Saudi Arabia

al-Ruwāfah

47. The archaeological site of al-Rawwāfah/al-Ruwāfah is placed 75 km southwest of Tabûk in modern day Saudi Arabia.¹

The first mention of the monumental inscriptions of al-Ruwāfah is found in a report of journey of the 19th century,² while the discovery of a bilingual inscription (texts A, B and C), a Nabataean inscription (text D) and a Greek inscription (text E) came about only at the beginning of the 20th century.³

The bilingual text (A, B and C) is engraved on a lintel placed at the main entrance of the temple, while the Greek text (C) continues (lines 7-8) on the column that supported the left far end of the epi-style ending (lines 9-10) on the right column of the door. The other Nabataean inscription (text D) was found near the temple, while the

¹ The correct spelling of the toponym is al-Ruwāfah (cf. Macdonald et al. 2015, 44 fn. 84).

² The description is given by Burton (1879, 1: 239) who says that some beduins showed him the fragment of a Nabataean inscription, which had been brutally broken, and of two other two slices that were lying on the ground.

³ A. Musil (1926, 184-9, 258, 291, 312) came to the site on 25 June 1910 saying that he had found the ruins of a sanctuary and the inscriptions at issue. Later, H. St. J.B. Philby (1951, 448-59), staying at al-Ruwāfah from 20 to 24 January 1951, claimed to have found a fragmentary Greek inscription; when he came back the following year, he could no longer find either the Nabataean inscription or the Greek fragment, which had probably been moved to the collection of Khalil al-Faraj. The Greek inscriptions (texts A, C and E) were published by Seyrig (1957, 259-61; SEG 19 no. 899).
Greek inscription (E) presumably comes from the capital of the column that supported the other part of the lintel.

**Dimensions**  
Texts A, B and C (6 lines) length 230 cm 1st line: height of letters 2.5 cm; 2nd line 1.7 cm; 4th line (Nabataean text) 2.2 cm; 5th line 2.5 cm² Text C, lines 7-8 height 8 cm, length 35 cm; lines 9-10 height 8.5 cm, length 24.7 cm, height of letters 2.5 cm

**Dating**  
2nd CE (164-169 CE)

**Bibliography**  
SEG 45 no. 1995; Seyrig 1957, 259-61; Altheim, Stiehl 1969, 5: 548-51; Milik 1972, 54-8; Bowersock 1975, 513-22; Graf 1978, 9-11; Quellen, 295-302; Macdonald et al. 2015, 44-56

**Text and translation**

**A**

1) Υπερ αιωνιου διαμονης κρατησεως (των θειοτατων κοσμοκρατορων (Σεβαστων μεγιστων (Α)ρμενιου Αντωνεινου και Δουκιου
2) [Αυρηλιου Ουηρου] (παις πολεμος) θνος lacuna of approximately 14 letters] ΣΤΑ καθειδρυσεν μετα προτο
3) lacuna of approximately 5 letters?] και εκ (τειντο] lacuna of 25 letters Koi το [lacuna]

**B**

4) 'l šlm' dy mt [lacuna of approximately 30 letters mrqs] 'wrlys 'ntwnyns wlwqys 'wrlys [wr]s dy '[---]' [lacuna] dnh nws' dy 'bdt (š)rt tmwdw qdmy šrk(t)h lmhw' [š](w)h mn ydhm wmšmš(h) [ml']l'm
5a) [lacuna] wḥp(y)t [lacuna of approximately 12 letters] '[dw] nts (') (d/r/w)[.]ty [lacuna of approximately 10 letters] w(r)mšhm

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4 Milik 1972, 55. The dimensions were provided by H.St.J.B. Philby who ignores lines 3 and 6.

5 The transcription and the translation of the present texts follow the reading of Macdonald et al. (2015, 50-1 and 54-5), and are adapted to the transcription conventions here employed.
C

5b) Επί ηεική καὶ αἰώνιω διάμονη αυτοκρατορῶν Καίσα(ρ)ω(ν) ΚΑΙΣΑ(ρ)ΚΟ(ω)Ν [Αυ]ρηλίου ΑΥΡΗΛΙΟΥ
6) καὶ (Λ)ουκί(ου) Ὀψιν Σέβ(αστον) ἈΡΜ(ε)ΝΙΑ(κ)ΩΝ [ΜΗΔΙ]ΚΩΝ
(ΠΑ)ΡΘΙΚ(ΩΝ) ΜΕ(Γ)Ι(Σ)ΤΩΝ καὶ τοῦ πα(ντος) (ΟΙ)ΚΟΥ ΑΙ(ΤΩΝ) ΤΟ(Ν)ΟΥ ΟΘ(ΑΙ)ΜΟΥ(ΔΗ)ΝΩΝ ΕΘΩΝΟΣ [lacuna]
7) τον νέον συνετελ(ε)ν
8) καὶ το ιερόν καθ(ε)ιρωσεν
9) [...] Κλαυδίου Μοδεστοῦ
10) [...] (β) αντιστράτη(γου)

