A Nabataean funerary inscription from the Blaihed Museum

This paper presents a study of an unpublished Nabataean funerary inscription from Dumat\(^\text{a}\) al-Jandal in Saudi Arabia. The inscription, in the Blaihed Museum private collection in al-Jawf District in Saudi Arabia, is an important addition to the study of Nabataean funerary inscriptions, as it gives the rst and only indication of the sale of a tomb, a practice that is considered abnormal for the Nabataeans. Parts of the inscription are missing or eroded. It is our hope that the publication of this article will lead to further research concerning the missing parts of the inscription.

Keywords: Nabataean inscriptions, funeral inscriptions, Dumat\(^\text{a}\) al-Jandal, Blaihed Museum, Semitic inscriptions

Introduction

A considerable number of Nabataean funerary inscriptions are spread over a wide area of the Nabataean kingdom. Despite the fact that the majority of these inscriptions, especially those found in Sinai and in aur\(^\text{a}\)n, are brief and short, providing only personal names, a considerable number of funerary inscriptions reveal a good deal of information concerning the tomb and its assets. Speci- cally, thirty-nine tomb inscriptions containing legal formu-la\(^e\) have so far been recovered, thirty- ve of which were found in Hegra, two in Petra, one in al-Jawf and another in Madeba (Healey 1993).

Long funerary inscriptions generally contain several clauses that vary from one inscription to another and may contain the following: the tomb’s owner, the inheritances, the protection clause, the penalty (curse, nes), the date and the sculptor’s name. We may nd some of these clauses but not all in the same inscription, with the possibility of their order changing from one inscription to another (1993).

Normally, Nabataean funerary texts emphasise the restrictions on the use of the tomb and its inalienability through protection clauses (1993: 45). Such clauses may contain the following:

- the prohibition of burying any stranger to the family in the tomb; e.g. CIS II 219 reads: \(\text{wl'}\ r\ \text{nw's} \ \text{d}y\ dy\ \text{y}tqbr\ bh, \ “\text{and no stranger has the right to be buried in it}”\);
- the prohibition of writing any deed of entitlement and against burying any non-relative in the tomb; e.g. CIS II 210 reads: \(\text{wl'}\ rsy\ “\text{n}w's\ lr\ \text{m}k\t\ bkpr\ dhn\ q\ klh\ w'l'\ lmqbr\ bh\ “\text{nw's}\ r\ q\ lhn}\ “sdq\ b'dsdq, “\text{and no one has the right to write for this tomb any deed of entitlement or burying in it any non-relative other than by hereditary title}”\);
- the prohibition of buying or selling the tomb; e.g. CIS II 208 reads: \(\text{w'dy}\ l’\ \text{y}tqbr\ bkpr\ dhn\ lhn}\ “sdq\ b’dsdq\ w’dy\ l’\ \text{y}tzn\ w’l’\ \text{y}rhn\ kpr\ dnh, “\text{and no one shall be buried in this tomb except by hereditary title, nor shall this tomb be sold nor given in pledge}”.

Penalties consisting of nes (e.g. CIS II 211; 212), curses (e.g. CIS II 197) or both (e.g. CIS II 206) apply to anyone violating the sanctity of the tomb. In the case of nes, disrupters pay the dues to the king (e.g. CIS II 199) or his local representative “the governor” (e.g. JS 38), to the deity (e.g. CIS II 198) or to both (e.g. CIS II 206).

Our inscription, the subject of this study, is different from all the funerary inscriptions hitherto recovered. This inscription does not regard the tomb as a family property, as other inscriptions do; rather, it describes the sale of a tomb to an unrelated person. The inscription, which belongs to the epigraphical collection of the Blaihed private museum in al-Jawf in Saudi Arabia, was found, as
mentioned above, at Dʿumat al-Jandal in al-Jawf Province. Unfortunately no further information on the context in which this inscription was found is available in the Blai-hed Museum.

Dumatʿ al-Jandal

Dʿumat al-Jandal is a historical city located in north-western Saudi Arabia in al-Jawf Province. It is located about 45 km from Sakakah, the main city of al-Jawf. The name Dʿumat al-Jandal literally means “Dʿumah of the Stone”, as

Archaeological remains yield Babylonian, Nabataean, Arabian and Islamic records, which show that Dʿumat al-Jandal was one of the most ancient settlements in Arabia; it played an important role as a trading centre on the trade routes which connected South Arabia with Mesopo- tamia and Syria (1988: 150). The city was known to the Assyrians as Adummatu, describing it as “the seat of the King of the Arabs”. Excavations in the city have indicated a prosperous community during the time of the Nabataeans (Charloux & Loreto 2013: 13; Loreto 2012).

