

# XIV CONGRESSVS INTERNATIONALIS EPIGRAPHIAE GRAECAE ET LATINAЕ

## Session Heiligtümer und Kulte

*From Personal Experience to Public Display:  
A look into the therapeutic sanctuary of Gadara (Palestine)*  
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Curative sanctuaries, where faithful (up to misbelievers sometimes! thanks to the godly benevolence) are healed by a divinity, are among places expected to be right locations for publicizing one's personal experience of the divine. In Roman times, publishing the miraculous deeds of the divinity in his/her *topos* by the means of inscriptions and/or anatomical *ex-votos* was expressions of thanks to the god/dess and exaltation of his/her power.

One of these places, the baths/sanctuary of Hammath Gader (Ἐμμαθᾶ in Eusebius' *Onomasticon*) on the territory of the city of Gadara in northern Syria-Palaestina (then *Palaestina IIa*), were 'worldy' known for their beauty. Excavations directed there by Y. Hirschfeld and Giora Solar brought to light a rich amount of inscriptions in Greek, all of the Byzantine period (fifth to seventh century), among which an epigram by the empress Eudocia that deserved already attention. The 72 inscriptions (discovered *in situ* for the great majority of them) were edited by Leah Di Segni in the final report: *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader*, Y. Hirschfeld (ed.), Jerusalem, 1997 (p. 185-266). Looking forward the relevant volume of the on-going *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudeae Palaestinae*, the present state of the archaeological and epigraphic dossier already invites to address two related issues: the first one, neglected up to now, can help to enlighten the second one, more extensively concerned with the historical interpretation of the site.

Locations where inscriptions were set in the sanctuary offer a good case-study for distinguishing personal experience and public display, besides the fact that any epigraphic practice has a media purpose *per se*. All 'personal' inscriptions (graffiti for a few) use the same standard formula of the type: ἐν τῷ ἀγίῳ τόπῳ μνησθῆ ὁ δεῖνα (*vel sim.*) which is read in many diverse religious contexts with no specific relationship to divine cures. No inscription makes any allusion to the therapeutic nature of the place. The lonely clue for relating them to the curative waters – thanks to their location *in situ* – is their direction towards the hot source and the Oval Hall where incubation practices must have taken place. The picture differs when we turn to inscriptions engraved by 'officials', all Christians: either the text praises a wonderful place "for those in pain" (Eudocia), or it illustrates building or restoration works "for the healing of the sick" (in 622). And yet these inscriptions are but concerned with public display and self-illustration in the magnificent Hall of Fountains, all looking opposite to the very spots of the miraculous cure. Both attitudes are well exemplified with the five inscriptions of the oval pool in Area G: the four 'personal' inscriptions are religious while the 'official' inscription is neutral (τοῦτο τὸ ἔργον). In a second part of my paper, these observations will be connected with the curative nature of the sanctuary, clearly attested in epigraphic and literary evidence alike, but only from the Byzantine period onwards (continuing in the beginnings of Islam). The nature of the place in "pagan times" – spa for leisure or cult place? – is still debated, in lack of explicit religious evidence for these centuries (late second-third century). And yet, incubation practices and confrontation of various kinds of testimonies (up to some without direct connection with the site), set down a body of evidence for demonstrating that the therapeutic nature of the sanctuary goes back to the "pagan" Empire.