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EPIGRAPHY AND VILLAGE LIFE IN SOUTHERN SYRIA DURING THE ROMAN AND EARLY BYZANTINE PERIODS

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1. *Introduction*

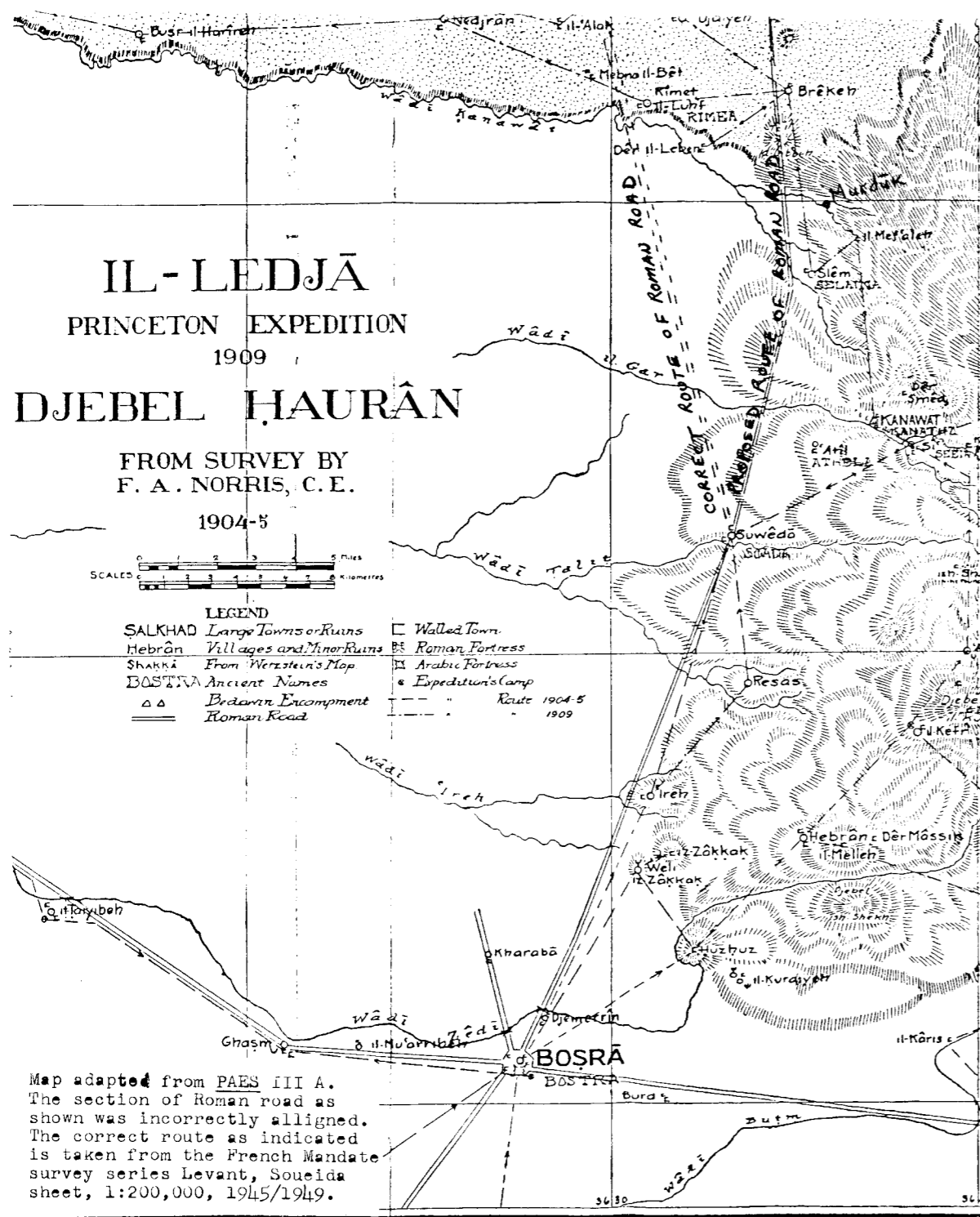
On the morning of Tuesday, the fourteenth of May, 1861, the Anglo-French epigrapher W.H. Waddington departed from Damascus on horseback.¹ He took with him an assistant named Asad-Amer and a large quantity of blank notebooks. Within two years the notebooks contained facsimiles of over 1,000 inscriptions which Waddington hand-copied from stones imbedded in tombs, bridges, temples, arches, theaters, churches, houses, courtyards and a varied assortment of other buildings both private and public throughout southern Syria. These were published, with others copied in Lebanon and north Syria, as the *Recueils des inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* in 1870.² It remains, more than a century later, the fundamental source of Greek and Latin epigraphy from southern Syria, and a monument to the energy and erudition of one of the 19th century's great orientalists.

In time, other collections of inscriptions — including Nabataean, Safaitic, Arabic and Syriac — were published after various surveys in this same region. Notable among those

¹ J.B. Chabot, "Le Voyage en Syrie de W.(H.) Waddington", *Mélanges Syriens offerts à René Dussaud*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1939) 352. It is worth noting that for security purposes Waddington finished the first day's journey "avec l'escorte de 20 druzes..." (ibid).