Historical evidence shows strong Nabataean occupation in Marid castle at Dʿumat al-Jandal; graf ti, pottery and painted Nabataean remains were found around the castle (al-Muaikel 1988: 17). A Nabataean dedication inscription from the al-Jawf area was published by Savi-
gnac and Starcky (1957: 196–215) and contains a dedi-
cation of a sanctuary made by a person called ʿnmw, commander of some unidenti ed fort. According to al-
Muaikel (1989: 17) this fort was the Marid castle of Dʿumat al-Jandal, and he uses this in support of his

The city of Dʿumat al-Jandal was annexed to Provincia Arabia in AD 106 (al-Sudairi 1995: 49). During the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, the governor of Syria Cornelius Palma annexed the Nabataean kingdom on behalf of the emperor, and the old Nabataean king-
dom became part of the new Provincia Arabia. The
details of Rome’s annexation of Nabataea are not known, but some epigraphic evidence suggests that a military invasion, commanded by Cornelius Palma, swept the region. More specifically Roman forces seem to have come from Syria and Egypt, as is shown by a papyrus found in Egypt (Bowersock 1971: 224–231; Taylor

The inscription

The inscription is carved on a rectangular block of sand-stone measuring 52 cm high and 165 cm wide (Fig. 1). It consists of six lines; some parts of the rst, second, fourth, fth and sixth lines are missing, but this does not prevent us from providing an acceptable reading and translation of the text. We therefore suggest the following reading and translation:

Transcription

1. dnh qbr w[w[n?] dy mtqr qbr qysw dy zbn {:. }{yn br}
2. {m}ly(k) br b[sl]m br ʿmyw mn qysw br [mt]w
3. rm k lyqt rm dy yhw ‘yn dnh wbnwhy mn
4. ʿrwhy w rhm mtqbryn bbr br wqbryn b[h]
5. c d ʿ[m ʿb][b]c b 29 bsbt snt 13 l . . .
6. tlw br ms[rmw . . . . .]

Translation

This is the tomb and the [eternal] dwelling called qysw’s tomb that {. }{yn son of} {. }{m}ly(k) son of ‘b[sl]m son of ʿmyw bought from qysw son of [mt]w . (These) are invio-
lable according the nature of inviolability. This ‘yn and his sons after him and their descendants may be buried in this tomb, and they may bury (members of their family) in it forever, on Wednesday on 29 in snt in the year 13 of . . . , tlw son of msl[rmw . . . .].

Comment

Nabataean funerary inscriptions are of great importance, in addition to their main purpose as the proclamation of a tomb’s property. This is because they reveal religious, social and, to some extent, legal traditions, namely, patterns of inheritance, engagement and obligations and the transmission of the property.

This funerary inscription is, as it has been indicated, a new addition to our knowledge regarding Nabataean funer-
arial tradition, as it refers to a cession of tomb and an (eter nal) dwelling by sale to a non-relative, which gives the rst and only indication of such a practice in Nabataean inscriptions. A funerary inscription from Hegra (CIS II 204) contains a tomb cession by donation to a relative: a man transfers the absolute ownership of a tomb to his wife (Healey 1993: 191–192). We note that tomb cessions are also common in Palmyra. Certain Palmyrene tombs have inscriptions, the so-called “concession texts”, which allowed the owner to sell portions of the tomb (Piacentini 2005: 250).
The Nabataean funerary inscription.

Fig. 1.
The Nabataean funerary inscription.

The inscription comprises the following main clauses:
- the proclamation of the act. This contains two main elements: the nature of the property, which is the subject of the inscription, and the property’s name;
- the transfer of ownership to the purchaser;
- the transmission of the right of deposition on the tomb;
- the date;
— the sculptor’s name.

Line 1:
The text starts with the traditional clause which occurs, routinely, in similar Nabataean funerary inscriptions: the nature of the property—which is the subject of the inscription—and the property’s name. This refers to a tomb (qbr’) and an eternal dwelling (‘wn†).

The rst noun, qbr†, is of widespread use in Nabataean inscriptions. qbr† and kpr† seem to be alternatives in Nabataean, and the occurrence of the two terms in CIS II 197 confirms this suggestion. kpr is probably of Liyianite origin and its use may not have extended to the north of the Nabataean territory (Healey 1993: 69). The noun kpr† also occurs in a Syriac inscription found near Serrin and dated to AD 73 (Pognon 1907: 15–22). The use of kpr† to designate a tomb has no cognates in other Aramaic dialects.

‘wn† occurs here for the second time in Nabataean since it is attested before in CIS II 202. It is the equivalent of the Syriac ‘awwana and the JAr. ),$ (al-Theeb 2000: 5). Healey (1993: 186) thinks that ‘wn† could be an Iranian loan, and it seems to be a euphemism analogous to such euphemisms as byt ṣim ‘house of eternity’. ‘wn† is here referring to a tomb as an eternal abode, or part of a tomb. mtqr† is the participle s.m., an ethp₅el form of the root qr† meaning “to call” (Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995: 1026–1027).

qbr qysw meaning “qysw’s tomb”, is an interesting example of tomb nomenclature. It is unique in Nabataean for a tomb to have a name. Note, however, that there is evidence of plots of land having names in the Babatha archive (Yadin et al. 2002).

zbn is perfect pe₃al 3p.s.m. The verb zbn has two meanings: “to sell” when it occurs in the form pa₅el and “to
buy" when it occurs in the form pe'al (Cantineau 1930–1932: 67). Here the verb undoubtedly refers to the form pe'al because zbn is followed by the seller’s name, then by the preposition mn meaning "from", then by the buyer’s name.

