

Lebanon

Sidon

48. The inscription comes from Sidon. It was discovered in 1866 in a garden near the castle of St. Louis, in which there were a lot of fragments of columns and residues of marble belonging to the same construction of the stone in question.¹

The form of the Nabataean letters is typical of the classical period, between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, although here ' has an altered writing (for example, see the ' of the third line). (Plate X, no. 2)

Dimensions height 15 cm; length 14 cm

Dating 1st BCE (4 BCE?)

Bibliography De Saulcy 1867, 9-14; Renan 1868, 537-9; *VIS*, 113-4, no. 7; Levy 1869, 435-40; *CIS* II no. 160; *RES* nos. 482.1, 2092.1; Roche 1996, 75-7; Nehmé 2003, 4-6; *Quellen*, 131

Text and translation

1) *d' rb't' dy['bd ---]*

2) *'srtg' br zw[---]*

3) *ldwšr' 'lh[---]*

4) *5 lhrtt[---]*

1 De Saulcy 1867, 9. The epigraph was found about 5 metres away from the south door of the city. Littmann (*PPAES* IVA, 4) suggests that the inscription has been engraved on the jamb of a door or on an altar rather than on an architrave.

- 5) Ζωίλου στρατηγος [---]
6) -σεν

- 1) This is the *rb't'* that [made ---]
2) the strategist son of Zū[---]
3) in honour of Dūšarā god of[---]
4) 5 of Areta[---]
5) (son of) Zoilos, strategist, [---]
6) -

Commentary

In line 1 the word *rb't'* appears. It is a noun, found only in Nabataean in five inscriptions,² whose meaning has been interpreted in many different ways.³

In Palmyrene the term *rbw'h* is registered in an inscription on a slab inside the tomb of Malkō, in the necropolis located south-west of Palmyra, identifying an 'alcove' at the bottom of which there are some burial recesses.⁴

From a philological point of view, in Arabic *raba'a* means 'to gallop', 'to graze the grass in spring'.⁵ In the *fa'ala* form *rabba'a* means

2 At Ḥarabā (VAS, 195, 77 = RES no. 88), Bosra (RES no. 2092), Tell al-Šuqāfiyyah (found in 1982, published in 1988 and republished in 1990 by Jones et al. 1988, 47-57; Fiema-Jones 1990, 239-47), Petra (found in 1981 and published by Hammond 1996, 132) and Kos (see no. 51).

3 For Renan (1868, 539) the root of the word, which defines a square object, may derive from the Aramaic *rb'*, to compare to a sort of cubic *naos*, a κλίνη 'bed, couch' (Latin *pulvinar* on which the statue of the god was laid down to offer him a banquet, *lettis-ternio*), but it could also be a synonym of *bayt* 'house', 'temple'. De Vogüé translates it as 'altar', 'base or votive tablet' (VIS, 113-4). Levy (1869, 436, he cites a note of Nöldcke) interprets the term as a 'square block' since its presence in the Mishnah (Middoth 3,5): *wrby'yn šl 'rš* 'square blocks of cedar'. Clermont-Ganneau (1906a, 216) supposes a derivation from the root '*rb'* 'four', identifying an aedicule characterized by four columns, galleries or doors, exactly as in Greek τετράστυλον, τετράπυλον and τετράστοον (= Latin *atrium*). Littmann (PPAES IVA, 4-5), in agreement with Clermont-Ganneau, thinks that '*rb'* followed by the adjectival suffix *-n'* is a nominal stem '*rb'n'* that designates a 'cell', a 'recess'; Cantineau (1930-32, 2: 145) suggests that *rb't'* means 'votive tablet', whereas '*rb'n'* 'recess, cell, square sanctuary'. So, it is a building made up of four elements recognizable in an inner cell of certain Nabataean temples, in particular the two temples of Sī' that, taking into account the drawing of H.C. Butler at the beginning of the century, had a square form (Nehmé 2003, 17 and no. 46: the excavations led by J.M. Dentzer in the sanctuaries of Sī' show that the cell of the temple 2, dedicated to Dūšarā, was rectangular whereas we do not know if the cell of Ba'alšamin was rectangular or quadrangular). See also DNWSI, 1058: 'cell', 'rectangular sanctuary' and *Quellen*, 92 'ein Weiherelief'. As regards the inscription of Tell al-Šuqāfiyyah, the editors have translated *rb't'* as '(quadrangular) shrine' (see the comments in Jones et al. 1988, 49).

