



## Summary :

The excavations at the monastic complex of Alahan in Isauria have revealed twelve inscriptions. Two of the best preserved of them provide information on the stay at the monastery of two individuals with the same name (Tarasis), possibly father and son. The first was the founder of the xenon (hospice) of the monastery and died in 462, while the second had become a priest there a year earlier. These dates are the only safe evidence concerning the monastery's foundation, which can be placed to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century.

## Date

Second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.

## Geographical Location

Isauria

## 1. Introduction

Twelve inscriptions were found during the excavations conducted at the [monastic complex of Alahan](#) (known today by its Turkish name Alahan Manastir) in [Isauria](#) by the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara under the supervision of Michael Gough, during the period 1955-1972. Only two of them survive almost intact and provide historical information regarding the monastery and the people who lived there. Of the remaining ten, nine contain only a few letters, while one, on the north wall of the so-called «[narthex](#)», to the south of the [baptistry](#), has been entirely destroyed. All inscriptions are written in capital letters.

## 2. The inscription of Tarasis the elder

† ΕΝΘ]ΑΔΕ ΚΙΤΕ ΤΗΣ ΜΑΚΑ/  
ΡΙΑΣ ΜΝΗΜΗΣ ΤΑΡΑΣΙΣ Ο ΚΤΙΣΑΣ ΤΑ ΑΠΑ[ΝΤΗ]/  
ΤΗΡΙΑ, ΤΕΛΕΥΤΗΣΑΣ ΜΗΝΙ ΦΕΒΡΟΥΑΡΙΟΥ/  
ΤΡΙΣΚΕΔΕΚΑΤΗ ΙΝΔ(ΙΚΤΙΩΝΟΣ) ΠΕΝΤΕΚΕ/  
ΔΕΚ[Α]ΤΗΣ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΗΝ ΥΠΑΤΙΑΝ ΦΛ(ΑΥΙΟΥ)/ 5  
ΣΕΥ[Η]ΡΙΑΚΟΥ ΦΛ(ΑΥΙΟΥ) ΔΑΓΑΛΑΙΦΦΟΥ/  
ΤΩΝ ΛΑΜΠΡ(ΟΤΑΤΩΝ) ΗΜΕΡΑ ΤΡΙΤΗ ΠΡΩ/  
ΤΗ <ΤΗ> ΕΒΔΟΜ[Α]ΔΙ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ/  
ΝΗ<Ε>ΤΕΩ[Ν]† ([fig. 1](#))

The inscription is carved on a [tabula ansata](#) on the side surface of a stone [sarcophagus](#) found in a cave around 80 m. to the west of the «[West church](#)». It is written in nine verses (letter height 4,7-1,7 cm., inscription's total height: 42 cm.; width: 1,10 m.). The text, which begins in the top left and ends at the bottom right with a cross, survives almost intact.<sup>1</sup>

The name «Tarasis» mentioned on the inscription (v. 2), is particularly common in the region of Isauria.<sup>2</sup> The phrase «ὁ κτίσας τὰ ἅ παντητήρια» (v. 2-3) was added to the inscription later as shown by its carving outside the edges of the *tabula ansata*, in an attempt to distinguish the Tarasis of the inscription from the Tarasis mentioned on the second inscription. The participle «κτίσας» must be interpreted here as «founder» despite the fact that, during the Byzantine period, the word κτίστης (the builder) was had also the meaning of the benefactor.<sup>3</sup> The word «ὁ παντητήρια» is not known before the 5<sup>th</sup> century, while it is rarely used after this date. It possibly denoted a hospice intended for the visitors of the monastery, and must therefore be sought in the interior of the complex. It may correspond to the two-storey building constructed to the east of the «Western church» that survives to this day.<sup>4</sup>

Verses 3-9 of the inscription mention the date, the [indiction](#) and the year of Tarasis' death: 13 February, Tuesday in the first week of Lent of the 15<sup>th</sup> indiction, which coincides with the year 462. It remains unknown why the inscription contains the names of Flavius



Severinus and Flavius Dagalaiphus), who, as we conclude from the inscription of Tarasis the younger, had served as **consuls** during the previous year, 461, rather than the names of the consuls of the year 462.

Finally, the word «νη<ε>τεώ[v]», which is also mentioned in the last verse of the inscription (v. 9), must be read as «νηστειών».

