

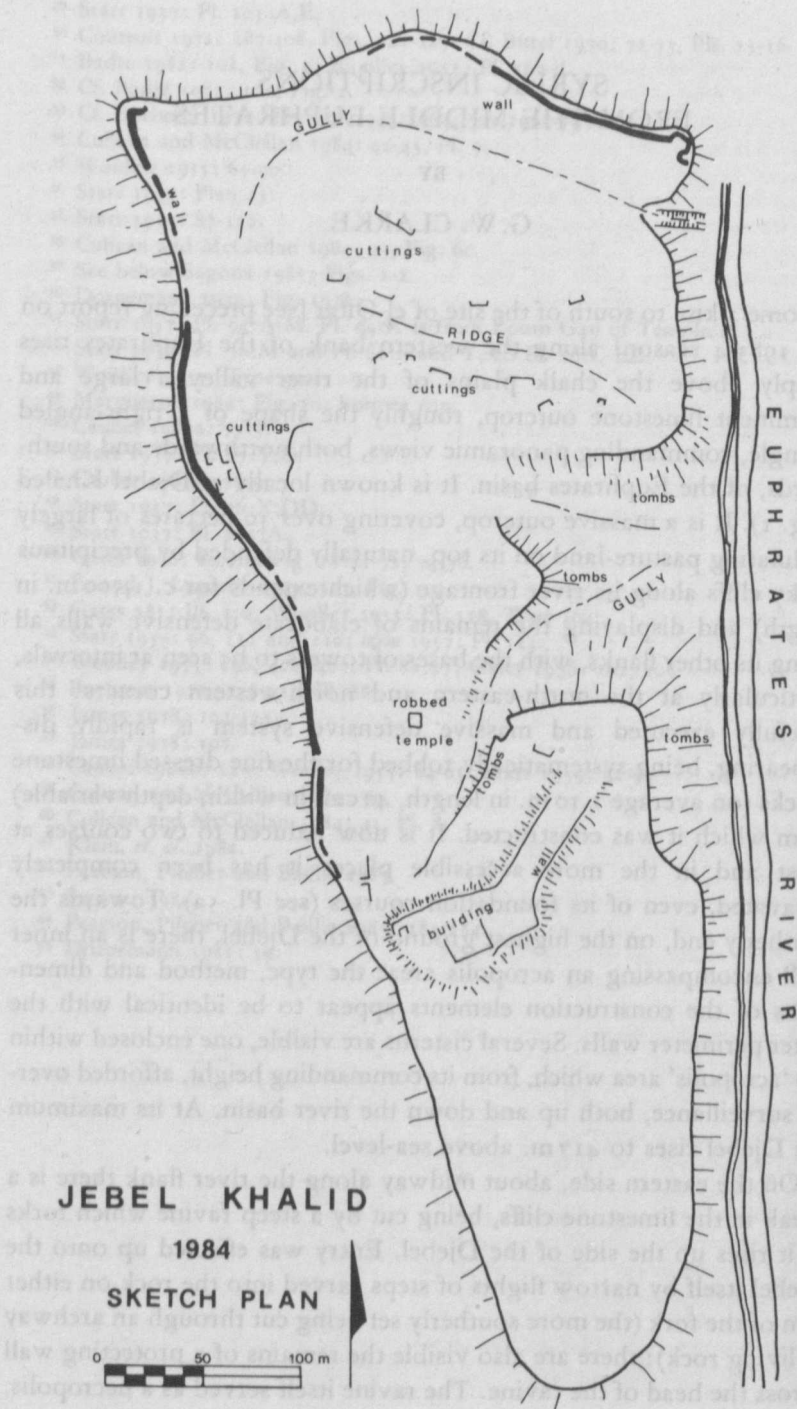
## SYRIAC INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE MIDDLE EUPHRATES

