

## COMMENTARII BREVIORES

### Nabataeans on the Capitoline

Among the problematic dedications of kings from the remains of a Capitoline monument at Rome is an inscription on Pentelic marble commemorating a Nabataean king. Since the various dedications seem not all to come from a single historical period, speculation has ranged over dates for various texts from the age of Sulla to the early empire<sup>1</sup>. The dedication to a Nabataean ruler, discovered in the excavations of Sant' Omobono in 1940, seems clearly to belong to the group of inscriptions long known, but it has elicited very little attention. It was published initially, with a photograph, by Attilio Degrassi in 1954<sup>2</sup> (cf. *Ann. épig.* 1955, 72; *SEG XV*, 616) and then subsequently by Luigi Moretti in 1968 in his corpus of the Greek inscriptions of Rome (*IGUR I.* no. 16, pp. 25-6, with a photograph and dimensions). In 1959 the text had attracted the sharp eye of J. T. Milik, who proposed a different reading for one of the names on the inscription<sup>3</sup>. I regret that I did not discuss this text in my *Roman Arabia* of 1983 and seek to repair the omission now.

The inscription is bilingual and survives in two joining fragments, on which the following seven lines can be read. The varying spaces between letters below reflect disparities on the stone caused by differing widths of letters and changing spaces between letters.

Ὡ ΣΤΗΑ	
ḌADALLI·F·LEG	2
Β Α Σ Ι Λ Ε	
NABATAIΩNBAΣI	4
ΠΑ Β ΕΙ ΒΗΛΟΣ	
ΘΑ Ι Μ Ο Ο Β Δ Α	6
ΟΙΠΡΕΣΒ	

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<sup>1</sup> See, for a general account of the dedications and an analysis of some of the texts (but not the one discussed here), R. Mellor, "The Dedications on the Capitoline Hill," *Chiron* 8 (1978) 319-30. I am very grateful to my friend Christopher Jones for first drawing my attention to the Nabataean dedication and for providing a critical reading of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> A. Degrassi, *Boll. Com. Arch. Rom.* 74 (1954) 34-7, no. 20.

<sup>3</sup> J. T. Milik, *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 10 (1959-60) 149.

Degrassi, postulating two additional lines at the top, presented the text as follows:

[Rex--- / Nabataeorum rex--- / Rabeibel]us Tha[---f(ilius),  
Thaemo Ob] / dadalli f(ilius) leg[ati].

Βασιλε[ύς---] / Ναβαταίων βασιλε[ύς---] Ῥαβείβηλος [Θα---/  
Θαίμο Ὀβδαδάλλου] / οἱ πρεσβ[ευταί].

Profiting from Milik's onomastic observation on the name in line 6, Moretti, keeping the two additional lines from Degrassi, revised the text to read

[Rex-----]

[Nabataeorum rex-----]

[Rabeibel]us · Tha[emi f(ilius)---Thaemoob-]

dadalli · f(ilius) · leg[ati]

Βασιλε[ύς---]  
Ναβαταίων βασιλε[ύς---]  
Ῥαβείβηλος [Θαίμου υἱός---]  
Θαιμοσβδαδάλλου υἱός]  
οἱ πρεσβ[ευταί]

It will be immediately observed that the last three lines of Greek appear as two lines of Latin, and we cannot be certain that the first two lines of Greek were represented by two lines of Latin, as supposed by both Degrassi and Moretti. Furthermore, the length of the line at the right seems to be indicated by the sixth line (i. e. the fourth line of the Greek), which can be fully restored because the Latin fragment of the name (or names) Thaemoobdadallus permits us to establish the entire word with certainty. The sixth line, however, like the fifth, begins one space to the right of the left margin as determined definitively by the beginning of the fourth line (Ναβαταίων), which shows open space to the left of the N. The stone-cutter was conscious of centering lines since the first and last lines of the Greek part of the text (i. e. lines 3 and 7 of the whole) have been perfectly centered. Both lines 5 and 6, therefore, presumably terminated about one space from the margin on the right as well. The size of letters and the spaces between them in lines 5 and 6 are both more generous than in line 4. The same space that accommodates thirteen letters in line 4 would accommodate, starting from the margin, only eleven letters in line 5 and only ten in line 6. Hence, the full length of the Greek lines comes to twenty-one

or twenty-two letters from margin to margin in lines 5 and 6, but twenty-six letters in line 4 (where the letters are narrower and more closely placed). By contrast, the Latin text was not centered at all, as line 2 makes plain.