² This was originally published in the third

volume of a larger work, *Inscriptions recueillies en Grèce et en Asie Mineure par Philippe Le Bas*, which Waddington described as an "ouvrage que j'étais chargé de continuer après la mort de l'auteur, et dont elles forment le complément..." (iii). The separate volume will hereinafter be referred to as *Wadd.*



were the three expeditions from Princeton University between 1899 and 1909,³ the survey by Dussaud and Macler at the turn of the century,⁴ and the collection made by Maurice Dunand in 1925.⁵ The Greek and Latin inscriptions alone now number more than 2,000. These are being re-edited and re-published as forthcoming volumes in the ongoing *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* series presently undertaken by the Institut Fernand-Courby in Lyon, France.⁶

For many reasons, little archaeological work has been conducted in southern Syria. Even the once large and important cities such as Bosra (mod. Buṣrā ash-Shām) and Philippopolis (mod. Shubah) are only now beginning to attract the attention of serious field archaeologists. In lieu of archaeological evidence, the published inscriptions, together with the available historical sources, give some picture, however indistinct, of life in southern Syria during the first seven centuries A.D. Village life figures quite prominently in these texts, since it is from villages that the great majority of them come. Hence the subject of this paper.

By reference to specific inscriptions I will examine the following six topics: (1) the Hellenization process, (2) village government, (3) building activities, (4) inter-village activities, (5) tribal and clan activity and (6) occupations and professions. There are many other aspects which could be examined, and these will be noted in the concluding remarks.

My aim is to focus attention on matters often overlooked in the political histories of Roman and Byzantine Syria, i.e. how the indigenous communities reacted to and functioned within the Roman imperial system. It is the Greek inscriptions much more than the Latin, Nabataean or other that record the everyday affairs of the villages and their inhabitants. To a limited extent Profs. Heichelheim⁷ and Rostovtzeff⁸ showed the potential significance of such a study. A closer examination was made by A.H.M. Jones⁹ and G.M. Harper,¹⁰ but to date no full-scale, systematic study of village life in southern Syria has yet been attempted.^{10a} A generation ago Georges Tchalenko showed what useful information could be gained by a careful study of villages in northern Syria.¹¹ This paper is but a preliminary step in that direction, which I hope to expand upon in a larger work.

³ W.K. Prentice, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions: Part III of the Publications of an American Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1899-1900* (New York, 1908), hereinafter *AAES*; E. Littmann et al. *Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904-05 and 1909*, Division III: Greek and Latin Inscriptions, Section A: Southern Syria (Leyden, 1910-21), hereinafter *PAES*.

⁴ R. Dussaud and I. Macler, *l'oyage Archéologique au Ṣafā et dans le Djebel ed-Drūz* (Paris, 1901) and the same authors' *Mission dans les régions désertiques de la Syrie Moyenne* (Paris, 1903), hereinafter *l'oyage and Mission*.

⁵ "Nouvelles Inscriptions du Djebel Druze et du Hauran", *RB* 41 (1932) 397-416; 561-580 and *RB* 42 (1933) 235-254; *Mélanges Syriens offerts à René Dussaud*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1939), II pp. 559-579; *Ar Or* 18 (1950) 144-164; collectively hereinafter *NIDH*.

⁶ Vols. I-VII and VIII Pt. 2 as well as Vol XIII

Pt. 1 (Bosra) are now in print; hereinafter *IGLS*. In addition, the following abbreviations should be noted: *IGRRP: Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanae Pertinentes*; Musée: *Le musée de Soueida*; Ewing: W. Ewing, "Greek and other Inscriptions Collected in the Hauran", *PEFQS* (1895); Fossy: C. Fossy, "Inscriptions de Syrie," *BCH* 21 (1897); SEG: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, VII (1934).

⁷ F.M. Heichelheim, *Roman Syria* in T. Frank (ed.), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, Vol. IV (New Jersey, 1959 — reprint) 121-258.

⁸ M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (2nd., Oxford, 1957), 270-273 and notes 661-666.

⁹ "The Urbanization of the Ituraean Principality", *JRS* 21 (1931) 265-275 (hereinafter "Urbanization").

¹⁰ "Village Administration in the Roman Province of Syria," *YCS* 1 (1928) 104-168.

^{10a} See now note no. 103 below.

¹¹ G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1953).

2. The Hellenization process

Though the villagers of southern Syria spoke an Aramaic or Arabic dialect, they very often recorded their everyday affairs in Greek inscriptions. This in itself indicated some degree of Hellenization, even on the fringes of territory which had belonged to one or another of the Greek kingdoms created after Alexander's death. Three centuries of Macedonian rule established Greek as the new *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean. Certainly some Syrian villagers spoke Greek, but the Hellenization process, at least linguistically, does not appear deep-rooted outside the large cities.

The Greek of the village inscriptions is often a *patois* of dubious meaning which makes the *koinē dialéktos* of the New Testament and papyri seem classical in comparison. But it is not always the spelling or grammar or syntax of an inscription, nor even the proper names of the villagers, which exposes the Semitic background of the inscribers. One illustration of this is the brief dedicatory text which Waddington copied at 'Amra in the Jebel al-'Arab:

<p>Ἄουεῖδος Δάδου ἐποίησε τῇ Ἀθηνᾶ, σεννότου ρή'.</p>	<p>Aoueidos (the son) of Dados made (this) for Athēna, (in) the year 190 (A.D. 295).¹²</p>
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Both the name of the dedicant ('Awīdh) and his father (Dād) are Semitic and well-attested in this region. Athēna was long ago identified with the Arabic goddess Allāt. It is the appearance of the term σεννότος which makes this text especially interesting. We should expect instead Greek ετος as in most inscriptions of this type. Waddington correctly identified *sennotos* with Semitic šnt; cf. Arabic *sana(tun)* and Syriac *šantā*.