BY

G. W. CLARKE

Some 3 km. to south of the site of el-Qitar [see preceding report on the 1983/4 season] along the western bank of the Euphrates rises steeply above the chalk plains of the river valley a large and prominent limestone outcrop, roughly the shape of a right-angled triangle, commanding panoramic views, both northwards and southwards, of the Euphrates basin. It is known locally as Djebel Khaled (Fig. 1). It is a massive outcrop, covering over 50 hectares of largely undulating pasture-land on its top, naturally defended by precipitous rocky cliffs along its river frontage (which extends for c. 1,500 m. in length) and displaying the remains of elaborate defensive walls all along its other flanks, with the bases of towers to be seen at intervals, particularly at the north-eastern and north-western corners: this carefully executed and massive defensive system is rapidly disappearing, being systematically robbed for the fine dressed limestone blocks (on average 1.10 m. in length, 40 cm. in width, depth variable) from which it was constructed. It is now reduced to two courses at most and in the more accessible places it has been completely excavated, even of its foundation courses (see Pl. 5a). Towards the southerly end, on the highest ground of the Djebel, there is an inner wall encompassing an acropolis area: the type, method and dimensions of the construction elements appear to be identical with the outer perimeter walls. Several cisterns are visible, one enclosed within the 'acropolis' area which, from its commanding height, afforded overall surveillance, both up and down the river basin. At its maximum the Djebel rises to 417 m. above sea-level.

On the eastern side, about midway along the river flank there is a break in the limestone cliffs, being cut by a steep ravine which forks as it rises up the side of the Djebel. Entry was effected up onto the Djebel itself by narrow flights of steps carved into the rock on either arm of the fork (the more southerly set being cut through an archway of living rock): there are also visible the remains of a protecting wall across the head of the ravine. The ravine itself served as a necropolis.



It is filled with the remains of robbed *tumulus* graves; a further necropolis lay down in a valley on the western side, consisting of cist graves laid out in rows, cut into the bedrock (also systematically robbed: no inscriptions noted). Sherds abound (to be published separately), indicating that the concentrated use of the area was in the late Hellenistic period through until the Middle Roman Empire. At the head of the more southerly fork can still be discerned the foundations of a small building; to judge by the numerous architectural elements visible (column drums, column lengths, foundation base of handsome limestone blocks, a raised podium floor packed with rubble with a distinct floor level of white chalky substance several centimeters deep throughout), this served as a rural temple. Lying nearby is an octagonal-shaped capital, decorated with a beaded frieze ('Parthian' style). The whole complex is rapidly disappearing, the remains of the *cella* walls having been systematically robbed for their fine limestone blocks. A little to the north of this spot, on a south-facing slope (favoured in this area for shelter from the bitter winter winds) appears to be the outline of streets and dwelling foundations laid out in a regular grid.<sup>1</sup> This must have served as a military base with its elaborate defensive system and its commanding view for miles, to north and south, of the river frontier. The Persian king Sapor in his *Res Gestae* claims to have destroyed among his 37 cities in Roman provinces Batnae (= el Bab) and Hierapolis (= Membij) and their surrounding territories. If Djebel Khaled was still manned as a fortress in the mid-third century A.D. we can reasonably assume it would have been included in the depredations.<sup>2</sup>

To-day the Djebel stands guard over a crossing-point of the Euphrates (by barge)—in fact the only one operating all the way between Jerablus and beyond Meskene. It needs to be appreciated that the river at this point is now regularly wider by several factors as a result of the back-up of water with the flooding of the Tabqa Dam. In earlier days the river here would have afforded a particularly narrow passage, convenient for a ferry or for throwing across a pontoon bridge of boats.<sup>3</sup>

The ancient itineraries mention three major Roman stations along the river route between Europos (Jerablus) and Barbalissos (Meskene) viz. Ceciliana [Caecilia], Betamali and Serre [Gerre]. There is every chance that Djebel Khaled is to be identified with one of these, most probably with the second of them viz. Betamali (Tabula Peutingeriana), βηθαμμαρία (Ptolemy), Bemmaris (*Itinerarium*

*Antoninianum*).<sup>4</sup> This spot is in fact found named as Qara-Membidj on many, even recent, maps,<sup>5</sup> although in 1907 Chapot reports<sup>6</sup> that he did not hear the name locally. The village that lies at its northern base he heard referred to as Hachlé (= either Qichlet Joussef Pasha [cf. Turkish 'Kizla' = barracks] or its neighbouring village of Khaled).

Chapot describes the place as 'un champ de ruines peu considérable' and his *carnet de voyage* makes it quite clear that he is talking of Djebel Khaled:

"Après Hachlé, pendant une bonne demi-heure, une série de grottes taillées, la plupart rectangulaires; très peu présentent des formes courbes et arrondies. À deux ou trois d'entre elles conduisent des escaliers, également pratiqués dans le roc. Même, en un endroit, on reconnaît des soubassements de murailles" (p. 282 n. 3).

