

A NEW NABATAEAN INSCRIPTION FROM QAŞR AL-HALLABAT*

by
Giancarlo Lacerenza

Qaşr al-Hallabat lies on a knoll in the semi-desert area of northeast Jordan crossed by the *Via Nova Traiana* and, at present, by the highway linking Zarqa with the oasis of Azraq. The origins of the fortress date back to a Roman and subsequently Byzantine *praesidium*, while the most recent settlement in it dates to the Umayyad period.¹ The site was first explored by the Princeton Archaeological Expedition to Syria (PAES) led by H. C. Butler,² and has been further investigated by several scholars and survey missions.³ Since 1979 it was systematically excavated by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan under the direction

of J. Marcillet-Jaubert and G. Bisheh.⁴

The inscriptions, although not many, cover the whole period of settlement in the Qaşr. For the Roman period, we have a lintel inscription concerning the building of a *castellum novum* under Caracalla, in 212-213,⁵ and a later tetrarchic milestone (ca A.D. 293-305).⁶ From the Byzantine period are, a well-known administrative decree of Anastasius I, dated to the beginning of the sixth century and carved out of several reused basalt blocks,⁷ and a shorter text, dated to A.D. 529-530, concerning the restoration of the fort under Justinian.⁸ Only two short Kufic inscriptions have been

*) I was able to identify and photograph the inscription during an epigraphic survey in Jordan in October-December 1992, for my Doctorate course in Oriental Studies at the Istituto Universitario Orientale (Oriental Institute University) of Naples, Italy. I am grateful to Prof. A. V. Rossi, IUO Chancellor and course director, and to my tutor, Prof. F. Vattioni. My deepest thanks are also due to Dr. Safwan Tell, Director-General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, and to Dr. Ghazi Bisheh for their kind permission to study and publish this material in *ADAJ*.

1. Cf. K.A.C. Creswell, 'Fortifications in Islam before A.D. 1250', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, (1952), pp. 89-125; Idem., *Early Muslim Architecture*, I.2., 2nd ed. (Oxford 1969), pp. 502-505; F.A. Toqan, *Al-Ha'ir. An Investigation on the Umayyad Castles in the Desert*, (Amman 1979), pp. 405 ff. (Arabic); G. Bisheh, 'Qaşr al-Hallabat: an Umayyad Desert Retreat or Farm-Land', in A. Hadidi (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, II, (Amman 1985), pp. 263-265; S.T. Parker, *Romans and Saracens: A History of the Arabian Frontier*, (Winona Lake 1986), pp. 30-32.
2. H.C. Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria*, (PPAES II.A), (Leiden 1909), pp. 70-77; Appendix, pp. XVII-XIX.
3. A. Musil, *Arabia Deserta*, (New York 1927), pp. 351-353; A. Jaussen and M.-R. Savignac, *Mission archeologique en Arabie*, III, (Paris 1922), pp.

113ff; N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, (New Haven 1940), pp. 35-38; H. Field, *North Arabian Desert Archaeological Survey 1925-1950*, (Cambridge, Mass. 1960), pp. 69ff.; D.L. Kennedy, *Archaeological Explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan*, (BAR International Series 134) Oxford 1982), pp. 17-65; D. Kennedy and D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air*, (London 1990), pp. 74ff., 199-202.

