



THE GOD PAKEIDAS IN JERASH – HIS WORSHIP THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND EPIGRAPHICAL SOURCES¹

Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3273-2447>
Centrum Badań nad Światem Antycznym
University of Wrocław

Achim Lichtenberger

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2653-9859>
Institut für Klassische Archäologie und Christliche
Archäologie WWU Münster

Abstract: The finds from the ancient city of Gerasa brought in 1930' two inscriptions dated to the second half of the 1st century CE which mention the deity called Pakeidas. The aim of this paper is to discuss Pakeidas and his relation to another god labelled Theos Arabikos worshipped in the same city. The authors make a broad Semitic overview on the etymology of the name Pakeidas looking at the West and East (Akkadian) Semitic evidence. The authors discuss the possible location of the temple dedicated to this god beneath the Cathedral. They also reexamine in the light of epigraphic sources in comparison to the Aramaic material from the Near East the function of *archibomistai*, cultic agents who served to this local god.

Keywords: Gerasa, Decapolis, gods, Arabia, epigraphy, priests, Semitic.

¹ This paper is an outcome of a cooperation between the authors during a 10-month WiRe fellowship, Women in Research at the University of Münster, between October 2020 and July 2021. The improvements for this research are funded by National Science Centre (Poland) UMO-2021/42/A/HS3/00421 “Epigraphic culture in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East in antiquity: status, display, democracy, identity.” For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC-BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.



Fig. 1. Map of Jordan indicating the position of Gerasa (© the authors)

I. Introduction

Gerasa, modern day Jerash in northwestern Jordan, was a city belonging to the Decapolis (**Fig. 1**),² a group of Graeco-Roman cities in what is today Jordan, Syria and Israel.³ The settlements were founded in Hellenistic times and thrived throughout the Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic periods. During the Roman period, they display a Roman urban layout and socio-political profile with deities from Graeco-Roman *panthea*. The geographical and political location of Gerasa in the Decapolis and the important trading routes connecting Bosra, Philadelphia, Aila and the Red Sea were conducive for communication and the free exchange of traditions. This is one of the reasons why the religious

² On Gerasa cf. Kraeling 1938; Zayadine 1986; Kennedy 2007; Lichtenberger – Raja 2018.

³ Lichtenberger 2003, 6–20.



Fig. 2. Inscription 1 (after Welles 1938, 383–384, no. 17, Pl. CVIa)

life of the cities of the Decapolis is a mosaic of cults of various traditions: some with Greek and Roman character, but many others are rooted in a local and regional Syrian, Phoenician and Arab context.⁴ According to the find coins of Gerasa from the late 1st century BC and the early 1st century CE, the city was well connected economically with Nabataea.⁵ A funerary Nabatean inscription from Petra, as well as a bilingual Graeco-Nabatean text from Jerash, confirm Nabatean presence in the city, and the toponym Garšu is evidence that a strong Semitic element was present in the city during this time.⁶ After the establishment of the Roman *provincia Arabia* in 106 CE, Gerasa joined the new province.⁷

It comes as no surprise that Gerasa offers epigraphical evidence of deities of Arab or, generally speaking, Semitic origin. Attested are inscriptions explicitly mentioning such divine names as: Theos Arabikos (the Arabian God), Holy God Pakeidas and the God of Aumos.⁸ The aim of this paper is to describe the worship of the god Pakeidas as known only from two Greek inscriptions from Jerash.

The first text⁹ (inscription 1) is written on two architrave blocks and dated to 73/74 CE (Fig. 2):

[Αγ]αθῆ Τύχηι. Ἔτους ζλρ'7

[Υπὲρ τῆς τῶν Σεβαστῶν σωτηρίας Ἄ]μερος Ἐραγελοῦ ἀρχιβωμιστή[ς θεοῦ ἀγ]ίου Πακείδα καὶ Ἦρας ΣΥ¹⁰[- - ὑπὲρ τῆς δεινός? τ]ῆς ἰδίας γυναικῶς εἰς τὴν κτίσιν [τῆς οἰκοδ]ομῆς ἱεροῦ θεᾶς Ἦρας Ε[- -] εὐσεβείας ἔνεκεν δραχ(μας) ἐπ[τακ]οσίας.

⁴ On the religious life of the Decapolis and of Gerasa, cf. Lichtenberger 2003; Riedl 2005.

⁵ Lichtenberger – Raja 2020.

⁶ Starcky 1965. The contacts between Nabateans and Gerasa are also marked in the epigraphical sources, see a bilingual, Graeco-Nabatean inscription found in Jerash, mentioning king Rabbel (probably Rabbel II) (Welles 1938, 371–373, no.1). See also Gregoratti 2011, 515.

⁷ On the establishment of the new province, cf. Lichtenberger 2011.

⁸ Gatier 1995, 117; Lichtenberger 2003, 229.

⁹ Welles 1938, 383–384, no. 17.

¹⁰ Possibilities to reconstruct this word are many: συμβίου, συζύγου, συννάου, Συρικῆι, etc. We cannot exclude a Semitic name which would follow the Greek.

