

POLISH CENTRE OF MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

STUDIA PALMYREŃSKIE
XI

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Michał Gawlikowski, Khaled As'ad, The Imperial cult in Palmyra under the Antonines
Studia Palmyreńskie IX, Warsaw: PCMA & WUP, 2010, 43 - 48



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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AAAS	<i>Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes</i>
AE	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
AM	<i>Athenische Mitteilungen – Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der antiken Welt</i>
ArchCl	<i>Archeologia Classica</i>
AS	<i>Antiquités syriennes</i>
BAR	<i>British Archaeological Reports</i>
BEtO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
BGU	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen [Staatlichen] Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden</i>
BjB	<i>Bonner Jahrbücher</i>
BMC Arabia	<i>Coins in the British Museum. Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia</i>
BMC Parthia	<i>Coins in the British Museum. Parthia</i>
BMusBeyr	<i>Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth</i>
BSAA	<i>Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CIS	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i>
CRAI	<i>Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
DaM	<i>Damaszener Mitteilungen</i>
DHA	<i>Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne</i>
EtTrav	<i>Etudes et Travaux</i>
FGrH	<i>Fragmente Griechischer Historiker</i>
HR	<i>Cassius Dio, Historia Romana</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae, Berlin</i>
IGLS	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie</i>
IGR	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i>
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
Inv.	<i>Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre</i>
JGS	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome</i>
MUSJ	<i>Mélanges de l'Université St. Joseph</i>
NH	<i>Naturalis Historia</i>
PACT	<i>Journal of the European Study Group on Physical, Chemical and Mathematical Techniques applied to Archaeology</i>
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i>
P. Dura	<i>Dura-Europos Parchments and Papyri</i>
P. Oxy	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
PAT	<i>Palmyrene Aramaic Texts</i>
PNO	<i>La Palmyrène du Nord-Ouest</i>
RA	<i>Revue archéologique</i>
RdA	<i>Rivista di Archeologia</i>
RM	<i>Römische Mitteilungen – Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung</i>
RMD	<i>Roman Military Diplomas</i>
RTP	<i>Recueil des tessères de Palmyre</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SHA	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

THE IMPERIAL CULT IN PALMYRA UNDER THE ANTONINES

MICHAŁ GAWLIKOWSKI AND KHALED ASʿAD

The restoration work directed for many years by Khaled Asʿad in the ruins of the Umayyad city of Qasr el Heir el Sharqi, excavated and published by Oleg Grabar (Grabar *et alii* 1978: 46-51, Fig. 270), has reached the mosque built within the Great Enclosure. The ruins of the mosque were cleared between 1997 and 2000 by Waleed Asʿad, then architect of the Palmyra Museum, with a view to partial restoration (Genequand 2003a,b: 43-45 and 69-72). Grabar had already read the general disposition of the building correctly (Grabar *et alii* 1978: 46-51, Fig. 270; reproduced by Genequand 2003b: 71, Fig. 3), but the recent work uncovered a monumental inscription engraved in Greek on a huge ashlar block [Fig. 1].

Upon my arrival in Palmyra in 1999, I was shown a hand copy made by Waleed and some photographs of the stone. A week later, I was able to visit the site, take new photographs and make my own copy, which differs very little from the excellent drawing provided by Waleed, whom we would like to thank for his kind help. Some years later, new photographs were taken and provided on our request by Denis Genequand, whom we would like to thank warmly for his generosity.

Back in 1972 Oleg Grabar found another very similar stone in the course of his excavations in Qasr el Heir. During a visit to the site in 1974 Jean Balty, Han Drijvers and Michał Gawlikowski established that the first lines of the inscription were concealed under Umayyad plaster fixing the stone upside down in the baths right outside the Great Enclosure. Next year, Drijvers and Gawlikowski returned to Qasr el Heir with some tools and cleared the entire epigraphic field. Photographs were taken and sent to Glen Bowersock, who was entrusted by the excavator with the study of the inscription [Fig. 2]. He published it in 1976 (Bowersock 1976: 349-355, Pl. 53; cf. *Bulletin épigraphique* 536, REG 90, 1977: 431; SEG 26, 1641; reprinted in Bowersock 1994: 195-201).¹

Upon examination it became apparent that the inscription from the mosque and the one found previously formed in fact one text, nearly complete, even though the two stones are now far apart [Fig. 3]. The stone in the baths contains the beginning of 13 lines, leaving at left a large unscribed surface 40 cm wide. The new stone bears the remaining part with the end of the lines, and an additional line at the end. Where the two stones joined, a few letters have been damaged, but except for one passage, the losses can be safely restored.²

1 The two halves of the inscription were published recently, independently of the present authors, by Chr. Delplace (2005: 311-319; cf. *Bulletin épigraphique* 454; REG 119, 2006: 729-730). Her text is incomplete and the sense of her translation differs from ours.

