

TWO FORGOTTEN NABATAEAN INSCRIPTIONS

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1. THE 'UNAISHU INSCRIPTION

In 1896 one of the tombs in Petra near the theatre was partly rifled. Among the remaining pieces a sandstone slab with a Nabataean inscription was discovered. The stone was noticed by various visitors to Petra in that year: G. Hill, M.J. Lagrange, M. de Vogüé, and A. Musil. By the next year, the stone was already lost (cf. BD 1904, 402).

The inscription (CIS II No. 351) refers to "‘Unaishu, the brother of Shuqailat, the Queen of the Nabataeans, the son of..." and was part of a longer inscription written on other slabs from the grave. According to the given descriptions of the site, the tomb was identified with tomb BD No. 808.

Tomb 808 is situated on the upper row of tombs at the western slope of Ġebel el-Ĥubṭa, towards the es-Sîq and the theatre (cf. BD 1904 figs. 166, 450f., 454f. pl. XIX; Zayadine-Hottier 1976, 103 pl. 48). The facade of the tomb follows the Hegra type. Besides short remarks in BD and by Puchstein (1910, 22f), the tomb never attracted further investigation from archaeologists, even though it is imposing and much broader than the surrounding tombs. This might be because it was never finished.

In the context of other royal tombs in the area and those of high-ranking members of the royal court, it seems sensible to assume that the large tomb 808 was intended to be the burial place for a distinguished person. The events of A.D. 106, when the Nabataean kingdom and dynasty was cut short by Trajan, halted the construction.

Hill (1897, 136) reported that the inscription was taken from a grave in a loculus of the back wall, just opposite the entrance. This grave had been rifled shortly before, while the other burials within the tomb were left undisturbed.

2. THE MOULTON INSCRIPTIONS

In 1912 W.J. Moulton found two small fragments of Nabataean inscriptions in a tomb, which he believed was tomb 808, the 'Unaishu tomb of CIS and BD. Presumably the inscriptions belonged to a grave in a loculus of the right sidewall, but, since 1896, the tomb was found rifled completely (Moulton 1919-20, 90-92 pl. 2).

The inscriptions are written on small sandstone slabs. Fragment a) shows the name "Arctas"; fragment b) only two fully preserved letters, part of a third letter,

and the lower extremity of a line written above. Moulton read "Nabataeans". Fragment a) is broken, but the right side and bottom edges seemed to be almost entirely intact, indicating the lower limit of the grave. Moulton pointed out the fact that, since the name of Aretas is written so low and at the end of the inscription, it does not mean the resting place of Aretas I himself but of one of his descendants, or one bearing some relation to him. After taking measurements and photographs, Moulton hid the fragments in the tomb. After this the inscriptions were forgotten. One was re-excavated 60 years later, but the excavators were unaware of Moulton's discovery, report and replacement. The other was transferred to Palestine and was given an incorrect provenance.

3. 'UNAISHU, THE "BROTHER"

As one of the more important Nabataean inscriptions, the 'Unaishu inscription has been discussed often. Earlier scholars took "brother" to mean 'Unaishu as the real brother of Queen Shuqailat (cf. Dalman 1912, 107 and others). Y. Meshorer demonstrated that "brother" should be understood as a title of a high-ranking position at the royal court (Meshorer 1975, 61f.). The best reference for "brother" as a title in the Nabataean administration is given by Strabo, Geogr. XVI 4, 21; he identifies "brother" with the title "epitropos". Similar titles are well known in Eastern kingdoms (cf. Donner 1961, 271f.; Hinz 1971, 298). Meshorer also uses the Syllaeus inscription from Miletus (9 B.C.) for comparison, where Syllaeus is called "brother" of King Obodas II, but his father was Teimu and the father of Obodas II was Malichus I. In none of the known dynastic inscriptions is 'Unaishu mentioned as a member of the royal family (to the long known inscriptions can be added Khairy 1981). Therefore it is not a probable assumption that he was the husband of one of the Nabataean princesses or of Shuqailat II (after the death of Malichus II) (Zayadine 1986, 237).