Translation: For the Good Fortune, in the year 136 GE¹¹ (73/74 CE), [month or day?] 7. For the salvation's sake of the Emperors. Ameros, son of Ragelos, head servant of the altar of the holy god Pakeidas and of Hera his consort? / Syrian?/ the one who dwells in the same temple For - - - from the purse of the wife in regard of the construction of the temple building to the goddess Hera - - - gave in the act of piety 700 drachmas.¹²

The second text (inscription 2) is carved on a small horned limestone altar with a bowl on top which according to Welles is from the late 1st century CE (**Fig. 3**).¹³

Ἀγίῳ Π-
ακειδᾶ Τῦ-
χη δούλῃ
Ἀπολλᾶ
Λέσβου
ἀνέθη-
κεν

Translation: To holy Pakeidas. Dedicated Tyche, servant of Apollas, son of Lesbos (or Lesbos?).¹⁴

Tyche, the name of the female dedicator, is of Greek origin, but it does not necessarily mean that she herself was Greek. She was the slave of Apollas, son of Lesbos. It is the name of a female slave whose original name we do not know, but which could also have been of Semitic origin.

These two inscriptions are different in character. The first one is a foundation text connected to the construction of a temple, while the second is a private dedication. Even though we do not have more sources concerning Pakeidas, both inscriptions provide some information. Both date to the period before the creation of the *provincia Arabia*. In the following we will analyze such aspects as the archaeological context of the finds, and we will rethink a localization of his temple and the temple of Hera mentioned in the first inscription, the worshippers and their names and functions. We will deal with the question of the Graecized Semitic name “Pakeidas,” its etymology and his connection to Hera. We will consider whether Pakeidas and Theos Arabikos—a god attested in four later inscriptions found at Gerasa—are two different names of one god or two different deities? Furthermore, we will discuss the ritual practices and the role of the priest called *archibomistes*. These aspects will allow us to draw a complex portrait of a divine being worshipped in Roman Gerasa.

¹¹ GE = Gerasa Era.

¹² Translation by A. Kubiak-Schneider. We thank Anna Kordas from the University of Warsaw for the revision of the translation.

¹³ Welles 1938, 384, no. 18.

¹⁴ Translation by A. Kubiak-Schneider.



Fig. 3. Inscription 2 (after Welles 1938, 384, no. 18, Pl. XCVIIIc)

II. Archaeological Context of Finds Relating to the God and the Potential Temple of Pakeidas

The two inscriptions mentioning Pakeidas and the four inscriptions naming Theos Arabikos were all—except one of unknown provenance—excavated in the area south of the Artemision (**Fig. 4**).¹⁵ One Pakeidas inscription was found east of the so-called Fountain court in the Cathedral,¹⁶ the other in room B 59 of the so-called Clergy House.¹⁷ The Artemision is the monumental temple of Artemis which was erected after the time of Hadrian in the central northern part of the city. The Cathedral was a large Early Christian ecclesiastical complex built south of the Artemision and on top of an earlier late-Hellenistic temple.

Of the Theos Arabikos inscriptions, one was found to have been reused as a paving stone in the Fountain Court of the Cathedral,¹⁸ another one had been repurposed as a

¹⁵ Cf. in the following Lichtenberger 2003, 221–225.

¹⁶ Welles 1938, 383–384, no. 17.

¹⁷ Welles 1938, 384, no. 18.

¹⁸ Welles 1938, 384–385, no. 19.

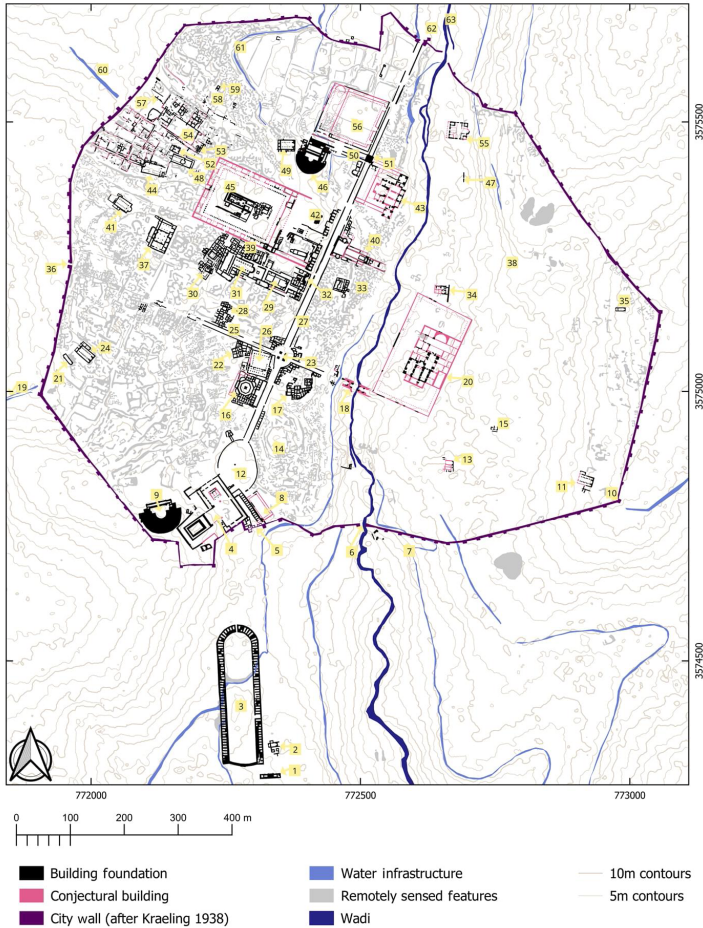


Fig. 4. Map of Gerasa with Cathedral (no. 29), Church of St. Theodore and Fountain Court (no. 31) and Nymphaeum (no. 32) (Lichtenberger – Raja – Stott 2019, fig. 3)

pilaster base in the shrine of the Virgin Mary in the Cathedral,¹⁹ a third had been inserted in the north wall of the Nymphaeum²⁰ and the fourth inscription was found in the modern village to which it was probably taken as building material.²¹

