (?), which had been destroyed by old age, at its own expense, under Iulius Firmanus, *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, the work being arranged (?) by Pomponius Victor, *centurio* of the *legio III Cyrenaica* and Numisius Clemens, his colleague, and construction being supervised by Amrus, son of Haian, the first (man) of their community.

Very narrow *A*'s, nearly always without a dash, thus resembling a Lambda.

#### *Commentary*

The emperor's titles which are still legible are sufficient to identify him as Marcus Aurelius. The combination of the *cognomina ex virtute* Armeniacus, Parth[ic]us, Medicus, Germanicus and Sarmaticus<sup>8</sup> fits only this emperor. These imperial titles are also the most important clue to the dating of the inscription: Marcus Aurelius accepted the *cognomen ex virtute* Sarmaticus – the last one taken by him – in the summer of 175.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the inscription must date to the period between the middle of 175 and 17th March, 180, the date of Marcus' death.

We can probably date it even more precisely to the period between mid-175 and mid-177. After the middle of 177, Commodus, his son and co-emperor from that date (sometime before 17th June, 177), should have been mentioned.<sup>10</sup> True, one could doubt this conclusion, since sometimes sons and co-emperors were not named because they were often not real colleagues with equal power, but only presumptive successors. Nevertheless, especially in the eastern part of the

<sup>8</sup> See P. KNEISSL, *Die Siegestitulatur der römischen Kaiser*, 1969, 97ff. The titles given in our inscription correspond to those in CIL III 14149<sup>2</sup> (see the following page), where, however, the titles are more abbreviated.

<sup>9</sup> KIENAST, *Kaisertabelle* 139.

<sup>10</sup> KIENAST, *Kaisertabelle* 147.

Empire, in the last years of Marcus Aurelius there were very good reasons to mention Commodus. In April 175, the governor of Syria, Avidius Cassius,<sup>11</sup> who had perhaps been given power superior to the governors of the neighbouring provinces, declared himself emperor (he may have thought that Marcus Aurelius was dead). Even though Avidius Cassius was killed three months later, it became a mark of loyalty to the emperor to mention his presumptive heir. Thus, in another inscription of the last years of Marcus Aurelius from Arabia, which mentions a certain --- Severus as governor, Commodus is cited with his complete titulature. The governor underlined this by calling himself *leg(atu)s Augg(ustorum) pr(o) pr(aetore)*, indicating that he was a legate of two emperors.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the inscription from Hegra should most probably be dated between late summer 175 and mid-177.

That the inscription can be dated precisely is especially important because the governor named in the inscription, Iulius Firmanus, is otherwise unknown.<sup>13</sup> The two elements of his name – the *nomen gentile* Iulius and the *cognomen* Firmanus – are very common. The *nomen gentile* Iulius was taken by all those who received their Roman citizenship from Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius or Caius or had been freed by such persons or their descendants. The *cognomen* Firmanus is also far from rare.<sup>14</sup> Thus, there is no possibility, at least for the time being, of identifying our governor with anyone known from inscriptions and literary sources.

It may not be by chance that this governor had such a common name and that we have not heard of him before now. The pestilence which raged throughout the Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and the devastation of the wars of the period, affected the leading as well as the lower strata of the society.<sup>15</sup> Gaps in the aristocracy were apparently filled by people like M. Valerius Maximianus<sup>16</sup> – another man with common *nomina* – who under other circumstances would not have attained such high rank.

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<sup>11</sup> E. DĄBROWA, *The Governors of Roman Syria from Augustus to Septimius Severus*, 1998, 112ff.

<sup>12</sup> CIL III 6027. 6028 = 14149<sup>2</sup> from Umm al-jimāl. The name of Commodus was erased after his *damnatio memoriae* in 192.

<sup>13</sup> See M. SARTRE, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine*, 1982, 77ff.; B. E. THOMASSON, *Laterculi praesidum* I, 1984, 327ff.; III, 1990, 42; *Idem*, *Opuscula Romana* 24, 1999, 171ff. There is no mention of anyone of this name in the data bank of the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*. Neither do we find in the *Prosopographia militarium equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum*, 1976–1993 (by H. DEVIJVER) even a Firmanus, not to speak of a Iulius Firmanus.