The known data of the Nabataean dynasty in the first century A.D. is as follows:

Aretas IV (9 B.C.-A.D. 40) and 1. Huldu (9 B.C.-A.D.18)

2. Shuqailat I (A.D. 18-40)

Children: Malichus II, Shuqailat II, Obodas, Rabel, Phasael, Sha'udat I, Gamilat I, and Hageru I

Malichus II (A.D. 40-70) and Shuqailat II

Children: Rabel II, Gamilat II, Hageru II, and Sha'udat II

Child of Sha'udat I: Qashmu

Child of Hageru I: Aretas

Rabel II (A.D. 70-106) and a) Shuqailat II (A.D. 70/71-75/76)

1. Gamilat II (A.D. 76-102)

2. Hageru II (A.D. 102-106)

Children: Obodas, Malichus

Child of Qashmu: Qashmu

Queen Shuqailat of the 'Unaishu inscription could be the second wife of Aretas IV, or the daughter of Aretas IV and wife of Malichus II, or at least the same Queen ruling for a short period for her too young son Rabel II from A.D. 70/71 to 75/76. Most scholars have preferred the last possibility, understanding 'Unaishu as the premier of Queen Shuqailat II. This is the only period in which a Queen ruled the Nabataean kingdom. Otherwise it would be expected to find in the inscription that 'Unaishu was called "brother" of King N.N.

This sound dating depends strongly on the interpretation of "brother" as premier. But one must be open to various other identifications, such as trustee, intendant, chamberlain, guardian etc. Clearly "brother" signifies a position close to the Queen, but it is impossible to specify it confidently as the administrator of the reign.

There is another difficulty. The titles of Shuqailat II found on the coins (Meshorer 1975, 72-75) are different from the form given in the 'Unaishu inscription, which can only be attested for Shuqailat I, the wife of Aretas IV (Meshorer 1975, 55f.). Furthermore, the mention of "Aretas" in fragment a) recorded by Moulton might point to an early dating. These observations encourage a dating before A.D. 40 with later graves continuing into the reign of Rabel II, a possibility which can not be excluded, but at the moment other evidence points to a dating in the last quarter of the first century A.D.

4. THE LINDNER EXPEDITION

In 1973 M. Lindner started a couple of small-scale excavations at the slope of Gebel el-Hubta for the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Nürnberg in co-operation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. One of the chosen areas was tomb BD No. 813, about 100m south of tomb 808. The description of this important tomb and the results of the excavations are given by M. Lindner and F. Zayadine in many reports (the best found in Zayadine 1974, 142-45; id. 1979, 192-97; id. 1986, 229 - 37; cf. Wenning 1987, 283-85). The tomb facade is of the Hegra type, 20m high and 12m broad. The arrangement of the tomb complex with burial chamber 813, triclinium 812, courtyard with porticos, nefesh, cistern and garden(?) points clearly to the importance of this tomb and its owner, who was 'Unaishu.

4.1

On the first day M. Lindner found a sandstone slab with a Nabataean inscription near the entrance of the tomb. It was read by F. Zayadine as "Malich(us, King of the) Nabataeans" (Lindner 1973, 25; Zayadine 1973, 81 pl. 50,2; id. 1974, 144, 148 pl. 66, 2; id. 1974a, 48 fig. 22; Lindner 1980, 259 fig. 14; Zayadine 1986, 233 fig. 27). Lindner compared the inscription with the 'Unaishu inscription "from the nearby tomb 808".

The next year F. Zayadine argued, that the 'Unaishu inscription belongs to tomb 813 in reality and not to tomb 808 as believed previously (Zayadine 1974, 142; id. 1974a, 45-48; id. 1986, 232). His arguments are convincing. The description of G. Hill (1897, 136) does not match tomb 808, which has no loculi with sunken graves, nor the facade. The drawings of both tombs in BD (1904 figs. 166f) are incorrect, showing that Brünnow and von Domaszewski did not research the tombs closely. Following Hill, the 'Unaishu inscription was taken from the grave in loculus 6 in tomb 813. This loculus is in a prominent position in the tomb, in the middle of all graves. Therefore 'Unaishu might be the most distinguished dead of this tomb, both the first to be buried and the owner.

The inscription found by Lindner is identical with fragment b) of Moulton (first noticed by Wenning 1987, 284). This supports the identification of tomb 813 as the tomb of the 'Unaishu inscription as well.

4.2

In 1978 another fragment of a Nabataean inscription on a sandstone slab was found in this tomb with loculus 4. F. Zayadine read this as "Queen of the (Nabatae)ans" (Lindner 1978, 86, 94f.; Zayadine 1979, 192 pl. 92,1; id. 1983, 230, 256; id. 1986, 233 fig. 25). Already in 1973 two Nabataean dipinti on plaster fragments had been discovered in the tomb. One was found in loculus 9 and was read as "T...T/Shuqailat". The other was found close to loculus 3 and was read as "Aretas?" or "RTL" (Zayadine 1973, 81; id. 1974, 145, 148 pl. 66, 1.3; id. 1974a, 49 fig. 24; Lindner 1980, 259f. fig. 15; id. 1983, 253 fig. 10; id. 1985, 18 fig. p. 19; Zayadine 1986, 233 fig. 26). Four inscriptions and two dipinti were found in tomb 813 in Petra. Together, they provide a vivid impression of the importance of this tomb and of the burial customs in Petra in general.