This means that the restorations proposed for the Latin lines by Degrassi and Moretti cannot be correct. But it confirms their view that the fragment THA in the Latin cannot represent the beginning of Thaimoobdadallou in the Greek. Since the VS immediately preceding THA ought to be the end of the name Rabeibelus, it is his father who must be the THA, therefore Thaemus. Considerations of space prove that we can have two and only two named Nabataean *legati*. The plural of LEG is assured by the Greek text. But similar considerations of space prove, against Moretti, that if we accept Milik's reading of Thaimoobdadallus as the name of the father of the second legate there would be absolutely no space remaining for the name of the legate himself. Accordingly, another solution must be found.

One other observation on layout and space: since Rabeibelus' name starts a line in both the Latin and the Greek texts after the royal titulature, we must have both legates' names and office in the lines that follow (two in Latin and three in Greek). It is clear that the two Latin lines were of uneven length and, as remarked earlier, were not centered. This means that the first line or lines were probably not centered either.

The father's name cannot be left as Thaimoobdadallos. Milik had rightly identified the three Nabataean elements here: *tym*, a noun meaning servant; *'bdt*, a name, Obodas in Greek contexts, derived from *'bd*, "servant" or "slave"; and *'llh* ("god"). The *t* after the *d* would have to be considered as assimilated into a second *d* after the vowel. Milik thus postulated a single name *tym'bdt'llh* meaning "the servant of Obodas the god"<sup>4</sup>. But this solution has a fatal philological flaw. It presupposes the construct state of the simple noun *tym*, whereas the Greek version has two highly visible *o*'s. One of these must represent the final *waw* of the proper name *tymw*, which is the simple noun for "servant" transformed into a name through the characteristic Nabataean *désinence w*, producing *o* in a vocalized Greek form. The other *o* has to be the vocalization of the *'ayn* at the beginning of *'bdt*. The epigraphic demands of spacing in the lines are thus reinforced by a strictly philological argument. *Thaimo* can only be a

<sup>4</sup> A Nabataean king Obodas had, in fact, received the epithet, "the god": cf. A. Negev, "Obodas the God," *Israel Exploration Journal* 36 (1986) 56-60.

proper name, that of one of the legates, and not part of one long name. The father was accordingly *'bdt'lh*. The meaning of his name is likely to be simply "servant of god" with *'bdt* as a variant of *'bd*<sup>5</sup>.

The king himself is identified with the characteristic Nabataean formula, *X mlk' mlk nbtw*, a formula that appears on inscriptions and coins<sup>6</sup>. The chiasmic word order of the Nabataean is artfully reflected in a chiasmus in the Greek ("King X, of the Nabataeans King"), and something similar may well have been achieved in the Latin. We have now to ask which Nabataean king is commemorated on the Capitoline. Again considerations of space in the Greek text rule out two royal names from the period between Sulla and the early empire, Malichus and Rabbelus. We are left with Obodas and Aretas, and of these by far the most obvious candidate is the resplendent Aretas, who reigned as a friend of Rome over many decades of the early principate (from 9 B.C. until A.D. 40)<sup>7</sup>. If there were any uncertainty as to whether this is the king in our inscription, extra space available after ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ] in line 4 would decide the matter. We need an epithet, and the regular attribute of Aretas in Nabataean documents, epigraphic and numismatic, is *rhm 'mh* ("who loves his people"), which appears in Greek as φιλόδημος. That word completes line 4 to make a total number of precisely twenty-six letters and thus ideally fills the available space to the margin. I suspect that no epithet appeared in the Latin text, since there is no Latin word that would correspond with it. The chiasmic structure of *rex Aretas Nabataeorum rex* would, in fact, exactly fill a single line. In view of the lack of centering and abbreviated organization of the extant part of the Latin text one additional line on top seems preferable to two.