<sup>14</sup> KAJANTO, *Cognomina* 187.

<sup>15</sup> See *Hist. Aug. Marc.* 13, 5; cf. G. ALFÖLDY, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen*, 1977, 22; A. BIRLEY, *Marcus Aurelius*, 1966, 212, 284.

<sup>16</sup> See for example B. E. THOMASSON, *Fasti Africani*, 1996, 164ff.

It is not surprising that the two centurions named in the inscription are also unknown. We have no other evidence for *centuriones* of *legio III Cyrenaica* – the most important unit in Arabia, stationed at Bostra – named Pomponius Victor and N[u]misius Clemens.<sup>17</sup> The social background of *centuriones*, commanders of the *centuriae* of a Roman legion, was such that we normally know of individuals from a single inscription, if at all. In the case of the two in question, we once again find *cognomina* which are very common.<sup>18</sup> Almost the same may be said of the *nomina gentilia*.<sup>19</sup>

We already have testimony at Hegra of a painter connected with the *legio III Cyrenaica*<sup>20</sup> and of several auxiliary soldiers, *dromedarü* and cavalymen of an *ala* of Gaetuli, from two places south of Hegra.<sup>21</sup> But these were individual, unofficial inscriptions, and it is no coincidence that they were written in Greek.<sup>22</sup> Our inscription is the first to use the official language of the Roman army,<sup>23</sup> and hints at the presence of a detachment of *legio III Cyrenaica* at Hegra.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, it can be dated with almost absolute precision, and reveals that soldiers were stationed at Hegra before the Severan period.<sup>25</sup> Finally, these

<sup>17</sup> See E. RITTERLING, RE 12, 2, 1925, 1516 and P.-L. GATIER, La Legio III Cyrenaica et l'Arabie, in: Y. LE BOHEC – C. WOLFF (eds.), Les légions de Rome sous le Haut-Empire I, 2000, 341 ff.

<sup>18</sup> See KAJANTO, Cognomina 30 (Victor as one of 18 *cognomina* must often attested), cf. 18, 57, 72, 89, 96, 278 resp. l.c. 68f., 263 (more than 500 examples of Clemens).

<sup>19</sup> See O. SALOMIES, Arctos 32, 1998, 215.

<sup>20</sup> AE 1977, 835 = SEG 36, 1986, 1379 = 40, 1523; for the interpretation see R. HAENSCH, Capita provinciarum, 1997, 557 n. 30 (contra BOWERSOCK, Arabia 96).

<sup>21</sup> H. SEYRIG, Syria 22, 1941, 218–223 = SARTRE (n. 13) 30–33; cf. BOWSER, Post.

<sup>22</sup> But note the Latinisms ἐκὼς ἅλε and τόγμα in these inscriptions (SARTRE, l.c. no. 3 cf. 1 resp. 6); for the BENEFIT (= *beneficiarius*?) in no. 21 see J. NELIS-CLÉMENT, Les Beneficiarii, 2000, 374; we do not accept ΔΙΣ = δισ(πενσάτωρ) in no. 3 because *dispensatores* were imperial slaves; perhaps *duplicarius* was meant. Perhaps neither Greek nor Latin were the mother tongues of these soldiers. – See lastly J. SIPILÄ, MedAnt 7, 2004, 317–348, esp. 320, and U. HACKL – H. JENNI – CH. SCHNEIDER, Quellen zur Geschichte der Nabatäer, 2003, 55 for doubts, if the Hedjaz was inside the province Arabia «proper». Against such doubts P.-L. GATIER – J.-F. SALLES, Aux frontières méridionales du domaine Nabatéen, in: J.-F. SALLES (ed.), L'Arabie et ses mers bordières, 1988, 173–190, esp. 185. See now also A. LEWIN, The Organization of a Roman Territory: the Southern Section of Provincia Arabia, in: E. DĄBROWA (ed.), The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East, 1994, 109–118.