In total, 11 loculi are found in the tomb. The loculi lateral to the 'Unaishu grave had been rifled completely. Some of the others still contained pieces of jewellery, coins and pottery. Loculus 4 yielded a silver coin, which F. Zayadine attributed to Malichus II and Shuqailat II (Zayadine 1979, 192 pl. 91,3). He took this coin and the Malichus inscription, which he reconstructed as "In the year...of Malichus, the King, King of the Nabataeans", as terminus ante quem for

a dating between A.D. 40-60 (Zayadine 1986, 237). But neither the classification of the coin nor the reconstruction of the Malichus inscription is secure. The coin follows type No. 163 of Meshorer (1975, 110 pl. 8) and should be attributed to Rabel II and Gamilat II, A.D. 101/2, instead of Malichus II. A bronze coin of Rabel II and Gamilat II of the same year, but of type no. 162 of Meshorer (ibd.), was found in the portico of the tomb (Zayadine 1986, 237 fig. 28). Even if the inscription begins with "In the year" it remains open how it continues. It is quite possible to add "of Rabel, the King, the King of the Nabataeans, the son" before the preserved writing "of Malichus, the King, the King of the Nabataeans". Such a reconstruction would be preferable to a dating in the reign of Malichus II, as the 'Unaishu grave is the earliest burial and the Malichus inscription from one of the loculi of the right sidewall must be later. Loculus/grave 4 is dated by the coin from A.D. 101/2. Therefore the late dating is more convincing than dating in the reign of Aretas IV.

4.3

F. Zayadine in the beginning called tomb 813 a "royal tomb" (Zayadine 1979, 197; Lindner 1980, 264; Zayadine 1983, 230), but has lately expressed some caution (Zayadine 1986, 233). Indeed none of the inscriptions or dipinti indicates the burial of a member of the royal family in this tomb; neither Malichus II, nor Shuqailat II, nor 'Unaishu can be identified as a member of the dynasty. Only the 'Unaishu inscription confirms a relationship to the royal court, but on a political level referring to his position at the court. Pride regarding this relationship to the royal court leads to the large number of references to names of the royal dynasty in the inscriptions on the various graves in this tomb. The royal names - Aretas, Malichus, Shuqailat - are to be understood mostly as part of dating formulae, for example, Zayadine's interpretation of the Malichus inscription (Zayadine 1974, 148; id. 1986, 233; cf. already Moulton 1919-20, 91), or juridical content describing the rank of the dead.

The common hypothesis of a row of "Royal Tombs" from the tomb of the Roman governor Sextius Florentinus (tomb BD No. 763) to the 'Unaishu tomb 813 on the el-Ḥubṭa slope cannot be accepted, if the evidence is examined (cf. Wenning 1987, 276ff.). Only the Urn tomb (BD No. 772) is a royal tomb, perhaps that of Aretas IV (Wenning 1987, 282). But this again is a hypothesis. Tombs of members of the royal family and of the royal court are found in prominent positions in the el-Ḥubṭa necropolis and elsewhere, but in a more open and accidental relation towards to each other. One must acknowledge that tomb 813 differs in its position from the "Royal tombs" such as the Urn tomb, which is just opposite the central and main sanctuary of the city, while tomb 813 is directed towards the es-Sīq.

5. AN INSCRIPTION IN JERUSALEM

One of the two hidden inscriptions of Moulton reappeared during the excavations of the tomb, fragment b), the Malichus inscription. Fragment a) with the name "Aretas" had a different fate. It was taken from the tomb between 1912 and 1920 and offered to collectors in Jerusalem by a dealer. During this period the Benedictines of the Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion were engaged in building up an Archaeological Museum of their own, as were other communities (Gisler 1935, 14f.; Wenning 1986, 222 with further references to this collection). They bought the offered Nabataean inscription, not knowing its real provenance. They were told it was from one of the Nabataean cities in the Negev, surveyed that time by A. Jaussen, R. Savignac, H. Vincent, A. Musil, C.L. Woolley, T.E. Lawrence, and Th. Wiegand. Their interest in a Nabataean inscription was understandable, because the Museum of the Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für die Altertumskunde des Heiligen Landes possessed an important Nabataean dynastic inscription (Dalman 1912 No. 92) already, which was found by P. Karge in tomb BD 764 in Petra 1909 (Thomsen 1913, 124f.).

