

*Original article***NABATAEAN ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS**

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Abstract:

The Nabataean kingdom, a cornerstone of cultural and historical significance in Jordan, has a rich legacy of inscriptions that offer valuable insights into its history, culture, and administration. This study aims to systematically survey and analyze Nabataean royal inscriptions, exclusively in texts that refer to the deeds and legacies of the royal family members. This helps us understand their role in the kingdom's administration and cultural development. A detailed review informed the analysis of previous scholarship and archeological discoveries. The study's findings are significant, as they demonstrate that ancient Nabataeans' practice of marrying within the royal family was potentially influenced by Egyptian customs and the unique practice of defying kings, as seen in the case of Obodas, the God. Furthermore, it establishes a chronological framework for the reigns of Nabataean monarchs to show the relationships within the royal family and their impact on the kingdom's historical and cultural landscape. This study has yielded different results concerning Kings Rab' I and II, Queen Šuqylt I, Malichus II, and other royal figures.

1. Introduction

The Nabataean kingdom, flourishing between the 4th century BC and the 2nd century AD, was one of the most prominent reigns in Northern Arabia and the Southern Levant, particularly in what is now known as Jordan. The Nabataeans were originally nomadic people inhabiting the southern Near East [1]. Their kingdom expanded to vast territories. They were famous for their trade in the Silk Road, a significant trade route connecting the East and the West, and controlled commerce in that area, enabling them to extend the kingdom and exchange cultures. This economic power and cultural exchange were significant aspects of their influence. Despite their influence during that period, the number of inscriptions directly referring to the kingdom and its kings and their achievements is limited compared to the richer epigraphic records of other ancient empires. According to Gibson [2], this is due to the rejection of Nabataean kings to write their history despite being educated. Even though Nabataean inscriptions are scarce, researchers could identify Nabataean life, culture, and art and culture. For example, the figural representations on Nabataean coins portray Nabataean Kings [3]. Additionally, the inscriptions would provide us with more information regarding their lifestyle, as in the study of al-Salmeen and Schmitt-Korte [4]. They examined an inscription on a bronze tablet, finding that it records King Aretas IV's dedication of a water well/cistern to the god Dushara and his family. This

offers new insights into Nabataean water-related cult practices and an updated royal family tree. Therefore, it is crucial to study the surviving documentation to understand Nabataean life, particularly royal life, better. This paper aims to analyze the Royal Nabataean Inscriptions discovered across various geographic zones within the Nabataean kingdom. The focus is on inscriptions that directly refer to the deeds and legacies of the kings, their ministers, and queens or those prepared by others in the memory of the royal family. The objectives of this study are to:

- *) Provide detailed analysis and commentary on the transliteration and translation of each identified royal inscription.
- *) Construct a chronological framework for the reigns of Nabataean monarchs based on these inscriptions.
- *) Explore the inscriptions' political, cultural, and familial implications to understand Nabataean royal life and governance dynamics better.

Concentrating on these royal inscriptions, many of which were discovered in the Petra area and other significant locations such as Sammeḥ in Saḥḥad and Obodat at Negav, this paper seeks to significantly contribute to our understanding of the Nabataean kingdom's historical and cultural landscape.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a detailed descriptive analytical approach, focusing on each inscription's transliteration, translation, and

contextual interpretation. First, it involves a careful survey and selection of inscriptions across the Nabataean kingdom's vast geography, focusing on ones that refer to the deeds and memories of royal family members. Second, each inscription is subjected to detailed analytical commentary, drawing from extensive reviews of prior scholarship and archeological findings to contextualize and interpret their historical and cultural significance. Finally, the study constructs a chronological framework of the Nabataean monarchs' reign. It examines the royal family relationships, such as royal marriages and the kings' deifications, highlighting the influence of external cultures on the Nabataean Society.

3. Results

3.1. The inscription of the King Rab'l I

This inscription [5] was discovered by Germer Durand in 1897 in the temenos of Qaser-el Bint at Petra [6-8]. It contains five lines, which have been studied for the first time by Clermont Ganneau in 1897, fig. (1) [8].