One other inscription from the Jebel al-'Arab demonstrates the process and the limits of hellenization. This text is from the village of Shaqqā (Saccaea/Maximianopolis):

<p>(In memory of) Alexander (son) of Acrabanus, pious high priest, community-minded, interpreter for the procurators; Namēlē his wife, Petran, and Rufus (his) son, laid (him) to rest among his own.¹³</p>	<p>Ἀλέξανδρον Ἀκραβάνου ἀρχιερέα εὐσεβῆν φιλό- πατρην, ἐρμηγέα ἐπιτρόπων, Ναμήλη [γ]υ[νή] α[ὐ]τοῦ, Πετραία, καὶ Ροῦφος υἱὸς, ἐν ἰδίοις κατέθεοντο.</p>
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This is a common funerary dedication, unfortunately undated. φιλόπατρις could be taken in its literal sense of "patriotic", but here the meaning seems closer to that of the term εὐεργέτης "benefactor". The wife's name is recognizably Semitic.¹⁴ The patronymic is simply a rendering of 'Aqrabā(n), still today a place-name (cf. note 39) in the western Ḥaurān. Alexander was obviously a man of some social standing, since he combined a religious function with the duties of an interpreter (ἐρμηγέας) for the financial officer attached to the governor's staff.¹⁵ Apparently he traveled among the villages with the imperial officials, providing *viva voce* translations wherever needed. That the villages of this region required such a service is somewhat surprising in light of the sophisticated rural administrative system attested in Roman times. This is the subject of the next section of the paper.

¹² *Wadd.* 2081.

¹³ *Wadd.* 2143

¹⁴ H. Wuthnow, *Die semitischen Menschennamen in griechischen Inschriften und Papyri des Vorderen Orients* (Leipzig, 1930) 81, s.v.

¹⁵ C. Clermont-Ganneau, "Les Epitropes de la Province d'Arabie", *BEHE* 230 (1921) 161-164; cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Greek City* (Oxford, 1940) 290 and note 45.

3. Village government

Political stability in southern Syria was not initiated by the Romans. Herod the Great and his descendants, and the last few Nabataean kings, had effectively curbed the banditry and the Bedouin raids which must have impeded the social and economic development of the entire region. There is every reason to believe that Nabataean rule, had it continued to be effective beyond the first century, would have been just as beneficial as Roman rule. But the available evidence indicates that Nabataean control of internal and external affairs grew increasingly ineffective in the late first century.¹⁶ This in turn jeopardized its long-standing client-kingdom status with Rome, and resulted in Roman annexation of the kingdom in A.D. 106.¹⁷

Villages which had been within Herodian territory (the Lejā and Jebel al-'Arab regions) were attached to the province of Syria; those within the Nabataean kingdom (eastern Batanaea and the Ḥaurān) were included in the new province of Arabia. Some of these villages were assigned to the territory of the few cities of the region. Those in the Ḥaurān fell within the territorial limits of Bostra or Canatha.¹⁸ But many, especially those of the upland areas attached to Syria, did not take on the role of shadowy appendages of *poleis*. From the abundant evidence of the inscriptions, they assumed instead the form, if not the substance, of cities. Villages formed their own assemblies, elected or appointed boards of magistrates, managed a common fund, negotiated with the Bedouin in their vicinity, petitioned the governor for redress of wrongdoing, sent ambassadors to Rome, regulated the use of common land, undertook joint endeavors with other communities, and subscribed public works projects of every conceivable type;¹⁹ some of these will be described in the next section.

Villages referred to their corporate or collective function by employing a remarkably diverse range of terms. Most notable among these are "the village" (ἡ κώμη), "the villagers" (οἱ κωμηῖται), "those from the village" (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς κώμης), "the people" (ὁ δῆμος), "the community" (τὸ κοινόν), and "the assembly" (ὁ ὄχλος).²⁰ Other collective terms were employed. A damaged Greek inscription from Junayn in the Jebel al-'Arab may indicate that the term τὸ συνέδριον (assembly or common-council) was used there instead;²¹ this group, representing "the whole village" erected or dedicated some structure (a *propylon*?) under the supervision of magistrates elected by "the people". These "administrators" (διοικηταί) were but one example of the many village officials we find attested in the inscriptions. In addition we find the following titles: "village chief" (πρωτοκομήτης or στρατηγός); "trustees" (πιστοί); "planners" (προνοηταί); "commissioners" (ἐπιμεληταί); "overseers" or "supervisors" (ἐπισκοποί); "managers" (οἰκονομοί); lastly, "advocates" or "legal representatives" (ἐκδικοί and σύνδικοί).²²

¹⁶ F. Winnett, "The Revolt of Damasī: Safaitic and Nabataean Evidence", *B. ASOR* 211 (1973) 54-57.

¹⁷ On the *motivation* for this, see G.W. Bowersock, "Syria Under Vespasian", *JRS* 63 (1973) 138-140. Arabia's annexation may have been only the penultimate stage of a Trajanic *Ostpolitik* designed to fix the Roman frontier at the Zagros mountains.

¹⁸ A. Alt, "Das Territorium von Bostra", *ZDPV* 68 (1951) 235-245; M. Sartre, "Le Territoire de Canatha" *Syria* 58 (1981) 343-357, emending Alt's errors regarding Bostra's northern

territory. Adraa (Der'ā) undoubtedly incorporated villages in the western Ḥaurān.

¹⁹ Jones, "Urbanization", 268-275; cf. his *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1971) 282-287.

²⁰ Jones, "Urbanization" 272.

²¹ *Wadd.* 2188 (undated). I wish to thank Mr. Francis Piejko, Utica, New York, for his suggestions regarding the restoration of parts of this text, and for comments on many other aspects of this paper.

²² Jones, "Urbanization", 270-272.