4 See Nehmé 2003, 21-2 who cites Ingholt (1962) in footnote 69.

5 Cf. Nehmé 2003, 18.

‘multiply by four’ and from its derivatives the idea of ‘four, square’ originates, as in the other Semitic languages.⁶

The term *rb't* could be an Arabic loanword from *ribā'ah*, a sort of *ḥamālah* that means ‘obligation, duty, responsibility’ to return the favour;⁷ presumably it refers to a ‘building erected in honour of a deity to repay it for the grace’.⁸

According to Levi Della Vida, it is simply a ‘rectangular object’ referred to the tablet carrying the votive inscription.⁹

In the missing part of the epigraph about ten letters could fit in with the *lacunae* and possibly the first line ends with the verb ‘*bd*’ followed by a personal name.¹⁰

In line 2 there is the term ‘*srtg*’ < Gr. στρατηγός, which is used only in Nabataean in this form¹¹ assuming the meaning of ‘général (d’infanterie)’;¹² it refers to the son of Ζωίλος (a name occurring in no. 10), presumably a Nabataean official who was present at Sidon.¹³ At the end of the line we distinguish two letters, *zw*, that are the initial part of *zw'l*¹⁴ (?).

6 In some varieties of Aramaic *rb'* assumes the meaning of ‘to lie down’, ‘crouch down (in the manner of an animal)’ and also ‘to make square’. See JBA, PTA, Gal., Sam. (Jastrow 1903, 1444; *DJPA*, 514b and 515a; *DJBA*, 1058a; Tal, *Sam*, 812; Cook, *Qumran*, 218; *DNWSI*, 1055). Also in Hebrew the original meaning of *rb'* is ‘to lie down’ with interchangeable /' / - /š/, so much so that the verb *rbš* has the same meaning, as well as in Arabic *rabaḍa* (passage /š/ > /d/) means ‘to kneel’, ‘to lay down’, ‘to sit upon thighs or buttocks’ (Lane, 1011; *DGes*, 1215-1216; *KAHAL*, 526-7). In Ugaritic *rb'* means ‘to quadruple’, ‘four’ (*CLUC*, 280-1). In Akkadian *rabāšu* has two meanings: referred to animals it means ‘to sit’, referred to men it means ‘to camp, to lay down’ (*CAD* XIV, 10 and ff.; *AHW* II, 933-4). As L. Nehmé points out, the term assumes a specific meaning in Late Aramaic, in fact, in Syriac we find *rba'* ‘to recline, to dine’ (in Origen’s Hexapla in Isa 17,2 the LXX’s κοίτη ‘bed’ was translated *rba'*). Cf. the complete philological explanation in Nehmé 2003, 20-3.

7 Lane, 1019.

8 Colombo 1994, 73.

9 Levi Della Vida 1938, 144 referring to the inscription from Kos.

10 Nehmé 2003, 6.

11 *DNWSI*, 92. See the metathesis /rt/ for /tr/. The transcription indicates the original Aramaic spelling of the term; in fact, it is a Greek word that entered Aramaic as a loanword. The same metathesis happens in Jewish Aramaic, Palmyrene and Syriac: ‘*strt'*’ (Monferrer-Sala 2013, 104-5 and 109). For the role and the characteristics of ‘*srtg*’ in the Nabataean epigraph see Nehmé 2015, 103-22.

12 Cantineau 1930-132, 2: 66. Unlike *hprk'* (< Gr. ὑπαρχος) that among the Nabataeans designated the ‘général de cavalerie’ before the Roman conquest (Cantineau 1930-32, 2: 88), also the ‘prefect’ (*DNWSI*, 292).

13 For an explanation regarding the presence of a Nabataean official at Sidon, see Roche 1996, 76-7.

14 In Quellen, 131 the authors read /q/ rather than /z/ in order to restore the name *qw[y]l'* or *qw[l]'*.

The text dates back to 4 or 3 BCE, in fact in line 4 we read '(year) 5 of Aretas',¹⁵ referred to Aretas IV.

In line 5, after the mention of στρατηγός, there is sufficient space to include a verb. In *editio princeps* De Saulcy (1867, 9) integrates with (ῥκοδομη)σεν, while in other editions (ἀνέστη)σεν is preferred.

At Sidon during the reign of the local king 'Ešmun'azar II (Phoen. 'šmn'zr¹⁶) the temple complex dedicated to 'Ešmun, the tutelary deity of the city associated with Greek Asclepius, was expanded. The presence of a huge sanctuary represented for a Nabataean, who traded incenses and aromas, an opportunity to stop over and carve a dedication to his gods, in this case Dūšarā, as we may read in line 3.

15 De Saulcy (1867, 14) read the number '13', while Levy (1869, 437) and Vogüé (*VIS* no. 114) the number '32'. Kammerer (1929-30, 463, no. 7) dated the inscription to 23/24 CE. In the text it is clear that the year is engraved by three oblique and two joined lines tending to the left. The correct reading, 'year 5', is recorded in *CIS* II no. 160.

16 See Krahmalkov 2000, 83.