What Chapot is referring to is one of the immediately obvious aspects of Djebel Khaled. In various sections up on the Djebel the limestone outcrops have been extensively quarried (no doubt in part to provide the local defence works) but these quarry galleries have in turn been excavated out to make rooms of quite spectacular proportions, complete with door-ways, windows, wall-niches (see Pl. 7a and b). Considerable subsidence makes it impossible to tell whether a number of 'rooms', now open on one side, were once enclosed. Socket holes have been cut at irregular intervals up the walls (in other similar structures they are found used for affixing pegs from which were suspended lamps and other household utilities or as decorative patterns).<sup>7</sup> In one instance steps have been cut through a doorway in the rock leading up onto a terrace above a series of five adjoining 'rooms': one of these rooms is internal (c. 9 metres square), the other four extend along a frontage of approximately 34 metres, with the average height of the walls being an impressive 6 metres and more—even without clearance of floor débris. This series of rooms (and others) were enclosed by a wall, encompassing a forecourt. If they had at one stage served as burial chambers such courtyard walls (along with enclosed sepulchral gardens or *cepotaphia*) were standard;<sup>8</sup> and staircases leading up onto terraces or upper levels were also regular features in Greco-Roman tomb constructions.<sup>9</sup> Only clearance work will reveal if they had in fact functioned as burial chambers (with signs of funerary couches, cist graves etc.) or as dwellings (or, as likely as not, as both, at different periods).

There can be little doubt from their form that one complex of

chambers at least served originally as burial chambers. This is a series of six rooms high up on the south-easterly flank of Djebel Khaled looking across the river basin. The most impressive of these (opening into a room some 12 metres square) has pilasters carved out of the rock flanking the room on either side: they are plain but for four registers of simple line decoration in red. Two central columns (now broken off) were carved out to support the architrave. They are ovoid in shape, with broad fluting, ending in austere capitals: on either side they have engaged pilasters, carved in style matching the pilasters that flank the chamber. Technically in fact they consist of narrow rectangular pillars with half-columns attached to front and back, first found in the Propylon to the Palace at Vergina (early third century B.C.) and thereafter reasonably common, especially where the support provided was to be deep.<sup>10</sup> These double half-columns, too, have four simple lines of red decorative paint (see Pl. 6b). Close parallels in the area show beyond doubt that this is *sepulchral* architecture.<sup>11</sup> Adjoining, on the north side, was a room 10 metres square (there has been severe subsidence): this has a barrel-vaulted ceiling and from it opened off three inner chambers, one of which (c. 8 metres square) was screened by a decorative entrance featuring three upper windows and a doorway flanked by squared pillars (see Pl. 8a). They require clearance and study to determine types of burial and any later reuse. Close by, on yet higher ground, is a small natural rock cavern for which a squared doorway has been carved: simple crosses appeared to be cut in the coarsely picked stonework.

Up above the northern mouth of the ravine a further set of three rooms has been carved out of the rock, each about 5 metres square, interconnected by two internal doorways but two of them provided with an external door. There is a dormer window in one room (which appears to have a simple cross above it on an arch on the external wall-face); there is a deeply-alcoved window in a second. Despite massive subsidence the forecourt outside one room (measuring about 9 metres  $\times$  8 metres) is clearly discernible. This has all the appearance of having been a domestic dwelling. It is perhaps worth remarking, however, that the lay-out and orientation of these three rooms could be consistent with a liturgical function—two entrances on the south side (one for men, the other for women) leading onto a third room facing east (sanctuary); they could conceivably, therefore, have been adapted to serve as a primitive church,<sup>12</sup> located directly above the tomb that is now to be described.

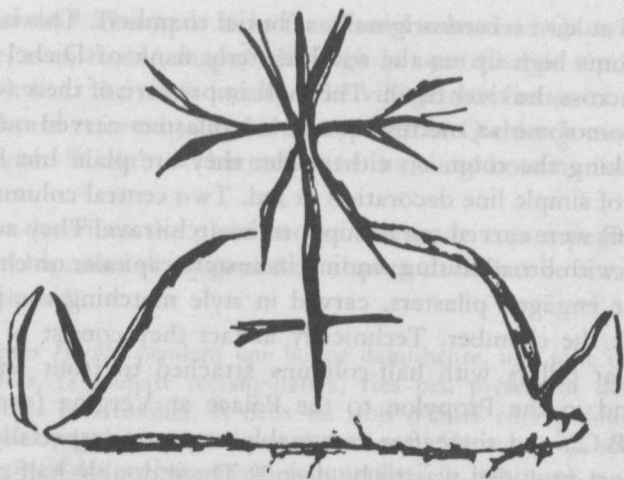


Fig. 2.