The earliest inscription relating to the Arabic god stems from the north wall of the Nymphaeum, where it was integrated in secondary use. The Nymphaeum was erected in 190/91 CE²² and it can be considered whether older building material was used for its construction,²³ since it is remarkable that also a second inscribed spolia was found in

¹⁹ Welles 1938, 385, no. 20.

²⁰ Welles 1938, 386, no. 22.

²¹ Welles 1938, 385–386, no. 21.

²² Kraeling 1938, 54; Welles 1938, 407–407, no. 69.

²³ As assumed by Jones 1928, 159.

the north wall naming a dedicant with a Semitic name.²⁴ Therefore the question arises whether earlier dedications at a sanctuary associated with the Arabic god were reused for the erection of the Nymphaeum. This would suggest that the sanctuary of the Arabic god was in decay or had been abandoned by the end of the 2nd century CE. However, since it is not known whether the inscriptions from the Nymphaeum wall belong to the original construction of the Nymphaeum or to a later renovation, this must remain unknown from an archaeological perspective. From a historical perspective the dismantling of a sanctuary of the Arabic god before the end of the 2nd century CE is unlikely, because under the Cathedral a Graeco-Roman temple has been found that was erected in the 1st century BC and that seems to have existed more or less intact (though maybe in decline) until the Cathedral was built in 404 CE.²⁵ Of the structure that is interpreted as a temple only the foundations and scattered architectural fragments were found. It had dimensions of 16.6 × 9.3 m and was probably a podium temple with antae. It has been suggested that this temple was indeed the sanctuary of the Arabian god²⁶ and its foundation date correlates nicely with the strong Nabataean influence in the late-Hellenistic period. Therefore, it seems most likely that the inscriptions were added to the Nymphaeum as spolia only in late antiquity, when the temple under the Cathedral was superseded by the Christian building.

III. Altars in Gerasa and *archibomistai*

The altar on which inscription 2 was written is of a well-attested type: a bowl for incense offering is located between four triangle-shaped ornaments situated at the corners of the altar top.²⁷ These triangular features are interpreted as horns. Similar altars were also found in other places in the region and beyond, but their high frequency is unique to Gerasa. This suggests that altars were a strong visual element of religious life in the city. Horned altars were common throughout the Graeco-Roman Near East, e.g., in Phoenicia, Nabataea, Palmyra and Hatra²⁸ and they were particularly widespread in Gerasa. Dedicatory inscriptions in Gerasa were often written on slabs in the shape of horned altars.²⁹ In this context they are only carriers of inscriptions and the altar iconography is used to connote a sacred atmosphere. There is further evidence for the importance of altar iconography in the public sphere of Gerasa: During the work of the Danish-German

²⁴ The names such as Meliton and Sosibios in Welles 1938, 407, no. 70 are rather Greek, but we cannot exclude the Semitic origins of the name Mallaios which would correspond to ML'. See also Welles 1938, 407, no. 71, a graffito on a column of the Nymphaeum: The mentioned Zabdion is a Greek form of the common Semitic name ZBD'.

²⁵ Brenk – Jäggi – Meier 1994; Brenk – Jäggi – Meier 1995; Brenk – Jäggi – Meier 1996; Jäggi – Meier – Brenk 1997; Jäggi – Meier – Brenk 1998; Lichtenberger 2003, 221–225.

²⁶ Lichtenberger 2003, 222.

²⁷ This altar was found by the Yale University expedition in 1931 led by C. S. Fisher during the excavations in Jerash and first noted in McCown 1934 who recognized that the dedication concerned a new Semitic deity.

²⁸ They all bear local traits. For the altars from Hatra see recently Kubiak 2016b; Foietta 2019; Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 16–22. For Lebanon, cf. Fani Alpi 2016, 244. For Nabatea, see Patrich 1990, 92–95 and Alpass 2013.

²⁹ Lichtenberger – Raja 2015, 120–127.

Jerash Northwest Quarter Project, a large architectural block was discovered in 2012.³⁰ This architectural block was designed as a horned altar although in fact it was part of the frame of an entrance. The monumental block was later reused in a Roman oil press and its original provenance cannot be determined.³¹ Still, it is impressive evidence for the conspicuous presence of this sacred iconography in Gerasa.

There is a direct link between the prominence of altars as visual expressions of religious life in Gerasa and the cult of the god Pakeidas in Jerash. The first inscription mentions that Amer(os) = ʾMR, son of Ragel(os) = RGL³² was charged with a cultic office, *archibomistes*, of the “Holy God Pakeidas.” Ameros is the transcription of the name ʾMR and his father’s, Ragelos is equal to RGL. Both names are frequent in Safaitic inscriptions.³³ The Greek term *archibomistes* is composed of the prefix *archi-*, “great,” “in head position” and *bomistes*, “of the altar.” We propose here the translation “head master of the altar.” The cultic status of this man is important evidence regarding religious functionaries in the Graeco-Roman Near East. He is not described by the common term for priest—*hierous*, but rather his cultic profession is more foregrounded.