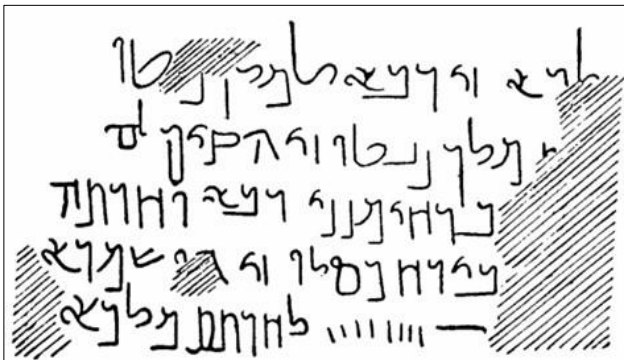


Figure (1) inscription of Rab'l I (After: Cantineau, 1932) [9]

Transliteration

1. (*dnh s*) *lm' zy Rb' l mlk nbṭw*
2. (*br 'bd*) *t Mlk nbṭw zy hqym lh*
3. (.....) *br hymny rb' whdth*
4. (.....) *byrh kslw zy hw Šmr'*
5. (*šnt*) *18 l. Ḥrtt Mlk'* [6,9].

Translation

1. *This is the statue of Rabb'el, king of the Nabataeans.*
2. *Son of Obodas, the king of Nabataean, made by*
3. (.....) *son of Hymananay the great which was restored.*
4. *in the month of kislew, which is Šamra*
5. *(in the year) 18 of the king Ḥaritat* [6,9].

Commentary

We notice from this inscription that the name of the father of Rabb'el was missing; only the last can be read. This made a different reading for the name of the father by the scholars. Some scholars interpret the text as ('bd) t, indicating that Obodas I was Rb'l's father [6,9] some others read it (Hrt)t, and this means that the father of Rb'l, Ḥrtt [10]. Probably the first reading is more correct as we know from the Nabataean records that there were two Nabataean kings known as Rab'l: Rab'l I (87 B.C.), who was the son of Obodas I and the brother of Aretas III, whose reign was very short. Rab'l II, the son of Malichus II, and his reign was between (71-106 A.D.) this means that the last letter for the father's name in this inscription is not logical to relate it to the name of Mlkw. On the other

hand, in the period of 71-106 A.D., the time of Rab'l II, in this time the Nabataean used their style of writing, and they used the relative pronoun *ḏī* instead of *zy*, an example can be noticed in the inscription, which was dated to the year 26 of Rab'l [9]. In this inscription, we also noticed that there was an influence from the ancient Aramaic writing by using the *zy* instead of the *day*; this can prove that the text is ancient as the earliest inscription of Aretas II from Ḥalasa [11]. This also may prove that Rab'l, mentioned in this inscription, was Rab'l the first. This inscription is important because it was made during the 18 years of Aretas III's reign in honor of his brother Rab'l I, probably after Aretas's victory against Antiochus XII, the last Seleucid [6].

3.2. Inscription of Wadi Mousa

A monumental inscription on a rectangular, hard white limestone block has been reused on the eastern wall of a small barn on the right side of Wadi Musa-Petra main road. The block was broken from the right side; it contained six lines, and the beginning of everyone was missing. 4th lines are uniform, but the last two lines are closer, fig. (2).

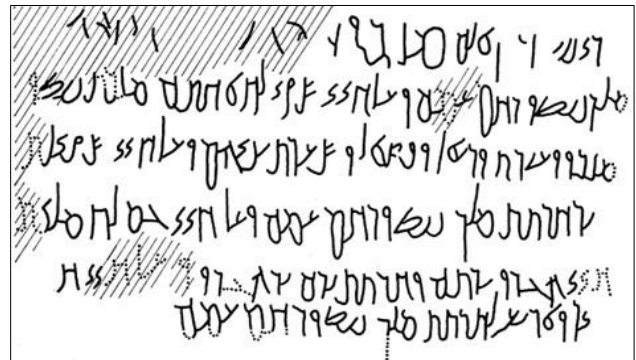


Figure (2) Inscription of Wadi Musa (After: Khairy, 1981) [13]