At a slightly lower level below these rooms is a small tomb chamber. On the wall outside leading to its entrance Christian graffiti are to be clearly seen (crosses by themselves or enclosed within circles, triangles); in some cases they appear to overlie each other—suggesting immediately that these marks were left by visiting pilgrims (see Pl. 8b). Over the narrow rectangular entrance into the chamber (48 cm.  $\times$  90 cm.) has been deeply carved a three-forked cross with the prolonged base ending in the centre with a further (Latin) cross and flourishes generously flowing out to either side (vaguely reminiscent of rivers of Paradise or a hill of Paradise).<sup>13</sup> There are several patches of red paint discernible. To the left of the top of the cross are carved the Greek letters I X C, that is to say 'I(ηcoῦc) X(ριστόc), Jesus Christ. See Pl. 5b and 6a, and Fig. 2.

Inside one descends by two steps into a chamber (1 m. 90 cm. = 2 m. 51 cm.) with a domed ceiling showing further traces of red as well as of black paint (maximum height 1 m. 98 cm.). There is one *arcosolium* only, to the left as one enters, with the *mensa* almost entirely broken away, over which has been carved in bas-relief on the wall a 'Maltese-type' cross (arms, slightly tapering outwards, each 20 cm.) set in a red-painted wreath with *omega* and *alpha* apparently painted in suspension from the two horizontal arms (in reverse order, as not infrequently)<sup>14</sup> with further traces of red at either side of the base (= ? the ends of the ribbon of the encircling wreath, or *taeniae*,

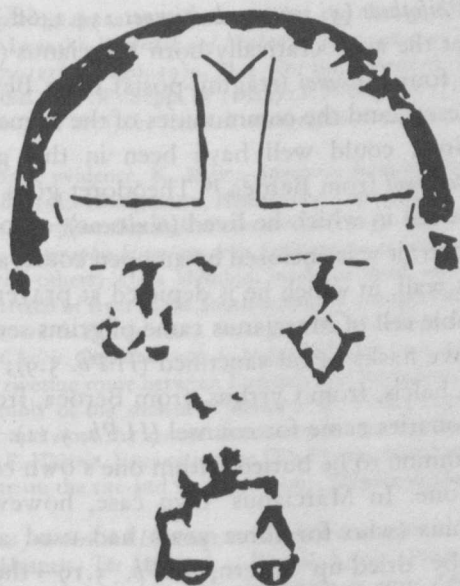


Fig. 3.

hanging down from the knot into which they are often depicted as tied). See Fig. 3. Three bands of red can still be seen above the inside doorway and rhythmic, interlacing festoons of rubrication decorated the *arcosolium*. The clearance of the floor debris revealed fragments of non-descript coarse buff-ware with some sherds of the ubiquitous red-slip found throughout the *tumulus* graves of the ravine and a few small fragments of glass. One can suspect that this is a Roman tomb reused (as often) for a later Christian burial with the crosses, over the entrance and over the tomb, loudly assertive of a new and holy occupation.

That the occupant was indeed regarded as saintly is shown not only by the pilgrims' graffiti on the wall outside but also by two Syriac inscriptions, painted in black, on the wall over the tomb itself, in two very different hands and scripts, one block of 5 lines, the other of some 9.<sup>15</sup>

We do know that by the late fourth-century monastic groups were establishing themselves in this general vicinity. Theodoret H.E. 4.28.3 (G.C.S. 268.9ff.) records in particular that "in the desert of Chalcis" Avitus, Marcianus and Abraames, along with a number of others, took to the ascetic life during the reign of Valens.