2 We are indebted to Pierre-Louis Gatier and Bruno Helly, Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Lyon, and to Adam Łukaszewicz, University of Warsaw, for their valuable advice and suggestions.

In particular, the date between AD 166 and 169 was clear from the beginning, as was the fact that the inscription concerned the imperial cult in Palmyra.

L. 1. Bowersock restored the date as October 166, one year short of the real one which is given in its entirety on the newly found stone. On the stone discovered earlier this line is blank. Now it can be seen that line 1 contains an indication where to look for the statues the inscription is referring to. Indeed, since the text appears to have been inscribed on a plain wall, the statues were placed probably not immediately above it. The reference “above the architrave” would be self-explanatory in a given architectural context. Placing statues on an architrave on top of columns would be very unusual, but a stone shelf may be meant instead, such as that supporting the four statues of ‘Ogeilu b. Maqqai on the northeastern wall of the Agora (*Inv.* X: 44; *PAT* 1378; As^cad, Yon 2001: no. 16). The use of the accusative to describe the honorands and their statues is regular of course in Greek honorific inscriptions.

Ll. 2-6. The imperial titulature is now complete. It differs only slightly from Bowersock’s restitutions. The title of Augustus (Σεβαστός) is given in the plural after the mention of the predecessors, rather than after each of the two names, and that of Παρθικοί is missing, being exceptionally replaced by, and not supplemented with, the less common Μηδικοί. Both emperors acquired it in 166 after the Parthian war of Verus. The epithet κύριοι, added by the new inscription, was not official but common at the time (Bureth 1964: 77-82). It corresponds to the Aramaic usage of referring to an emperor as *qsr mrrn*, “Caesar our Lord” (e.g. *CIS* II: 3938 = *Inv.* III, 11; *PAT* 284).

Ll. 6-7. We have now the name of the dedicant, Rabbelos son of Ouaballathos Simōnou. If rendered back into the original Aramaic, it becomes Rabb’el bar Wahballat bar Šim’ōn. While this individual is not evidenced otherwise in Palmyrene epigraphy, one Alexandros Iades, son of Ouaballathos son of Simōn, whose married daughter was honored posthumously with a statue in AD 179 (*CIS* II 3954 = *Inv.* V, 5; *PAT* 300), was probably his brother.

L. 7. At the end, ΘΕΥΣ is an obvious mistake for θεοῦ, perhaps influenced by ἱερεὺς in the next line.

Ll. 7-8. Our Rabbelos was the high-priest of Bel and the annual president of the thiasos of the priests of this god. His was then the highest religious office in the city. There is no point in repeating here the names of other known symposiarchs, already listed by Milik and by myself (Milik 1972: 221-239; Gawlikowski 1973: 75-79), and of those among them who offered statues of other emperors and members of their family, as quoted by Bowersock in his partial publication of this inscription. However, a priest called Wahballat bar Šim’ōn left his name and seal on two tesserae (*RTP* 696 and 724; Milik 1972: 231, 233, no. 12). He could have been the father of Rabb’el and Alexandros. As he had offered wine for a sacred banquet mentioned on one tessera, he might have been another symposiarch, as J.-T. Milik has already hypothesized.

Rabbelos was not only the high priest of Bel, but also a local priest of the imperial cult, as Bowersock guessed correctly already. In fact, such iunctim, though never attested before, could be more common, judging from parallel texts of other symposiarchs offering statues to the reigning emperors.

Our inscription is the earliest of this short series. The symposiarchy of Rabbelos covered the year before the one in which the inscription was commissioned, i.e., the Seleucid year 478, lasting from October 166 to September 167. During that year the city of Palmyra had already received from the imperial chancery a laudatory letter on his behalf, as indicated by the expression in line 10. The proud Rabbelos expressed his gratitude to the two emperors by setting up their statues shortly after leaving office.

Ll. 8-11. Our man offered to his fellow priests, presumably members of the *thiasos* of Bel, “gracious gifts” with which to sustain twice daily the sacrifices of frankincense. No doubt the imperial letter was written in response to an official embassy informing the rulers of the excellency of Rabbelos and of the dispositions he took, most probably to promote the imperial cult. Though the verb ὑποτάσσω usually means “to submit”, the actual text of the letter is not given here; it could have been engraved nearby, perhaps under a statue of the worthy official, offered by his fellow priests or by the city itself.

