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ERICA C. D. HUNTER

An inscribed reliquary from the Middle Euphrates

During the 1987 excavation season conducted by Prof. Graeme Clarke at Djebel Khaled, a reliquary inscribed in Syriac was discovered at the nearby village of Khirbet Khaled¹. It was, apparently, found along with another basin that is uninscribed, but is shaped like a deep bath and also with two lengths of monolithic columns². In the 1988 excavation season, a limestone block bearing a uniquely incised cross also came to light, functioning as a prop for a villager's sleeping platform³. However, such is the precariousness of this material that, by the 1989 excavation season, the limestone block had already disappeared, probably having been broken up.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE RELIQUARY

The limestone reliquary is rectangular in shape with dimensions 65 cm × 38.5 cm × 38.5 cm. It has a rectangular rim 7.5 cm thick. Whilst the internal dimensions of the reliquary are 50 cm × 23.5 cm, the short sides only measure 11 cm in depth⁴. The reliquary's floor slopes down to the deepest internal point of 22 cm, forming a 'V' junction with an included angle of 132°⁵. Thus, the base of the reliquary is 16.5 cm thick at its midpoint and 27.5 cm thick at its edges. Indeed, the reliquary is a fairly solid item, with its weight being

1 The author wishes to thank Prof. Clarke for sending her the photographs of the inscribed reliquary and the other finds, Dr. S. P. Brock for his helpful suggestions and Dr. S. A. Durrani for the mathematical calculations.

2 See Plate I: *Uninscribed bath from Khirbet Khaled*.

3 See Plate II: *Stone incised with a unique cross*. The block is shown *in situ* as a prop for a sleeping platform. The tripartite head is probably representative of the Trinity, but this style is not included in the vast array of crosses reproduced in A. Desreumaux and J. B. Humbert, "Hirbet es-Samra. Contribution à l'épigraphie syro-palestinienne augmentée de quatre inscriptions en grec", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan)*, XXV, (1981), plates XII-XX. Nor does it occur in A. N. Palmer, *Monk and mason on the Tigris frontier*, (Cambridge, 1990), fig. 48 "Crosses on stone from Tur 'Abdin and its environs".

4 Measurements supplied in private correspondence between Clarke and Hunter (26 October 1987). Recorded 18 May 1987.

5 See Plate III: *Internal view of the inscribed reliquary*. The position of the inscription on the short side is also visible.

estimated at approximately 207 kg, and with a capacity of holding 19.4 litres of liquid⁶.

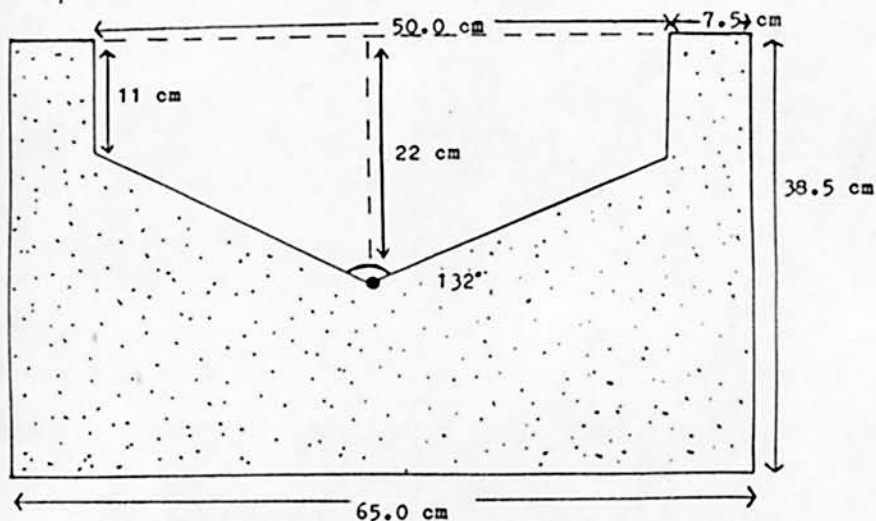


Fig. 1. Cross-section (long side) of the reliquary

At the point where the 'V' junction occurs within the reliquary an outlet hole has been drilled, emerging equidistant between a pair of discs that have been carved in bas-relief on one of the long sides⁷. The discs, which are 15cm in diameter, feature identical motifs of four-petalled rosettes. To the upper right of the aperture is a lozenge-shaped depression which has been incised, rather than having been the result of an overflow of liquid. Apart from this decoration, the reliquary is unadorned and without joins since it was carved from one block of limestone. The dressing marks of the mason are still visible, for the reliquary has suffered little physical deterioration.

On one of the short sides, a Syriac inscription of four lines has been incised, covering an area of 31 cm × 14 cm⁸. In its drafting, the inscription conveys an impression of clarity and regularity with the well-cut characters

- 6 The volume of the reliquary, if solid = $65 \times 38.5 \times 38.5 \text{ cm}^3 = 96,346.25 \text{ cm}^3$
 The volume of the hollow portion of the reliquary is given as:
 (i) volume of the rectangular slab = $50 \times 11 \times 23.5 \text{ cm}^3 = 12,925 \text{ cm}^3$
 (ii) volume of the prismatic section = $\frac{1}{2} \times (50 \times 11) \times 23.5 \text{ cm}^3 = 6,462.5 \text{ cm}^3$

$$= 19,387.5 \text{ cm}^3$$

$$\text{Hence, the volume of the actual solid material of the reliquary} = 76,958.75 \text{ cm}^3$$

The reliquary's weight is calculated on the assumption of the density of the limestone being 2.7 gm per cm³.

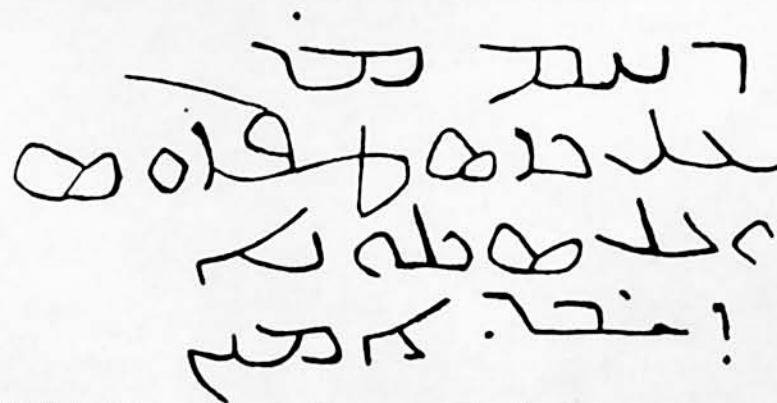
⁷ See Plate IV: *View of the reliquary, showing the long, decorated side*. The awkward juxtaposition of the aperture and the lozenge-shaped depression is evident, as is the vertical alignment of the inscription on the short side.