<sup>23</sup> For the garrison of Arabia see now P. WEISS – W. ECK, ZPE 150, 2004, 253–264.

<sup>24</sup> Legionary centurions could also command *vexillationes* of *auxilia*: CIL III 14370<sup>2</sup> = ILS 5338 = IBR 291; CIL XIII 6509 cf. R. SAXER, Untersuchungen zu den Vexillationen des römischen Kaiserheeres von Augustus bis Diokletian, 1967, 130 and n. 672 (but in the case of the other examples cited by him the centurions commanded formations of legionary soldiers and auxiliaries). For the tomb of a *centurio* in the Nabataean Army at Hegra see HEALEY, Inscriptions p. 206ff. no. H 31 (6/7 AD?).

<sup>25</sup> Contra B. ISAAC, The Limits of Empire, 1990, 125 ff.

centurions were involved<sup>26</sup> in a building project which concerned not only the Roman army, but also the civic community.

But what was being built? Unfortunately the inscription is damaged at the very point where the building is mentioned and, as already explained, the archaeological context offers no help. Because two officers of the Roman army were involved and the evidence for the building consists of an inscription which was expertly cut and formulated in a good, though not perfect,<sup>27</sup> Latin, one might expect construction of a military nature.<sup>28</sup> But there are a number of Latin inscriptions from cities in the eastern part of the Empire – not Roman colonies – which commemorate construction work of a non-military character, for example an *odeum* or an aqueduct not destined primarily for troops. Apparently the Roman authorities involved in these construction activities – the emperor, his governor, the soldiers working on them – were concerned that the building work should be commemorated by a Latin inscription.<sup>29</sup>

The key to the kind of building being erected lies in the reading and supplement to the end of line 3 and the beginning of line 4. The last letter which can be read without any doubt before the lacuna in line 3 is *M*, then probably an *A*. Then we find probably the traces of a *X* followed by two vertical hastae – one of them only partly preserved – and after a lacuna of some missing letters the last remains of the superior part of a letter. These remains could belong to a *M*, a *N* or a narrow *A* as it is typical of our inscription. Finally, at the end of the line a lacuna of about two or three letters.

There are only a few words with *MAX* in Latin. Thus, if there are really the remains of a *X* – as it seems almost certain – only one word comes into consideration: *maximus*. And we know that *Maximus* played a certain role in the imperial titlature of Marcus Aurelius. *Maximus* had originally been part of the title *Parthicus Maximus* adopted by Marcus Aurelius with his co-emperor Lucius

<sup>26</sup> For the formula *instans operi* see for example CIL VIII 765 = 12228.

<sup>27</sup> *Collega* should appear in place of *collegae*. The easiest explanation seems to be that a native Greek speaker slipped from the Latin *ablativus absolutus* to the Greek *genetivus absolutus*. A similar mistake can be found in another Latin inscription put up by Roman soldiers in Arabia: R. BRÜNNOW – A. v. DOMASZEWSKI, Die Provinz Arabia III, 1909, 291 = PAES III A 17 (*Phurnium* in place of *Furnium*).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. W. ECK, ZDPV 117, 2001, 47–63; F. MILLAR, Latin Epigraphy of the Roman Near East, in: H. SOLIN – O. SALOMIES – U.-M. LIERTZ (ed.), Acta colloquii epigraphici Latini Helsingiae 3.–6. Sept. 1991 habiti, 1995, 403–419.

<sup>29</sup> One can find examples in HAENSCH (n. 20) 513f., 536, 553, 568, 574, 579, 625f. A few of these examples may be cited here: AE 1933, 7 = I. Cret. IV 331 (the emperor restored *civitati Gortyniorum odeum ruina conlapsum*; 100 AD); AE 1963, 104, cf. 1964, 39 = 1971, 477 = 1991, 1578 (the famous Tiberium inscription at Caesarea Maritima); AE 1983, 927, cf. D. VAN BERCHEM, BJ 185, 1985, 85ff. (the emperors *Dipotamiaco fluminis ductum* (...) *[pe]r milites* (...) *[rei pub]l[ic]ae Antiochensium [facien]da curaverunt*; 75 AD); CIL III 6703 = IGLS I 164 (the emperor *[aquam] Augustam Nicopoli[m] adducendam curavit*; 21 AD).