Transliteration

1. (.....) *dy* (.....) *'Th mnkw ('l.*
2. *hyy ḥartt) mlk nbḥw rḥm 'mh w'l hyy šqylt 'ḥth mlkt*
nbṭ(w/l
3. *hyy) mnkw w 'bdt w rb'l w fš'l w š'dt bnyhm w 'l hyy*
sqylt/t 'ḥt)
4. *. mnkw br ḥrtt mlk nbṭw rḥm 'mh w 'l hyy ḡmlt mlk(t*
nbṭw
5. *w 'l hy) y hgrw brth w ḥrtt br (. šnt*
6. (.....) *yn w 'rb'l ḥrtt mlk nbṭw rḥm. 'mh.* [12]

Translation

1. *This is the statue of) the divine Malichus (.....*
2. (.....) *Aretas, king of the Nabataean, lover of his people,*
and for the life of Šuqailat, his sister, queen of
Nabataeans
3.) *Malichus and 'obodas and Rabb'el and Phas'el and*
Ša'dat their children and for the life of Šuqilat (sister of
Malikw)
4. *Son of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, lover of his*
people, and for the life of Gamilat, Queen of the
Nabataeans.
5. *and for the life of Hagerw his daughter and Aretas her*
son, son of H(agerw).
6. (.....) *In the year thirty or forty?) Four of Aretas, king of*
the Nabataeans, were lovers of his people [12]

▪ **Commentary**

Ḥarīṭat in line 2 means Aretas IV, the king known as (rḥm ‘mh) in many inscriptions [13], which means the lover of his people. This king ruled the Nabataeans from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D. [14]. His name was mentioned in other inscriptions, and in other inscriptions dated during his reign [5], dated to the fifth year of the reign of Aretas IV (4 B.C.) [5], dated to the 29 of the reign of this king, which means 20 A.D. His reign extended 50 years, from the area of Bsra in the north to Hegra in the south, the Dumah in the east, and the Negev in the west [15]. From 1-30 A.D., his state had been at el Ḥġr [16]. Aretas IV had married two wives; the first was Ḥuldu, and the second was Šuqailat I [7,17].

3.2.1. *Šuqylt I*

Šuqylt I referred to as the sister of her husband Aretas IV, had four sons: Malichus II, Obodat, Faša’el, and Šu’udat. [7]. Her name appeared in the Nabataean coins with Aretas IV, dated to the 27th year of Aretas IV’s reign [17].

3.2.2. *Mnkw*

‘Mank’ was the pronunciation of Nabataean Arabic of Malik the king [18], but mnkw probably the king Malichus II, the grandson of Aretas IV and Šuqailat I [7]. This name can be found in other inscriptions (CIS II, p. 354), in the inscription of Šammeh [19]; this king reigned in the year of 40-75 A.D. [11,20].

3.2.3. *Obodas IV*

The son of Aretas IV [11].

3.2.4. *Faša’el*

Perhaps this name was Aramaic [19]; she was the first daughter of Aretas IV and was born nearly 5-4 B.C. [7,16]. Probably this Faša’el, whom her father let her marry Herod Antipas about 27 of his reigns [15], her name also appears in the coins [16].

3.2.5. *Š’dt*

The daughter of Aretas IV, this name is mentioned in the inscriptions at Obodat [21], and in the CIS II, as Š’wdt.

3.2.6. *Haġaru and Ġamilat*

They were mentioned as sisters of Rabb’l II in the inscriptions [13]; Haġaru was not the person who was mentioned in CIS 354 [21]. In this case, we should agree with the restoration of Milik in lines 3-4 (Šqyl(t) ḥt Maniku) [12].