⁸ See Plate V: *View of the reliquary, showing the short side with the Syriac inscription*.

being evenly spaced. The downward inclination of both ll. 2 and 4 suggest that the lines have not been plotted, as does the re-adjustment of the text which occurs midway through l. 3. The right-hand margin of ll. 2, 3 and 4 has been aligned with the cross that occurs above l. 1, but the left hand margin is irregular. Ll. 3 and 4 both measure 24 cm, in comparison to ll. 1 and 2 that are 26 cm and 31 cm respectively, but their length may have been determined by the natural irregularities which occur in the rock⁹.

The inscription is legible, with only minor difficulties occurring at the commencement of l. 4 where there has been some slight weathering. The rubrication of the characters is still visible, providing a noticeable contrast against the buff-coloured limestone. However, the inscription is distinguished by its vertical alignment when the reliquary is set on its base; in what presumably was its functional position¹⁰. Of course, the convention of vertically aligned inscriptions was common, *viz* the specimen from Babiska, dated A.D. 547 and the corpus from Heshterek, spanning 8C.A.D. - 12C.A.D., amongst others¹¹.

TRANSCRIPTION & TRANSLATION OF THE INSCRIPTION¹²



l. 1	RHM MRN	Have mercy, Our Lord
l. 2	'L KRSTPRWS	upon Christopher
l. 3	W'L SKLWN'	and upon SKLWN'
l. 4	D'BD 'MYN	who made (this). Amen.

⁹ Measurements supplied in private correspondence between Clarke and Hunter (26 October 1987). Recorded 18 May 1987.

¹⁰ Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 224 attributes the phenomenon of vertical inscriptions to scribal convention, reproducing the manner in which manuscripts were written.

¹¹ E. Littmann, *Semitic inscriptions*, (New York, 1904), pp. 33-34, *re* the A.D. 6C stoa at Babiska where the two panels in the parapet of the colonnade have dovetailed plates with Syriac inscriptions written vertically. See H. Pognon, *Inscriptions sémitiques de la Syrie, de la Mésopotamie et de la région de Mossoul*, (Paris, 1907), p. 191 *sqq.* and A. Palmer, "A corpus of inscriptions from the Tur 'Abdin and environs", *OrChr*, 71 (1987), p. 64.

¹² See Plate VI: *Syriac inscription*.

Palaeographic summary

The eight-word inscription, consisting of 33 letters, has been written in a clear Estrangela. There are no examples of Gamal, He, Šadhe, Qoph, Shin and Tau; but the remaining letters exhibit the majuscule features of this script. In their duplication, the characters Alaph, Kaph and Ayin show little variation beyond the chirographical. Similarly, the three examples of Lamadh exhibit a conservative form. The three specimens of Semkath each have a pronounced 'V' at the junction of the left and right hand loops and characteristically remain unattached to the following letter — in two of the cases¹³. The single final Mim shows the expected closed, square form, whilst the rubrication of the base-line of the two medial examples of Mim, indicates that this letter is open.

However, some promiscuity of form may occur in the case of Waw. In l. 3, the example that is ligatured to the preceding Lamadh exhibits the straight, vertical stroke leading to the rounded head and is typical of Estrangela. By contrast, the penultimate letter of l. 2, an unattached Waw, is closed. Exceptions do, of course, occur as is shown by the inscription from Qartmin Abbey, Tur 'Abdin (dated A.D. 534), where the single, closed Waw is differentiated from the usage of this letter otherwise¹⁴. However, the angular, diamond form of the specimen on l. 2 is reflected by the letter at the beginning of l. 3, even though it is open. Of course, the sharp opening stroke may have been executed by the mason, as a convention.

That square forms were used for initial letters in a line may be seen in the examples of Resh and Dalath at the beginning of ll. 1 and 4 respectively. Although some deterioration has taken place in the case of the latter letter, the vertical and horizontal strokes intersect to form a right-angle, as is also found in l. 1. Yet, in both ll. 1 and 4, the Resh and Dalath that are reproduced later in the lines exhibit an obtuse angle. In addition to the two types of Resh that are found in l. 1, a third form appears; twice in the proper name KRSTPRWS. Here the letter consists of a vertical stroke that ends in a 'foot', but culminates in a wedge instead of the expected horizontal stroke. In neither instance, is any diacritical point discernable.

The mason may have attempted to reproduce the rounded or comma form of Resh which was used interchangeably with the angular form of this letter in manuscripts that were written in the Estrangela script from as early as

A.D. 5C¹⁵. Yet as might be expected, in inscriptions the angular type seems to have gained precedence, probably because its execution would have been easier to render. Hence, the rounded form occurs only rarely; in two undated inscriptions from Dêr Sim'ân¹⁶. Whilst it is possible that the mason may have been copying a blueprint of the inscription in which the proper name KRSTPRWS was written with the rounded form of Resh, if he was incising his own name, he may have just reproduced his 'signature' in the current letter forms.

Due to the classic tendencies of the Estrangela script, where certain conventions that were established in A.D. 5C continue even in A.D. 13C, the dating of the inscription on purely palaeographic grounds is problematic. However, an earlier rather than a later date can be proposed, in the light of the context for which the reliquary was manufactured.

Commentary

Line 1 RHM MRN "Our Lord have mercy". Although the diacritical point of the initial Resh is not visible, this letter may be read with certainty. Indeed, from the position of the diacritical point belonging to the Resh in MRN, it might be inferred that the diacritical point of RHM was included in the cross that was incised to the upper left of l. 1. The appeal for divine mercy is expressed by the 1 singular Imperative Pa'el \sqrt{RHM} , but as the epithet MRN indicates, it is directed to Christ¹⁷. The tenor and tense of the petition is reminiscent of the inscription: MŠBHT' TLYTYWT' RHM 'LY "Praised Trinity, have mercy upon me", which is found on two jamb-stones of the east portal on the north side of the Trinity Church at Dar Kita and is dated to the second half of A.D. 6C¹⁸.