Verus in 165. After the death of Verus, Marcus often dropped the pompous epithet to *Parthicus*, but on the other hand it was frequent, especially in the province of Egypt, to add the adjective *Maximus* to all *cognomina ex virtute*.<sup>30</sup>

As in the case of other inscriptions, *Maximus* could have been written out or have been abbreviated. The remains of the two hastae after the presumptive *X* seem to point to the first of these two alternatives. It is quite possible that they are the last remains of an *I* and a *M*. Thus, we have to read and supplement *Maxim[i]*.

At the beginning of line 4 we find *LVM*, a typical ending for a masculine or neuter noun in Latin. There is a number of words in Latin which end in *-lum* in the accusative case. Many of them indicate a building, as for example *balneolum*, *castellum*, *catabulum*, *conciliabulum*, *macellum*, *sacellum*, *templum*, *vallum* etc.<sup>31</sup> But in the case that our decision to read and supplement *Maxim[i]* is right, we must search for a very short word ending in *-lum*, because there is now not much space left at the end of line 3 – about three or four letters. Under this presumption and if we take the general phenomenon into consideration, that Latin building inscriptions in the eastern part of the Empire mostly refer to buildings of a military nature, and if we take finally also into consideration the mentioned remains of an *A*, a *M*, *N* or *V*, it is most probable, that we have to supplement *ϐ[al]lum*.<sup>32</sup> Besides, in the case of *[temp]lum* – the only real alternative – we would expect the name of the god in question to appear after the mention of the building. Thus, it seems best to read *Maxim[i] ϐ[al]lum*, at least until we know more about the place where the inscription was erected. The above-mentioned inscription<sup>33</sup> of the governor – Severus who governed the provincia Arabia during the last years of Marcus Aurelius – also refers to *opus valli perfectum*.

But, as already noted, it was not only the Roman authorities who were involved with the building. The central figures was the community itself, the *civitas Hegrenorum*. The building was restored at their expense – *suis impendi[s]*. This expression probably means not only that the Hegreni paid for the building, but also that they supplied the workforce, at least for certain tasks. The Roman term *civitas* is very unspecific, and became even more general during the High Empire.<sup>34</sup> Normally, it referred to all communities in the Empire not organized according to the Roman model, i.e. which were not *coloniae* or *municipia*, and covered everything

<sup>30</sup> For these questions see KNEISSL (n. 8) 103ff., especially n. 66; compare for example CIL III 6578 = ILS 373 (175/6 A.D.).

<sup>31</sup> See L. DELATTE and others, Dictionnaire fréquentiel et index inverse de la Langue latine, 1981, 470 and 340f.; R. GINOUVÈS, Dictionnaire méthodique de l'architecture grecque et romaine III, 1998, 306ff.

<sup>32</sup> Remains of a city wall were observed in 1966 by 'Ādil 'Ayyāsh (BOWSER, Post 24; HEALEY, Inscriptions 3, 12).

<sup>33</sup> See note 12.

<sup>34</sup> See for example F. VITTINGHOFF, Europäische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in der römischen Kaiserzeit, 1990, 197f.

from Greek poleis to nomadic tribes. Thus, the term does not allow us any specific insight in the organisation of the Hegreni.

A little more can be said about the head of the community, *Amrus Haianis primus civitatis eorum*. Firstly, both this name and that of his father are common Semitic names. Amrus is the Latin form of the Semitic 'mr (man, chief) or 'mr (life).<sup>35</sup> This Latin transcription is already known from the archive of *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* at Dura-Europus.<sup>36</sup> The name of his father Haian (hyn) has, as far as we know, hitherto not been documented in any Latin inscription. But it is a very common semitic name, known from inscriptions in the Nabataean, Safaitic, Thamudic and Palmyrene languages, and meaning «living».<sup>37</sup>

This Amrus is called *primus civitatis*. This phrase is already known from Latin literary texts, meaning the most prominent member of a community.<sup>38</sup> But in the case of the *civitas Hegrenorum*, it perhaps had a more specific meaning. In the 1960s, R. ALTHEIM and R. STIEHL published a Nabataean inscription from Hegra, apparently dating to AD 356 and mentioning a «head of Hegra» (ryš hgr').<sup>39</sup> It would appear, therefore, that the constitution of the *civitas Hegrenorum* had not changed in two centuries.