In his *Historia Philotheos* (3, *sources chrétiennes* 234.246ff.) Theodoret in fact specifies that the aristocratically-born Marcianus (from Cyrrhus) was established four *stathmoi* (staging-posts) from Beroea (Aleppo), *H.Ph.* 3.9: his desert, and the communities of the numerous followers whom he inspired, could well have been in this general area—precisely four *stathmoi* from Beroea.<sup>16</sup> Theodoret goes on to describe Marcianus' little cell in which he lived (οἰκίσκος)—too small for him even to stand up in: it was enclosed by an open courtyard surrounded by a continuous wall, in which he is depicted at prayer (*H.Ph.* 3.2, 5, 7). To that humble cell of Marcianus came pilgrims seeking miracles, conniving to have flasks of oil sanctified (*H.Ph.* 3.9); bishops (from Antioch, from Chalcis, from Cyrrhus, from Beroea, from Hierapolis) and high functionaries came for counsel (*H.Ph.* 3.11). We know that it was not uncommon to be buried within one's own cell, so that bed and bier were one. In Marcianus' own case, however, a devoted follower, Eusebius (who for three years had used as his cell and oratory a nearby dried-up cistern, *H.Ph.* 3.19—therefore, in an abandoned military installation?) inherited Marcianus' sacred καλύβη (*H.Ph.* 3.4). Enthusiastic devotees of Marcianus had constructed mortuary chapels in Chalcis, in Cyrrhus and elsewhere in preparation for receiving his bodily relics (*H.Ph.* 3.18) but, on his own instructions, Marcianus was buried in a secret spot. Thousands of devout followers came in search of his body, but in vain, and eventually his monastic community gathered his mortal remains in a stone chest they had made.<sup>17</sup>

We here catch a vivid glimpse for appreciating the type of likely context for the dedicants—and the dedicand—of these Djebel Khaled graffiti and inscriptions, and even possibly for the use of some of the other structures, the grander perhaps serving as lodges for pious visitors(?).<sup>18</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Despite the winter winds, the sheltered lee of the slope prevented the taking of aerial photographs by kite to establish this observation beyond doubt.

<sup>2</sup> A. Maricq, *Res Gestae Divi Saporis, Syria* 35 (1958), 308ff., cf. J.-P. Rey-Coquais, *Syrie Romaine, de Pompée à Dioclétien, Journ. Rom. Stud.* 68 (1978), 58. H. R. Baldus, *Uranus Antoninus, Münzprägung und Geschichte*, Bonn, 1971, 229ff., 265ff., E. Kettenhofen, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, Wiesbaden, 1982, 53 ff, *Oracula Sibyllina* 13. 129f (ed. J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina*, Leipzig, 1902, 208) echo the woes suffered by Hierapolis, Beroea and Chalcis at this period.

<sup>3</sup> For map showing the area submerged by the Tabqa Dam see N. Egami, S. Masuda and T. Iwasaki, *Rumeilab and Misbrifat. Excavations of Hellenistic Sites in the Euphrates Basin 1974-1978*, Tokyo, 1979, Pl. 1. For the diabasis of the Euphrates in the vicinity of Hierapolis see P.W. Supp. IV (1924) s.v. Hierapolis 735f. [E. Honigmann], G. Goossens, *Hierapolis de Syrie. Essai de monographie historique*, Louvain, 1943, 94, 120f, 195ff.

<sup>4</sup> See for the basic evidence, K. Miller, *Itineraria Romana*, Stuttgart, 1916 (repr. Rome, 1964), 755 ff, cf. E. Honigmann, *Historische Topographie von Nordsyrien im Altertum*, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästinavereins* 46 (1923), 149 ff, nos. 110, 122, 196.

<sup>5</sup> R. Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale*, Paris, 1927, 451 would identify (with others) 'Qara Membidj' with the third, viz. Serre (leaving, one suspects, a large stretch of river to the south militarily unsupervised, from this 'Serre' as far as Eragiza towards Barbalissos). Strangely, R. Mouterde and A. Poidebard in their *Le Limes de Chalcis. Organisation de la Steppe en Haute Syrie romaine*, 2 vols., Paris, 1945 omitted this riverine route between Europos and Barbalissos from their survey. For a useful assembly of the ancient evidence P.W. IVA.2 (1932) s.v. Syria 1661 ff [E. Honigmann], and note the recent discussion on the significance of the Djebel Khaled site by R. P. Harper, *Excavations at Dibli Faraj, Northern Syria, 1972-1974: A preliminary note on the site and its monuments*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975): 319ff at 321f.