The name of the “head master of the altar of the Holy God Pakeidas” comes undoubtedly from Semitic, being its Greek paraphrase.

Archibomistai are hitherto only attested in Gerasa. The function of the head master of the altar is mentioned three times in the epigraphical sources. Besides inscription 1, this profession is also attested for the cult of “Apollo, Kore and *synnaoi theoi* (the co-dwelling gods)” in the dedication to the “Celestial Lady Artemis” (*Kyria Ourania Artemis*) from the 2nd century CE.³⁴ The inscription suggests that the function of *archibomistes* could have been performed not only by one, but by two or three people. The names Akrysius, son of Amyntos, and Diogenes and Amyntos his sons, the dedicators, imply that this function was kept in the family. The names of officials are Greek.³⁵ The deities whom these three men served are Apollo and Kore. So the cultic function does not necessarily apply only to Semitic gods and can be regarded as a specific feature of religious life in Gerasa.³⁶

Another text, not mentioning a divine name, gives us an insight and suggests that the profession of *archibomistes* was a branch of a priesthood, though P.-L. Gatier sees priesthood and the office of *archibomistes* as two distinct ritual functions.³⁷ Natiras, son of Gorgios specifies his profession as priest (*hierous*) head master of the altar (*archibomistes*). As in the first inscription mentioning Pakeidas, the name of the dedicator is Semitic and is very common in the region of the Hauran.³⁸

³⁰ Lichtenberger – Raja 2015.

³¹ P.-L. Gatier and J. Seigne note a presence of a cubic construction, a monumental altar on the high place of the hellenistic naos. Probably it refers to the inscription Zeus of Hammana. See Gatier – Seigne 2006, 178.

³² We kept the Greek endings in brackets to emphasize the Semitic character of the names.

³³ See: Negev 1991 and OCIANA database of the Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Manaser – Macdonald 2017).

³⁴ Gatier 1988, 151, no. 5.

³⁵ The inscription 29 at Welles 1938 attests that a certain Diogenes dedicated an altar to Lady Artemis. Malchos, the name of his grandfather, is Semitic and very common in the entire Near East.

³⁶ But see Lichtenberger 2003, 225 who argues that the deities also need to be interpreted as local, non-Greek deities.

³⁷ Gatier 1988, 154, no. 6.

³⁸ Gatier 1988, 154, no. 6.

The function of an *archibomistes* could be described as “president” of the rituals performed on the main altar of the god. The office-holder must have been responsible for offerings and sacrifices—it is not known whether these were animals, aromatics, plants or liquids. It was possibly a specific function in the priesthood and implied particular service to the gods.

At this point, the question arises whether the cultic office *archibomistes* was influenced or affected by Arab tribes or Nabateans with whom Gerasa had a vivid flourishing trade links. The term is very unusual in a Greek context. The parallels or rather equivalents of this function should rather be sought on the Semitic side. It resembles some of the ritual duties of the cultic actor, though we do not find an exact equivalent. We could interpret it as the chief, *rb*’, of an altar, either *mdbh* used in the Nabatean texts for an altar, which literally means “a place of sacrifice” or even *bmws* of the Greek term used for both an altar and a podium on which a betyl was placed,³⁹ but we cannot exclude other explanations, deriving from Safaitic, Thamudic or other Northern Arabic dialects. What is more, both Aramaic words are attested as epithets of Zeus in a group of Greek texts from Syria from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.⁴⁰ The Nabatean reference can be close to what happens in the ritual performances and use of an altar (or podium) in Gerasa. The *archibomistes* could thus be the “head master” of the sacred place.

IV. The Name of the Divinity: Its Etymology and Possible Competences

In 1940, L.-H. Vincent presented a thorough analysis of the holy god Pakeidas in Gerasa, trying to understand the etymology of this theonym and the origins of the cult.⁴¹ This work remains the most detailed and multifaceted study of the deity. However, many issues pertaining to the etymology of the name and its interpretation need to be revisited. We will look closely in this section at the connection between Pakeidas and Hera mentioned in inscription 1 in an attempt to understand the ambiguous name of the masculine deity.

Pakeidas is labelled in both texts as *hagios*, “sacred,” “holy.” This epithet is very common in the Near East.⁴² The Greek designation *theos hagios* combined either with another divine name (e.g., Dusares), a personal name or a toponym, is a well-attested “onomastic” formula referring to the deities worshipped in the Hauran and in the Nabatean kingdom.⁴³

Taking into account inscription 1, where the name of the god completes the cultic profession of the “head master of the altar” we can propose that the title *Theos Hagios Pakeidas* is his official cultic title which would correspond to the Semitic *qdwš/qdyš* in the construct sequence in Aramaic which would be as follows: *pqd ʔlh qdyšʔ*.

³⁹ Healey 2001, 158–159: DNWSI, v. bms.

⁴⁰ Healey 2001, 159.

⁴¹ Vincent 1940.

⁴² Lichtenberger 2003, 224. This observation is further corroborated by the research on the divine names and epithets pursued by the project ERC – MAP (MAP – 741182) and the records in the database, <https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/> (accessed on 27.01.2022).