All of this indicates that the villages emulated the cities in many details of administration. But there is as yet no compelling evidence that they usurped the ultimate authority of the city, the council (ἡ βουλῆ). The term “councillor” (βουλευτής) is attached to many men in village inscriptions, but as Jones pointed out long ago,²³ it is an honorary title designating one who had served (or was serving) on a city council. Likewise, the unique appearance of the city-council term *dekaprōtoi* in an inscription from Namra in the Jebel al-ʿArab²⁴ is clearly an honorific title, since the two men so named are designated as village *pistoi* in the same text. The term *boulē* does not appear in any village inscription, nor is any variant of it known from rural epigraphy except *bouleitēs*.²⁵

4. Building Activity

The known inscriptions demonstrate clearly that the villages of southern Syria undertook (normally at their own expense) public works projects of every conceivable kind. Among these I note the construction of baths, basilicas, stables, refectories, temples, hotels, reservoirs, theaters, aqueducts, courtyards, fountains and public buildings of uncertain character known by a variety of names. From the fourth century on some of the building inscriptions mention the erection of a significantly new structure: the watchtower (φρούριον). This apparently became a common feature on the skyline of many villages, especially those facing the desert frontier.

Perhaps the most common public structure of all was the inn or rest-house. Whether they were known as “the public guest-house” (τὸ δημόσιον πανδοχεῖον) or “the common guest-house” (τὸ κοινόν πανδοχεῖον), references to them are too numerous to warrant individual attention here. They normally included, or were built in conjunction with, stables and refectories. Some of these inns (built in northern Syria) have survived partially intact.²⁶

Many village inscriptions refer to buildings which also have a public association, although in somewhat a more official capacity. Some examples of the terminology used will demonstrate this. In one instance “those from the village” of al-Ajaylat (anc. Eglā) in the Jebel al-ʿArab “dedicated to their god Ethaos (Ithaʿ)” some kind of “public building” (δημόσιον τὴν οἰκοδομήν) in an unknown year.²⁷ At Majdal-ash-Shur in the eastern Ḥaurān another “public house” (ὁ δημόσιος οἶκος) was built in A.D. 362 “by provision and under the direction of” three *pistoi* of the village.²⁸ In another instance, the southern Ḥaurān village of al-Muʿarribah built in A.D. 336 “a common house” (ὁ κοινός οἶκος) by provision of two or more *pistoi* assisted by two or more *pronoētai*.²⁹ The exact function of these buildings is unknown. They may have been assembly-halls or public offices of some kind, even though the terminology of the inscriptions closely parallels that of the inns. Yet it isn’t odd that a village would dedicate a hotel to a deity, as noted above, and the matter remains unsettled.

Even more obscure in meaning is the “vaulted hall of the people” (καμάρα τοῦ δήμου) built by the village of Busān (anc. Bosana) in the Jebel al-ʿArab “under the advocacy of”

²³ Ibid, 272-273; cf. CERP² 286.

²⁴ Voyage, pp. 148-149 no. 12.

²⁵ Wadd. 2056 from Umm ar-Rūman in the southern Ḥaurān appears to be an exception to this, but only because Waddington very conjecturally restored the term *Koinobouli(o)n* (common-council hall) in the last (?) line of a

much-damaged text. I hope to republish this and show that the inscription simply refers to yet one more city councillor involved in village affairs.

²⁶ PAES III B no 1154.

²⁷ Wadd, 2209 (undated).

²⁸ Wadd. 2029.

²⁹ Wadd. 2070a.

one *syndikos* and two *pistoi* in an unknown year.³⁰ In the nearby village of al-Mushannaf (anc. Nela) a *syndikos* in association with a board of administrators built “the vaulted hall” (ἡ καμάρα).³¹ Here also the meaning is uncertain, but some sort of public assembly-hall seems to be implied. Whether it had *political* use, like the council-hall (βουλευτήριον) in cities, is unclear. I am inclined to believe that *καμάρα* (Latin *camera*) here is synonymous with the more common term *basilica*, a covered public building normally placed in the vicinity of the market and used for a variety of functions. At least two villages in southern Syria noted the construction of just such a building.³² At the very least, the importance of these buildings to the villages is demonstrably emphasized by the fact that high-ranking officials or boards of magistrates normally oversaw their construction.

5. Inter-Village Activities

At the site of a ruined monastery named Dayr al-Laban in the north-eastern corner of the Nuqrah, Waddington discovered and copied an unusual group of eight Greek inscriptions. All of them appear to be related, either in time or purpose or both. All are religious in nature and connected with the worship of a pre-Christian solar deity referred to in a number of texts as “Zeus-Aumos the Unconquered Sun-God”.³³ Dayr al-Laban was not a village but a sanctuary or sacred area, later converted into a Byzantine and then an Islamic monastery. What is particularly significant is that the majority of these inscriptions are joint dedications by two or more individuals, villages or tribes.

The longest text, and the only one that is dated, begins with a preamble acknowledging Emperor Constantine and his son Constantinus (A.D. 320). It then goes on to note that:

The courtyard and (something else) were (dedicated?) to the Lord and Unconquered Sun-God Aumos. Cassius Malichathus from the village of Rimea, of the tribe Khasetnoi, and Paulus Maximinus, from the village of Merdocha, of the tribe Audenoi, erected from the foundations (this) magnificent edifice and (its) roof, having generously donated their own time, by provision of Aumus and Amelathus (his) son, priests.³⁴

Malichathus and Maximinus, again identified by village and tribe, appear in two other inscriptions. One notes the construction of “the enclosure wall of the courtyard”³⁵ and the other that “the altar was built”.³⁶ In these latter two texts, the men are styled as *pistoi*.

On another large stone Waddington found two similar dedications obviously related to each other:³⁷

³⁰ Wadd. 2240.

³¹ Wadd. 2220 (undated).

³² Wadd. 2044: “The basilikē and the door...” (A.D. 330); Wadd. 2189 (undated).

