

## Elusa. A new tetrarchic inscription

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*Im Zuge des Elusa-Projektes konnte während der Ausgrabungen im Frühjahr 2019 (siehe den Vorbericht im selben Band) eine Inschrift geborgen werden. Der Fund wird in diesem Beitrag im Detail besprochen und epigraphisch analysiert. Es handelt sich um eine Kalksteinplatte mit einer achtzeiligen Inschrift, die ans Ende der Tetrarchie datiert werden kann. Besondere Bedeutung erhält der Fund, da es sich um die erste Nennung des Namens Elusa aus der Stadt selbst handelt und zudem den frühesten epigraphischen Beleg für den Rang der Stadt als Polis darstellt.*

A block discovered in secondary use in front of the bathhouse at Elusa bears a Greek inscription of at least seven lines (**Fig. 1**). The block is broken at the bottom and its height is preserved to a maximum of 72.5 cm; in width it measures 60 cm, in depth 20 cm. Its top surface is worn at the left end but smoothed at the right. On the right side of the block, the bottom corner is broken off but the surviving surface is dressed to smoothness. On the left side, the upper corner is broken off and the surviving surface is for the most part very worn, but a small area shows polished. The back is rough, except along the side edges. The stone may have formed part of a built pedestal, perhaps surmounted by a plinth, or it may have been engaged in a wall at the base of a niche in the façade of a building. In any case, since the sides of the block are polished, we can surmise that its present width, corresponding to two Roman feet, reflects the size of the base supporting a piece of statuary. The inscription makes it clear that this was the function of the structure in which the block was embedded.

The inscription is carved within a slightly protruding frame 7.6 cm wide at the top, 7 to 7.5 cm wide along the sides; the bottom side is lost in the break. On the left side, the frame almost completely disappeared, partly broken off with the left corner of the block, partly chiselled off and a diagonal strip across the inscribed surface is erased. A short tract

of the projecting frame can still be faintly made out level with line 6, which enables us to confirm the width of the frame on the left side and to evaluate the width of the gap at the beginning of the lines. The letters, carefully engraved with a fine chisel, belong to the narrow rectangular alphabet and have marked right-angled serifs<sup>1</sup>. They are very regularly aligned and similar in height: 6 cm in lines 1–3 and 5–6, slightly taller (6.5 cm) in line 4, slightly smaller (5–6 cm) in line 7. Two curvilinear marks can be observed at the end of lines 2 and 5, and a similar decorative element probably was symmetrically located at the beginning of the same lines. The inscription reads:

1	[ - - - - - ] Α Λ Ε Ρ Ι Ο
2	[ - - - - ] Α Ν Τ Ι Ο Ν
3	[ - - - ] Β Η Ε Υ Τ Υ Χ Η Ν Ε Ι
4	[ - - ] Ο Ν Ε Π Ι Φ Α Ν Ε Σ Τ Α
5	[ - - ] Ν Κ Α Ι Σ Α Ρ Α
6	[ - - ] Ν Ε Λ Ο Υ Σ Η Ν - - -
7	[ - ] Σ Δ Ι Α Τ Ι [ - - - - -
8	- - - ?

1	[Αὐτοκρ(άτορα) Φλ(άουιον) Οὐ]αλέριο-
2	[Ν υ Κωνστ]άντιον Ν
3	[Σεβ(αστόν) Εὐσε]βῆ Εὐτυχῆ ἀνεί-
4	[κ(ητον) κ(αί) Σεβῆ]ρον ἐπιφανέστα-
5	[Ντον] Καίσαρα Ν
6	[ῆ τῶ]ν Ἐλουσηνῶ[ν πό-]
7	[λι]ς διὰ Τι[ - - - - ?
8	[ - - - - ]

<sup>1</sup> Serifs meeting the upright or diagonal stems of letters at a right angle are typical of inscriptions of the Roman period in our region. In inscriptions from the Byzantine period, serifs appear in the form of tiny triangles.



Fig. 1: The inscription.

The city of the Elusenes (honours) Emperor Flavius Valerius Constantius Augustus Pius Felix invincible and Severus most noble Caesar, through Ti- [name of the man charged with the execution of the work].

In l. 1 *Αὐτοκρ(άτορα)* was no doubt abbreviated, as is most often in this kind of inscriptions<sup>2</sup>. In l. 3, the beginning of the epithet *ἀνείκητος*, *invictus*, seems to have been added as an afterthought, partly invading the frame. There is only space for its abbreviated form in l. 4, possibly here too invading the frame. The space in line 4 is so scarce that even *καί* was probably abbreviated or altogether omitted<sup>3</sup>, and the name of the Caesar may have been spelled *Σευῆρον* or *Σεβῆρον*, both well-attested forms in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, though less common than *Σεουῆρον*<sup>4</sup>. In l. 6, the space between the frame and the first surviving letters is also scarce, but the reading [ἦ τῶ]ν Ἐλουσηνῶ[ν πόλι]ς

is certain, and it is possible to make out the trace of a ligature of the first five letters: *ΗΤΩΝΕ*.