⁴³ IGLS XVI, 143, 160 382d, and see the MAP database, <https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/> attestation (accessed on 20.07.2021).

Unfortunately, we have no Semitic inscription (either Aramaic or Arabic) which would provide either such a divine name or such an onomastic formula. Nowhere in the Near East beyond Gerasa is this theonym attested in the Semitic epigraphical evidence.

The name of the god Pakeidas is not Greek in spite of being transcribed into the Greek alphabet. It is based on the Semitic root *pqd** or *pkd**. The root *pqd* and its variants are attested in the Akkadian, Aramaic (together with Syriac), Arabic, Hebrew and Ugaritic languages. We will now discuss possible translations of this root to gain a better understanding of the divine figure and his name.

Starting with the Akkadian evidence, *paqādu* has many meanings. Firstly, it means “to entrust for safekeeping;” secondly, “to put someone in charge,” “to assign,” “to give an order,” and thirdly “to administer” and “to inspect.” It can also mean “to inspect/to muster military troops.”⁴⁴ According to the Concise Aramaic Dictionary it is quite a frequent verb in cuneiform texts. It also has the meaning “to hand over,” e.g., animals for herding and pasturing. It was used in favorable and unfavorable formulae in letters and prayers both to bestow a favor on someone and to impose a death sentence. The aspect of administration appears in connection with the temple, the country or the entire world. The Chicago Akkadian Dictionary provides a reference to gods such as Marduk, Ishtar, Nabu and Nergal, as well as to an undefined personal god (in a personal name) who takes care of shrines and people.⁴⁵ Two nouns are formed from the verb *paqādu*: *paqdu*: “overseer of a land or an estate” and *pāqidu*: “provider,” “caretaker,” “guardian.” Phoenician, Ugaritic and Hebrew provide meanings of the root: “to command,” “to give orders,” “to survey.”⁴⁶

Regarding the Aramaic root *pqd*, the dictionaries note translations such as: “officer,” “magistrate,” “supervisor,”⁴⁷ but also a verbal meaning: “to visit,” “to command,” “to care for” (popular in Syriac documents). It can also imply a punishment.⁴⁸ The Nabatean inscription CIS II 350 places the tomb under the divine protection of Dushara, his throne and all the gods: *ppqdwn dwsr`wmwtbh w`lhy`klhm* to keep it from destruction, alteration or change, which is forbidden according to the funerary contract.⁴⁹

The text on a late antique magic bowl in Jewish Babylonian mentions a demon (*šd*) named *pyqd*,⁵⁰ which theoretically can relate to the Gerasene name Pakeidas. Moriggi translates this expression as “visitation spirits” and the texts in which it appears he labels “impious” (*tmy*).

Taking into account the Safaitic name of the highest ritual operator, the head master of the altar of the god Pakeidas, it is also necessary to check the possibility of linking this divine name with Arabic, in this case Safaitic, origins. In Arabic the root *fqd* or *fkd* also has various meanings. First of all, it signifies “lost,” “distracted,” but also “only” and “to be decided.” In the first meaning as “lost” it appears in the Safaitic inscriptions. *Fqd* and

⁴⁴ CAD P v. *paqādu*.

⁴⁵ CAD P v. *paqādu* 4b).

⁴⁶ Hofijzer – Jongeling 1995, v. *pqd*₁.

⁴⁷ Hofijzer – Jongeling 1995, v. *pqd*₂.

⁴⁸ <http://cal.huc.edu> v. *pqd* (accessed on 26.01.2021). The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon provides a long list of Aramaic documents in which the word appears and a translation of the relevant passages.

⁴⁹ CIS II.350, dated to about 90 CE. See also Healey 1993.

⁵⁰ Moriggi 2014, 48, Bowl 6 v. 10.

fkd also the components of personal names. The corpus of Safaitic inscriptions however does not attest a god named Faqid.

Hitherto, Pakeidas was interpreted, e.g., as Sun god and the father of Nabatean Dushara.⁵¹ Without any further reference, either iconographic or epigraphical, it is hard to agree with the idea of a solar deity. McCown associates Pakeidas with Satrapes/Shadrapha and proposes the meaning of this new Gerasene deity as “prince” or even “prince of fruitfulness,” linking it to the Biblical sources.⁵² P.-L. Vincent also suggests the meaning of “inspector,” based on a broad survey in the Semitic languages.⁵³ Kraeling, on the contrary, discusses the interpretation that Pakeidas (Pakidas) could simply have been a messenger of a supreme deity designated “Arabian God” (Theos Arabikos),⁵⁴ and one of the present authors has suggested that both designations could be related to the Zeus Angelos, mentioned in another Gerasene inscription.⁵⁵ N. Riedl also tends towards the meaning of a divine guardian, referring also to Akkadian mythology and the epithet *paqidu* applied to different Mesopotamian deities (Ishtar, Shamash, Marduk, Nabu).⁵⁶

Vincent in his paper refers to a dedication at Delos to a god called Pakeidokosos.⁵⁷ This name is usually seen as composite with the elements pakeidas/pakeidos and qos, whereby the latter corresponds to the divine name Qos / Qaus of Edomite origin worshipped by Nabateans, e.g., in Khirbet Tannur. In Khirbet Tannur he is represented seated on a throne flanked by bulls and holding thunderbolts, being equating him with Zeus.⁵⁸ The name Pakeidokosos is composed of theophoric names attested in sources from the 1st millennium BCE to the 1st century CE.