³³ D. Sourdel, *Les Cultes du Hauran à l'Époque romaine* (Paris, 1952) 54-56.

³⁴ Wadd. 2393.

³⁵ Wadd. 2394.

³⁶ Wadd. 2395.

³⁷ Wadd. 2396 a& b. Waddington hesitantly proposed translating the title *ιεροτομῆς* as “sacrificateur”, suggesting instead that it was a mistake in spelling for the commonly-attested title of *ιεροταμῆς* (temple-treasurer). To complicate

matters, the term occurs as *ωροτομῆς* and *οροτομῆς* in Wadd. 2397 (see note no.38), obviously a contemporary text. Some support for Waddington’s solution is found in PAES III A 765¹¹ (republishing Wadd. 2397). Prof. G.W. Bowersock has suggested to me that *ιεροταμῆς* should be taken as the correct spelling, and translated as “sacred butcher” or some equivalent term. This is an attractive alternative, but I have not yet found parallels to support it. Sourdel, *Cultes* p. 54 surprisingly sidesteps the entire issue by failing to reproduce these particular texts from Dayr al-Laban.

(a)
Jul(ius) Maximus (the son) of
Oredanus, from the village of
Rimea, temple-treasurer(?)
(ἱεροτομεύς sic) of the tribe
Khasetēnoi, built (this).

One other text, inscribed by someone with scant knowledge of Greek, is worth noting:

Aur(elius) Gla(u)cus, (the son) of
Bernicianus, from the village of
Idnos (?), temple-treasurer? built
(this). Aur(elius) Montanus (the
son) of Ausus, from the village of
Rimea, temple-treasurer? of the
tribe Khasetēnoi, built (this).³⁸

The significance of this group of texts was pointed out long ago by Jones, but only in a cursory fashion. Four villages and two tribes were involved in building projects at this sanctuary. No doubt they contributed to the maintenance of it as well. Not surprisingly, the villages which can be identified are very near Dayr al-Laban. Merdocha (mod. Murdūk) is eight km. south-east, in the foothills of the Jebel al-^cArab. Rimea (mod. Rimet al-Luḥf) and Borechath Sabaon (mod. Brākah) are a few km. north and northwest respectively — just within the southern edge of the Lejā. The name of the fourth village, Idnos, is quite uncertain, and hence its exact location is unknown. Like the others, it would have lain just east of the Roman road which ran north from Bostra, via Suweidā, and across the Lejā to Damascus. The sketch map will help to illustrate this.

From these texts, it is clear that certain villages near the sanctuary at Dayr-al-Laban were jointly responsible for major building projects at the site. It also appears that these villages participated in some sort of alliance, either through tribal affiliation or a more formal federation. The extent of this is unclear. The village of Borechath Sabaon is referred to as a *mētrocōmia*, literally a “mother-village.” This is normally taken to mean that it enjoyed a special status as the “capital” of a village league. If so, this might be understood as the in-between stage from village to city rank. But there is no evidence from these inscriptions that the other named villages were in any way subordinate to or dependent upon Borechath Sabaon. Other inscriptions from this region demonstrate clearly that *mētrocōmia* was an honored privilege.³⁹ Moreover it is especially interesting that these references to *mētrocōmiai* are from villages formerly within the Herodian kingdom, and initially attached to the province of Syria following the death of Agrippa II in A.D. 93/94.

This collection of inscriptions may be unique, and therefore not representative of inter-village activities elsewhere in southern Syria. In spite of this, it is interesting to record that some villages undertook co-ordinated activities, and that tribal identification, even after two centuries of Roman rule, was still an important social distinction. Even so, the same texts bear witness that one tribe (the Audēnoi) split, and became part of the

³⁸ *Wadd.* 2397.

³⁹ Cf. *Wadd.* 2480 (Zor^cah) and 2524 (Mas-mayah). Although an inscription from nearby Sūr (*PAES* 797²) yields the term *mētrocōmia*, it is by no means certain that the village of the inscription is

(b)
Aur (elius) Avitus (the son) of
Atticus, from the *mētrocōmia* of
Borechath Sabaon, temple-treasurer(?)
(ἱεροτομεύς — sic), of the tribe
Audēnoi, built (this).

Sūr. To the west of the Lejā, the village of ^cAqrabā is styled a *mētrocōmia* in the Greek text of a boundary-stone found by Dussaud and Macler, *Mission* 298 no. 175.

population of two villages. This was no doubt a common pattern, and part of the urbanization process in this region.

6. Tribal & Clan Activity

The Greek inscriptions of southern Syria yield twenty-one names that are unquestionably tribal and another twenty which are doubtless clans or even smaller groupings.⁴⁰ This will come as no surprise since the same region today still has tribal and clan associations which play an important social role.

Only one of the tribal inscriptions is from a village in the Ḥaurān; the remaining twenty are almost equally divided between villages in the Lejā and the Jebel al-^cArab. These are the upland areas on the fringes of the desert, and the areas which would be a natural choice of Bedouin in the transitory stage from nomadism to urbanization.

It is also worth noting that all of these tribal names are recognizably Semitic, and that with only one exception all are from villages. By contrast, the known tribal names from Bostra are Greco-Roman and the tribes themselves, in keeping with other Hellenized cities, were no doubt artificial creations to conform with the needs of a city constitution. Only about half of the tribal inscriptions can be dated; the earliest is A.D. 170 and the latest is A.D. 560.

The clan inscriptions parallel the tribal texts in almost every way. Only two names are associated with the Ḥaurān, and three names with cities. Two-thirds of the remainder come from villages in the Jebel al-^cArab, and the rest from villages in the Lejā. Dates range from early second century to late fifth century.