3.2.7. *Šqylt II*

She was the wife of Malichus II [11] and the mother of Rabb’l II, Haġaru and Ġamilat. This inscription is important because it is the second long Nabataean inscription found. Together with the one of CIS II 354, it gives a list of the royal family members of Aretas IV [12,14].

3.3. *Inscription of Obodat, the god king of Nabataean.*

This inscription [5] was discovered by Ehni in 1822 in the Chapelle of el-Mer, dated 20 A.D. [9]. Vogue published it for the first time in 1897 [6]. It contains four lines, fig. (3)

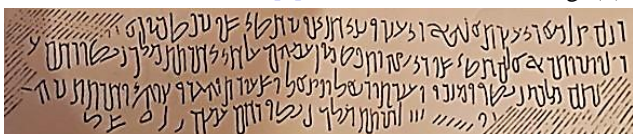


Figure (3) inscription of Obodat the God (Afte: Corpus, 1907) [5]

▪ **Transliteration**

1. *dnh šlm’ dy bdt ’lh dy bdw bny ḥnyw br ḥtyšw br pṭmon*
2. *dy lwtr wtr’ ’lh ḥtyšw dy dšhwt pṭmon ’mhm ’l ḥyy ḥrtt mlk nbṭw rḥm ’m/h w šqylt*
3. *w rb’l w fs’l w s’wdt w hgrw bnyhy w ḥrtt br hg/rw br brh*
4. *(byrh...šn/t 29 l ḥrtt mlk nbṭw rḥm ’mh bl’ šl (m). [9,22].*

▪ **Translation**

1. *This is the statue of ‘bodat, the god, which was made by the son of Ḥanaino, son of Ḥotaišo, son of peṭ ammon.*
2. *who is a water God of ḥotaišu who is in the Chapelle of peṭam(m)on their ancestor for the life of Ḥarīṭat, who loves his people, and for Šuqailat*
3. *his sister ... the queen of Nabataean and for Maliku, for Obodas, for Rab’l, for fiš’l, for Ša’udat, for Haġaru, his children for Ḥarīṭat, son of Hugrou.*
4. *in the month of ...) in the year 29 of Aretas, king of Nabataean who loves his people [6,9,22].*

▪ **Commentary**

From this inscription, we noticed the name of the royal family of Aretas IV (rḥm ‘mh), concerning his daughters, sons, and wives. We also see that the queen was called a sister of her husband, and we observed several Queens in the reign of a single king in the Nabataean royal stemma [14]. Abodas, the God here, is probably Obdas III, who reigned from 30-9 B.C.

3.4. *Inscription of Oboda*

The Negev discovered it in the Acropolis area of Oboda on the road of Petra to Gaza [7,21], in the ruins of the lower staircase. The pottery and large bronze figurines found in situ were associated with the inscription and helped to give a date shortly before 106 A.D.

▪ **Transliteration**

1. *’bdt w fs’l w š’wdt bny ḥrtt.*

▪ **Translation**

1. *‘Obodat and faša’el and šu’udat the sons of Ḥaretat [21].*

3.5. *Inscription of Šammeh*

Found in Šammeh, southeast of Salḥad, this inscription is engraved on a stone lintel measuring 40 cm in height and 24 cm in thickness. It contains two lines read as follows [19].

▪ **Transliteration**

1. *Dnh – bnyw’ – dy – bnh*
2. *mr’n’ – mlkw – mlk nbṭ (w)*

▪ **Translation**

3. *This is the building which built*
4. *our lord Malik, the king of the Nabataeans [19].*

▪ **Commentary**

This inscription likely pertains to Malik II, who reigned from 40-75 AD. The judgment is based on writing, one of the best styles of the late Nabataean scripts. This can be observed in the development of the writing of the letter (A), Alef, from the Aramaic: א א-א-א-א-א-א-א [23]; if we look at the Alef in the word are not in the second line of this inscription, it was written א, fig. (4-a). Moreover, if we look for the alef in the earliest Nabataean inscription of Ḥalaša

which was dated to the period of Aretas II (100 B.C.) [15], it was written \simeq in the word 'tr' in the first line, fig. (4-b) [9].