The titles *Εὐσεβῆς Εὐτυχῆς ἀνείκητος* indicate that the first honorand was an Augustus, while *ἐπιφανέστατον Καίσαρα* refers to the junior Tetrarch, the *nobilissimus* Caesar. Two Augusti called Constantius ruled in a tetrarchic framework: Constantius I, nicknamed Chlorus, Constantine's father and emperor of the Western part of the Roman Empire, and Constantius II, Constantine's son and emperor of the Eastern part. The *gentilicium* Valerius identifies the Augustus as Constantius I; the name of the Caesar is therefore restored as Severus. Constantius II bore the *gentilicium* Iulius and his Caesar was first Gallus, and after Gallus's death in 354, Julian. The identification of the honorand as Constantius I enables us to pinpoint the date of the inscription, between his elevation to Augustus on 1 May 305 and his death on 25 July 306. The formula of the inscription indicates that the city erected sta-

2 For this abbreviation, or the even shorter *Αὐτ(οκράτορα)*, see *IGLS* II, no. 262 and IV, no. 1347 from Syria; *IGLS* XIII, 1, no. 9048 (Bostra); *SEG* VI, no. 811 (Cyprus).

3 The abbreviation *κ(αι)* was already in use in the tetrarchic

period: see for instance *SEG* XX, no. 337. For the omission of *καί* in a list of Tetrarchs, see *JGR* III, no. 1112.

4 Examples from our region only: *SEG* XXXIII, no. 1298 (Tiberias); *CIIP* II, nos. 1548, 1556 (Caesarea).

tures, or perhaps busts, given the size of the pedestal<sup>5</sup>; but the fact that they honoured the emperor of the West and his Caesar makes it likely that another pedestal with a similar inscription honoured Galerius and Maximianus, the Augustus and the Caesar of the East, under whose rule Elusa found itself. This is the case, for instance, at Jarash, where two blocks at the corners of the tetrapylon bear Latin dedications by the governor of Arabia Aurelius Felicianus, one to Valerius Constantius Caesar (a role he filled between 293 and 305), the other, fragmentary, to Maximianus, either the Augustus of the West of Maximianus Galerius, the Caesar of the East<sup>6</sup>. No doubt two more blocks at the other corners of the tetrapylon honoured Diocletian and the remaining Tetrarch. In Jarash, Valerius Constantius Caesar was also honoured in Greek on a stele erected by the governor Aurelius Gorgonius and the former duumviri of the colony<sup>7</sup>. As Constantius, having spent all his time as tetrarch in Europe and in Britain, had no particular claim to the flattery of the Gerasenes, we can surmise that in this case too similar monuments were erected in honour of the Augusti, Maximianus and Diocletian, and of Diocletian's Caesar Galerius.

A different reading might be suggested for line 4, if we were to read *ἀνεί* [[κη]ον, instead of [κ(αι) Σεβῆ]ρον. This would change the interpretation of the inscription and its date, for with the disappearance of Severus from the inscription, *ἐπιφανέστατον Καίσαρα* would refer to Constantius, and he would be honoured not as Augustus but as Caesar, as he was between 293 and 305. This interpretation is less likely, firstly, because the three

letters KHT are not enough to fill the gap at the beginning of line 4, but most important, because as a rule the epithets Pius, Felix, invictus Augustus, or the corresponding Greek titles, are reserved for the emperor himself, and in the tetrarchy, for the senior emperor, not for his junior and heir designate. Yet there are exceptions: for example, in two Greek inscriptions from Heracleia in Thrace (*JGR* I, nos. 791–792), the city honours Constantius and Galerius as Caesars with the formula τὸν ἐπιφανέστατον Καίσαρα - - - Εὐσεβῆ Εὐτυχῆ Σεβαστόν. Also the title *Imperator/Αὐτοκράτωρ* (the restoration of which in our inscription is made necessary by the length of the gap in line 1) was normally reserved to the senior Tetrarchs; yet in the above-mentioned stele from Jarash Constantius is hailed as *Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Φλ(άουιον) Οὐαλέριον Κωνσταντίον τὸν ἐπιφανέστατον Καίσαρα*. This alternative interpretation, which regards Constantius as Caesar and therefore dates the Elusa inscription to the years 293–305, cannot therefore be totally excluded. Even in this case, we can expect the city to have set up more inscriptions honouring the other members of the Tetrarchy, in this case Diocletianus, Maximianus and Galerius.

Lines 6–7 preserve the name of the dedicator: [ἦ τῶ]ν Ἐλουσηνῶ[ν πόλι]ς. This way of referring to a city through the ethnic of its citizens is the norm in inscriptions and coins, as well as in papyri and literary sources, while the use of the simple toponym is much less common. Here we have the earliest epigraphical testimony not only of Elusa's name<sup>8</sup>, but also of its status as a polis. We have no data to ascertain when this status was granted

5 The width of the pedestal, as reflected by the inscribed block, cannot support two statues even if somewhat enlarged by a surmounting plinth. If the emperors were represented by statues, these could only have been smaller than life size and perhaps joined together in a half-embrace pose, like the tetrarchic group in the façade of St. Mark's in Venice. Busts, however, cannot be excluded: see the case of a possible bust of Diocletian, discussed by Gibson – Nagorsky 2016.

