The field work for the ‘Aqaba-Ma’an Archaeological and Epigraphic Survey began with a preliminary survey of the northern Wadi Araba in southern Jordan in 1979. This field work in the north eastern sector of the Wadi Araba was part of a larger survey of the eastern Wadi Araba planned by the late Dr. Crystal M. Bennett. It was generally related to earlier surveys she had conducted with Gerald Lankester Harding and Père Roland de Vaux and was specifically concerned with her excavations at Petra and Buseirah. The 1979 season enabled me to spend six weeks of intensive survey in the areas around Wadi Feinan and Khirbet Nahas and also explore other important sites in the Araba and at ‘Aqaba, and to visit Wadi Ramm. The idea was formed of initiating a survey in the marginal and desert areas to the east of Wadi Araba with a view to compiling a profile of the history of the human occupation of these areas and their interface with the Levant. In my discussions of this project with Crystal Bennett she mentioned to me her high esteem for Godfrey Tanner and his interests in epigraphy and comparative philology. Crystal had become acquainted with Godfrey during her years as Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.

The ‘Aqaba-Ma’an area was one of the most important yet not fully understood areas of the eastern Roman Limes. The ‘top end’ of the incense trade route from Yemen, through this area passed the overland camel caravans from Arabia and the Persian Gulf as well as the maritime trade from the Red Sea through the Gulf of ‘Aqaba. The southern end of the ancient Biblical King’s Highway (Numbers 20:17; 21:22) and in the Roman period the southern end of the Via Traiana, the ‘Aqaba-Ma’an area which embraces the southern Shara’ mountains and the Hisma desert is an ecologically and demographically important interface between the Levant and the Arabian peninsula. In the late Hellenistic period this area became one of the principal domains of the Nabataeans. One of the important aims of the survey has been to identify and map the Nabataean archaeological and epigraphic sites east of Petra and south to ‘Aqaba.

The great Roman historian Theodore Mommsen in his discussion of ‘the Arabian-Indian traffic with the region of the Mediterranean’ refers to Strabo...
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who mentions that 'for the sake of security a centurion (έκατοντάρχης) [was sent] with men'. Mommsen remarks that Strabo 'as one belonging to the Roman empire here mentions officials and soldiers, these can only be Roman; the centurion does not suit the army of the Nabataean king ...'. Since Mommsen, archaeological surveys of the eastern limes have done much to map the Via Nova Traiana and the various Roman military installations of the area. The relationship between the indigenous Nabataeans and the intrusive Roman forces in the 'Aqaba-Ma'an area is illustrated by the camps and fortifications along the Roman road from 'Aqaba which was Roman Aila to Bostra. In the 'Aqaba-Ma'an area the large and important site of Khirbet Humayma dominates the top end of the Hisma and provides ample archaeological evidence of the growth of the control of the trade which passed through the area from the time of the Nabataeans through to the Byzantines. Identified as Roman Avarra the site of Khirbet Humayma is part of a network of castella, turres and stationes which in the Roman period stretched from from Aila at the head of the Gulf of 'Aqaba to the strategic descent at Ras en-Naqb. These sites include Khirbet el-Kithara, Khirbet al-Khalde, Quweira along the Via Traiana to Humayma, and Khirbet Shudayyid at the head of the Ras en-Naqb escarpment. Preliminary surveys and excavations of some of these smaller network sites earlier this century suggest that like Avarra many of these sites appear to have been Nabataean installations which also came to serve Roman and later Byzantine interests in the Hisma.

However one of the problems that remains is the precise definition of the control and administration of the Hisma, through which passed by way of Wadi Ramm one of the main conduits of the incense trade route to Petra and Gaza. In 1981 the 'Aqaba-Ma'an Survey located new epigraphic evidence

1 T. Mommsen, The Provinces of the Roman Empire: From Caesar to Diocletian II, Chicago, Ares, 1909 [Reprint 1974], 151, f.n.1.
which contributes to an understanding of the pattern of the control and administration of the Hisma.

The inscription, engraved in the Nabataean script, on a large rock face at Hedeib el-Fala announced:

שלא ויוות בר קימת לכלרה zewnętrzn לעלם

SLM ZYNWN BR QYM'T KLYRK’ BTB L’LM

‘Greetings, Zeno son of Qayamat, Chiliarch, in/with the good for ever.’

This inscription, which incidentally was first sighted by Crystal Bennett who was visiting and assisting with the Survey, was translated with the assistance of the late Abbé Starcky who suggested that it be dated to the early second century A.D. This inscription provides evidence that a chiliarch or tribune announced his presence in this area after the Roman annexation of Petra in 106 A.D.