Combining all explanations of the Semitic root *pqd* with the deity Pakeidas from the Gerasene inscriptions, we can propose a new interpretation of the divine competences of this god. If we take into account the people speaking (and writing) Safaitic living in Gerasa and the nomads in the hinterland, we need to consider in the first place the aspects of divine protection and livestock herding as well as supervision in the sense of caretaking and divine administration of a land. Pakeidas was thus a kind of “landlord,” an overseer of his property and his people.

The association with Hera is no surprise in the context of supreme divinity, even though Pakeidas is not called “Zeus” in the Greek inscriptions. For some reason, probably concerning the field of divine responsibilities, such a correlation was not the perfect match with the field of his competences, or the deity was so bound up with his name that it was not translated into Greek. This would explain the Greek transcription only of the Semitic name Pakeidas, leaving it without any translation or interpretation with a known figure from the Greek pantheon (*interpretatio Graeca*).

⁵¹ Vincent 1940, 110–111; Dussaud 1941, 296.

⁵² McCown 1934, 181–183 (discussion on the possible interpretation of the meaning of the divine name).

⁵³ Vincent 1940, 101–106.

⁵⁴ Kraeling 1941, 8.

⁵⁵ Lichtenberger 2003, 211–212.

⁵⁶ Dussaud 1941, 296; Riedl 2005, 216.

⁵⁷ For the text dedicated to Pakeidokosos see ID 2311, <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/64757?hs=117-125>. Cf. also Vincent 1940, 102; Lichtenberger 2003, 223 together with the literature concerning the archaeological context.

⁵⁸ For the cult of Qos, cf. Healey 2001, 126–127; Alpass 2013, 261.

The case of this particular name, which was transliterated but not translated in the Greek texts, is not unique. This practice is well attested throughout the region in the time between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. A Greek inscription from Mes'ad – Tell Ahmar in the Hauran is a case in point.⁵⁹ It is a dedication placed on an altar or on a socle with visible remains of a sculpted eagle. The god to whom it is addressed is named Theos Hagios Askaras: Holy God Askaras. A. Sartre-Fauriat and M. Sartre propose an interpretation based on the Arabic term 'askar – soldier.⁶⁰ They dismiss interpretations of Askaras both as an anthroponym (in the construction “god of HN,” e.g., a famous figure in the Hauran “God of Aumos”) and as a toponym (in the construction “god of PN,” e.g., “Palmyrene gods”).⁶¹

In distant Palmyra the official and public Graeco-Aramaic text of the Tariff of Palmyra attests a divine name Rabbaseire in Greek and Rb'syr' in Palmyrene Aramaic in the context of the location of this monumental document in front of the temple of this god.⁶² His name is also enigmatic. Somehow, as in the Gerasene case, there must have been a strong attachment to this divine appellation and it was not replaced by a Greek one.⁶³

The association of a supreme local deity of non-Greek origin with the Greek Hera is attested in another part of the Near East: in Edessa. A mosaic from the 2nd or 3rd century CE shows mythological figures with their names in Old Syriac above their heads, among them Prometheus, Hera and Marelahe, Lord of the Gods.⁶⁴ He is depicted as a bearded man, with a nimbus around his head and even when seated his size differs from the other persons. He is larger than the other figures represented on the mosaic. His representation corresponds to the common image of Zeus. However, knowing the religious situation of Edessa and nearby Harran, the cultic centre of Sin, the Moon god, the designation Marelahe corresponds to Sin. This is well attested in the epigraphical material both from these two cities and from Hatra.⁶⁵ In any case, the appearance of Hera in the epigraphical material from the Graeco-Roman Near East is very rare.⁶⁶ In the coinage of Hippos, a female consort of Zeus is depicted but it is uncertain whether this is Hera.⁶⁷ In Gerasa, Hera is mentioned twice: in the inscription 1 under discussion and in the following text

⁵⁹ IGLS XVI.2 382d. The dedicator in the case of this text from the Hauran also bears a Semitic name, his patronym too is Semitic: Soaidos (related to the name of the village of Suweida?), son of Segnas.

⁶⁰ For Askaras we can propose here the etymology derived from the root *shr* from Old and common Aramaic meaning Moon/crescent and derived from the Akkadian *aškāru*, “moon crescent, first quarter”: see https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/cad_u_w.pdf (accessed on 18.02.2021), v. *uskaru*. It is also used to mean a lunar-shaped cultic object or divine emblem.

⁶¹ See the commentary to IGLS XVI.2 382d, p. 122: “*Le parallèle avec Pakeidas invite à faire d'Askaras le nom du dieu plutôt que le nom d'un fidèle, sur le modèle du « Dieu de Untel » ; P.-L. Gattier défend l'opinion inverse, qui reste possible. Mais ce nom est sans exemple et sans parallèle en Syrie.*”

⁶² For the text of Tariff of Palmyra, see Matthews 1984.

⁶³ Polish excavations from 2009 to 2011 in Palmyra revealed the probable location of this temple and the socle on which the Tariff was placed: Gawlikowski 2013, 89–90. There is a discussion about the identification of Rabbaseire with a more known theonym. One of the theories suggests the meaning “Great (one) of the Enchained.”

⁶⁴ Drijvers – Healey 1999, Cm 11.