D

1) (d)nh (by)τ’ ὅ (š)’ dt ’pk dct
2) (’)l/l(h’) (mg)yd(w) dy mn rb tw
3) l’(l’h’) ’lh [...(m)...(k)...]h(p)y t m(r’n’ [ ] hgmwn’
4) m(r’n’) (’) […] (h)gmwn’
5) (.) […] (’)
mnw

E

1) (E)/(C)YCΘA(l)/(T)Ο(Y) (Θ)[αμ]ου δήνων-
2) ν ψυλῆς Ροβαθου οἰκοδο-
3) μήσαν το ιερόν τούτο

A

1) For the eternal duration of the power of the most divine rulers of the world, the great (A)ugu(st)i, (A)rme(n)iaci, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius
2) [Au]relius Verus [lacuna] (m)/atoire] of the [T](ham)ud has founded [lacuna] with the enco(u)ragment
3) and through [lacuna] Quintus [lacuna]
4) For the well-being of [lacuna Marcus] Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius (Ver)us who [lacuna]. This is the temple which the (n)atio of Thamud made, the commanders of their natio, for the existence of which it was set in place by their hand and their worship [will be there, for ever]
5a) [lacuna] and with the encouragemen[t] of [lacuna] [A](dv)entus [lacuna] and at their request

5b) For the victory and the perpetual continuance of the emperors, the Caesa(r)s, [M](a)rcus [Au]relius, Antoninus
6) and (L)uc(i)us (A)urelius Verus, Aug(usti), Arm(e)n(i)aci, [Me] dici, (Pa)rth(i)ci Maximi and their wh(ole) (ho)use the natio of the Th(a)mu(d) [lacuna]
7) have comple(te)d the temple 8) and ha cons(e)crated the sanctuary.
9) [... of Cl]audius Modestus 10) [...] Propra(e)tor

1) (T)his is the (temp)le which (Š)a’a’dat, the priest of
2) (’I)[a]h(ā) son of (Mu)ḡīḏ(ā) who is from (the tribe) Roḇaṯō, [m] ade
3) for ’Ila(hā), the god of[...m)...(k)...] the en(c)ouragement of
4) o(ur) Lord [...] the (g)overnor
5) [...] (’A)manō

1) (E)/(C)ΥCΘΑ(I)/(T)Ο(Y) of the tribe of Thamud
2) of the tribe of Robathos they bu-
3) -ilt this sanctuary
Commentary

Bilingual inscription (A, B, C)

It contains a dedication to commemorate the feats of the emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Verus in the Near East; the campaign against Vologases IV, who attacked the Roman Empire in 162-166, is mentioned. The inscription indicates that the temple was erected by the Thamud tribe between the Roman victory over the Parthians and the death of Lucius Verus, so between 166 and 169 CE.\(^6\)

The semidivine image of the two winning Augusti, protectors of the Armenians (Σεβαστῶν μεγίστων Ἀρμενιακῶν), is highlighted by the label τῶν θειότατων κοσμοκρατόρων\(^7\) to whom Milik maintains the Nabataean mtmkyn\(^8\) corresponds. Conversely, Macdonald et al. (2015, 50), after a new revision of the epigraph, read only mt. As is clear from the two texts, the temple was built by the Thamud tribe. Even though the reference to Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος is difficult to read, we have a clear connection with it in the Nabataean part in which the sentence šrkt tmwdw\(^9\) is mentioned. The substantive šrkt was translated by Milik (1972, 56) as ‘fédération’ rather than as ‘tribe’.\(^10\)

On the basis of its mentions by Ptolemy and Stephanus of Byzantium some scholars have suggested that the term Saracen originated from the name of the tribe at issue through Greek Σαρακηνοί.\(^11\) Macdonald (1995, 98-100) identified šrkh with ‘military unit’, but this implies that at al-Ruwāfah the Greek term ἔθνος took on the meaning of ‘a

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\(^{6}\) Graf 1978, 10.