The last two visible letters in this line (n) seem to be the beginning of the name of the purchaser and we assume a [br] has also been lost at the end of the line.

**Line 2:**

This line contains the names of the seller and buyer, and the lineage. The reading of some parts in this line is doubtful; the seller’s patronymic mlk is certain, while the reading of his grandfather’s name is uncertain: the rst, second and fth letters (‘, b, m) appear to be clear, the third and the fourth letters are badly damaged. We may rebuild the missing letters as s and l to produce the personal name ‘bslm. Indeed, a careful review of the Nabataean personal names starting with ‘ and b and ending with m gave only the name ‘bslm (Negev 1991: n. 29, 10). Regarding the letter s, we can identify the vertical stroke and, with less certainty, the lower one extending from the rst stroke to the right. As for the I, confusion between the damage on the stone and what might be part of the vertical stroke is definitely a possibility.

The rest letter of the seller’s name is dubious, but the naming of the tomb as qbr qysw, in the rst line, makes the reading of the seller’s name as qysw conceivable. The patronymic of this qysw is also suspicious, as the rst letter of this name is partially damaged and we can only identify its right part. This letter seems to be m. The second letter could be read as s or t, while the third letter may be read as k or r; the fourth and the fth are, clearly, w and . The name could therefore be read as mskw, mtkw, msrw or mtrw; mtrw is the most likely. It is a new personal name in Nabataean, equivalent to Arabic/matr, meaning "to be cast away; deducted".

**Line 3:**

The reading of this line is certain. The saying rm k lyqt rm “inviolable according to the nature of inviolability” is a well-known protection clause that occurs in similar Nabataean inscriptions. rm meaning “inviolable, sacred place” occurs in some protection clauses in other Nabataean funerary inscriptions. The term is equivalent to the Arabic, /aram, aram, the Hebrew and the Syriac arma (Healey 1993: 72; Lemaire 1999; al-Theeb 2000: 103).

lyqt is a feminine singular noun that occurs in other Nabataean tomb inscriptions (CIS II 199, 206), and in all the papyri, except one, of the Dead Sea region (Yardeni 2000). Healey (1993: 72) considers lyqt to be an Arabic, equivalent to / allaqat, which means "nature, character, characteristics". In the Nabataean dictionary al-Theeb translated it as "customs or law" (2000: 97). The term is preceded by the preposition k, meaning “according to”. For Gawlikowski (1982: 303), the whole phrase—rm k lyqt rm—means “according to the custom of con-secration of the Nabatu”.

From the palaeographic point of view, we note that q is used inconsistently in this inscription. A closed form of q appears, in the noun lyqt, alongside the open form, which appears in the other words of the inscription. Patterns of a closed q occur in funerary inscriptions from Hegra (Healey 1993: nos. 8', 16', 30'4,5).

**Line 4:**

The reading and translation of this line are certain. Similar clauses are frequent in Nabataean funerary inscriptions from Hegra. This clause con rm the transfer of the right of the tomb property to the new owner and to his sons and descendants as legal inheritors after him.

rwhy is a sing. m. noun +suff. 3p.m.s., meaning “his posterity”. The term is the equivalent of Arabic /a ar, the Hebrew ואר and the Akkadian a ruti (see Healey 1993: 116).

mtqbryn is a participle ethp/el pl. m. of the root qbr meaning “to bury”, qbryn is the active participle pl. m. of the same root.

**Line 5:**

Reading dif culties arise again here; the beginning of this line is extremely weather-beaten. We can detect some letters, but not all, of the phrase c’d[m’b’]rb’C. This reading seems to be reasonable compared with similar clauses in other Nabataean funerary inscriptions.

This line comprises the date clause, which is frequent in the funerary texts. We would expect a king’s name in the missing part at the end of the inscription, but this cannot be read.

**Line 6:**

This line contains the sculptor’s name and his patronymic but the last part of the patronymic is missing. We can restore it as tllw br ms[l’m’ b’]rb’C. This may be followed, as usual, by the verb c bd “made”, or by the noun ‘mn or psl indicating the profession of the man who “made” the tomb, a “sculptor” or a “stonemason”.

**Conclusion**

This inscription is an interesting new addition to the repertoire of Nabataean funerary texts. It concerns
proclamation of the sale of a tomb and dwelling, a proclamation hitherto unknown in other funerary inscriptions. qbr qysw meaning “qysw’s tomb”, is an interesting way of naming a tomb. The fact that a tomb is named like this is unique in Nabataean. Some usual clauses occurring in funerary inscriptions are missing here, such as the penalty and the price clauses. Although some parts of the inscription are missing or weather-beaten, the suggested reading seems acceptable. We hope the publication of the text will lead to further suggestions concerning the missing part of the inscription.

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**Sigla**


JS Nabataean inscription in Jaussen & Savignac 1909.

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**References**