Since the focus of this paper is on village life, it will be useful to briefly investigate the relationship between village and tribe based on what the inscriptions relate. This can best be done by grouping the inscriptions according to similarity of activity or purpose, and noting whatever patterns may emerge. Those inscriptions which emphasize community action will be of particular interest.

Fully one third of the tribal and clan inscriptions (taken collectively) testify to involvement in some kind of public work. These projects include the restoration⁴¹ or construction⁴² of houses and the building⁴³ or enlargement⁴⁴ of temples or parts of temples, e.g. an apse,⁴⁵ a dovecote⁴⁶ or just a door.⁴⁷ The “magnificent edifice” built jointly by two tribes at Dayr al-Laban and the “magnificent buildings” erected by tribesmen at Najrān in the Lejā may well have been temples.⁴⁸ In one case a wall⁴⁹ and in another a “public room” (ἡ κοινόβια)⁵⁰ were built by provision of a clan and tribal *syndikos* respectively. A brief dedicatory inscription from Smād in the Lejā testifies that “the tribe of the Dabanēnoi made the public (speakers’) rostrum;”⁵¹ was this perhaps a reference to some local Hyde Park? On one occasion a city built and equipped some workshops; this task was supervised by “overseers” (*episkopoi*) of a named tribe.⁵² On another occasion the same (?) city repaired aqueducts, and in this inscription the supervisors were

⁴⁰ M. Sartre, “Tribus et clans dans le Hawran antique,” *Syria* 59 (1982) 77-91 and my “Notes on Tribal Names in Greek Inscriptions from southern Syria,” *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām* 1985, forthcoming.

⁴¹ *AAES* 389 = *NIDH* 112.

⁴² *Wadd.* 2481.

⁴³ *NIDH* 115 = *SEG* 1069.

⁴⁴ *Wadd.* 2366 = *AAES* 428a.

⁴⁵ *Wadd.* 2512.

⁴⁶ *Wadd.* 2173a = *PAES* 758.

⁴⁷ *Wadd.* 2483.

⁴⁸ *Wadd.* 2393b and 2427.

⁴⁹ *Wadd.* 2173.

⁵⁰ *Wadd.* 2220.

⁵¹ *PAES* 786³.

⁵² *Wadd.* 2309.

“councillors” from another tribe.⁵³ In yet another community a man who was probably a clan spokesman paid for the construction of a “stable and two refectories.”⁵⁴

Only one tribal inscription is identifiably Christian; this commemorates that “Sergius (the son) of Samaathus, from the village of Norerathē (mod. Najrān?) of the tribe Soborēnoi, from his own funds built the sanctuary (for the church) to Saint Elias, in the year 455 (A.D.).”⁵⁵ St. Elias is also honored by the construction of a *martyrium* in a clan dedication found at nearby il-Jāj.⁵⁶ The other texts of a religious nature are surely non-Christian. One commemorates a feast held in honor of an unnamed god,⁵⁷ another is a dedication to an unnamed deity.⁵⁸ In other inscriptions a column,⁵⁹ a statue (?),⁶⁰ an altar base⁶¹ and an altar⁶² were all dedicated by clans or tribes or members of each. Only rarely are gods mentioned by name. Lycurgus was honored in some fashion by a tribe,⁶³ and two or more shrines to “Fortune” (Tychē) were built by two clans and a private (?) individual (a patron?).⁶⁵ A (temple?) façade dedicated “to the god Kronos of the (clan) Sokarathoi” was constructed in the village of Kafr in the Jebel al-‘Arab “in the year 17 of Hadrianus Caesar” (A.D. 134).⁶⁶ In a unique text from ‘Ormān in the Ḥaurān, three men of the tribe Konēnoi “had responsibility for the cleansing (of the temple?)”⁶⁷

Surprisingly few tribal or clan dedications of a funerary nature have so far been discovered. Only one inscription is known in which a tribal patron is honored.⁶⁸ Likewise only one text has been published which commemorates a clan *stratēgos* (sheikh?).⁶⁹ Finally, there are two tribal inscriptions recorded which are so mutilated that their purpose remains, unfortunately, unknown.⁷⁰

7. Professions and Occupations

The village inscriptions also offer information regarding the occupations of the inhabitants. Thus we learn that a certain Gabnes, who built an altar, was a sculptor.⁷¹ The building profession itself is well-attested. The builder (οἰκοδόμος), partly out of pride and partly as free advertising, often notes his native village. In this way we hear of “Rabbus from Borechath Sabaōn”, a *mētrocōmia* in the Lejā, who built a house at Šalkhād in the Ḥaurān in A.D. 403.⁷² Likewise we know of Gadouos the son of Malechus “from the village of Eglā” (mod. al-Ajaylat) in the Jebel al-‘Arab who built a “memorial” and some other structure in Malaḥ aṣ-Šarrar in the eastern Ḥaurān.⁷³

The successful builder might have assistants and apprentices⁷⁴ and could boast of his own skills: “the rafters of this house ‘Addus (the son) of Taroudus, far best of builders, joined, and the work was carried to completion.”⁷⁵ These rafters were surely the basalt slabs still used today, which are often three or four meters long and may weigh one hundred kilos. Rapid completion of a building project was also acknowledged with favor; “the villagers” of Dayr-el-Mayas in the southern Ḥaurān bragged that “by

provision of the builder Oenus, from the village of Bosana (mod. Būsān in the Jebel al-‘Arab), the courtyard was completed in thirty-six days.”⁷⁶

Success in the building trade no doubt created a hierarchy among its practitioners. The most skilled (or least modest) builder might style himself as a “craftsman” (τεχνήτης)⁷⁷ or even an *architekton*.⁷⁸

