The Greek and Latin Inscriptions in the Governorate of ‘Ajlun in North-West Jordan

Nabil Bader
The Governorate of ‘Ajlun is the smallest governorate in today’s Jordan. It is located in north-west Jordan at 79 km north of ‘Amman, the capital of Jordan (fig. 1). ‘Ajlun Governorate covers about 420 square km. It is renowned for its mountains, with one of the highest in this area, at about 1,200 m above sea level, and for its castle called ‘Ajlun Castle (formerly Al-Rabad castle). As in other parts of Jordan, some Greek inscriptions were discovered in the Governorate. They were published in different international journals. Elaborating on the idea of a corpus of Greek and Latin inscriptions in Syria initiated in the 1920s by father Louis Jalabert, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan authorized in 1970 the Institute Fernand-Courby in Lyon (France) to collect and publish the Greek and Latin Inscriptions discovered on the territory of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The name given to this part of the corpus is I. Jordanie (Inscriptions de la Jordanie = IGLS XXI).

OLD AND NEW EPIGRAPHICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE ‘AJLUN AREA

In 2012, I was appointed to be the author of volume I. Jordanie 1.2 of the series, mainly devoted to the Governorate of ‘Ajlun and some areas in the Jordan Valley. I started some surveys to locate the Greek and Latin inscriptions; two campaigns were carried out. The first one was in the summer of 2013 and the second one was in April 2014. As a result of this work, Greek and Latin inscriptions from the region can be classified as follows:

– Latin inscriptions: milestones, mostly found on the Roman road leading from Gerasa to Pella in the Jordan Valley (Atallah 2003);
– Greek inscriptions: around forty inscriptions are attested in the whole governorate up to this moment, mainly mosaic floors, already published for the major part of them;
– Bilingual inscription: one Greek-Arabic inscription was found in the town of ‘Ajlun.

The types of the inscriptions found in the area and included in the corpus of ‘Ajlun (I. Jordanie 1.2) can be classified as follows:

– Pagan inscriptions;
– Christian inscriptions;
– Building inscriptions;
– Funerary inscriptions.

The main sites are the following:

– ‘Afana (عفانة): located at about 5 km to the north of ‘Ajlun. One Greek inscription was found in that village (Mittmann 1970, p. 181-182, no. 19);
– ‘Ajlun (عجلون): two inscriptions were found in the town centre, one already published (Van Elderen 1972) and another unpublished Greek-Arabic inscription (see below);
– ‘Ajlun Castle: some inscriptions were found in the castle (Zayadine 1987; Minnis & Bader 1988; Atallah & Abu Abeilah 1999-2000; Abu Abeilah 2007, p. 22-23);
– ‘Anjara (عنجارا): located at about 4 km to the south of ‘Ajlun city. An inscribed stone was found lying in front of a house in the eastern part of the village. The owner of the house told us that he was given the inscribed stone by a farmer from a village situated to the east of the village of Umm Jawzah, south of ‘Anjara. Some archaeological places were visited around – ‘Anjara like Umm al-Jlud (Galoudes), Salus, Shamsin, and Sarabis;
– Badiyya (بدیع): located to the south of the town of ‘Ajlun. Two churches were discovered, which can be dated to the 6th or the 7th cent. AD (Steuernagel 1925, p. 48; Mittmann 1970, p. 84; Al-Muheisen 2006). In Ras al-Dayr (راس الدير), three Greek inscriptions were discovered on the mosaic pavement of a church (Al-Muheisen 2006; see Bull. ép. 2008, 558, and AE 2006, 1617);
– Darar (مضار): a village in the Jordan Valley, where a milestone was found (O’Hea 2002; AE 2002, 1559);
Hallawa (حلاوة): two inscriptions were found in two sites in the adjacent areas (Zqaiyaq (ىق) and Al-Tantur (المتنور); Mittmann 1970, p. 49) and are still unpublished (Abu Abeilah 1998). The name of Hallawa was mentioned in one of them (as Kalwa);

Hashemia (ءيشامية): three inscriptions were found in a house in the centre of the village;

Ishtafina (اشتفي): two milestones carrying mile number 12 were located in this area (Atallah 2003; AE 2003, 1821);

Kh. Maqatiʿ (عقايبة): to the north of the town of ’Ajlun, the oldest dated Greek inscription on a mosaic floor in Jordan was discovered; it is dated to Ad 482 (Van Elderen 1972);

Mar Ilyas (الياس): to the north of the town of ’Ajlun. Seven inscriptions were found in that area, mostly fragmentary or on a mosaic floor (Augustinović & Bagatti 1951-1952; Di Segni 2006 and SEG 56, 1904);

Miḥna (مها) / Umm al-Yanabiʿ (أم اليابع): an unpublished inscription was found on a mosaic floor in a house in the centre of the village; a drawing of that inscription was made. It is a rare type of mosaic inscription with Nilotic motifs (Piccirillo 1981, p. 21-23);