The inscription thus names three authorities involved in the building process – the governor, the *centuriones* and the *primus civitatis*. The text tries to differentiate between their roles by using the formulae *sub*, *instans operi* and *curam agens operarum* respectively. We do not know enough about the use of these formulae to determine precisely what was meant in each case, but we have other examples from the same province of similarly complicated and detailed enumerations of the persons involved in building operations. These are the Greek inscriptions of the third century AD referring to fortification works – that means the same kind

<sup>35</sup> See for example M. SARTRE, *Bostra*, 1985, 174ff., cf. 149 and IGLS XXI 2, 181; 'mr was very common in Safaitic, but was used also by Nabataeans. 'mr was a very common Safaitic, Nabataean and Palmyrene name.

<sup>36</sup> R. O. FINK, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus*, 1971, 1, 9, 24 and 1, 37, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Nabataean (attested near Hegra itself): F. V. WINNETT – W. L. REED, *Ancient Records from North Arabia*, 1970, p. 150 no. 58, p. 156 no. 100; F. AL-KHRAYSHEH, *Die Personennamen in den nabatäischen Inschriften des Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Diss. Marburg 1986, 82; Petra: PH. C. HAMMOND, *BJ* 180, 1980, 265–269; Safaitic: E. LITTMANN, *Semitic Inscription*, 1943, 127; F. V. WINNETT – G. L. HARDING, *Inscriptions from fifty Safaitic Cairns*, 1978, p. 571 with references; Thamudic: A. VAN DEN BRANDEN, *Les Inscriptions Thamoudéenes*, 1950, 742; Palmyrene: J. K. STARK, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions*, 1971, 88. For Greek transcriptions see: SEG 7, 1069; BRÜNNOW – DOMASZEWSKI (n. 27) II p. 248; PAES III A, 794.

<sup>38</sup> See for example *Rhet. Her.* 4, 54, 68; *Cic. Verr.* 2, 2, 53; 4, 15; *Caes. Gall.* 2, 13, 1; *Liv.* 29, 28, 7 (*genere, fama, divitiis, regia tum etiam adfinitate longe primus civitatis*); 30, 42, 11.

<sup>39</sup> F. ALTHEIM – R. STIEHL, *Die Araber in der alten Welt V/1*, 1968, 306–308 = R. STIEHL, *A New Nabataean Inscription*, in: *Idem – H. E. STIER* (ed.), *Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben*, 1970, 87–90, cf. *Bulletin d'épigraphie sémitique* 1971, 125 (*Syria* 48, 1971, 481f.). Our particular thanks go to L. NEHME for pointing this reference out to us.

of building activity as probably mentioned by our inscription. Thus, an inscription from Irbid in the Ḥawrān of AD 238–239 uses the following phrases: for the salvation (ὕπερ σωτηρίας) of the emperor, 130 ells were constructed under (ἐπί) the governor, with a tribune acting as supervisor (ἐφεστῶτος), under the leadership (προεδρείας) of a certain person, under the surveillance of two town councillors and a co-councillor, by the order (διαταγή(τι)) of a further person, out of public funds (ἐκ δημοσίου).<sup>40</sup> Further examples of such inscriptions are known, especially from Adraha but also from Bostra and Harran.<sup>41</sup> These inscriptions apparently represent a phenomenon specific to this province.