Line 2 'L KRSTPRWS "upon Christopher". The preposition 'L can be read, even though the base-line of the Lamadh appears to be connected to the head of the Kaph. That this ligature has only been produced in the course

13 E. Littmann, *Syria: Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904-5 and 1909. Division IV. Semitic inscriptions*, (Leiden, 1934), p. 19 notes that in majuscule script Semkath was left unconnected even as late as A.D. 13C, in contrast to the minuscule and semiminuscule scripts.

14 Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

15 W. H. P. Hatch, *An album of dated Syriac manuscripts*, (Boston, 1946), p. 36 notes that in A.D. 5C, the rounded form of Resh was more common than the angular form, which gained ascendancy in A.D. 6C. See Plate V, Vatican city, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Vat. Sir. 160, fol. 68, dated A.D. 473.

16 Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1934), pp. 29, 37. The Dalath in Inscription 29 has a diacritical point, whilst the Resh in Inscription 46 is without. However, the shape of both of these characters would conform to Littmann's comment on p. 27; "their form is not ʾ, but ʾ or ʾ", which was made in reference to an undated inscription, also from Dêr Sim'ân.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 36 mentions that, on occasion, MRN was used "with the names of Biblical prophets, and also as the titles of political rulers" and cites the examples of MRN Tiberias Caesar and MRN Abgar, the king.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6. For the earlier discussion of this inscription, when the second part had not yet been discovered, see Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1904), pp. 32-33.

carving the inscription and is unintentional, is suggested by the rubrication which does not extend for the entire length of the stroke. The proper name, KRSTPRWS "Christopher" or "Christophorus" is one of the two persons on whose behalf mercy was sought. Whilst the combination Waw-Semkath expresses the Greek suffix τοϛ, otherwise the orthography of KRSTPRWS suggests an internal reduction of vowels¹⁹. According to Littmann, this trend indicates the adaptation of Greek names, which presumably may have been cumbersome for Semitic speakers to pronounce²⁰.

Line 3 W'L SKLWN' "and upon SKLWN". The repetition of the preposition "upon" extends the plea for mercy to a second person. The final Alaph is characteristic of Aramaic nomenclature, but in the light of the trend towards the internal reduction of vowels, SKLWN' may be a Greek name which has been Semiticised²¹. Alternatively, this proper name may have derived from $\sqrt{\text{SKL}}$ Pa'el, thus conveying the connotation of intelligence or knowledge²².

Line 4 D'BD 'MYN "who made (this). Amen". Due to the physical deterioration at the beginning of this line, only the perpendicular stroke and the diacritical point of the Dalath, together with the tip of the oblique stroke and the base line of the Alaph can be discerned. However, the reading of D'BD can be confidently proposed, even though the use of 3 masculine singular Pe'al $\sqrt{\text{BD}}$ is enigmatic given the two named subjects. Similarly, an inscription dated A.D. 784/5 from Qartmin Abbey, Tur 'Abdin uses the singular verbal form of 'BD together with none less than six men, whose names and occupations are specified²³. As Littmann points out, the silent Waw at the end of verbs was often omitted by scribes, possibly because they may have worked from oral instructions, instead of from a written text²⁴. The final word, 'MYN, can be clearly read and is a fitting conclusion to the inscription.

THE MANUFACTURE OF THE RELIQUARY

The short dedicatory inscription immediately raises questions about the manufacture of the reliquary. The semantics of $\sqrt{\text{BD}}$ Pe'al "do, make, prepare" are wide-ranging, but from its often synonymous usage with $\sqrt{\text{BN}}$ Ethpe'al "it was built, erected, founded" and $\sqrt{\text{HDT}}$ Ethpa'el "it was renewed restored, repaired", the most obvious application seems to be physical. That D'BD may connote the hewing of the reliquary from the solid limestone block and possibly its transportation from the quarry, is suggested by an inscription from the monastery of St. Gabriel, Qartmin in the Tur 'Abdin²⁵. Given the estimated weight of the reliquary this task may have been worth recording, even if the limestone was from a nearby source.

Additionally, D'BD may refer to the carving of the inscription and possibly even the decoration on the front of the reliquary by KRSTPRWS and SKLWN'. In the aforementioned inscription from Qartmin, and also in a collection of epitaphs, that are dated A.D. 8C - A.D. 12C, from Hachtarak in the Tur 'Abdin, this action is distinguished by $\sqrt{\text{QRT}}$ Pa'el "he incised" (literally "he gnawed")²⁶. On rarer occasions, the specifically physical effort of inscribing the inscription is expressed by $\sqrt{\text{SRT}}$, either as a Pa'el "he cut/engraved/scratched" or as a Pa'el "he set down in writing"²⁷. $\sqrt{\text{GLP}}$ Pe'al

25 Pognon, *op. cit.*, p. 42 records, 'BD ZKRY' ... WMN D'SB 'PYS L'S'Y P'PY' ŠWŠBYNH DNYTYH W'BD 'S'Y "Zacharie ... a fait ce travail ... et lorsqu'il eut détaché ce bloc de pierre, il supplia Isaie, du village de Fafa, son parrain de l'apporter. Isaie se donna beaucoup de peine ...". Some controversy surrounds Pognon's interpretation of D'SB "lorsqu'il eut détaché", claiming its derivation as Aphel $\sqrt{\text{SB}}$, citing as collateral evidence the Arabic $\sqrt{\text{NZ}}$ "pull out, extract, remove" and $\sqrt{\text{MZ}}$ II "pick, pluck, tear to pieces". See H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed., (New York, 1976), pp. 954 and 906 respectively. Whilst Pognon did consider the possibility of 'SB being an orthographic error for S'B'; Aphel $\sqrt{\text{S'B}}$ "he became old/aged", Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 66 adopts this interpretation, citing biographical information to support his reading. If Zechariah was an old man, then WMN D'SB "from the moment when he aged" may be a fitting reading, especially since Palmer claims that the clause is an "error for the phonetically indistinguishable WMN D'S'B". However, the emphasis on the physical actions associated with the manufacture of the inscription, *viz.*: W'YTYWH WMRQWH WSMWH BDWKT "on l'apporta, on le polit, on le mit à sa place" would lend weight to Pognon's suggestion, particularly in view of the time lapse of eight years. Payne Smith, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, col. 2498 lists $\sqrt{\text{SB}}$, Aphel, "abstulit, abstruxit, divulsit, evulsit", but apart from this inscription its usage elsewhere is unattested; a *hapax legomenon*?