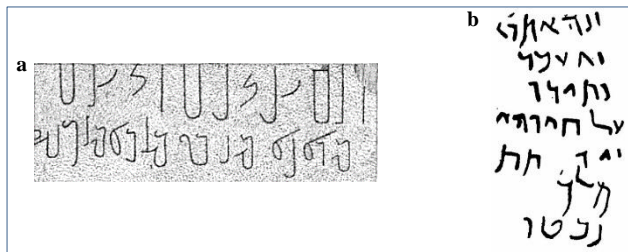


Figure (4) a. inscription of Sammh (Afte: Littman, 1914) [20], b. inscription of Halasa (Afte: Cantineau, 1932).

The name of Malichus II mentioned in this inscription was the first son of Aretas IV from his wife Šuqailat [11]; his name was mentioned in the inscription found at Wadi Musa, in which appears the name of the family of Aretas IV, including Malichus as the son of Aretas [24]. The name of this king also appears in the inscription of the Chapelle of Al-Mer [5] 354, in eight inscriptions from Al-Ḥeḡer dated to the reign of Malichus II (40-75 AD) [24], the same name found in the inscription discovered at Saḡhad [19], the name of Malichus II in the coins, associated with his wife Šuqailat [17]. Classical sources tell us that Malichus II dispatched his army to fight alongside Roman forces against the Jews [17].

3.6. The three inscriptions at Al-Ḥabis (Petra)

Discovered by Peter Parr on the eastern side of Al-Ḥabis in Petra, these three inscriptions were subsequently studied by Milik and Starcky [7]. According to those authors, the inscription was not mentioned in Dalman's corpus:

▪ Transliteration

1. *Šlm fš'l*
2. *Šlm fš'l Mlkt nbṭw*
3. *Šlm fš'l*.

▪ Translations

1. *Peace for Fasa'el*
2. *Peace for Fasa'el Mlkt nbṭw*
3. *Peace for Fas'el* [7]

▪ Commentary

Fasa'el, Gmlt, and Hgrw are personal names described as the children of Malichus. In the second inscription, the word *mlkt nbṭw* confirms the relationships between these inscriptions and other royal inscriptions in which the name Phasa'el was mentioned [14,16].

3.7. Royal inscriptions from Petra

3.7.1. Ḥubta royal inscription - 'Nyšw

In 1896, Grey Hill, a British explorer, noticed an engraved slab in a tomb at Ḥubta cliff at the end of the Siq and facing the theatre; it is a small-engraved inscription of 0.78×0.48 m, and the end of the last word disappeared. It was later copied by Musil [5,25], fig. (5)

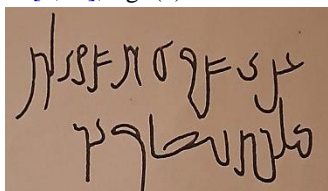


Figure (5) inscription of Hutba (After: Zayadine, 1986) [26]

▪ Transliteration

1. *'Nyšw 'ḥ Šqylt*
2. *mlkt nbṭ br*

▪ Translation

1. *'Neišw brother of Šuqailat*
2. *Queen of Nabataean son* [9,25,27].

▪ Commentary

'Nyšw was the prime minister of Šuqailat II, who ruled during the reign of Rab'l II (71-76), 'Nyšw helped the queen to rule the Nabataean Kingdom instead of Rab'l II, who was so young. Strabo's report on the Nabataeans shows that the king's minister was called brother, in this case, 'Nyšw. In this inscription probably was the minister of Šuqailat II [25]. This inscription was dated according to the finds in the tomb to the second half of the first century A.D. [25].

3.7.2. Ḥubta royal inscription - Malichos

In 1973, Zayadine excavated the area known as the royal Nabataean necropolis at the western slab of the Ḥubtha cliff. The excavation in tomb no. 813 resulted in the discovery of a short Nabataean inscription that read

▪ Transliteration

Mnku Nbt

▪ Translation

Maliku (king of the) Nabataean.