To conclude, in 2004 the editors of a Latin Inscription from the Farasān Islands in the Southern Red Sea, which mentions a *vexillatio* of the *legio II Traiana* and *auxilia* from Egypt in 144 AD, wrote: This inscription «opens a whole new chapter about the Roman presence in South Arabia and the Red Sea».<sup>42</sup> Our inscription not only adds to this chapter,<sup>43</sup> but also opens up a new chapter in the history of Hegra. Apparently, this settlement was, in the second century as well as the third, as important to the Romans as it had been to the Nabataeans. Retaining its political structure late into the Roman period, Hegra came to an accommodation with the new power just as it had earlier accepted Nabataean rule, and it profited not only from the Nabataeans but also from the Romans. At least, this was the impression which the Romans wanted to give, by means of our inscription, to visitors to Hegra. Let us hope that our inscription is the first but not the last example of cooperation between the indigenous people and the Roman authorities on the edge of the desert.

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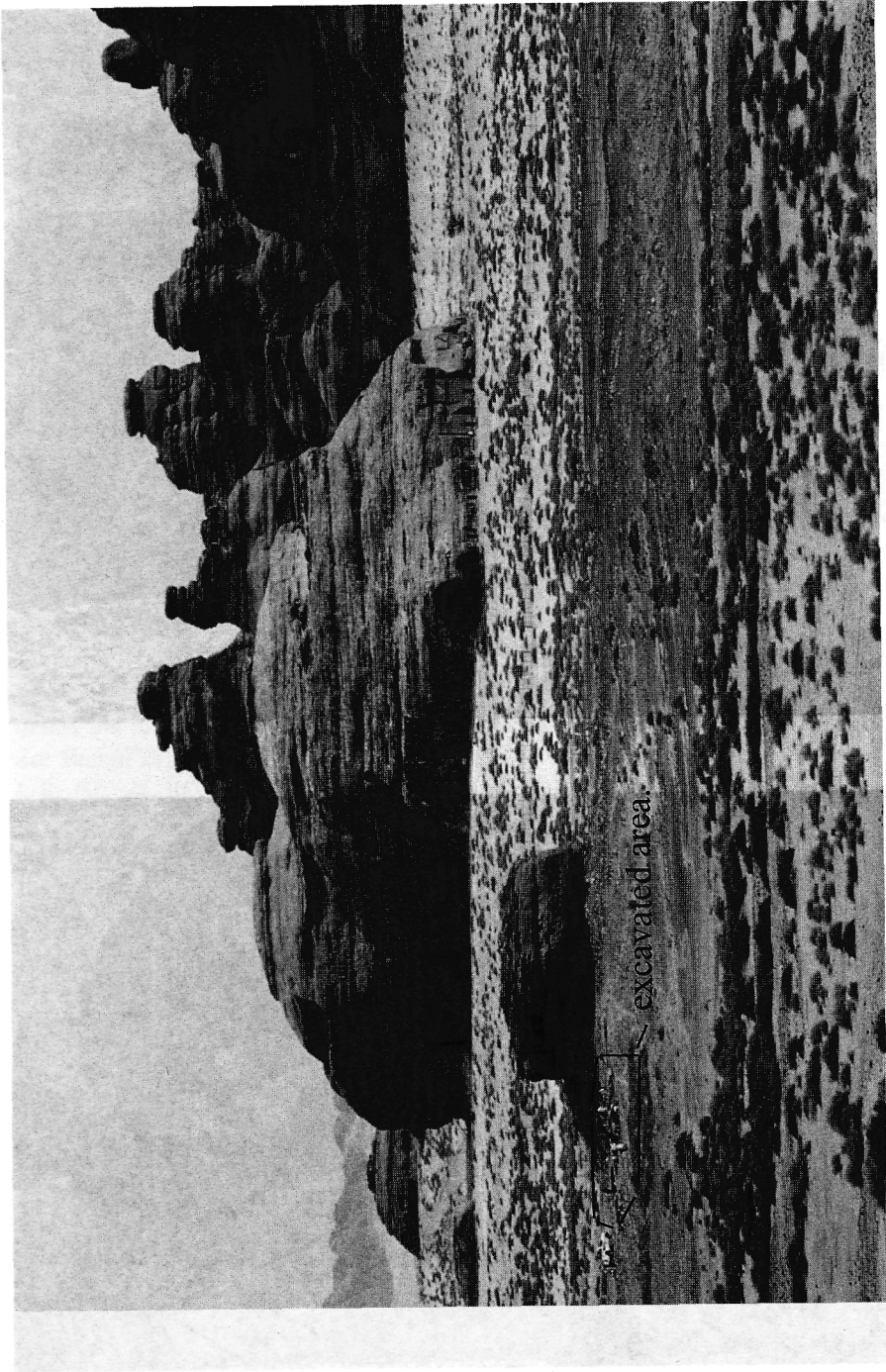
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<sup>40</sup> G. M. WHICHER, *AJA* 10, 1906, 289–294 (= *AE* 1907, 67).