\(^{7}\) Other two dedications to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus come from Philadelphia (Amman), in an inscription dating back to 161-169 (IGLS 21,2 no. 10), and in a text from Gerasa dating back to 163 (CIG no. 4464); in both epigraphs the two leaders are called Αὐτοκράτορ.

\(^{8}\) If the reading is right, it is a participle form from the root tmk ‘the rulers of the whole world (said of two Roman emperors)’, ‘to support’ (DNWSI, 1221). The root is used in Hebrew tāmak meaning ‘to take hold of’ (Gesenius 1846, 872 = DGes, 1444; KAHAL, 659-60), so in Akk. tamāḫu, also tamāku, with the same meaning (CAD XVI-II, 107; AHw III, 1312).

\(^{9}\) Actually, in the Greek version there is not a clear mention of Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος since during the recovery of Musil the stone had already deteriorated; in fact, Philby himself did not include this construction in his copy (Seyrig 1957, 260). This is also apparently confirmed by Altheim and Stiehl (1969, 5: 24) who do not mention it in their transcription of the epigraph.

\(^{10}\) Cf. Ar. šāraka ‘to share, to take part, to participate’, Syr. šrek ‘to be left, to end up in a state’ (Payne Smith 1903, 598b; Sokoloff 2009, 1608-9), also Akk. šarāku ‘to make a votive offering, to grant, to entrust’ (CAD XVII, 40; AHw III, 1183-4).

group of people united in some way’ as in Pseudo-Hyginus. Milik does not specify that the first letters in line 3 do not begin at the left edge where the words of lines 1-2 are all aligned.

In the Nabataean text, after the references to Antonius and Verus, Milik originally reconstructs ‘rmny’ ‘Armenians’, but Macdonald points out that there is not enough space between m and final ‘order to recreate the ethnonym. After that there is the term mws ‘temple’, a clear loanword from Greek ναός; the latter is not visible in section A where only the verb καθείδρυσεν (< *καθδρύω) ‘to settle, establish’ (but Nabataean ‘bd ‘to do’) remains.

At the end of line 4 the verb šmš appears, here in pa‘el form meaning ‘to serve’ in the sense of ‘divine service in the sanctuaries’, the root was subsequently used by Christian Assyrians to identify the diaconus.

In line 5a there is the verbal name ḥfyt that must not be confused with the Aramaic root ḥpy ‘to cover a surface’; it is loanword from Arabic ḥafīy bihi ‘to show someone honour, kindness, to manifest joy’ = Gr. προτροπη. In the same line Milik reconstructs ‘ntstys ‘dwnts

12 In De munitionibus castrorum (§29 and §19, 43), a work probably dated to the period of the inscription of al-Ruwāfah, the term natio = Gr. ἔθνος is employed with the acceptance of military unit comprising particular ethnic groups. In Wadd. no. 2196 there is στρατηγοῦ νομάδων, a title referred to an Arab leader; these nomads erected a statue for an imperial legatus of the province (Wadd. no. 2203): οἱ ἀπὸ ἔθνους νομάδων. In this case the term ἔθνος refers to a ‘military unity’ of nomads, as it is clear from another inscription from Haaran (like the previous two texts) in which we read παρεμβολή νομάδων translated as ‘escadrons de nomades’ (PPAES IIIA, 752).

13 Macdonald et al. 2015, 50 fn. 120. In addition, Milik, after the quotation of Κοίντος, reconstructs the expression: [Ἀντιστίου Ἀδουεντου πρεσβευτου Σεβαστῶν ἀντιστρατέγου...] identifying the legatus Quintus Antista Adventus.

14 Macdonald et al. 2015, 50 fn. 122.

15 The word is also employed in Palmyrene, Galilean Aramaic and Syriac indicating the citadel, ‘a palace area of a tell’ (DNWSI, 723).

16 In Com., BA ysansūnēh (Dan 7,10), Pal. (PAT, 416) ‘to serve’; in Syr. šames also ‘to provide, to recite’, while in JBA, PTA, and Gal. šmš + ‘m ‘to lie with, copulate’ (Jastrow 1903, 1602; Payne Smith 1903, 585; Sokoloff 2009, 1576; Cook, Qumran, 239; DJ-PA, 559a; DJBA, 1162a; DNWSI, 1168).