The agrarian basis of life in southern Syria did not pass unnoticed. Farmers took great pride in their work. One, named Diomedes, from Ghāriyyah ash-Sharkiyya near Bostra, was honored in a metrical epitaph as one who was “wealthy from farming.”⁷⁹ Another, Masalemus Rabbus, from Nahita in the western Ḥaurān, built some structure in the year A.D. 385 “from his own farming labors.”⁸⁰ We also have knowledge of collective enterprises. In one instance “the farmers (γεωργοί) of Zorava, at their own expense, set up (the statue of) Nikē.”⁸¹

Not surprisingly, priests and temple-treasurers are too frequently attested to warrant individual references. However, there is mention at the great Nabataean sanctuary of Si^c of a “trumpeter” (βουκινάτωρ) appropriately named Triton.⁸² This was undoubtedly a part-time job, as was that of an unnamed temple-sweeper (ὁ ναοκόρος).^{82a}

Lawyers (*scholastikoi*) are known from inscriptions at Ghaṣm in the Ḥaurān⁸³ and Zor‘ah in the Lejā.⁸⁴ In the latter text the person named may have been attached to the provincial governor’s staff (*officium*). Goldsmiths are known from two inscriptions. In one, a goldsmith named Moses (?) and his father built a memorial.⁸⁵ In the other something was built “through the generosity of Isakios (Isaac), goldsmith.”⁸⁶ Waddington found this inscription “beneath the arch” at the opening of one of the numerous springs which flow from the hillsides near al-Kafr in the Jebel al-‘Arab. The site is known in Arabic as ‘Ayn Mousa, “the Spring of Moses”, and this led Waddington to guess that the place-name honored the Hebrew ancestry of its benefactor.

The military profession may also be noted here. There are few villages in southern Syria which do not honor veterans. Resident veterans, like retired city-councillors, were held in high esteem — and for much the same reason. Their experience, prestige and wealth were assets to any small community, whether or not the individual had been born there. Most veterans are known from their tombstones, but others are honored while still alive for their active participation in community activities. It is sometimes difficult to know if a person honored has actually retired from military service or whether he may still be on active duty. In either case the communities involved publicly acknowledged their gratitude.

An inscription from near the Lejā relates that a certain Julius Germanus, centurion of the *Legio III Gallica*, is “the benefactor and founder of the Aerisians”;⁸⁷ Aera is modern as-Šanamāyn. A veteran named Rufus, a temple-treasurer in conjunction with two other men, made an offering “to Zeus” at Sahwat-al-Khudr near Bostra in 171.⁸⁸ A century later “the sanctuary was paved” at the nearby village of ‘Ayun by a veteran named Alexander (the son) of Bathourus.⁸⁹ A veteran named Bassus takes credit for building

⁵³ *Wadd.* 2308.

⁵⁴ *AAES* 377.

⁵⁵ *Wadd.* 2431.

⁵⁶ *Wadd.* 2436 = *PAES* 791.

⁵⁷ *Wadd.* 2370 = *PAES* 765¹

⁵⁸ *Wadd.* 2439.

⁵⁹ *Wadd.* 2339 = *AAES* 413a.

⁶⁰ *Wadd.* 2348 = *AAES* 421.

⁶¹ *Wadd.* 2537d.

⁶² *Ibid*; *Wadd.* 2173b (uncertain reading).

⁶³ *NIDH* 76 = *SEG* 1102

⁶⁴ *Wadd.* 2512.

⁶⁵ *Wadd.* 2339 = *AAES* 413a.

⁶⁶ Musée no. 198.

⁶⁷ *PAES* 694 = *NIDH* 182a

⁶⁸ *Wadd.* 2287 *PAES* 664.

⁶⁹ *Wadd.* 2236.

⁷⁰ *Mission* 243 no. 11 = *IGRRP* no. 1171.

⁷¹ *Wadd.* 2413n.

⁷² *PAES* 159.

⁷³ *PAES* 713, 714.

⁷⁴ *PAES* 787⁸

⁷⁵ *Wadd.* 2244 = *PAES* 738.

⁷⁶ *Wadd.* 2053b.

⁷⁷ *Ewing*, p. 132 no. 51.

⁷⁸ *Wadd.* 2471.

⁷⁹ *Voyage* 203 no. 88.

⁸⁰ *Wadd.* 2412 1

⁸¹ *Wadd.* 2479.

⁸² *PAES* 772

^{82a} J-M & J. Dentzer, *CRAI* (June, 1981) 92 note 9, also from Si^c. *Naokoros* is for *neōkoros*.

⁸³ *PAES* 618.

⁸⁴ *Wadd.* 2485.

⁸⁵ *PAES* 786^c

⁸⁶ *Wadd.* 2295.

⁸⁷ *Wadd.* 2413f.

⁸⁸ *Wadd.* 1969.

⁸⁹ *Wadd.* 1984b.