### 3. The inscription of Tarasis the younger

† ΕΝΘΑΔΕ ΚΑΤΑΚΙΤΕ/  
ΤΑΡΑΣΙΣ ΔΙΣ, ΓΕΝΟΜΕΝΟΣ/  
ΠΡΕΣΒ(ΥΤΕΡΟΣ) ΚΑΙ ΠΑΡΑΜΟΝΑΡΙΟΣ/  
ΠΑΡΟΙΚΗΣΑΣ ΕΝ ΤΩ ΤΟΠΩ/  
ΤΟΥΤΩ ΑΠΟ ΥΠΑΤΙΑΣ ΓΑΔΑ-/ 5  
Λ[Α]ΙΠΠΙΟΥ ΙΝΔ(ΙΚΤΙΩΝΟΣ) ΙΔ' ΕΩΣ ΙΝΔ(ΙΚΤΙΩΝΟΣ) [vacat]/  
ΥΠΑΤ[Ι]ΑΣ [vacat] ΖΗΣΑΣ ΤΑ/  
ΠΑΝΤΑ ΕΤΗ [vacat] (fig. 2)

The inscription is carved on a concavity above a stone sarcophagus in the so-called «Tomb of Tarasis». The text, in eight verses, is also carved on a tabula ansata. It begins in the top left with a cross, while the letters, whose height varies, are incised irregularly on the stone surface. Three lacunas in verses 6, 7 and 8 had been left in order to be filled in at a later date, something which did not actually occur.<sup>5</sup>

In verses 2-8 we are informed that Tarasis the younger, possibly the son of Tarasis the elder, served as «presbyter» and «**paramonarios**» at the monastery from 461 until unknown when, as the space left to be filled with the respective date, was never completed. This event makes it possible that Tarasis did not die at Alahan, nor was buried there, a hypothesis which was strengthened by the discovery of a silver reliquary in a church in the village of Çirga, 40 km south-west of Mut, with the inscription «ὁ πᾶρ ἁ ναπαύσεως τοῦ μακαρ(ι)οῦ Τάρασης δις»; the «Τάρασης δις» mentioned here, must be identified with the «Τάρασις δις» on our inscription.<sup>6</sup>

The word «πρεσβύτερος» refers to the second dignity in ecclesiastical hierarchy, that of the priest, held by Tarasis,<sup>7</sup> while the word «**παραμονάριος**» (or προσμονάριος) to a title according to which its holder was obliged to live in the monastery permanently and take care of its security during the night.<sup>8</sup>

The name «Γαδαλ[α]ίππου» (v. 5-6) must be identified with the name «**Δαγαλίφφου**» in the inscription of Tarasis the older.

Finally, the 14<sup>th</sup> indiction, mentioned in verse 6 («Ι νδ(ικτιῶνος) ιδ'»), corresponds to the year 461. During that year, as we are informed by the inscription itself, the office of consul was held by Flavius Severinus and Flavius Dagalaiphus.

### 4. The other inscriptions

1. ΙΦ+/  
ΘΕΟΔΟ/  
ΗΟΝΟ

The inscription was found on the central western gate of the «**East church**» and has been written on the inner side of the south pilaster (letter height 1,25-2 cm.). A large cross with triangular edgings was incised below it.<sup>9</sup>

2. ΚΟΝΟΝ  
ΗΡ [vacat] ΚΑΟΠΙΟΥ



The inscription is located on the window of the west wall of the narthex of the «Eastern church» (letter height 4,7-3,2 cm.). The letters HP are joined.<sup>10</sup>

3. + EYXHAIΩA... .+.

Inscription on the **pedestal** in the northeast of the «Eastern church» (letter height 5-5,5 cm.). A possible restoration is: +Εὐ χή α ἴ ωά [vνου πρες]+.<sup>11</sup>

4.+ENΘA K<A>TAKITH ΛEON

The inscription is written on three consecutive stones at the eastern end of the so-called «narthex», south of the **Baptistry**.<sup>12</sup>

5. IC XC

Inscription in the «**Church in cave**» at the western edge of the monastic complex.<sup>13</sup>

6. ΩΔΕ [vacat] +Θ

The inscription was found in a tomb located to the west of the tomb of Tarasis the younger (letter height 3,8-4,5 cm.).<sup>14</sup>

7. +NEΩNAKA

Inscription on the rock behind the «Cemetery», to the northeast of the «Baptistry» (letter height 2,7-9,5 cm.).<sup>15</sup>

8. KITICAO ...

The inscription was found in the same area as the previous one (letter height 2,5-5,1 cm.).<sup>16</sup>

9. +[.]ΩΠΩΚΟ/  
ΝΩΓΩΓΩ/  
ΝΙΟΥ

Inscription in the same area as the previous two (letter height 4,4-6,7 cm.).<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Chronology

The fragmentary condition of most of the abovementioned inscriptions allows neither their commentary nor their dating. Only the two almost complete inscriptions of Tarasis the elder and Tarasis the younger can be dated to the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, as they preserve the dates 462 and 461 respectively. These two dates taken into account, we have an important *terminus ante quem* for the foundation of the monastic complex at Alahan which can be placed with certainty to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century.