<sup>6</sup> V. Chapot, *La frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la conquête arabe*, Paris, 1907, 282.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. C. H. E. Haspels, *The Highlands of Phrygia*, 2 vols., Princeton, 1971, 1. 226f, S. Sauneron, J. Jacquet *et al.*, *Les ermitages chrétiens du désert d'Esna*, 2 vols., Cairo, 1972, I. 59f, who cite, among others, Lady Petrie on the hermitage of Abydos (p. 60 n. 1): "The most curious feature of the furnishing of the cell was the abundance of the pegs and hooks. No less than thirty-nine pegs of flint or bone witnessed to the orderliness of the recluse. They occurred on every plain and handy part of the walls, and in neat array, as recorded, in the smaller cupboard-recess. In pairs, they seem to have supported a curtain over an inscription and elsewhere, and perhaps a frontal before the altar. Others were very strong and placed high, as though for his cloak and flask. The roof of the oratory was roughly doomed and plastered, and in the centre a stout ox-bone, driven in, still remained bound by a leathern thong which had served for the attachment of a lamp". [Lady Petrie, in F. Petrie, *Tombs of the Courtiers and Oxyrhynchos*, 1925, p. 23 (§49)]. For squared holes to produce decorative patterns E. Will, *La tour funéraire de la Syrie et les monuments apparentés*, *Syria* 26 (1949), 298. Compare also the limestone quarries further north up the Euphrates at Énesh, above Bālkis. Not only are there multiple votive niches found over the open-cut working faces of the quarry but there are also visible horizontal series of squared holes for affixing scaffolding supports during the quarrying operations. See F. Cumont, *Les carrières romaines d'Énesh. Arulis et Ourima*, in *Études Syriennes*, Paris, 1917, 151ff esp. 154ff.

<sup>8</sup> See J. C. M. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, London, 1971, 91ff ('Walled Cemeteries' and 'Funerary Gardens'), cf. E. Will, *art. cit.* in n. 7, 310. For epigraphic *testimonia* on the περίβολος (surrounding wall) and the funerary garden within such an enclosure see J. Kubińska, *Les monuments funéraires dans les inscriptions grecques de l'Asie Mineure*, Warsaw, 1968, 135 ff (wall), 142 ff (garden).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum, *Anamur Nekropolii. The Necropolis of Aemurium*, Ankara, 1971, 93f, 103.

<sup>10</sup> See J. J. Coulton, *The Architectural Development of the Greek Stoa*, Oxford, 1976, 126f (listing especially examples in Hellenistic stoas e.g. Stoa of Philip at Delos, in court of the Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamum, Stoas of Eumenes and Attalos in Athens, Stoas of Assos), H. H. Büsing, *Die griechische Halbsäule*, Wiesbaden, 1970, 52ff (for a full discussion of Hellenistic examples, with some imperial instances in the

eastern provinces noted on p. 56 n. 25—including Hierapolis). J. J. Coulton also reports that there are two sets of late Hellenistic or early Imperial date in the north portico of the Esplanade at Oinoanda (the columns being reused in the basilical church), cf. J. J. Coulton, *The Buildings of Oinoanda*, *Proc. Camb. Phil. Ass.* 209 (1983), 1ff.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, C. H. E. Haspels, *The Highlands of Phrygia*, vol. 1, 155ff, 191f, vol. 2, figs. 85-8 (monumental two-column Hellenistic portico, in imitation Doric, leading to contiguous barrel-vaulted chambers at Gerdek Kaya) and C. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*, 3 vols., Paris, 1953-1958, vol. 1 (1953) 307ff and Pl. CXCI (monumental tomb with forecourt wall and portico cut out of the rock with two pilasters and two columns in similar severe and undecorated style at Bamuqqa: he cites another close parallel at Bsendlaya, dated to 134 A.D.).

<sup>12</sup> See for this basic lay-out J. Lassus, *Liturgies nestorienne médiévales et églises syriennes antiques*, *Rev. de l'hist. des religions* 137 (1950), 236ff.

<sup>13</sup> For a similar three-pronged cross with horizontal bar towards base of cross but without side flourishes, D. Feissel, *Inscriptions byzantines de Ténos*, B.C.H. 104 (1980), 486, for other examples of three-pronged crosses, Haspels, *op. cit.* in n. 7, figs. 563.2, 564.7. For 'typical Hauranic crosses with tailed arms' see also fig. 7.4 and Pl. X.h.i in D. L. Kennedy, *Archaeological explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan*, Oxford, 1982 (= BAR 134), 35f (at Qasr el-Hallabat).