In 1986 at an Embassy cocktail party in Amman, I was shown a photograph of a large natural stone bench located in the Hisma. This stone bench had been used as a picnic table by British and American diplomats who had been visiting the area and it was believed that an inscription on it may have been of interest to me. From the photograph I noticed immediately that it was a Greek inscription, and judged that it would probably be of some importance, as it was some time since Greek inscriptions had been reported in this area. Armed with a ‘mud map’ carefully drawn by the British Military Attaché, who had been present when the inscription was first sighted, we eventually relocated this inscription, which reads as follows:

ΡΩΜΕΟΙ ΑΕΙ ΝΙΚΩΣΙΝ ΛΑΥΡΙΚΙΟΣ
ΕΓΡΑΨΑ ΧΑΙΡΕ ΖΗΝΩΝ

Upon my return to our base camp at ‘Aqaba I immediately sent a copy of this inscription and a detailed photograph to Professor Tanner, with a request that he assist with the translation and study of this new inscription.

Professor Tanner suggested that the most obvious translation is:

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Romans always conquer.

I, Lauricius, wrote 'Greetings/Hail Zeno'.

Having visited the site as a member of the survey in a subsequent season, Professor Tanner wrote that 'it is tempting to see this rock platform as the improvised tribunal or suggestus of a temporary encampment used by Roman soldiers. Considering the commanding view and the availability of spring water for man and horses a few hundred yards north and at El Ghal a further kilometre north-north-east, it may well mark a seasonal outpost used regularly over a number of years by patrols operating in the Hisma. It would be reasonable, though not essential, to conclude that such units would have been based on the Roman fort at Khirbet el Kithara (Roman Praesidio). The temptation to link this Greek inscription with the Nabataean inscription at Hedeib el-Fala is very strong. The use of Greek and Roman military titles such as κλήρικος: KLYRK' and κυνηγόντας: QNTRYN' in the Nabataean-Aramaic administrative lexicon provide ample evidence of the penetration of the intrusive Hellenistic/Roman administrative nomenclature, and in this case may suggest that Zeno the tribune was of a Nabataean family which served in the patrols which administered this southern part of the Limes.'

The family name קם:Qayamat is also known from other Nabataean inscriptions at Petra and Meda'in Saleh. However in the nearby Ramm area, it occurs in an inscription as the cognomen of one of the Nabataean craftsmen who worked on the Temple complex in Wadi Ramm:

This is translated as follows:

1. May Al-Lat remember ‘Abdallahi
2. son of Qayamat, the mason, who (is)
3. from Yafdu (?) May it be well with him!

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8 Jobling and Tanner, op. cit., 136.
9 Jobling and Tanner, op. cit., 135.
11 op. cit., 142.
12 R. Savignac, 'Notes de Voyage: Le sanctuaire d’Allat à Iram', Revue Biblique 41 (1932), 417. The translation used here was made by Lucy Davey. Her contribution is here acknowledged to the work of the ‘Aqaba-Ma’an Survey both in the field and in research at the University of Sydney.

55
W. Jobling

This new Greek inscription, especially if it can be combined with the Nabataean inscription, provides tentative evidence for Mommsen's claim.

While working with the 'Aqaba-Ma'an Survey Professor Tanner located the following Greek graffito to the north of Wadi Ramm and east of the old Nabataean outpost at Quweira:

ΧΟΘΑΙΒΟΣ

Of this Semitic proper name ΧΟΘΑΙΒΟΣ (CHOTHAIBOS) Professor Tanner observed that:

It is inscribed on a very smooth natural rock face well above ground level as distinct from the more fractured rock near ground level in that previous longer example. Perhaps in contrast with the first find the script is better and clearer because of the nature of the surface. All the letters appear to have been formed by pitting followed by smoothing the pitted impression to give a finish reminiscent of monumental Greek inscriptions from the Classical period. It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions of dating as the uncial sigma - itself an early development - presents the only divergency from lettering of the Classical period. The letters are of very even size and are written almost, but not quite, in a perfectly straight line. It is thus evident that the text could belong on grounds of style to any period from the first century BC to the Byzantine period. However, it is highly probable that such a text would belong to the period after the Roman occupation in 107 AD rather than to that of the admittedly Hellenized Nabatean client kingdom. The careful formation of the alpha and the shape of the beta if anything would suggest a date not later than the third century AD, but it is impossible to be dogmatic. It is a very good clear example.