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1. On the inscription see Gough, M., "Some recent finds at Alahan (Koja Kalessi)", *Anatolian Studies* 5 (1955), pp. 116-118; Bean, G.E., "Inscriptions", in Verzone, P. (ed.), *Alahan Monastir: Un monument dell' arte Tardo-Romano in Isauria* (Turin 1956), pp. 52-54, and Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), pp. 22-23.



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3. Mitford, T.B., "New inscriptions from Early Christian Cyprus", *Byzantion* 20 (1950), p. 153, note 1.
4. About the word and its interpretation see Mitford, T.B., "New inscriptions from Early Christian Cyprus", *Byzantion* 20 (1950), pp. 153-154; Gough, M., "Some recent finds at Alahan (Koja Kalessi)", *Anatolian Studies* 5 (1955), p. 117, and Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), pp. 22-23.
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6. Gough, M., "A fifth century silver reliquary from Isauria", *Byzantinoslavica* 19 (1958), pp. 244-50 and especially p. 248.
7. Papadakis, A., "Priest", A. Kazhdan (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3 (Oxford-New York 1991), p. 1718.
8. See Magdalino, P., "Prosmonarios", A. Kazhdan (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 3 (Oxford-New York 1991), p.1739. See De Laborder, L., "Église d' Aladja dans le Taurus", *Revue Archéologique* 4 (1847-1848), p. 175, Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), p. 24.
9. Bean, G.E., "Inscriptions", in Verzone, P. (ed.), *Alahan Monastir: Un monument dell' arte Tardo-Romano in Isauria* (Turin 1956), p. 51, note 1, and Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), p. 24, fig. 2.3.
10. Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), p. 24, fig. 2.4.
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12. Gough, M., "Excavations at Alahan Monastery, Third Preliminary Report", *Anatolian Studies* 14 (1964), p. 189; Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), p. 25.
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14. Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey Based on the Work of Michael Gough* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), p. 25, fig. 2.8.
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17. Harrison, M., "The Inscriptions and Chronology of Alahan", in Gough, M. (ed.), *Alahan. An Early Christian Monastery in Southern Turkey*



Based on the Work of Michael Gough (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1985), p. 25, fig. 2.11.

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## Glossary :

	<b>baptistery</b>
The building or room used for Baptism. It had a font usually in the form of a cross. After the 6th c. the baptisteries constitute distinct constructions- octagonal, circular, cruciform- detached to the church or its courtyard.	
	<b>consul, -lis</b>
An official of the Roman state. In the period of the Republic, it was the highest military and political office: two consuls were elected each year. The consular office survived into the Imperial period (and further into the early Byzantine period), becoming a honorary post.	
	<b>indiction</b>
A 15-year cycle according to which a year was assigned in the Middle Ages. Initially it denoted an extraordinary agricultural tax; later on (under Constantine I) it was a tax of which the amount remained unchanged during a 15-year cycle. It gradually acquired a chronological meaning, which it kept even after the tax ceased to exist. The chronological system based on indictions became mandatory under Justinian I. The system was not absolutely precise, since it was the years of the indiction that were reckoned (first indiction, second indiction and so on, until the fifteenth), while the cycles themselves were not numbered.	
	<b>narthex</b>
A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.	
	<b>paramonarios (or prosmonarios)</b>
The "conciierge" of a church or a monastery. He lived permanently in the monastery and was responsible for its security. It was a simple office rather than a clerical dignity.	
	<b>pedestal</b>
Base on which stands a bust, a stele or a statue.	
	<b>sarcophagus</b>
A large rectangular stone coffin in which a dead person was laid to rest. In some cases sarcophagi were made also of clay, wood or metal.	
	<b>tabula ansata (lat.)</b>
Rectangular surface with projections on its sides. It was used either to incise an inscription on it or as a simple decoratif element. It appears on sarcophagi during the 3rd-4th centuries and disappears after the 6th c.	
	<b>vacat (lat.)</b>
Term used to denote the lacunas in the text of an inscription.	