<sup>14</sup> A few examples, from widely scattered evidence, of *omega-alpha* (in that order), usually connected to the horizontal arms of a cross: (for Syria) J. Jalabert and R. Mouterde, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, vol. 2, Paris, 1939, nos. 258, 276, 310, E. Baccache, *Églises de village de la Syrie du Nord*, 2 vols., Paris, 1979-1980, vol. 2 fig. 245, Mouterde and Poidebard, *op. cit.* in n. 5, planche CXVIII.8 (Aleppo); (for Africa) N. Duval, *Recherches archéologiques à Haidra. 1 Les inscriptions chrétiennes*, Rome, 1975, nos. 15, 52, 91, 409, 419, 424; (for Egypt) G. Levebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte*, Cairo, 1907 (= *Inscriptions Graecae Aegypti*, vol. 5, repr. Chicago, 1978), nos. 45, 406, 415; C. Thomas, *Christianity in Britain to A.D. 500*, London, 1981, 91 fig. 7 (for Roman Britain). For lengthy discussion of the significance of the reverse order and with further examples (Rome) see M. Guarducci, *I Graffiti sotto la Confessione di san Pietro in Vaticano*, 3 vols., Vatican, 1958, 1.57ff.

<sup>15</sup> See the publication below (pp. 83-89) by Professor T. Muraoka.

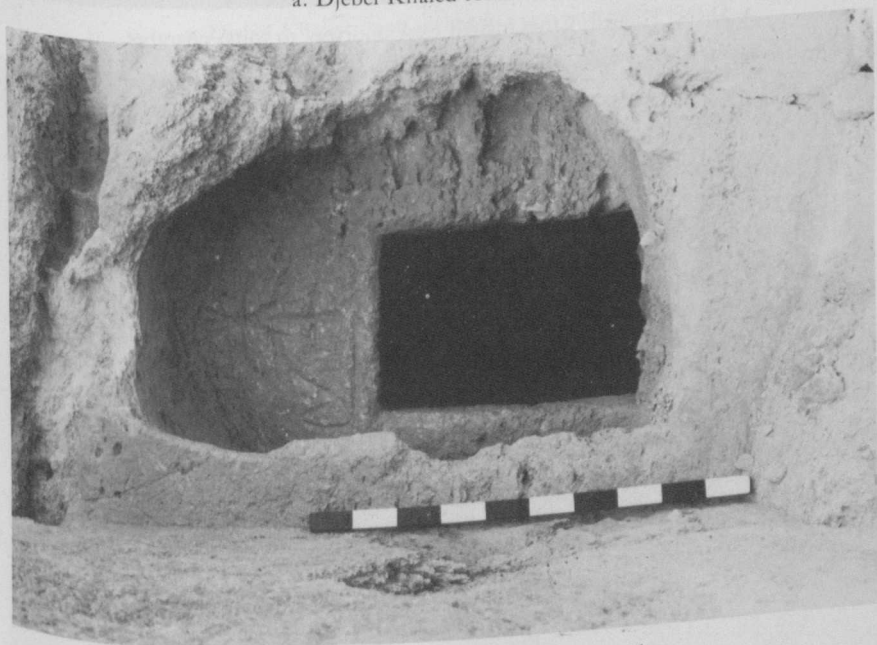
<sup>16</sup> For the assembled evidence see P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*, Paris, 1977, 185ff, A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 2 vols., Louvain 1958-1960, vol. 2, 117ff. Jerome was, of course, a famous anchorite in the vicinity of Chalcis ad Belum—for a period—in the mid-370's: for the evidence, J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His life, writings and controversies*, London, 1975, 46ff.

<sup>17</sup> For some examples of 'quarry-monasteries' see W. A. and E. T. A. Wigram, *The Cradle of Mankind*, London, 1914, 54f. (Dara), 117ff (Rabban Hormizd), cf. A. Stein, *Old routes of Western Iran*, London, 1940, 324ff (cave complex at Karafto); J. Bowman and J. A. Thompson, *The monastery-church of Bar Hebraeus at Maragheh in West Azerbaijan*, *Abr-Nahrain* 7 (1967-1968), 35ff. For references to the ascetic life spent in abandoned tombs, cisterns, caverns etc., R. Browning, *The 'Low-Level' Saint's Life in the Early Byzantine World*, in (ed.) S. Hackel, *The Byzantine Saint*, Birmingham, 1981, 126.