4. G. Bisheh, 'Excavations at Qaşr al-Hallabat, 1979,' *ADAJ* 24 (1980), pp. 69-77; idem, 'The Second Season of Excavations at Hallabat, 1980,' *ADAJ* 26 (1982), pp. 133-143; idem, 'Qaşr al-Hallabat: A Summary of the 1984 and 1985 Excavations,' *Archiv für Orientforschung* 33 (1986), pp. 158-162. See also R. Wenning, *Die Nabatäer - Denkmäler und Geschichte*, (Göttingen 1987), pp. 51 ff; G. Bisheh, 'Hallabat,' in D. Homés-Fredericq and J.B. Hennessy (eds.), *Archaeology of Jordan*, II.1, *Akkadica suppl.* VII (Leuven 1989), pp. 245-251.
5. H.C. Butler, *PPAES* II.A, p. 71; idem, *PPAES* III.A.2, no. 17.
6. J. Marcillet-Jaubert, 'Recherches au Qaşr El Hallabat,' *ADAJ* 24 (1980), pp. 121-124.
7. H.C. Butler, *PPAES* III. A.2, no. 20; J. Marcillet-Jaubert, *ADAJ* 24 (1980), pp. 121-124; idem, 'Les inscriptions grecques de Hallabat' II,' *ADAJ* 26 (1982), pp. 145-154.
8. H.C. Butler, *PPAES* III.A.2, no. 18.

found so far for the Umayyad period.⁹

In addition to these inscriptions, which fit perfectly in the history of the site, there is a brief Nabataean inscription discovered during the PAES and published by E. Littmann with other inscriptions from the Southern Hauran.¹⁰ This inscription (Fig. 1) is inserted about 270 cm off the ground in a wall of Room 4 of the castle,¹¹ one of the chambers in which the blocks bearing the Byzantine decree had been used. It shows two lines of Nabataean writing (char. height: 9-13 cm), carved in a basalt block, the front of which measures 28.5-30 x 52 cm, while the thickness, not verifiable, should be about 20 cm. The text reveals that the block was originally the right side of a lintel on the door of a funerary building:

dnh qbr' d[y bnh/'bd...]

lzbwdw brh

This is the tomb which was built/made by.....)

*for Zbwdw, his son.*¹²

That inscription has long remained the only evidence for Nabataean inscriptions from the site; but during the 1984-85 exca-

vations in the inner part of the castle,¹³ a second Nabataean inscription was found (Fig. 2), which has remained unpublished to date. I produce it here by courtesy of Dr. G. Bisheh and of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

It is a small basalt block (27 x 74 x 20 cm), like the first inscription, on which appears just one line of Nabataean writing (char. height: 3-13 cm). The block, discovered while cleaning out the room (and at present placed on a wall of room no. 6 near the northeast corner staircase), had evidently fallen off the wall in which it had been reused. The text, although partially erased, does not have serious lacunae and is readable:

[...dy] 'bd grpw br zbwdw

[...which] was made by Grpw son of Zbwdw

We find here the Arab name *grpw*, well attested in North Arabic inscriptions (twelve Safaitic and one Thamudic),¹⁴ but seldom found in Nabataean ones;¹⁵ it still lacks an exact vocalization provided by Greek texts.¹⁶ The name *zbwdw*, as we have seen, occurs in the first inscription also; and

9. G. Bisheh, *ADAJ* 24, (1980) p. 75.

10. E. Littmann, 'Nabataean Inscriptions from the Southern Hauran', *PPAES* IV.A (Leiden 1914), no. 1 (RES 2035); then in Riley and Kennedy, *Rome's Desert Frontier* p. 37, pl. 12e. Note that Littmann's apograph is rather inaccurate (see here Fig. 1).

11. I use the number of the plan according to G. Bisheh, *Archaeology of Jordan* II. I, p. 247.

12. For the reading cf. E. Littmann, *PPAES* IV.A, p. 1ff., to be updated for the proper name *abwdw* with J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen*, II, (Paris 1932), p. 91, and now A. Negev, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm*, *Qedem* 32 (Jerusalem 1991), pp. 25 no. 370, 109 no. 13, 202. The name *Zbwbw*, the root of which *zbd* gives other Nabataean anthroponyms like *zbd'*, *zbdw*, *zbdy*, *zbydw*, *zbydt*, is attested also in Palmyrene, see J. K. Stark, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions*, (Oxford 1971), pp. 18, 86 and vocalized in Greek Ζαβουδοσ: cf. H. Wuthnow, *Die semitischen Menschennamen in griechischen Inschriften*

ten und Papyri des vorderen Orients, (Leipzig 1930), pp. 48, 137 (with some variants), A. Negev, *Personal Names*, p. 202, regards *zbwdw* as a "local Nabatean" name of the Hauran.

