

Greek Inscriptions - Discussion

This stele and its intriguing inscription have been discussed in several works since the stele's serendipitous discovery in 1965. These include: Barger, T. (1966). "The Riddle of Meda'in Salih." *Archaeology*, 19. 217-219. Barger, T. (1969). "Greek Inscription Deciphered; Seal Found in Arabia." *Archaeology*, 23. 139-140. Bowersock, G. (1971). "A Report on Arabia Provincia." *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61. 219-242 [note page 230]. Bowersock, G. (1983). *Roman Arabia*. Harvard University Press: Massachusetts. [note page 96].

Professor G.W. Bowersock has noted that, since the painter referred to in this inscription took his name from the Roman emperor Hadrian (reigned 117-138 A.D.), the inscription could not be earlier than Hadrian's reign; its lettering also is characteristic of the second or third centuries A.D. The headquarters of the Third Cyrenaica Legion, during Hadrian's reign, were at Bostra in Rome's Province of Arabia. Apparently, a painter (presumably a shield-painter) among the Roman troops at Mada'in Salih, a southernmost outpost of the Nabataeans in this province of Rome, set up this marker to honor the fortune of Bostra.

The language of the inscription is Greek, though the official language of the Roman army was Latin. This reflects the personal character of this dedication, which is not an official document emanating from the Legion.

The Tyche of a city was the presiding deity of the city and often the symbol of the city. By dedicating this stele to the Tyche of Bostra, Hadrian (the shield-painter) is demonstrating his allegiance to the city where his legion had its base. He is declaring himself to be a person from Bostra in a foreign land.*

This Greek stele was outside Saudi Arabia for many years, but was returned in 1999, and placed on display in the National Museum. It has not yet been catalogued into the National Museum's collection of pre-Islamic epigraphy. The story of this stele's discovery, export and return to Saudi Arabia has been recounted in "Well of Good Fortune" by P. Kesting, in *Saudi Aramco World* (May/June, 2001, pp. 14-17).

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