<sup>18</sup> I owe thanks to many people for helpful criticism and suggestions, in particular to P. J. Connor (Melbourne), G. W. Bowersock (Princeton), W. E. Kaegi, Jr. (Chicago). But I am especially in debt to the sharp eyes and critical acumen of Miss J. M. Reynolds (Cambridge). The figures were drawn by Ms. M. Mottram.



a. Djebel Khaled fortifications



b. Djebel Khaled: Entrance to tomb chamber

PLATE 6



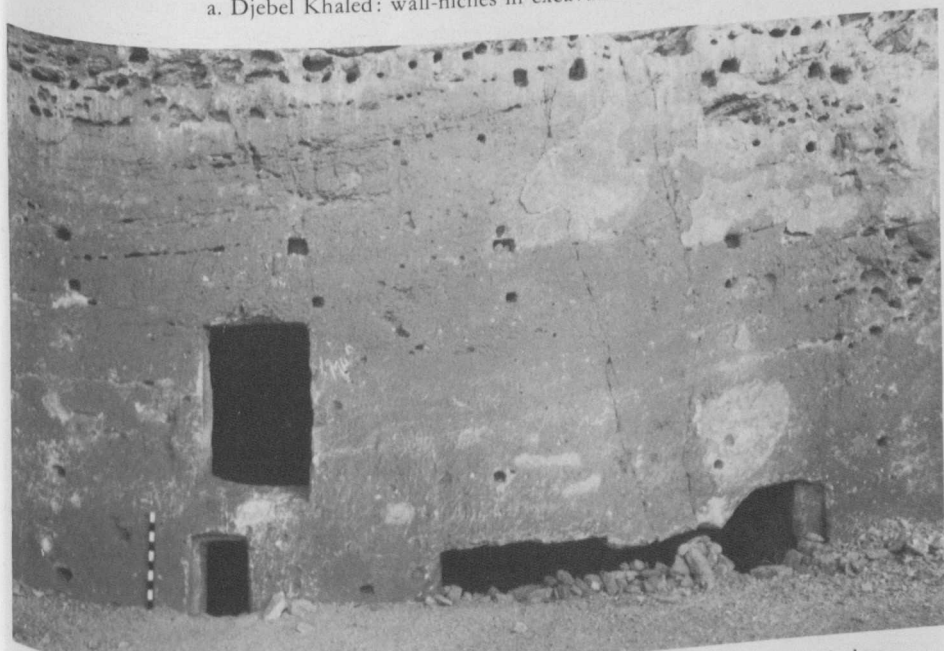
a. Djebel Khaled: Cross incised over doorway to tomb chamber



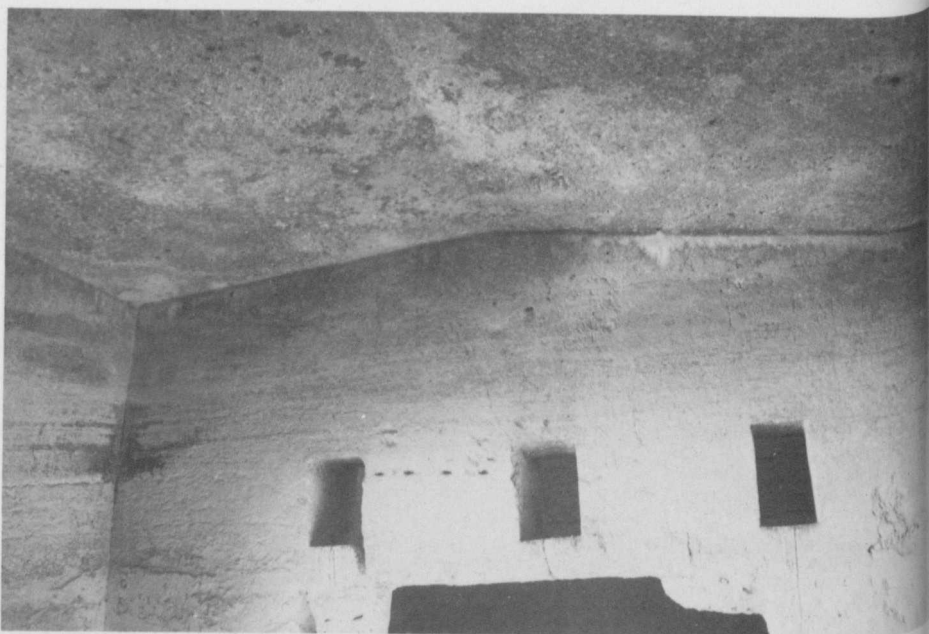
b. Djebel Khaled: Double-half column, and pilaster



a. Djebel Khaled: wall-niches in excavated limestone.



b. Djebel Khaled: window + doorway leading to interior room. Note socket holes.



a. Djebel Khaled: chamber with barrel-vaulted ceiling and doorway with three upper windows.



b. Djebel Khaled: Christian graffiti.