

A NABATAEAN SCULPTOR'S SIGNATURE FROM PETRA

by

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In August 1986 during work on the registration of architectural and sculptural objects conducted by British archaeologists at Petra, the existence of a new Nabataean inscription was brought to the attention of one of the authors (Z. Fiema).¹ The inscription was found on a stone drum decorated with acanthus leaves which once was the lower portion of a Corinthian capital. The drum, which is neatly situated on the second landing of the steps leading up toward the museum at Petra, was probably uncovered during the clearing and excavations of the *temenos* of the Qaşr by Parr during the 1960's or during the clearing and restoration done by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, however the exact provenience of the drum may be impossible to establish.² The inscription is *ca.* 5 cm. long and *ca.* 1.4 cm high (Pl. LXVI, 1, 2 & Fig. 1), and is incised upon the convex *anulus* which originally marked the separation of the column shaft from the acanthus leaf decoration on the lower part of the Corinthian capital. The inscription consists of seven letters which can be clearly read even though the lower portion of some of them are slightly damaged. The text reads as follows:

šlmwr/d''

Because of the close similarity between the shapes of the letters *resh* and *daleth*, it is difficult to decide which of the readings was actually meant by the ancient writer. It

seems clear, however, that this is a signature left by a sculptor upon his work. Indeed, the inscription was not intended for display to the public because of the fact that when the capital was in place on the top of a column shaft, the inscription would never be seen by anyone. Therefore it is difficult to see the inscription as a greeting beginning with šlm followed by a personal name. Examples of workers leaving their names on their work "in memoriam" rather than for display are common in the Hellenistic Roman East and it must be assumed that the name belonged to a sculptor who executed the Corinthian capital. One of the best examples of sculptors' signatures comes from Palmyra, where a team of sculptors working on the temple of Bel left their names in a trilingual inscription on the upper surface of a drum from a column that was then situated in the peristyle of the temple cella.³ Another signature is known from Si'. There a damaged column was found consisting of the upper portion of the shaft, the capital, and the abacus. A Greek inscription on the abacus was left which reads "Kasit son of An'am made it."⁴

In Nabataean and Palmyrene, the name šlmw occurs often but compound names employing šlmw as the first element are distinctly rare.⁵ The second portion of our sculptor's name may reflect the Semitic root *r'h/r*'' which is rare in Nabataean,⁶

1. Warmest thanks are extended to Prof. Margaret Lyttleton, British Museum, who kindly called attention to the existence of the inscription.

2. See Peter Parr, "Découvertes récentes au sanctuaire du Qaşr à Pétra," *Syria* (1968), pp. 1-24; and *ADAJ* 11-12 (1967-68), pp. 5-19.

3. See Z. Fiema, "An Inscription from the Temple of Bel in Palmyra Reconsidered," *BASOR* 263 (1986), pp. 81-83.

4. E. Littmann and D. Magie, Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedi-

tion to Syria in 1904-5 and 1909. Division III. *Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Syria*. Section A. Southern Syria, Part 6 (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1916), p. 369.

5. A few possible examples are found in Nabataean inscriptions over which there are disputed readings, see *R. E. S.* I:227.

6. There is an uncertain occurrence of this root in a compound name found in the index of *R. E. S.* I:417 but this appears to contain a citation error. Compare also Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen*, 2: 147.

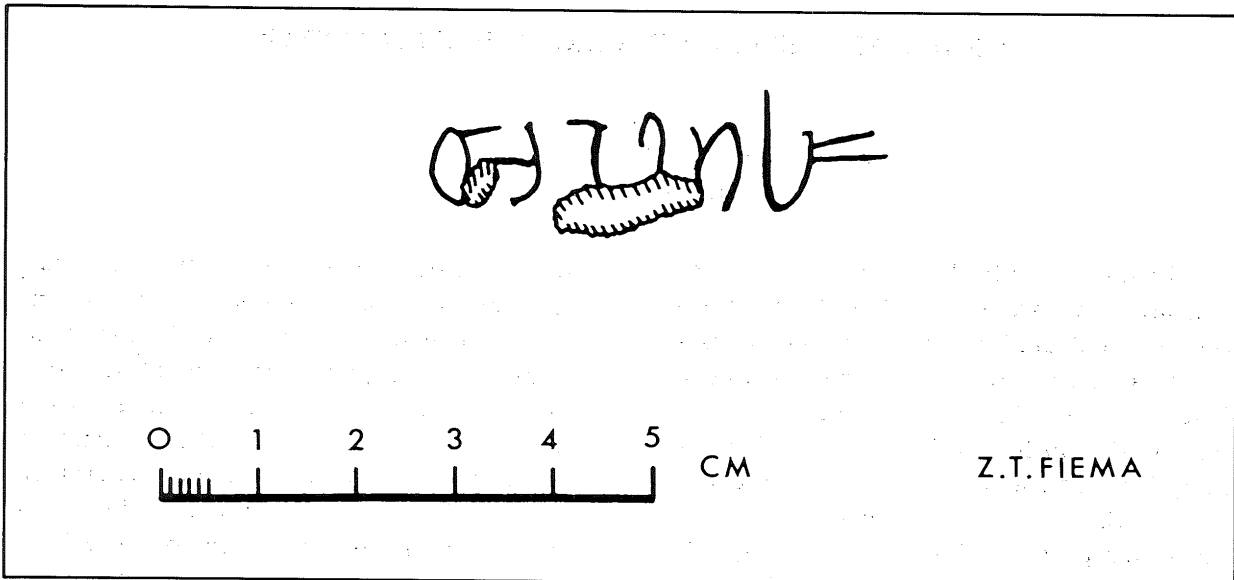


Fig. 1

but found as a proper name in Palmyrene.⁷ It is found often in Semitic compound names containing divine elements such as Sabaeen *yr'l*, and Thamudic *r'l*.⁸ Another alternative is to see the reading as *šlm wr/d'*, representing the names of two sculptors, although this seems to us to be somewhat less probable. The reason for this is that the proper name *šlm* in Nabataean is infrequent in the inscriptions as against *šlmw* which is very common.⁹ The last possibility is to view this as a compound name *šlmwd'*, the last portion reflecting the Nabataean personal name *wd'w* occurring mostly in Sinai.¹⁰

There are some features of the script

which deserve attention. The *lamadh* is connected to the preceding letter *sin* rather than to the following letter *mim*, a less than common ligature in Nabataean although examples are known.¹¹

We conclude that this text represents the compound name *šlmwr/d'*, left by a Nabataean sculptor as a signature upon his work at Petra, which may now be added to the Nabataean onomasticon.

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7. See Jurgen K. Stark, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 49.

8. G. Ryckmans, *Les Noms Propres Sud-Sémitiques* t.1, (Louvain: Bureaux du Museon, 1934), p. 249.

9. For example, there are some 46 certain citations in the *C.I.S.* and an additional 7 probable occurrences, see *C.I.S.* II:2:247. Can-

tineau, *Le Nabatéen*, 2: 151 cites 65 certain and 4 uncertain examples of the spelling *šlmw*, as against 4 certain and 2 uncertain examples of *šlm*. However, the name *šlm* is common in other Pre-Islamic texts, especially Safaitic (see Lankester Harding 1971: 325).

10. Cantineau vol. 2, p. 89. One might compare the name *wd'* in Safaitic, Liḥyanite, and Thamudic in Harding p. 638.

11. For example, *C.I.S.* nos. 194 and 921.

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