13. See G. Bisheh, *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 33 (1986) and *Archaeology of Jordan*, p. 248.

14. A. Negev, *Personal Names*, p. 20 no. 257; note also the form *grpm*, from the same root, in South Arabic: cf. G.L. Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, (Toronto 1971), p. 159.

15. Records at Umm al-Jimal (E. Littmann, *PPAES* IV.A, no. 59 (RES 2081), Petra (J.T. Milik and J. Starcky, 'Inscriptions récemment découvertes à Pétra,' *ADAJ* 20 (1975), no. 4, pp. 119-120), and in an unpublished graffito from South Sinai (A. Negev, *Personal Names*, p. 20 no. 257).

16. Γορπος and Γορεπος (Γορεπου) in H. Wuthnow, *Die semitischen Menschennamen*, pp. 42, 134; see also J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen*.



1. First Nabataean inscription of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat (RES 2081).



2. The second Nabataean inscription of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat.

again we have a fragment of a funerary lintel, this time its left side. These circumstances clearly seem to indicate that the new inscription should be the missing part of the first one. The block is the same kind of basalt stone, with the same surface treatment and, originally, almost the same size, at least before its sides were reduced to insert it into the wall. It seems that during this reduction the first inscription was shortened nearly 2 cm on the left side, while the second one was retouched on the right side and cut down, resulting in the erasure of the upper part of some letters. Moreover, the handwriting of the two inscriptions has similar features and is the same size and, lastly, the text reassembled (Fig. 3) is absolutely consistent:

*dnh qbr' d[y] 'bd grpw br zbwdw
lzbwdw brh*

This is the tomb which was made by Grpw son of Zbwdw for Zbwdw his son.

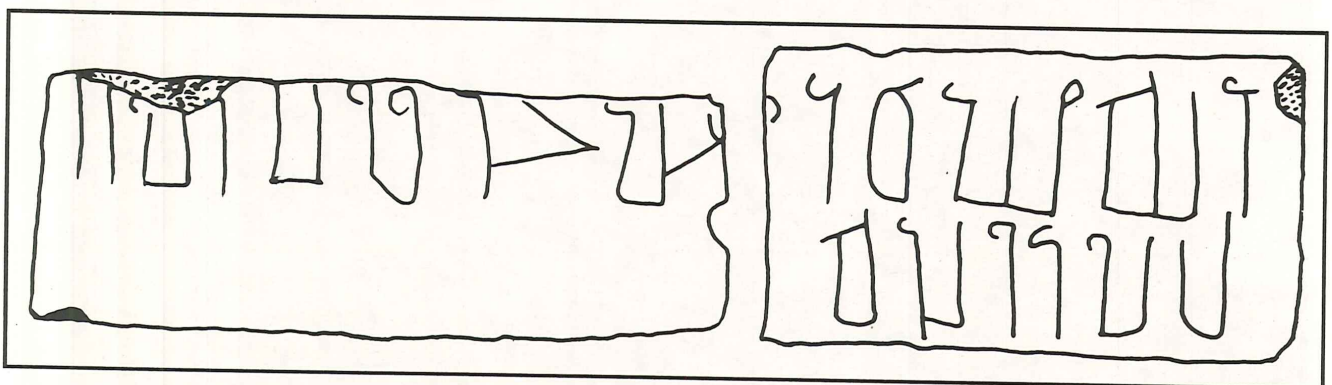
Littmann's proposal to read in the first line *bnh* (he built) instead of *'bd* (he made) can be ruled out. But the first datum to point out is the repetition of an anthroponym every alternate generation, i.e., the grandfather's name *zbwdw* for his grandson. I think it is possible to link this particu-

lar fact with the fact that in one of the other inscriptions where the proper name *grpw* is attested, we also find the name *zbwdw*; this coincidence occurs in a funerary inscription of Umm al-Jimal which reads:

*zbwdw
br grpw
Zbwdw
son of Grpw.¹⁷*

The question is whether *Grpw son of Zbwdw* of the Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat inscription, who erected a tomb for his son *Zbwdw*, could be the son of *Zbwdw son of Grpw* in the Umm al-Jimal stele, or, at least, a member of the same family.

The simplest hypothesis is that the Ḥallabat inscription was brought from the area of Umm al-Jimal with other basalt blocks recut for reuse as building material. Funerary inscriptions on tomb lintels are not unknown in that site,¹⁸ and, if the *Grpw* and *Zbwdw* attested in both sites belonged to the same family, it could be highly probable that the Ḥallabat inscriptions pertain to an Umm al-Jimal tomb, if not to the same tomb where the *Zbwdw br Grpw* epitaph was found.¹⁹ Family vaults are very common in the whole area, are usually marked



3. Apograph reassembling the Nabataean inscriptions of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat.

17. E. Littman, *PPAES* IV.A, no. 59 (RES 2081).

18. Cf. E. Littmann, *PPAES* IV.A, nos. 39 (RES 2063), 40 (CIS II 191), 42 (RES 2064), 43 (RES 2065), 46 (RES 2068).

19. It is tomb no. 6 of the plan in E. Littmann,

PPAES IV.A, pp. 34-57, where inscription no. 58 (RES 2080) was found. I do not know whether the tomb, already in ruins when visited by the PAES, still preserves its ancient lintel.

outside by one or more rows of stelae, each one bearing the name of the deceased and his/her patronymic, through which it is sometimes easy to determine relationships.²⁰

The second possibility is that in the immediate vicinity of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabat there was an ancient Nabataean tomb, from where the inscription had been removed. Such a possibility would involve a re-examination of the origins of the complex, since the presence of a Nabataean tomb would imply a Nabataean settlement there in the first-second century A.D. (approximate date based on palaeography), probably

based on the agricultural exploitation of the surrounding area.²¹ It is true that, to date, excavations have not provided any significant evidence of Nabataean remains (pottery or buildings); but, on the other hand, the origin of the inner and most ancient part of the castle still eludes scholars; and some Nabataean remains, both around the castle and the neighbouring Ḥammam al Ṣarah, have not yet been exhaustively studied.²²

G. Lacerenza
Viale Tiziano 14
B0055 Portici NA
Italy

20. Typologies of these relationships in H.C. Butler, *PPAES* II.A, pp. 205-210; E. Littmann, *PPAES* IV.A, pp. 34-57, esp. 52-55.

21. More extensive, of course, than the small agricultural enclosure situated 400 m to the west of the castle, for which see G. Bisheh, *SHAJ* II, pp. 264-265. For the occupation of the Nabataeans in the Roman-Byzantine Ḥauran see F.E. Peters, 'The Nabataeans in the Hawran,' *JAOS*, 97 (1977), pp. 263-275; S.D. Miller, *The Lava Lands of Syrian Regional Urbanism in the Roman Empire*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation,

Ann Arbor 1984; J.-M. Dentzer, 'L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans le Hauran antique' Pp. 63-136 in J. M. Dentzer (ed.), *Ḥauran* I, (Paris 1985)

22. Only a very small part of this material, which I saw during my survey in the area, has been published; see meanwhile H.C. Butler, *PPAES* II. A. pp. 77-80; K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, pp. 498-502; R.W. Hamilton, 'Ḥammam al-Sarakh,' *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2nd edition, vol.3, pp. 146-147; R. Wenning, *Die Nabatäer*, pp. 51ff.