Ll. 11-12. The repetitive statement about the content of the imperial letter does not make much sense as it stands, and contains moreover the incomprehensible form ΘΥΜΑΤΟΡΩΝ which puzzled Bowersock. The full text now available makes it clear, however, that it is a dittography we are dealing

with here. The stonecutter was supposed to cut *περὶ χάριτος καὶ δωρεᾶς προσθέσεως* (correctly *προσθέσεως*) *θυμάτων*, “about the gracious gifts for the establishment of sacrifices”, but when he reached the last word, he attached the end of the preceding *αὐτοκρατόρων* and repeated the whole phrase once again, this time finishing it correctly. The word at the end of line 12 is a iotacized form of *ἡμερήσιος*, preceded by a short word beginning with Δ. The reading *δῖς* is better recommended than *δύο*, as the space available for the middle letter is very narrow.

L. 13. The reading *ιερεῦσι* is strongly suggested by the extant traces of letters and by the general sense [Fig. 4]. In the following lacuna, and before the first missing letters of *Ἀδριανός*, there is place for some four letters of which the third was *epsilon* or *sigma*. The names of the late emperors in the nominative case should have determined the words lost in the first half of line 14. There are some traces of letters before the date, but none can be distinguished. Thus, the meaning of this passus remains obscure.

The date of the inscription falls in December 167, about one year before the death of Lucius Verus (Gonis 2009: 196). The emperor had spent most of the five preceding years in Syria, leading his troops in the Parthian war. The city of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates, with close links to Palmyra, had been conquered recently on the Parthians, and the governor of Syria was Avidius Cassius, the future usurper of the imperial purple, a Syrian by birth and a protégé of Verus. The Parthian victories were widely celebrated throughout the Roman East (cf. Bowersock 2001). The priests of Bel apparently decided to honor the imperial brothers twice every day and their president established a foundation to provide means to this effect.

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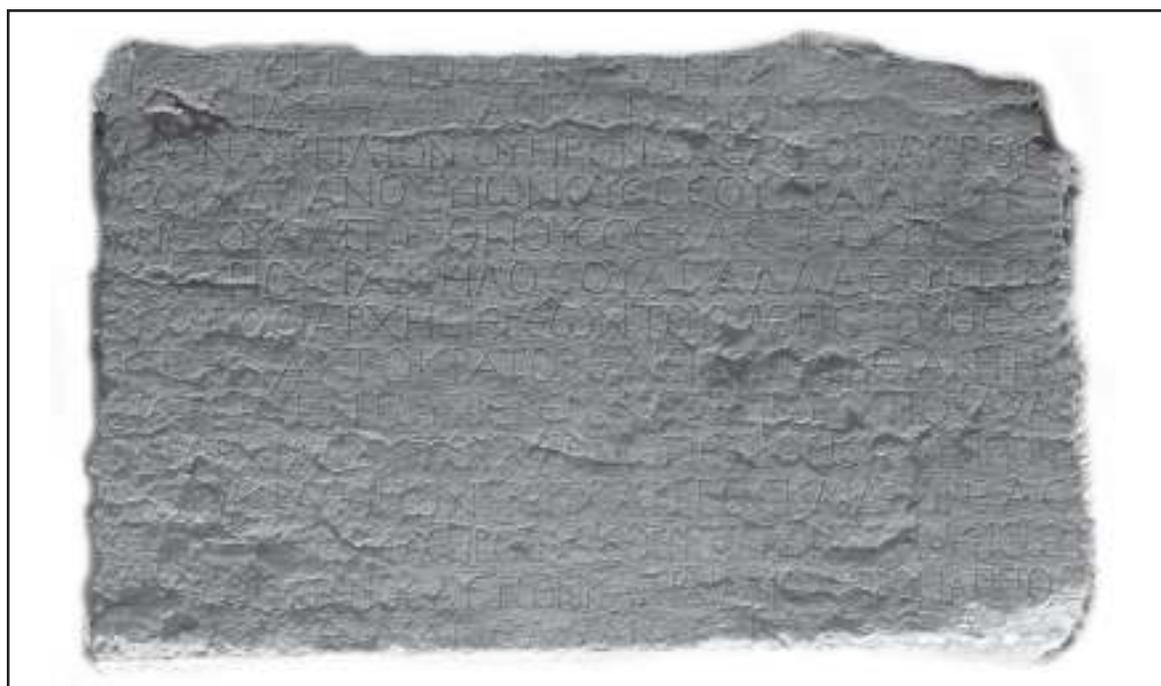


Fig. 1. Greek inscription from Qasr el Heir, right half
(Photo M. Gawlikowski)