(and financing?) a tower for the village of il-Mashqūq in the Jebel al-ʿArab.⁹⁰ The villagers of Qrayah, just a few kms. northeast of Bostra, were proud to make a public announcement regarding a project important to their village:

To Good Fortune! The reservoir was built in the year 190 (A.D. 295) at the common expense of the village, costing 15,000 denarii, by provision of Flavius Cornelius, primipilarius.⁹¹

In the Jebel al-ʿArab village of Ḥabran the tribe Mozaidēnoi honored (with a statue?) as their patron a veteran named Aurelius Antonius Sabinus.⁹² In the nearby village of Namrah another (?) Aurelius Sabinus described himself in a funerary inscription as a veteran and member of the tribe Askēnoi.⁹³ Two veterans served as “overseers” (*episkopoi*) of an unspecified project at Ṣalkhād in the Ḥaurān.⁹⁴ Even descendants of veterans benefit from a certain prestige, if the term οὐετρανικὸς is correctly understood in a number of inscriptions.⁹⁵ At Umm el-Zaytān in the Lejā two such οὐετρανικὸι served as “planners” in the construction of a shrine (Kalybē).⁹⁶ The ease by which a man might pass from the military to a magistracy is exemplified by Theodorus Emmilis of el-Ghāriyah in the Ḥaurān, who distinguished himself in the careers of “soldiering and politicking.”⁹⁷ He was only one of many who chose to make this particular transition. Obliquely related to the military profession is the occupation noted in a unique inscription from the village of Zayzān in the western Ḥaurān dated A.D. 485:

Prosper, Zizios! (This) building of Malichus, engineer (μαγγάναριος) (was constructed) by authority of Antoninus, Anouneus and Anina (being village magistrates) in the year 380.⁹⁸

A few professions remain to be noted. In the Lejā village of Sūr an enigmatic funerary text commemorates Aurelius Marcellus the son of Salus, “former steward (πραγματευτής) for thirty years in foreign lands;” his body was brought home and buried “in the forecourt” of his cousin’s house.⁹⁹ Also in the Lejā, two men of Majadal who refer to themselves as surgeons (εἰατροτομεῖς) built something with money “from the common fund of the village.”¹⁰⁰ The well-known Nabataean/Greek bilingual inscription from ‘Umm aj-Jemal, just south of the modern Syrian-Jordanian border, notes that “Fihir, son of Shullai” had been a “tutor” (τροφεύς);¹⁰¹ his pupil was Ghadīmat (al-Akrash?), king of the Tanūkh tribe and ancestor of the equally famous, and equally enigmatic, Imru’ al-Qays, “King of *all* the Arabs.” Lastly I should note the brief dedicatory inscription from Buṣr al-Ḥariri in the Lejā which reads: “May you live, Oaedos (Waʿed), teacher (ὁ διδάσκαλος), may you live!”¹⁰² One may hope to be so honored by his own students.

⁹⁰ *PAES* 177 = *Wadd.* 2053.

⁹¹ *Wadd.* 1963.

⁹² *PAES* 664.

⁹³ *PAES* 760.

⁹⁴ *Wadd.* 1989.

⁹⁵ *PAES* 765¹³; *Wadd.* 2227.

⁹⁶ *Wadd.* 2546.

⁹⁷ *NIDH* 230 = *SEG* 1217.

⁹⁸ Fossy, *BCH* (1897) 44 no.19 = *IGRRP* 1165; cf. Heichelheim, *Roman Syria* 195 and note 76. The date given for this text in all three of these is incorrect. The exact meaning of *manganarios* is uncertain. F. Cumont, *L’Égypte des Astrologues* (Bruxelles, 1937) 85 and note 3 indicates that in

context it can mean “prestidigateur”, “machiniste”, or “enchanteur”. Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1966) s.v. note that “conjurer” or “mechanical engineer” could be correct. Neither source was aware of this inscription. The brevity of the text is of little assistance, but the context implies a building skill of some kind.

⁹⁹ *Ewing* 137 no. 64.

¹⁰⁰ *PAES* 787.

¹⁰¹ *PAES* 238¹. I cannot agree with the interpretation of *tropheus* given in M. Sartre, *Liber Annuus* 29 (1979) 253-258.

¹⁰² *Wadd.* 2472 = *AAES* 432c.

8. Conclusion

The limited scope of this paper will, I hope, show the need for further research into the everyday affairs of these villages and their inhabitants. The aspects which I have briefly discussed are far from exhaustive. A full-scale investigation should include those inscriptions which deal with common ownership of property, the leasing of land for pasturage, management of what the texts refer to as “the common fund” (τὰ τοῦ κοινοῦ), private donations to villages, and constructions of a religious nature, both pre-Christian and Christian. Much of this would involve consulting the relevant Nabataean and Safaitic texts as well.

It should be clear that the evidence from Greek epigraphy is but one dimension of a more complete picture of village life in southern Syria. Careful archaeological excavations of some of the now deserted villages is absolutely essential.¹⁰³ This would constitute a second dimension. The third dimension can best be illustrated by Dr. Helga Seeden’s recent ethnoarchaeological expeditions at Bostra.¹⁰⁴ By carefully co-ordinating a team of observers and recorders, she has demonstrated clearly how much can be learned of village life in antiquity by the systematic study of a living village.

Epigraphy alone serves only as a record of *what* was done, *when*, and *by whom*. It seldom answers the questions of *how*, or *why*. At best it is a supplement, although a valuable one, to what archaeology and anthropology can detect. In this sense it is an aid to understanding, and appreciating, the process of historical and cultural continuity in one uniquely interesting geographical area — that of southern Syria.

¹⁰³ Fundamental to the study of village architecture throughout southern Syria is the new study by François Villeneuve, *Recherches sur les villages antiques du Haurane: 1er siècle av. J.-C. — VIIème siècle ap. J.C.* (unpublished dissertation presented for the degree of Doctorat de 3ème cycle en archéologie, University of Paris, March, 1983). I wish to thank Dr. Villeneuve for providing me with a photocopy of this; I regret that it did not arrive in time to be

utilized in this paper.

¹⁰⁴ On the 1980 season see the preliminary note in *Archiv für Orientforschung* 28 (1981/82) 214-215 and the preliminary report entitled “Busra 1980: Reports from a South Syrian Village”, *Damascener Mitteilungen* 1 (1983) 77-101. For reports, see *AAAS* 33, 1983 (in press) and *Berytus* 32, 1984 (in preparation). See also above pp. 13-26.