To these observations it may be added this is the Greek form of the Nabataean-Aramaic proper name Kutba: קוטבה.13 The late Abbé Starcky noted that 'D'autres noms divins, tel Kutba, le dieu Scribe mentionné à Pétra et ailleurs, pourraient bien désigner le même dieu que Dushara.'14 This deity was identified in a Nabataean-Aramaic inscription at the sanctuary of Iram in the

14 J. Starcky, 'Les Figures divines à Pétra', in Pétra, La cité rose du désert, ed. Jean Starcky, CNRS (n.d.).
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Wadi Ramm by John Strugnell in 1959.15 This may lend support to the speculation that the Greek inscription located by Professor Tanner may be a brief prayer. Many similar brief invocations of the gods Dushara and al-Lat in pre-Islamic North Arabian have been recorded and studied during the survey.16 Also associated with the deity al-Uzza who is attested in the inscriptions of Wadi Ramm it has been argued that these may be names associated with the veneration of Mercury and Venus in the pre-Islamic pantheon.17 This new Greek inscription located by Professor Tanner is also further evidence for the penetration of intrusive Hellenistic culture into pre-Islamic North Arabia.

In the last season of the survey another new Greek inscription was located in a large rock shelter at Jebel Umm Sahm which is situated to the south of Wadi Ramm and is part of the basin into which the wadis of Jebel Suraybit and Jebel el-Kash debouch.18 The inscription is set between a Latin and a Byzantine cross and there is the remains of what appears to be a large cruciform cartouche also on the same panel.19 The inscription reads:

ΖΑΧΑΡΙΑΣ ΒΩΤΑΝΕ

and may be transliterated ‘Zacharias Botane’. The praenomen is a well known Greek proper name and is frequently attested in graffiti east and west of the Jordan and in the Sinai. The cognomen ΒΩΤΑΝΕ provides some interesting philological problems and has caused Professor Tanner to suggest that ‘whilst at first glance the word ΒΩΤΑΝΕ seems Semitic because Greek nouns do not have nominatives in epsilon, nevertheless in an era when ε/αι were already homophones in colloquial speech as in Modern Greek, and with this confusion prevalent in papyri since Ptolemaic times, ΒΩΤΑΝΕ might well represent a Greek nominative plural of the first declension ending in -ατ.’20 Further the papyri also show incessant confusion of omega andomicron as well as our epsilon and alpha-iota cases. Furthermore ο/ω are also fully homophonous in

modern Demotic Greek. So is ΒΩΤΑΝΕ perhaps a colloquial phonetic spelling of βοταναι - fodders? This meaning is common and goes back to Homer’s *Odyssey*, X, 411. If so, perhaps we have a shop sign as prosaic as on a tesselated pavement of an Imperial Age Basilica or Stoa: Ζαχαρίας βοταναι: ‘Zacharias - Fodders’.

I am inclined to see the name ΒΩΤΑΝΕ as a compound Nabataean-Aramaic proper name which consists of the two elements ‘Abu and Tane. This would give the longer proper name Ḥabtane which is shortened to Butane when the first element, which means ‘father of’, is shortened from Abu to Bu. This reflects the well attested shortening of the longer form Abu to Bu as in Arabic. Then the segmental phoneme Tane in Greek would represent with its alpha that letter’s Semitic source, the glottal stop aleph, which would suit the Hebrew (חַּתִיב) and the Aramaic word for ‘fig’ or ‘fig tree’ (חַתִיב). This would give the translation ‘father of figs’ or ‘fig man’.

The crosses and possibly also the cartouche support Professor Tanner’s Byzantine date for the inscription and suggest that this large rock shelter may have given refuge to an early Christian desert ascetic. These desert ascetics played an important role in servicing the camel caravan trade which plied the Arabian peninsula. Also it is worth noting that in the accounts of the early church historians of the operations of Mavia, Queen of the Saracens, it is recorded that Mavia appointed an Arab hermit Moses to the Bishopric in Alexandria. Zacharias Botane may well be an example of such a hermit.

These new inscriptions have yet to take their place in the ongoing research and debates in Roman Frontier Studies for as B.H. Warmington has said, ‘a special task lies before the archaeologist of the Roman frontiers, in assisting us to understand not only the Roman defences but also the nature of the enemy.’ Professor Tanner’s contribution in the field and in the study have won him an important place in this ‘special task’. It is sincerely hoped that retirement will enable him to continue to play an important part in the ongoing study of this new material.

*Ad meliores annos!*

*University of Sydney*

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21 Jobling and Tanner, op.cit., 315.