6 Welles 1938, 414, nos. 105–106.

7 Welles 1938, 431, no. 161. Welles misunderstands the meaning of the term *στρατηγοί* in this inscription. In a colony, it corresponds to the office of duumvir. Gerasa became a colony sometime in the second half of the third century: Schürer 1979, 152.

8 The name of Elusa or the ethnic of a native of the city are attested in a few inscriptions and many papyri from the sixth and seventh centuries (Alt 1921, 18–19, no. 20; *SEG* XXVIII, nos. 1395, 1396; Beersheba tax edict, fr. 1, col. III, l. 13, *SEG* LIV, no. 1643; mosaic map of Madaba, Donner 1992, 72, no. 104; *P. Nessana*, nos. 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 39, 46, 51, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 71, 76, 79). In literary sources the city is first mentioned by Ptolemy (V, 15, 7), and possibly much earlier if *Χελος* of Judith 1:9 and *Ἄλουσα* of Jos., *Ant.* XIV, 18 refer to Elusa in the Negev: for a discussion of this question, see Di Segni – Tsafir 2017, 290–292.

to Elusa. A possible hint that this occurred when the Nabataean realm was annexed to the Roman Empire may be seen in the fact that the era of Arabia, which continued in use in most of the Negev after it was detached from Provincia Arabia and attached to Palaestina<sup>9</sup>, is called ‘year of Elusa’ or ‘year of the city (of Elusa)’ in several inscriptions and papyri<sup>10</sup>. This piece of evidence, however, is not conclusive, for the definition of the era of 106 CE as ‘era of Elusa’ may reflect a perception of its sixth-century users, who identified the era of Arabia with the era of the city, rather than historical reality.

In line 7, after διὰ, the letters TI are followed by a blank rather wider than the space left between letters in this inscription. This suggests that they represent an abbreviated *praenomen*, probably separated by the following name by an abbreviation mark, seemingly a tiny dash which left a trace in a small crack in the clean line of the break. Ti. is the Latin abbreviation of Tiberius, in Greek abbreviated Τι. or Τιβ., but Ti. is occasionally used also as an abbreviation of Τίτος<sup>11</sup>. The use of the *praenomen* had become obsolete in this period among commoners, but was fairly persistent among the upper classes<sup>12</sup>; it is not unexpected here, for the man entrusted with the erection of the imperial images must have been one of the leading citizens of Elusa. The first letter of his *nomen gentilicium*, of which only the tip remains, must be alpha, delta or lambda. If the man had a Roman name that his ancestors had received with Roman citizenship

from one of the emperors, it could have been Τίτος Αἰλιος, after Antoninus Pius; with the *praenomen* Tiberius, the only imperial *gentilicia* would be Iulius or Claudius, both unsuited to the remnant of the letter. Alternatively, Titus/Tiberius may have descended from a Roman citizen, perhaps a veteran soldier who had settled in the Negev, who had Roman citizenship as his birth-right; if so, he can have borne any *gentilicium* beginning with A, D or L, and it is irremediably lost. Also lost is the man’s *cognomen*, which most likely occupied part of line 8, since there is not enough space for it at the end of line 7, and perhaps also a word indicating his office or function (e.g.: ἐπιμελητοῦ), or the name of another citizen who shared the task with him.

### Conclusion

The Greek inscription originally counted at least eight lines. It was engraved on a pedestal supporting the images of Constantius Chlorus, emperor of the western part of the Roman Empire, and his Caesar Severus — or less likely, of Constantius Chlorus as Caesar. No doubt this pedestal was one of a couple, the other one supporting the images of Galerius and Maximinus, or less likely, one of a quartet, the other three representing the Augusti, Diocletianus and Maximianus, and the Caesar Galerius. Accordingly, the inscription can be dated between May 1, 305 and 25 July 306, or less likely to the years 293–305. In either case it represents the earliest testimony of the city status of Elusa.

<sup>9</sup> On the era of Arabia, see Meimaris 1992, 146–304. On the territorial changes starting in the late third century and their impact on Elusa, see Di Segni 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Year of Elusa: *SEG* XXVIII, nos. 1395, 1396, from Avdat; *P. Nessana*, nos. 55, 57; year of the city: Kirk – Welles 1962, 181, no. 114; *P. Nessana*, no. 14.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance *SEG* XXVIII, no. 1209; XXXVI, no. 815 bis; XL, no. 1036; XLI, nos. 157, 1414; XLII, nos. 171, 589, 749, 810–814.

<sup>12</sup> This can be observed by comparing funerary inscriptions from the third and fourth centuries, which in a very large proportion represent people of the middle class, with lists of consuls and provincial governors of the same period, especially since the mid-third century, which represent the senatorial and equestrian classes. In the former category *praenomina* are extremely rare, in the latter the *praenomen* is still mentioned in a fair number of cases.

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