Rasun (رواسون): one inscription was found on an altar (Atallah 1998; SEG 48, 1923);

Kh. al-Wahadnah (الوهادنة): three mosaic inscriptions were found (Burckhardt 1822; Augustinović & Bagatti 1951-1952, p. 279-283; Piccirillo 1981, p. 18-20);

Wadi Rajib (دري رجب): a Greek inscription was found in a small Byzantine monastery church; a Syriac inscription was also found in a Byzantine church which is thought to be a monastery church (Piccirillo & Al-Qudah 2003; cf. SEG 53, 1880).
During the survey carried out in the summer of 2013, a bilingual inscription was found on the upper lintel of the main entrance of the Greek Orthodox church situated in the town centre of 'Ajlun. According to the archaeologists, the area where the church is located is part of the old village of 'Ajlun and, indeed, the external examination of the church shows that it could be built on an older building (BADER 2015).

The stones carrying the inscription are of limestone and are formed of many parts. The surface of the stones is well prepared to receive the inscription. The text is completely preserved (fig. 2-3). The Arabic part of the inscription has a half circle shape surrounded by a band with an average width of 4 cm and the band carries the Greek part of the inscription. The Greek inscription is above and under the Arabic inscription.

Dimensions: Height 108 cm; width 48 cm; height of letters: 5-8 cm; line spacings: 2-4 cm.

Διὰ δαπάνης τοῦ Παναγίου τάφου

« At the expenses of the prosperous Byzantine Monastery in Holy Jerusalem, this noble temple was built as a church for Al-Khadr (Saint George), peace be upon him, in the year 1885 (AD) Christian era. » (Arabic)

« At the expenses (of the Brotherhood) of the Holy Sepulchre. 1880 (sic) August 7. » (Greek)

The importance of this inscription is in the use of the Greek language along with the Arabic language at the end of the 19th cent. AD. The two parts are not identical; the Arabic version has more information than the Greek; for example Saint George is not mentioned in the Greek part of the inscription. To my
knowledge, no other bilingual inscriptions were found in 'Ajlun Governorate. The only other bilingual Greek-Arabic inscription in the region is that of Saint George, on the lintel of the main gate of the church of Al-Husun in the Governorate of Irbid at about 35 km to the north east of 'Ajlun. It is dated to the year 1886, one year later. Both buildings have been carried out during the time of Nicodemus, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Jerusalem (AD 1882-1891). It is worth mentioning that the discovery of the church of the Map in Madaba in the central part of Jordan was contemporary with the building of the church of 'Ajlun.

As mentioned in the Arabic part of the inscription, the church is devoted to Saint George, one of the most popular saints in this area. In fact, most of the churches belonging to the Greek Orthodox church are devoted to Saint George.

As for the location of the inscription, we should point out that the church where the inscription was found is in the centre of the town, which is the old part of 'Ajlun. The remains of many old churches were discovered in the surrounding area; most of them are dated or can be dated to the 6th or 7th cent. AD, by inscriptions that were found in those churches: 'Ajlun Castle (ATALLAH & ABU ABEILAH 1999-2000), Mar Ilyas, Badiyya, Ras al-Dayr.

The use of the Greek language in an area where the Arabic language is dominating means that there were some people still using the Greek language at the time of the church’s dedication. The Greek Orthodox church was directed by Patriarchs who were natives of Greece and were Greek native speakers, which means that the Greek language was still playing an important role in the Christian community in the late 19th cent.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

**ABU ABEILAH (M.)**

**ABU ABEILAH (M.)**
2007  « New Mosaic Floor in the Castle of 'Ajlun (Qalʿat al-Rabāḍ) », *Berytus* 50, p. 85-87.

**AL-MUHEISEN (Z.)**

**ATALLAH (N.)**

**ATALLAH (N.)**

**ATALLAH (N.) & ABU ABEILAH (M.)**

**AUGUSTINOVIC (A.) & BAGATTI (B.)**

**BADER (N.)**

**BURCKHARDT (J. L.)**

**DI SEGGI (L.)**

**MINNIS (D.) & BADER (Y.)**

**MITTMANN (S.)**

**O’HEA (M.)**
2002  « Note on a Roman Milestone from Gador (Al Salt) in the Jordan Valley », *Levant* 34, p. 235-238.

**PICCIRILLO (M.)**

**PICCIRILLO (M.) & AL-QUQAI (Z.)**
2003  « L’ermitago nel Wadi Rajib sulla montagna di Ajlun in Giordania », *ADAJ* 17, p. 73-75.

**STEUERNAGEL (C.)**

**VAN ELDEN (B.)**
1972  « Early Byzantine Inscription found near Ajlun », *ADAJ* 17, p. 73-75.

**ZAYADINE (F.)**