<sup>41</sup> *AE* 1900, 160 = *IGR* III 1287 = *Syria* 29, 1952 p. 313; very similar: *IGR* III 1288 = *SEG* 16, 809; see further *AE* 1922, 133 = *SEG* 7, 951 = *Syria* 29, 1952 p. 314f. = *SEG* 16, 810; cf. *IGR* III 1286 = *Syria* 29, 1952 p. 312; *AE* 1905, 213 = *Syria* 29, 1952 p. 311; *AE* 1953, 231 = *SEG* 16, 805; 16, 806; *Bostra*: *AE* 1973, 550 = *IGLS* XIII 9109; *Harran*: *IGR* III 1149. See lastly M. HORSTER, *Bauinschriften römischer Kaiser*, 2001, 168ff., especially 173.

<sup>42</sup> C. PHILIPPS – F. VILLENEUVE – W. FACEY, *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 34, 2004, 239–250; the same authors will discuss the inscription further in an article which is forthcoming in *Arabia* 2, 2004, and to which we obtained access through the generosity of F. VILLENEUVE. For *AE* 1980, 890 = *SEG* 27, 1005, cf. 31, 1497f. see lastly C. MAREK, *Der römische Inschriftenstein von Barāqīš*, in: N. NEBES (ed.), *Arabia Felix*, 1994, 178–190.

<sup>43</sup> One should also take into consideration the very small fragment of a monumental Latin inscription from Madiama (Maghâyr Shu ‘aib): *Bull.* 10 of the Institute of Archaeology, London 1970 plate 17, mentioned by G. W. BOWERSOCK, *Topoi* 6, 2, 1996, 559.



*Fig. 1*

*Fig. 2**Fig. 3*

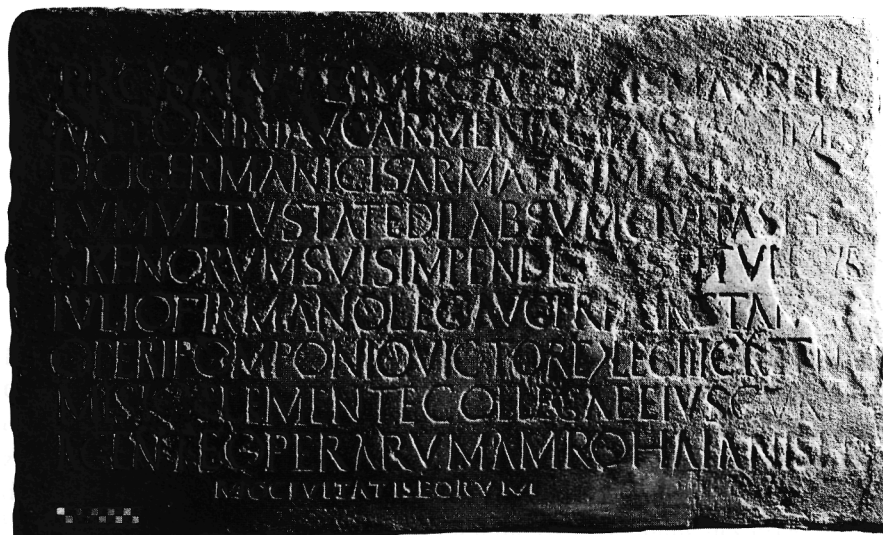


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