▪ Commentary

According to Zayadine Malikw, it was probably Malichos II (4-70 A.D.), son of Aretas IV [26,28].

3.7.3. Ḥubtha royal inscription – Nabataean Queen

Another inscription fragment was discovered in the eastern cliff of Ḥubtha during the excavation of Zayadine in 1978; this short inscription was found in a fragment of sandstone slap, which was read.

▪ Transliteration

Mlkt (Nbt) w.

▪ Translation

the queen of the Nabataeans

▪ Commentary

The objectives discovered within the tomb, especially the coins belonging to Maliku II, suggest that the grave is related to a Queen of the Nabataean dynasty [27].

3.7.4. Qasr el-Bint royal inscription - Šu'adat

P. Parr discovered one inscription engraved in Nabataean script in a marble block in 1965, probably a statue base at Qasr el-Bint.

▪ Transliteration

Š 'dt brt Mnkw

▪ Translation

Šu'adat, daughter of Maniku

▪ Commentary

The name Šu'adat is mentioned in other inscriptions as a daughter of Aretas IV [5] 354 in Petra and at Oboda [21]. It occurred in one inscription found at Qumran [12], with her brother Rab'l and called the Queen of Nabataeans [12,16], and as we know, Rab'l is the son of Malichus II [16]. In this inscription, Šu'adat was probably the daughter of Malichus II, which means there are two Šu'adat, one mentioned in the inscriptions of Wadi Musa [12] and the other as a daughter

of Aretas IV [5,21]. Šu'adat is the second mentioned as a daughter of Malichus II in this inscription and in one of Qumran's inscriptions [12].

4. Discussion

The analysis of these inscriptions has provided us with insightful findings about the Nabataean royal family, political matters, family relations, and nominalization. Both inscriptions, Royal inscriptions found in Petra and the inscription of Šammeh, reveal how the royal family dealt with political issues related to ruling, sovereignty, and cooperation, such as the ruling of Šuqylt II, who governed during the reign of Rab'l II, when he was young with the help of Nysw, her prime minister and King Malichus II cooperation with the roman against the Jews. Additionally, some inscriptions provide us with insights into family relationships, such as the inscriptions of King Rab'l I, which gave us the possibility of Obodas I being the father of Rb'l; the inscriptions of Wadi Mousa and Obodat, which showcase the status of the beloved King Aretas IV among his people and provide an overview of his family members; and the three inscriptions at Al Habis, which demonstrate the family lineage of King Malichus. Finally, these royal inscriptions provided information about the use of Nabataean writing and how it was affected by Aramaic writing during the reign of King Rab'l I. They also uncovered the use of specific names on royals, suggesting the close kinship within the royal family, such as naming the queen after *her husband's sister*. It can also inform us about the historical and cultural landscape in which the Nabataean kingdom expanded.

5. Conclusion

These royal Nabataean inscriptions are very few according to the number of Nabataean inscriptions and the duration of the Nabataean kingdom (4th cent. B.C. 2nd cent. A.D.); however, it is still unclear who the first king was (Aretas I, who known from his coins which dated to the second century B.C.). Moreover, we know the names of Nabataean kings until the decline of the Nabataean kingdom by Roman force (106 A.D.) The name Aretas appeared many times in the royal inscriptions, but there was no indication that he was Aretas the first or the second. In addition, the division of the kings depends on the inscriptions, which give attribute lineage based on the first name of the king mentioned in the text; for example, the inscription of Wadi Musa. From these royal inscriptions, we can observe that the kings married their sisters, which could be interpreted as keeping the royal blood, probably following Egyptian customs. In some cases, the Nabataean kings added another distinguished name to their original name that did not exist in another Arabic script. For example, Aretas IV, known as Rahm mh, the lover of his people, and Obada III, was known as Obada the God after he died. This means that the Nabataean gave the divinity of their kings. These royal inscriptions helped us to establish a chronological table of the Nabataean kings.

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