17 Cf. Syr. mšmšayā and Ar. šammās ‘deacon, sacristan’, he who serves Mass in the Christian oriental churches’ rituals. The root, which may be confused with Sem. šms/š ‘sun’, is of uncertain origin. It seems without doubt to be of Egyptian origin or even an Egyptian loanword šms ‘to serve’, rather than from the root meaning ‘sun’ in the sense of ‘to serve the sun!’ (Klein 1987, 668). Cf. Sem. *šms – Pro. Afro-As. *šam- ‘sun’ linked to the root meaning ‘to burn, to shine’ (HSED nos. 2328 and 2329).

18 DNWSI, 394-5.

19 Lane, 604-5. Cf. Arabic ḥifāyah (pl. ḥufawā’) ‘care, attention’. In a bilingual Greek-Palmyrene inscription the term ḥpyw = Gr. σπουδή is found (DNWSI, 395).
hgmwn’, i.e. legatus Quintus Antistius Adventus who is identified through the title of hgmwn ‘governor, leader’; hgmwn is evidently a loanword from Greek ἡγεμών. Macdonald does not agree with this reading and, conversely, he points out that there are two t separated by a wide lacuna and in the space between ḥfyt and ḏwnts about 13 letters fit in, too many to reconstruct what Milik proposed. At the end of the line we read the verb rmṣ probably meaning ‘to pacify’, used only in Nabataean with this meaning, according to Milik, who proposed this interpretation, it is a loanword coming from Arabic ramaṣa bayna ‘to make peace between’, ‘réconcilier des ennemis, mettre la paix entre eux’. By contrast, Macdonald suggests that this translation is philologically impossible because here ramaṣa is not followed by bayna, but by the plural pronoun -hm whose translation ‘made peace between them’ appears to be unacceptable; so, according to Macdonald the form is a maṣdār, i.e. ramṣ and the sentence wa-ramṣ-hum would mean ‘and at their request’.

The text C includes the name of L. Claudius Modestus who probably was a governor of Provincia Arabia in the 2nd century.

Inscriptions D and E

The two texts describe the building of the sanctuary. The Nabataean section (D) mentions š’dt (a name that recurs in no. 39), probably a minister who built the sanctuary. In the inscription we notice the term ‘pkl (also ‘pkl’), a loanword from Akkadian apkallu (< Sumerian ab-gal) used in Nabataean, Palmyrene and Hatraean meaning ‘reli-

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20 He was legatus of the legion VI Ferrata in Syria Palaestina and commanded a legion, the II Adiutrix, in the war against the Parthian Empire (161-166). Probably from 165 to 167 he was governor of Arabia Petraea and he is cited in an epigraph from Bosra (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum III no. 92) and in another from Gerasa (SEG 7 no. 822).

21 Macdonald et al. 2015, 51.

22 DNWSI, 1078. More generally the root rmṣ in used in JBA ‘to wink, to drip’ and in LJLA and Sam. ‘to embroider, to set (gems)’ (Jastrow 1903, 1483; DJBA, 1088b; Tal, Sam, 839).

23 Kazimirski 1860, 1: 924-5.

24 See Macdonald et al. 2015, 51 fn. 126 and Macdonald 2009, 11-12.

25 The name may refer to the consul named in 155 CE in the Acts of Arval as frater (see Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum VI no. 2086). If this identification is right, he would be Claudius Modestus who became consul in 152 CE, as suggested a mutilated inscription from Beneventum (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum IX no. 1574). According to some scholars, on the contrary, he could be the father of the governor of Arabia (for a detailed analysis of the question cf. Camodeca 1983, 207-12).
gious functionary, priest’ and ‘exorcist-priest’ too. The personal name mgdyd comes from Arabic muğid, another form of the name mgyd and mgdy (see no. 36). The god ‘Ilahā, to whom the temple is dedicated, seems to have assumed a special significance for the tribe, whose name rbwtw (/roḇaṭō/) = Gr. Poḇaθou may be a literal translation of al-Ruwāfah.

In the inscription E the initial sequence, which Milik originally read CIOCΩAIΩI (on the copy of Philby), turns out to be problematic in its interpretation.

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26 PAT, 342; DNWSI, 95-6


28 Milik 1972, 58.

29 Bowersock 1971, 231. The name appears in Not. Dign. [occ.] [or.] 34.27 as Robatha.

30 According to Van den Branden it could be a graphic representation of the Arab custom to cut the hair and to shave the temples, in fact, considering O rather than Θ, he reconstructs the word σισόη translating it as ‘manière de couper les cheveux en rond’, also ‘roll of hair’ (LSJ, 1601); but this suggestion proves to be contrived (Macdonald et al. 2015, 54 and fn. 138). For further considerations, see Graf 1978, 10.