26 Pognon, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-202. Specifically Inscriptions 95, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 107, 110, 113 and 116*. Excepting Inscriptions 101 and 116*, in each case the verb is accompanied by the name of the stone mason, being qualified either by his ecclesiastical rank or by HTY' "sinner", possibly denoting a novice. However, Inscription 110, dated to A.D. 11C, uses the singular of QRT together with two names; ŠMW'YL and BNYMN "Samuel and Benjamin", both of which are unaccompanied by any qualifying epithets. The entry in Payne Smith, *op. cit.*, vol. II, col. 3741 indicates that this root is not frequently used, and then only in Pa'el and Ethpa'el.

27 *Idem*. Specifically Inscriptions 105, 108, 111 and 115, all emanating from A.D. 12C. See the entry for this root in Payne Smith, *op. cit.*, vol. II, col. 2738.

19 R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, (London, 1879-1901), vol. II, col. 1821 records under the entry KRYSTWPWRWS "Christophorus", the variant spellings: KRYST'PWRWS, KRYSTWPR', KRYSTPWR', KRYSTWPRWS.

20 Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1934), p. 12.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 21 comments that the "rendering of the Greek termination by the Syriac ω is very unusual", when discussing the proper name GYWRG'. That the paradigm was applied to the proper name Christopher can be seen in n. 19.

22 Payne Smith, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, col. 2627.

23 Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71, specifically p. 71 where he proposes that there was "one main subject and several subsidiary subjects".

24 Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1934), p. 28.

"he carved/engraved" appears to have been used as a synonym of $\sqrt{\text{SRT}}$, possibly for emphasis²⁸. That the comprehensive term D'BD was used, may be due to the genre of the inscription, for several physical actions might be combined in dedications.

Alternatively, D'BD may have implied the sponsorship or patronage by which means the reliquary was created²⁹. Hence, an A.D. 8C inscription again from Qartmin in the Ṭur 'Abdin names Patricia, daughter of Eluṣṭriya as the subject of 'BDT³⁰. Undoubtedly, the finances of this woman "whose name and patronymic betray an attachment to Byzantine aristocratic culture", allowed the stoa to be 'made'³¹. Were KRṢṬPRWS and SKLWN' the patrons of the reliquary, presumably they would have at least identified their patronyms, and possibly the villages from which they came. Further, had the two men been of any ecclesiastical or civil standing, their titles would have been mentioned, and even the frequent epithet ḤṬY' "sinner" is notably absent.

If D'BD does imply the physical manufacture of the reliquary, then KRṢṬPRWS and SKLWN' may have been the craftsmen; possibly one as the hewer of the limestone block and the other as the monumental mason. Such a division of labour is suggested in the previously discussed inscription from the monastery of St. Gabriel in Qartmin. Thus the pair of names might be a 'firm' signature³², and possibly that of local artisans since had the men travelled from afar, then they may have advertised their origins. The qualifying phrase "from this village" is only occasionally included in inscriptions, presumably because this fact would have been implicit if no location was cited³³. Hence, KRṢṬPRWS and SKLWN' may have been attached to the monastery complex at Djebel Khaled.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 201. Inscription 115, ll. 5-6 reads: SRT MWŠ' ḤṬY' BR' DY LH DHW GLP LWḤ' HN' "Son fils Moïse, le pecheur, a écrit, et c'est lui qui a sculpté cette inscription avec son encadrement". Pognon notably justifies his translation to include "son encadrement", on the basis of his interpretation of LWḤ'. The inscription might be also rendered, "His son, Moses, the sinner, set it (i.e. the inscription) down in writing. He carved this tablet". Here GLP may be used to stress the physical action which was undertaken. See Payne Smith, *op. cit.*, vol. I, col. 732.

29 H. C. Butler, *Early Churches in Syria. Fourth to Seventh Centuries*, (Princeton, 1929), p. 256 points out the discrepancy in modern English surrounding clauses such as "he built and founded this church", in that they have a causative rather than literal meaning. Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1934), p. 20 queries the expression "made and built" ('BD WTQN), suggesting from Greek parallels a dual role of sponsorship and supervision. Palmer, *op. cit.*, (1990), p. 204 summarizes the diverse semantics of 'BD, including that of sponsorship.

30 Palmer, *op. cit.*, (1987), p. 121.

31 *Idem.*

32 Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

33 Pognon, *op. cit.*, p. 199, Inscription 111, dated A.D. 12C.

FUNCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE RELIQUARY

The massive, rectangular shape of the reliquary together with its decoration is reminiscent of Jewish ossuaries³⁴. Thus, the arrangement of two rosettes, filling the two metapes of the front panel, with the intermediate space being occupied by a central motif; in this case a lozenge, is commonly attested³⁵. The direct legacy of reliquaries from Jewish ossuaries is postulated by Grabar, being a result of the common *milieu* in the first centuries A.D.³⁶. Yet, the reliquary from Khirbet Khaled shows some adaptation; for the 6-pointed star which often forms the central motif of the disc in Jewish ossuaries, is replaced by the much rarer 4-petalled rosette³⁷. This may have been a stylised cross³⁸.

If the external appearance of the reliquary is similar to that of an ossuary, several internal features differ quite dramatically. Rather than being merely a receptacle, the design of the reliquary which has been hollowed out to form a 'V' shape, culminating in an outlet hole which at 22cm forms the deepest internal point, suggests that fluid was drained. Had the accompanying cover survived, presumably it would have had a hole drilled through which fluid might have been poured; to emerge from the lower part of the reliquary. Although the cover of the specimen from Khirbet Khaled has been lost, it may well have been gabled with an acrotère at each of the four corners.

Indeed, the form of the reliquary, with the outlet hole being placed on one of the long sides is one of two types. In the second category, the outlet hole is situated on one of the short sides, often in the form of a chalice from which the oil would be scooped³⁹. Thus the 'Cosmos and Damian' reliquary found

34 E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Graeco-Roman Period*, v. III, (New York, 1953) fig. 105-223 provides a comprehensive collection of Palestinian ossuaries. See also H. Leclercq, "Ossuaires", *DACL*, v. 30, (Paris, 1937), col. 22-7, figs. 9277-70.

35 P. Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries*, (Leiden, 1983), pp. 36-41 discusses rosettes as a decorative element on ossuaries, positing on p. 39 that this common design symbolised the handle-rings which were attached to wooden coffins. P. 69 discusses the lozenge motif, and in particular refers to ossuaries 365 (Plate 29) and 577 (Plate 28), where it forms the central motif, flanked by rosettes.