<sup>5</sup> For the names *tymw* and *'bdt*, see J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen* 2 (Paris 1932) 155–6 and 125, and A. Negev, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm. Qedem* (Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, vol. 32, Jerusalem 1991) 68 (no. 1218), 48 (no. 827).

<sup>6</sup> Y. Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins. Qedem* (Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, vol. 3, Jerusalem 1975) 60. Cf. Cantineau, *op. cit.* 35, no. VI (Hegra), *mknw mlk' mlk nbtw* (for Mank/Malichus). The Hegra text appears as no. 26 on p. 167 of J. F. Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada' in Salih* (Oxford 1993).

<sup>7</sup> For Nabataean history in the late republic and early empire, see G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983, corrected reprint 1994), chapters 3, 4 and 5.

We have now to determine the reason for an appearance of Nabataean *legati* in Rome in the time of Aretas. A notorious episode recorded by Josephus (*AJ* 16. 295–6; 335–55; 17. 52–7; *BJ* 1. 574–7) provides the only major diplomatic context of Nabataeans in the Roman capital within the lifetime of this king. It occurred in the reign of Augustus at the beginning of Aretas' reign. Syllaeus, a powerful courtier of the former king and the person Strabo (16. 4. 23–4) held responsible for misleading the Roman troops taken into South Arabia by Aelius Gallus in the mid twenties, was actually present in Rome at the time of Aretas' succession. He was an enemy of the new king and for a while succeeded in keeping Augustus from accepting Aretas on the throne. But the supporters of Aretas ultimately prevailed at the expense of Syllaeus, who returned to the Near East. A few years later he was back in Rome, hounded by charges of treason and even of murdering the previous king. Augustus adjudicated the case, presumably in the presence of his *consilium*, as he usually did for problems in client kingdoms<sup>8</sup>. Syllaeus was found guilty and executed<sup>9</sup>. This was the final and definitive confirmation of Aretas as king of the Nabataeans. The dedication on the Capitoline monument is most likely to belong to these early years of Aretas' rule, either when he was first confirmed by Augustus or when Syllaeus was finally destroyed.

A re-edited text of the Sant' Omobono fragment may now be offered, incorporating the foregoing observations and providing, if convincing, at least one dated inscription from the dedications on the Capitoline monument:

[REX · ARETAS · NABATAEORVM · REX]  
 [RABEIBEL]VS · THA[EMI · F · THAEMO · OB]  
 DADALLI · F · LEG[ATI]  
 ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΡΕΤΑΣ]  
 ΝΑΒΑΤΑΙΩΝΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΦΙΛΟΔΗΜΟΣ]  
 ΡΑΒΕΙΒΗΛΟΣ[ΘΑΙΜΟΥΥΙΟΣ]  
 ΘΑΙΜΟΟΒΔΑ[ΔΑΛΛΟΥΥΙΟΣ]  
 ΟΠΠΡΕΣΒ[ΕΥΤΑΙ]

An articulated text would stand as follows:

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Suet., *Tib.* 8 (Archelaus).

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed and documented account of the last years of Syllaeus, see Bowersock, *op. cit.* 51–3.

[Rex Aretas Nabataeorum rex]  
 [Rabeibel]us Tha[emi f. Thaemo Ob-]  
 dadalli f. leg[ati]  
 Βασιλεὺς Ἀρέτας]  
 Ναβαταίων βασιλεὺς φιλόδημος]  
 Ῥαβειβηλος [Θαιμου υἱός]  
 Θαίμο Ὀβδαδάλλου υἱός]  
 οἱ πρεσβευταί]

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В статье предлагаются уточнения к тексту двуязычной латинской и греческой надписи с Капитолия. В надписи упомянут некий набатейский царь, как предполагает автор, Аре́та, правивший с 9 г. до н. э. по 40 г. н. э., и два царских посла, имя второго из которых должно восстанавливаться следующим образом: Θαίμο Ὀβδαδάλλου υἱός] – Thaemo Obdadalli f(ilius).