⁶⁵ For the cult of Sin in Edessa, Harran and Hatra, see: Green 1992; Beyer 1998, H 1001; Kubiak 2016a, 344.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lichtenberger 2003, 324–325.

⁶⁷ Lichtenberger 2003, 33.

written on an architrave found in the vicinity of the Artemision.⁶⁸ Apart from these examples, there is a Greek text mentioning the goddess in a figurative relief in Suweida in the Hauran among a group of figures including Aphrodite, Athena, Hermes, Paris and Zeus.⁶⁹ She holds two ears of corn in her right hand and is wearing a crown on her head, similar to the *corona muralis* worn by Tyche. Another attestation of Hera comes from Bosra, where in a dedication she is mentioned alongside Zeus Kyrios, Zeus the Lord, and both are determined as *theoi patrooi*: the ancestral gods.⁷⁰

We do not want to enter into speculation about a possible identification of Hera with a local goddess, because we do not have any explicit source which would point to an association with a Semitic goddess.⁷¹ Her epithet in inscription 1 is very unclear. We proposed in the translation two possibilities to read the label in the gap: “consort” or “Syrian,” but these remain conjectural. We cannot exclude the reconstruction of a transcription of a Semitic label, epithet or even the name of a goddess of non-Greek origin.

The name of Hera occurs as a component of theophoric personal names used in the vast region of the East (including, for example, the distant sub-region of Susiana).⁷² Other goddesses like Artemis, Aphrodite, Athena are paradoxically represented much more frequently in the theophoric names than Hera, the consort of Zeus, while her divine husband is spread in the epigraphical material all over the region. In Gerasa, the only consort of Zeus Olympios that is attested in inscriptions is possibly Tyche,⁷³ underlining that Hera, the Greek *parhedros* of Zeus, was not widely recognized in the region.

V. Theos Arabikos and Pakeidas, the Same or Different Deities?

Pakeidas is, as mentioned, often likened by researchers to Theos Arabikos, whose name occurs in the Greek inscriptions from Gerasa. They were found in the same district of the urban area as the Pakeidas inscriptions. These are only attested in the 1st century CE whereas the Theos Arabikos inscriptions are from later periods. We can observe a change

⁶⁸ Welles 1938, Pl. 106 (insc. 17); Riedl 2005, 202.

⁶⁹ IGLS XVI. 2.304. See also commentary on the relief and the represented gods.

⁷⁰ <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/245563?hs=49-56> (accessed on 12.02.2021); IGLS XIII.1.9002. This text was dedicated by a Roman soldier, Gaius Julius Maximus of the III Legio Cyrenaica. The gods in this inscription could be the “indigenous” deities worshipped in Bosra or the divine “incomers”, i.e. the deities of his “homeland”. The second explanation is likely considering the epigraphic evidence concerning, e.g., Palmyrenes abroad (Rome, Cos, Dacia) and making dedications to the such gods as Bel, Yarhibol, Aglibol, etc. labelled “ancestral gods”.

⁷¹ IGLS XVI.2.304. For the discussion about the possible identification of the Greek goddess with a Semitic name see commentary of M. Sartre in the quoted volume of IGLS (p. 20). Zeus in this context also does not have to be equated with Baalshamin, Lord of Heavens. This Greek interpretation can also correspond to the god in the chief position, a deity-protector of the settlement, as in the case of Marelaha in Harran and Edessa.

⁷² This observation comes from a quick perusal of the database of Greek inscriptions packhum.org. For Susiana see <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/314633?hs=950-955>. The anthroponyms with the component Hera are attested in Northern Syria in Hellenistic times and in Dura-Europos. From the epigraphic evidence it can be both a male and female theophoric personal name.

⁷³ Welles 1938, 381, no. 13; Lichtenberger 2003, 208. This observation also results from the examination of the database of Greek inscriptions packhum.org using the search keyword Hera.

in the naming of the deity who in the 1st century CE was called Pakeidas and possibly from the 2nd century CE Theos Arabikos. The change of name could attest to some kind of Graecisation of a Semitic deity's name after the establishment of the *provincia Arabia*, which took the name from an ethnonym that had previously not been used as an ethnic self-designation.⁷⁴ Personal names which appear in the context of inscriptions mentioning the "Arabian God" are of Greek origin as are the names of the dedicators and their ancestors or relatives,⁷⁵ while the name of the altar "head master" of Pakeidas is Arabic and so is the name of his father. Of course, we need to take into consideration that Greek names can also be used by non-Greeks, but the fact that among the dedicators to Theos Arabikos we find no Semitic name is striking and would explain the choice of a descriptive name instead of an incomprehensible Semitic theonym or epithet as in the case of Pakeidas. As we pointed out, our knowledge about the cult of Pakeidas is based on only two texts: an inscription on a building and a votive text. He had his fixed place in the religious landscape of the city, confirmed by a cultic place and a special ritual agent of his cult. Concerning Theos Arabikos, all the inscriptions are votive, without with no intimation of ritual agents. However, one inscription mentions the dedication of a vestibule, entrance or pilasters (*παραστάς*) with altars to this deity.⁷⁶ Hence, there appears to have been a special cultic place devoted to Theos Arabikos, too. The question is only: was it the same place as for Pakeidas, or were there two different sanctuaries? They may have been one and the same deity but it is equally likely that they were two different gods. The worship of the "Arabian God" was introduced or gained popularity in the 2nd century CE among the population of Gerasa. It is worth noting that the two denominations do not appear at the same time as if there is no overlap or direct continuity.