36 A. Grabar, "Recherches sur les sources juives de l'art paléochrétien", *Cahiers archéologiques*, XIV (1964), p. 53.

37 Figueras, *op. cit.*, p. 37 comments that "the six petals appear almost automatically, and this is the commonest form on the ossuaries". Figueras lists two specimens with four-petalled rosettes; ossuaries 341, 511. See plate 9.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 41 notes the transformation of rosettes into crosses, citing ossuaries 232 and 341. See Plate 10. In these two examples, however, the cruciform shape is well-defined, in comparison to the example from Khirbet Khaled.

39 W. Gessel, "Das Öl der Märtyrer: Zur Funktion und Interpretation der Ölsarkophage von Apamea in Syrien", *OrChr*, 72 (1989), p. 186.

by Mayance at Apamea, featured this device⁴⁰, as did two specimens which Lassus included in his *Inventaire Archéologique de la région du nord-est de Hama*, from the villages of Qerrât and 'Aṭṣan⁴¹. And, another reliquary of the same form, from Restan-Arethusa is shown by Lassus in *Sanctuaires Chrétiens de Syrie*, along with a reliquary from Kafer Nabo, where the design and also the decoration — two disks with crosses rather than four-petalled rosettes — is similar to that from Khirbet Khaled⁴².

The reliquary could be easily mistaken at first glance for a holy water basin, or an aqueduct-type of installation, as did Prentice when a basalt specimen was found at Mo'allaq in Syria at the turn of the century⁴³. What function reliquaries fulfilled was surmised by Mayance, viz:

Ils consistent en un bloc de marbre, de forme rectangulaire dans lequel, à la partie supérieure, a été creusée une petite cavité destinée à contenir des reliques, et reliée par un étroit conduit à une sorte de petit godet aménagé sur la face latérale droite. Le couvercle de reliquaire affecte la forme d'un couvercle de sarcophage; il est percé, au sommet, d'un trou en forme d'entonnoir par où l'on pouvait verser, dans la cavité contenant les reliques, un liquide qui était ensuite recueilli dans le petit godet latéral et qui était sans doute considéré comme sanctifié par le contact avec les reliques⁴⁴.

That the specimen from Khirbet Khaled operated similarly, seems without question.

As Mayance mentioned, the contact of the liquid, always oil, with the relics sanctified it. Indeed, the bones of martyrs were reputed to have miraculous properties, so much so that an A.D. 13C inscription from Karakoche narrates the metamorphosis of pillaging Tatars (Mongols), who upon finding the bones of saints in a monastery which they were ransacking "became sheep instead of wolves"⁴⁵. Eight centuries earlier, Philoxenus of Mabbug highlighted the curative powers of the martyrs bones for he wrote; "and demonic spirits cry out bitterly at his power within them, for sicknesses are driven off and illnesses chased away"⁴⁶. Yet Philoxenus stressed that these miracles

40 A detailed description of the reliquary inscribed to the martyrs Cosmas and Damian occurs in J. Napoleone-Lemaire and J. C. Balty, *L'Église à Atrium de la Grande Colonnade*, (Brussels, 1969), p. 60. See p. 58, fig. 13 for a cross-section and an overhead view of the reliquary.

41 J. Lassus, *Inventaire Archéologique de la région au nord-est de Hama*, 2 vols., (Damascus, 1935), vol. I, pp. 17 and 105 respectively. See also, figs. 17 and 112.

42 J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires Chrétiens de Syrie*, (Paris, 1944), p. 160.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 166, n. 6.

44 F. Mayance, "La quatrième campagne de fouilles à Apamée", *Bulletin des Musées Royaux d'art et d'histoire*, VII:1 (Jan-Fev. 1935), p. 4.

45 Pogonon, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-30, Inscription 74, ll. 6-9.

46 S. P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 122-3. A French translation together with the Syriac text is provided by A. Tanghe, "Memra de Philoxène de Mabboug sur l'inhabitation du Saint-Esprit", *Le Muséon*, LXXIII (1960), pp. 53 (Syriac), 78.

were not effected by the bones *per se*, but by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Philoxenus of Mabbug was, of course, writing contemporaneously with the rise of the cult of martyrs which flourished in Syria in A.D. 5C. His comments presumably were a reaction to this phenomenon, or more particularly to the superstitious elements therein. The growth of cult-centres appears to have been two-pronged; either developing around the burial-place or site associated with a martyr or saint, as happened in regard to St. Sergius at Resapha or St. Simon Stylites at Qal'at Sēm'an respectively⁴⁷. Or, involving the transportation of a martyr's relics to a location with which he was unconnected during his lifetime. Hence, one of the reliquaries found at Apamea, was dedicated to St. Theodore, from Asia Minor⁴⁸.

Indeed, so prevalent appears to have been the cult of martyrs in Syria, that Lassus notes an innovation in church architecture to accommodate this phenomenon. Based on a survey which he conducted in the regions of Jebel Sēm'an and Jebel Baricha, Lassus claims that edifices which were built after A.D. 420 incorporated a "chapel of the martyrs" which was characteristically located in the south sacristy of the sanctuary or presbyterion⁴⁹. Butler had not recognised this development, preferring the *diaconium-prothēsis* arrangement for the triple-room structures found in many of the churches⁵⁰. Yet the discovery of reliquaries *in situ*; at the Atrium church in Apamea and village churches attests that the "chapel of the martyrs" was a common feature⁵¹.

Given the proportions reached in Syria in A.D. 5C, when thousands of pilgrims visited cult-sites, Lassus proposed that reliquaries were used to manufacture the "oil of the martyrs", which was drained into terra-cotta

47 For the development of Resapha as a shrine and pilgrimage-centre see, J. Spencer Trimmingham, *Christianity amongst the Arabs in Pre-Islamic times*, (London, 1979), pp. 235-8, P. Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine*, (Brussels, 1950), pp. 68-70. The church at Qal'at Sēm'an is discussed in detail by Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-105; Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), pp. 129-132; A. Grabar, *Martyrium: recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 2 vols., (Paris, 1946), vol. 1, pp. 364-5.

48 H. Delehay, "Saints et reliquaires d'Apamée", *AnBoll*, 53 (1935), p. 238 comments that St. Theodore was one of the renowned martyrs from Asia Minor, whose grave at Euchaita in the Pontus, was visited by many pilgrims. A detailed description of the Theodore reliquary is provided by Napoleone-Lemaire and Balty, *loc. cit.*

49 Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), p. 177, based on an architectural analysis on pp. 173sq. Grabar, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 340 notes "un usage ... dans un grand nombre d'autres églises syriennes (V^e et VI^e siècle), a fait fixer les mêmes martyria dans l'une des deux petites salles à côté de l'abside, de préférence dans celle du Sud", with further discussion on pp. 341-2.