The only accounts about the small inscription in the Benedictine collection were given by F.M. Abel (1920, 120, 126 No. 23 fig. 23) and L.H. Vincent (1920, 576f., fig.). Vincent correctly demonstrated that the piece could not be from the Negev, but should be from Petra. He used the 'Unaishu inscription for comparison. In the same year the report of W.J. Moulton was published, demonstrating that the Aretas inscription belonged to the 'Unaishu tomb as well. Since then the inscription seems to have been forgotten and lost. It might be possible that the inscription, was lost, like many other items in the Benedictine collection, or perhaps it was transferred to one of the other Jerusalem museums or still remains in the shelters of the Dormition Abbey.

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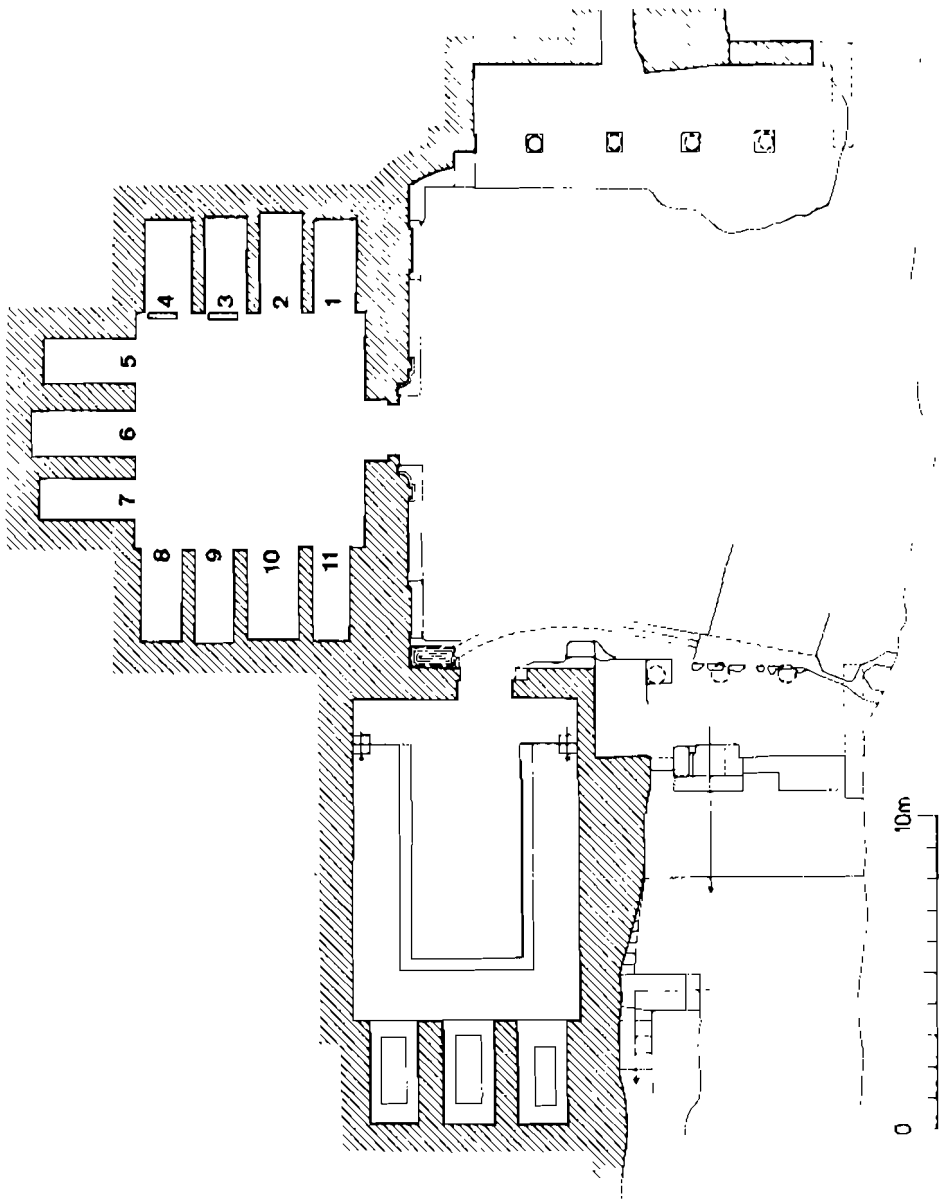


Fig.1 Petra, Tomb 813 (Lindner, 1980, fig. 17).