How should we understand "Arabikos"? In our opinion, it is the deity connected to the new province, so he would be the Arabian god, divine ruler of the *provincia Arabia* more than connected to the group of people identified as Arabs. Should we approach Pakeidas and Theos Arabikos through the Nabatean, Safaitic or Edomite connection? Such an identification is possible, though far from certain at the present moment.⁷⁷

An inscription from Bosra mentions a deity called Zeus Safatenos.⁷⁸ Here in Gerasa, we have evidence of the god called Theos Arabikos. Both epithets "Arabikos" and "Safatenos" are very rare in the religious epigraphy of the Graeco-Roman Near East. "Arabikos" specifies only a deity worshipped in Gerasa, and "Safatenos" appears only in Bosra. We cannot ignore the fact that both Theos Arabikos and Zeus Safatenos were gods of high importance in the pantheons. In the case of Zeus Safatenos we might see behind this Greek interpretation the god Ruḏaw, who is mentioned very frequently in Safaitic inscriptions.⁷⁹ The designation "Theos Arabikos" underlines the uniqueness of the deity

⁷⁴ Lichtenberger 2003, 224. The title "arabikos" was held by Septimius Severus since 195 CE (Kienast 1996, 158).

⁷⁵ These are very popular names also among non-Greeks, such as: Alexandros, Philippos, Demetrios, Zenobios, etc.

⁷⁶ Welles 1938, 385, no. 20.

⁷⁷ Healey 2001, 142. He states that the inscription nr 1 mentioning Pakeidas was found in the so-called Nabatean temple, but the association of this divine figure with the Nabatean set of gods is very obscure.

⁷⁸ IGLS XIII.1.9001; <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/245562?hs=35-40%2C99-104> (accessed on 27.01.2022).

⁷⁹ Bennet 2014, 44–45.

and his high position, similar to that of Zeus Arabikos. He is THE Arabian god.⁸⁰ We do not intend here to go along with the previously held view that Theos Arabikos may be identified as Dushara, the god of the Nabateans and of their royal family.⁸¹ It is tempting, in view of his high position in the pantheon, to make the connection with the royal house and his worship in Bosra, but the epigraphical data we have at our disposal is not sufficient to prove such an identification. The Nabateans worshipped two other gods each of whom could justifiably be called the Arabic god. First of these is Shai 'al-Qaum and the second 'lh š'bw identified as the Protector-Fortune of the Nabateans (*gd nbtw*).⁸² The first deity was interpreted in the Greek texts with Lycurgus and was an important deity among soldiers.⁸³ He is also mentioned in the Safaitic inscriptions. The second god was likewise of some importance, becoming a protective deity of the Nabatean people.⁸⁴ However, it is again one of many possibilities, assuming a fluid use of designations of deities. Without any clear reference or any mythological or ritual text a direct attribution or identification remains speculative.

VI. Conclusions and Outlook

It is likely to associate Pakeidas and Theos Arabikos as one the same deity. After the creation of the *provincia Arabia* by Trajan, this particular god could have gained the name “the Arabian god” in the wake of the new geo-political situation.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, through the earlier connections Pakeidas must have been associated with the non-Greek inhabitants, labelled Arabs, of Gerasa and its hinterland. We have argued that the Gerasene god Pakeidas is related to a Semitic deity responsible for the divine supervision, caretaking and administration of the land. The inscriptions related to this deity are from the 1st century CE, i.e., before the creation of the Roman *provincia Arabia*. The inscriptions were found in an area close to the later Artemision, an area in which a temple of the 1st century BC was also erected, possibly under Nabataean influence. It cannot be ruled out that Pakeidas was a kind of “divine governor” of the Nabataean kings. Do we have here a divine protector of the Nabatean rulers? Aramaic Nabatean texts offer a formula 'lh mr'n² – god of our lord followed by the name of the king (Aretas or Rabbel) or simply: 'lh rb'l – god of Rabbel.⁸⁶ After the establishment of the Roman province, the deity lost its close affiliation with the Nabataean royal house and became an “Arab” cult of the *provincia Arabia*. If this scenario holds true, the linguistic “Graecisation” of a Semitic cult can be put into a local context, less subject to broader cultural trends but rather to the political situation at the end of the Nabataean kingdom.

⁸⁰ For “Arabic” or “Arabian” identities of gods in Gerasa see also Andrade 2013, 165.

⁸¹ E.g., Vincent 1940; Wenning 1994, 27.

⁸² Both known from the inscriptions of Palmyra: CIS II.3973 and CIS II.3991.

⁸³ His cult arrived with a Nabatean cavalryman in Palmyra, where he is attested as a “god who does not drink wine” (or rather “fermented drinks”): Healey 2001; Alpass 2013.

⁸⁴ Healey 2001, 154.

⁸⁵ On the regional impact of the creation of the *provincia Arabia*, cf. Lichtenberger 2011.

⁸⁶ Healey 2001, 154.

Abbreviations

CIS – J.-B. Chabot (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Pars Secunda, vol. III: *Inscriptiones Palmyrenae*, Paris 1926–1927.

IGLS – L. Jalabert et al., *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, Beyrouth–Paris 1929–

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