50 Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

51 Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), pp. 175-6, quoting an (unpublished) report of Tchalenko which was sent in October, 1940 to Seyrig, the Director of Antiquities, lists sixteen churches. See also, Napoleone-Lemaire and Balty, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-9 for a detailed description of the *in situ* of the reliquaries at the Atrium church in Apamea. Pp. 63-4 attempts a reconstruction of the placement of the reliquaries in the "chapel of the martyrs".

phials (εὐλογία)⁵². Of course, the prophylactic value of this product was highly prized, even being considered a cure for inebriation, and apart from fulfilling the requirements of the pilgrim-trade, the "oil of the martyrs" may have also been used by local communities for quasi-medical purposes⁵³. That reliquaries served the needs of villagers and pilgrims may be suggested from the large number of specimens which have been found in the restricted areas of Jebel Sem'an and also Jebel Baricha, indicating that each church may have had a "chapel of the martyrs".

A further role is assigned to the reliquaries by Gessel in his recent article, "Das Öl der Märtyrer". From a reconstruction of the baptismal ceremony, based on the groundplan of the "cathedral de l'est" at Apamea, he claims that the reliquary, presumably the pink marble specimen which Mayance found, supplied the chrism⁵⁴. Problems surround Gessel's suggestion that the tre-foil room (CD) was the place of pre-baptismal unction, since the recent excavator of the site, Balty designates instead the baptistery at (BL), distinguished by its semi-circular apse set into the eastern wall⁵⁵. Whilst the location of the baptistery remains disputed, Balty does acknowledge the anointing process and may therefore uphold Gessel's association of the reliquary with the production of chrism⁵⁶.

The relationship between the "chapel of the martyrs" and the baptistery had already been noted by Lassus during his discussion of the churches at Taklé and Kseijbé, where the rooms were adjacent being connected by a door

52 Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), pp. 163-5.

53 Gessel, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-90, including the recommendation of St. John Chrysostom, *Homilia in Martyribus*, (PG 50,664f.) of the usage of the "oil of the martyrs" to combat drunkenness, by means of a total corporeal unction. Grabar, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 343 summarises the comprehensive powers of relics.

54 Gessel, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200, although the reliquary which is placed within the tre-foil room is not identified. However, Mayance, *op. cit.*, p. 7 reports the discovery of a rose marble reliquary during the excavation of the "cathedral de l'est", but does not specify its *locus*.

55 See the report by J. C. Balty, "Le group épiscopal d'Apamée dit 'cathédral de l'est'. Premières recherches", *Apamée de Syrie: bilan des recherches archéologiques 1969-1971*, (Brussels, 1972), pp. 198-200. He postulates that the candidates disrobed in (BR) and (BU) which were cloakrooms and then proceeded to their baptism which included unction in (BL). Gessel, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200 postulates that after unction in the tre-foil room (CD), the naked candidates would have walked through the *piscina* in the eastern niche, which connected rooms (CB) and (CC). He makes no reference to the possible function of the apse set into the eastern wall of room (BL), but on the other hand, Balty does not proffer any interpretation of the role of the tre-foil room (CD) in their plan. Furthermore, both sets of scholars cite paradigms for their arguments; Balty specifies the baptistery attached to the church of Sts. Paul and Moses at Dār Qitā and also make a footnote reference to the martyrion of Antioche-Kaoussie. Gessel bases his proposal on the baptismal font that, like the postulated *piscina*, was both walk-through and oriented on a south-north axis at Qal'at Sem'an.

56 Balty, *op. cit.*, p. 200 which mentions "l'unction sur tout le corps", whilst suggesting that the three semi-circular niches between the columns of the apse were places to set flasks of oil used in the anointing process. However, no specific mention is made of a reliquary.

in the southern wall⁵⁷. On the basis of this physical proximity, Lassus stated, "[n]ous aurions aussi une preuve intéressante d'une relation qui semble exister entre les lieux de pèlerinage — ou, plus simplement, le culte des saints — et les cérémonies baptismales"⁵⁸. Undoubtedly, the reliquaries that were found at Taklé and Kseijbé would have fulfilled both functions; i.e. producing holy oil for pilgrims and villagers and also supplying chrism since the two activities probably were mutual.

By contrast, at Apamea, Gessel implies that the manufacturing process was specialised, being divided between the "cathedral de l'est" and the Atrium church. If the former location appears to have been the source of the chrism used in the baptism ceremony, in the latter the three specimens which Mayance found in 1932 were, in Gessel's opinion, "vollauf das Begehren auch zahlreicher Pilger nach Märtyreröl dank ihrer gut durchdachten technischen Anlage befriedigen konnten"⁵⁹. No reason is given for the differing roles of the reliquaries at Apamea, but these may have been due to its standing both as the capital of *Syria Secunda* in A.D. 5C and also as a metropolitanate with seven bishoprics.

APPLICATION TO KHIRBET KHALED

The discovery of the reliquary at Khirbet Khaled indicates that this site was associated with the cult of martyrs which reached its apogee in Syria during A.D. 5C. Hence one of the Byzantine buildings whose ruins are still visible at Khirbet Khaled may originally have been the church in which the reliquary was housed⁶⁰. The two lengths of monolithic columns that were found nearby may have supported a ciborium which had been erected over the reliquary, as occurred at Kafer Nabo⁶¹. To this "chapel of the martyrs" pilgrims may have come to obtain *ampullae* of holy oil, consecrated by its contact with the relics held within the reliquary and possibly also to receive baptism in an adjacent baptistery.

The nearby limestone outcrop of Djebel Khaled was an area of anchoritic activity and the assemblage of previously discussed evidence from the site has all the hallmarks of a cult of a holy man⁶². The crosses and Christian graffiti

57 Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), pp. 173-4, 222.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

59 Gessel, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

60 Communication between Clarke and Hunter (17.VII.89) notes two ruinous older buildings (?Byzantine date) within the village.

61 Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), p. 174.

