

PREFACE

This little work is the result of a continually growing interest on my part in pagan Edessa. That city is supposed to be the cradle of Syrian Christendom and may have been the first Christian kingdom in the world; yet all the inscriptions from the first three centuries A.D. are pagan. To get slightly better hold on the pagan component in this religious crucible, a collection of all the relevant texts was a *conditio sine qua non*. The linguistic and general cultural importance of these texts, of course, stands in its own right. Together with the Aramaic texts of Palmyra and Hatra, these early-Syriac inscriptions belong to the field of late-Aramaic epigraphy, where they occupy a place modest in extent, but important for variety.

I am greatly indebted to all who have helped me with the preparation. My thanks are due in the first place to professor J. B. Segal of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the London University, who during my short visit to London in the summer of 1968 put his photographs, drawings and notes at my service, discussed with me for hours the problems posed by many inscriptions, and afterwards again showed his interest in many ways. The booklet itself no doubt clearly shows how much I owe to him. Its shortcomings naturally fall entirely to my account.

Further I have to thank Mrs. G. E. van Baaren-Pape for a careful translation of the Dutch text.

Finally I am most grateful to my assistant, Mr. A. C. Klugkist, who has spent many hours with me collecting the data and preparing the text and indexes for the press. The work gave us both much enjoyment, and we learnt a good deal from it. I hope that those using this little book will have the same experience when studying these texts and their background. The subject is eminently suitable for treatment by a working-group of students and teachers, in view of the various questions it raises, and the many aspects of the culture of Edessa which come to the fore.

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