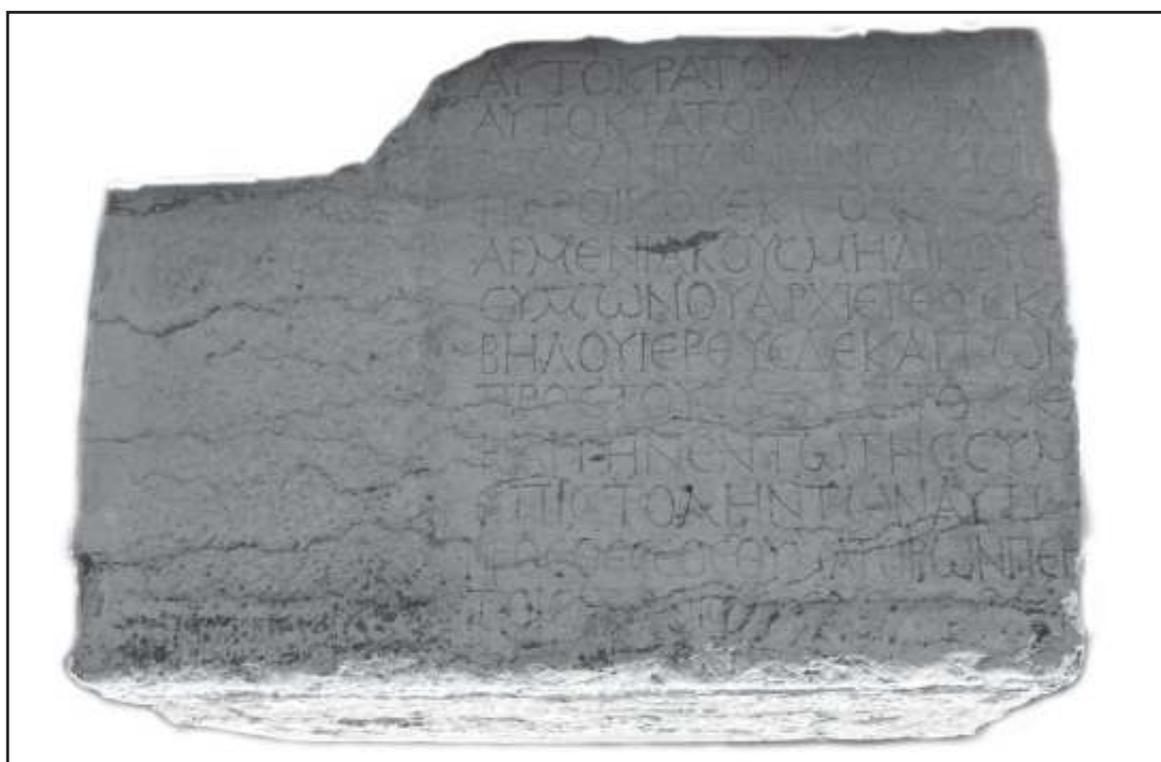


Fig. 2. Greek inscription from Qasr el Heir, left half
(Photo M. Gawlikowski)

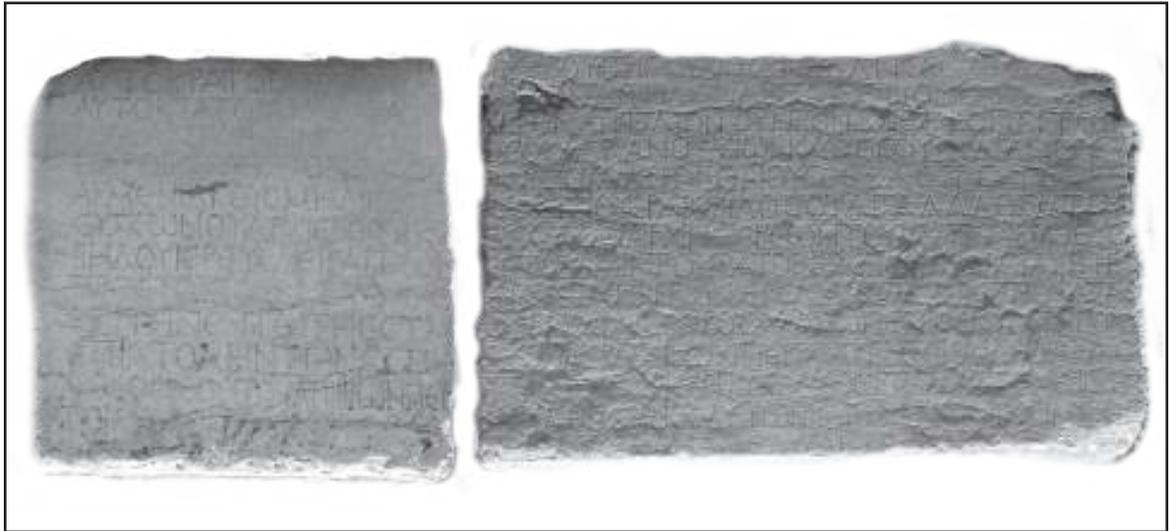


Fig 3. Greek inscription from Qasr el Heir, digital reconstruction combining left half (published by Glen Bowersock) and recently found right half (Photo D. Genequand)



Fig. 4. Close-up of the lower right part of the inscription and the illegible last line (Photo M. Gawlikowski)