62 See G. W. Clarke, "Syriac inscriptions from the Middle Euphrates", *Abr Nahrain*, XXIII (1984-85), pp. 73-82 and specifically p. 78 for discussion and description of the graffiti and the crosses. Clarke only fleetingly mentions the Syriac inscriptions on p. 79, but these are

which were carved at the entrance to the sepulchre attest that numerous pilgrims paid their respects. The three-forked cross incised on the outside of the tomb-chamber and the Maltese-type cross which was painted within, assures that the erstwhile occupant's status was saintly. Finally, the two Syriac inscriptions which were written on the walls of the 'cella' and which have been allocated, on palaeographic grounds, to the medieval period, support a continuing veneration of a saint or a martyr.

If a centre of pilgrimage had developed at the site of Khirbet Khaled, it is possible that the remains of the holy man may have been taken from his abode, the sepulchre at Djebel Khaled, to be enshrined in a church that was built for his commemoration. Such a phenomenon was not unknown in Syria, as the *Historia Philotheos* attests concerning the celebrated example of Mar Maron⁶³. Yet, the identity of the saint is enigmatic, for the reliquary's inscription does not divulge any information about the contents contained therein. Nor, can it even be presumed that the bones of one person were held, for multiple deposits seem to have been made, as is illustrated by the Greek inscription dedicated to "Jude and D... and saint Callinicus and saint John the soldier and the forty martyrs", from the "cathedral de l'est" at Apamea⁶⁴.

However, would it not be fitting for a saint of the stature of Marcellinus to be associated with the reliquary, especially since Clarke makes the suggestion attractive by noting that the followers of this holy man "gathered up his mortal remains in a stone chest they had made"⁶⁵. Of course, the problem remains as to where Marcellinus actually established his cell. Its distance from Beroea was noted as four *stathmoi* in the *Historia Philotheos*, but Theodoret does not specify in which direction the cell could be found⁶⁶. Vööbus would place the monastery "in the direction of Apamea"⁶⁷, but by specifying that

discussed at length by T. Muraoka, "Two Syriac inscriptions from the Middle Euphrates", *Abr Nahrain*, XXIII (1984-85), pp. 83-9 and by Erica C. D. Hunter, "Syriac inscriptions from a Melkite monastery on the Middle Euphrates", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, LII:1 (1989), pp. 1-17. For the anchoritic activity at Djebel Khaled see G. W. Clarke and P. J. Connor, "Inscriptions, Symbols and Graffiti near Joussef Pasha", *Abr Nahrain*, XXV, (1987), pp. 33-6.

63 Theodoretus, *Historia Philotheos*, XVI, col. 1420. (PG 83). An English translation is supplied by Theodoret of Cyrillus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R. M. Price, (Kalamazoo, 1985).

64 Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), p. 164 wrongly ascribes the reliquary to the Atrium church at Apamea, but provides a transcription and translation of the Greek text, as does Delehayé, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-40, together with a discussion of the named saints. Regarding multiple reliquaries, see Lassus, *op. cit.*, (1944), p. 171 and also *Historia Philotheos*, XXI, col. 1449.

65 Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 80 referring to *Historia Philotheos*, III, col. 1337.

66 *Historia Philotheos*, III, col. 1329.

67 A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 2 vols., (Louvain, 1956-60), v. II, p. 249. P. Canivet, *Le monachisme Syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*, (Paris, 1977), p. 185 does not propose any location for the monastery.

the Djebel Khaled complex was precisely four *stathmoi* from Beroea, Clarke presents an alternative proposal⁶⁸.

Indeed, had the relics contained within the reliquary included those of a 'megalomartyr', would it not be plausible that the masons may have hoped, via their inscription, to secure a blessing? Certainly the Syriac inscription is unique, in that it is not a commemoration of the saints held within, but rather a dedication of the reliquary. Although dedications are found on a wide range of liturgical items, including episcopal thrones and wine-presses, no other reliquary is extant with this genre of inscription⁶⁹. Could it be that the dedication distinguished the reliquary which was otherwise left unmarked, ostensibly, in respect of Marcellinus' wishes for anonymity after his death⁷⁰? At this stage, the identity of the martyr for whom the reliquary was manufactured can only remain conjecture.

It is paradoxical that the names of the two presumed masons have remained for posterity. Despite the inscription being written in Syriac, the combination KRSTPRWS and SKLWN' may indicate that the monastery complex at Khirbet Khaled was bilingual. As it is attested in the *Historia Philotheos*, Greek and Syriac appear to have been spoken concomitantly at the monastery which was established further north on the Euphrates at Zeugma⁷¹. Greek may, however, only have been the preserve of a minority of monks, in comparison with the autochthonous language, Syriac⁷². Whilst the masons probably emanated from the indigenous population, the morphology of KRSTPRWS suggests the infiltration of Hellenistic influences in the Aramaic culture⁷³.

68 Clarke, *loc. cit.*

69 See Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1934), pp. 65-6 for the inscription on a parapet at Zebed: — 'R' RWBL' 'BDYT TRWNWS' "AR(D)A Rabula made this throne". Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71 discusses the inscription dedicating the wine-press (M'SRT HD') from Qartmin Abbey in the Tur 'Abdin. Particular note may also be made of the dedication, BDYT BSHD(') HN' "I made this martyrion", which Littmann, *op. cit.*, (1934), p. 43 records from Kafer Nabo.

70 *Historia Philotheos*, III, col. 1337.

71 *Ibid.*, V, col. 1354.

72 Canivet, *op. cit.*, p. 250 claims that Syrian monasticism derived from men who were educated in Greek culture, pointing out on p. 248 that the monks whom Theodoret immortalised in his *Historia Philotheos* bore, with one exception (Aphraates), Greek names, thus indicating their social origins and milieu. In commenting on the petition of the monks from Apamea after the expulsion of Severus in A.D. 512, Peeters, *op. cit.*, p. 90 notes that the majority of signatures were in Syriac, with only a minority in Greek, but including those of the archimandrites, thus lending support to Canivet's social divisions.

73 C. Cannuyer, "Langues usuelles et liturgiques des Melkites au XIII^e s.", *OrChr*, 70 (1986), p. 111 in discussing the languages of the Melkites prior to A.D. 636 makes a tripartite division with (a) a Greek-speaking elite, (b) an indigenous Hellenised population which was bilingual, (c) rural/peasant communities speaking Syriac. Whilst the masons may have belonged to (c), by virtue of their trade skills they may have been incorporated into an artisan class that might be accommodated by (b).

Furthermore, the proper names may lend cautious support to the previous identification of the monastery site at Djebel Khaled as Melkite, on the basis of the palaeography of the two Syriac inscriptions from the 'cella' of the holy man⁷⁴. Whilst these have been dated as late as A.D. 12C, the reliquary may be placed within the *milieu* of A.D. 5C. Hence, it would seem probable that the cult-centre at Khirbet Khaled was established prior to the emergence of the Melkite church in the wake of the Chalcedonian controversies *circa* A.D. 450. If the site became associated afterwards, the chronology of the monastery complex would be compatible with the pattern of Melkite dominance in northern Syria, which continued until the medieval period.

Per se, the reliquary is material evidence of a phenomenon which flourished in A.D. 5C, perhaps being the expression of an 'heroic' age prior to the irreversible division of the Syrian Church. Most of the other reliquaries have been concentrated in areas which became Chalcedonian; in the Jebel Sem'an and Jebel Baricha regions of *Syria Prima* or at Apamea and the vicinity of Hama in *Syria Secunda*⁷⁵. Moreover, specimens, or fragments thereof, have been located at Gerasa and also at Ras Siaga, their presence indicating that the cult of martyrs spread south to the cities of the Decapolis⁷⁶. That this practice also extended eastwards is attested by the discovery at Khirbet Khaled; on the borders of Euphratesie and Oshroene.

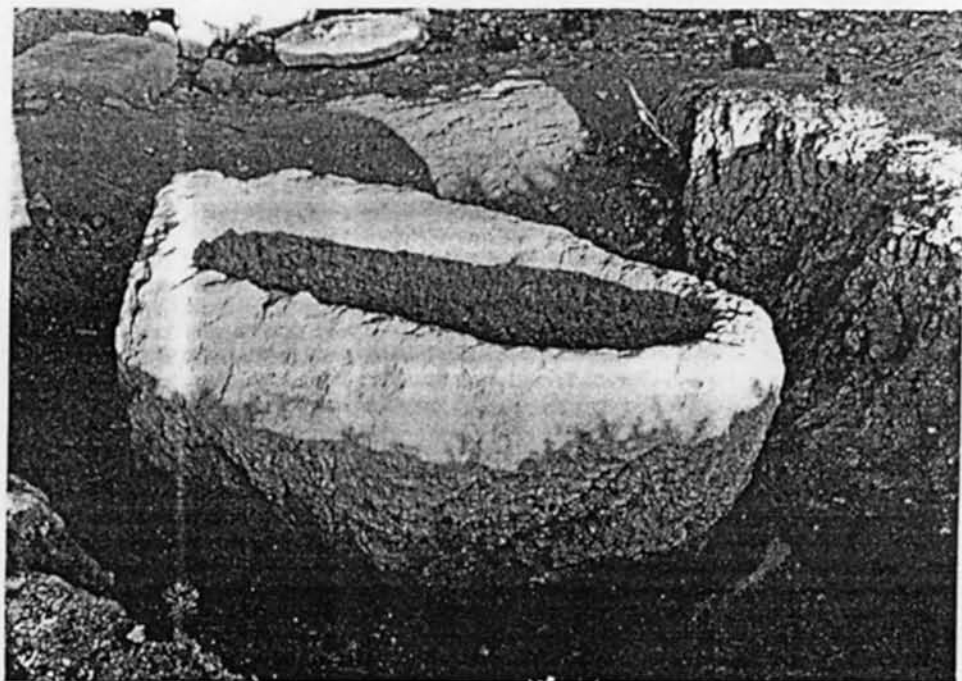


Plate I: Uninscribed basin from Khirbet Khaled



Plate II: Stone incised with a unique cross

⁷⁴ See Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 13.

⁷⁵ It should be pointed out that, had other regions of Syria also been subjected to the scrutiny of Littmann and Lassus, other reliquaries may have come to light. Further, the problem of mis-identification of these objects is serious and probably has attributed to numerous reliquaries not having been recorded as such.

⁷⁶ C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa: city of the Decapolis*, (New Haven, 1938), p. 182 lists reliquaries from the churches of St. Peter's and St. George's as well as from the Cathedral. However, their siting behind or beneath the altar differs from the placement of reliquaries in Syria. Pp. 245-6 discusses the specimen that was set before the bishop's throne in St. George's church. Plate LI (a) and Plate L (b) show items from the church of SS. Peter and Paul, listed on p. 253. The reliquary from Ras Siaga is described by B. Bagatti, "Edifici Cristiani nella regione del Nebo", *Rivista di Archaeologia Christiana*, XIII, (1936), pp. 125-6. See also Fig. 16.

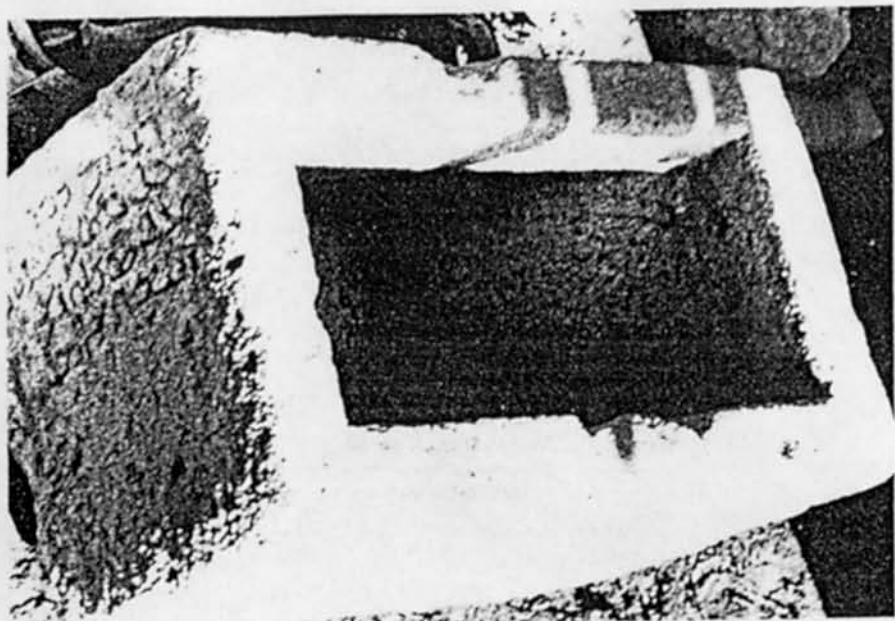


Plate III: *Internal view of the inscribed reliquary*



Plate IV: *View of the reliquary showing the long, decorated side*



Plate V: *View of the reliquary, showing the short side with the Syriac inscription*



Plate VI: *Syriac inscription*