**Arabian archaeology
and epigraphy**

A new Nabataean inscription from Taymā'

A new six-line Nabataean inscription was recently discovered during building work in the centre of the oasis city of Taymā', north-west Saudi Arabia. It is the epitaph of a ruler, or chief citizen, of the city and is dated by the era of the Roman Province of Arabia to AD 203. All but one of the names in the text are Jewish, and this is by far the earliest record of Jews in the oasis. The Nabataean script of the epitaph is also of great interest since it shows features which are normally associated with much later periods in the development of the Nabataean into the Arabic script.

Keywords: Nabataean inscription, Nabataean script, Tayma, Arabia

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The Nabataean inscription published here was found in March 2009 at Sabha, in the city centre of Taymā', north-west Saudi Arabia. This location lies a few metres north of the Tabūk-Madīna road, east of the Wādī Burayda which flows towards the sabkha of Taymā' (GPS [WGS 84] N 27° 37' 49.13'', E 38° 33' 0.95''). The inscription was discovered in one of several rectangular foundation pits excavated for the construction of a new building. The deposit consisted of mud and some quarry stones mixed with modern waste. The deposit was *c.* 70 cm thick and lay upon an asphalt layer which was also detected in other foundation pits. The asphalt probably originates from a former street or square in this area. It is therefore clear that the inscription was not *in situ* when it was found and it seems to have been brought there in modern times when the asphalt layer was covered with material (including the quarry stones) which had been removed from a possible ancient site.

The inscription is carved on a sandstone stela 50 cm high, 46 cm wide and 9.6 cm thick. The inscription of six lines is enclosed within a border, carved in relief, consisting of three parallel horizontal lines at the top and the bottom, and a *tabula ansata* flanked by a double vertical line on the left and on the right. The interior of the left 'ear' of the *tabula ansata* has been hollowed out

but that on the right has not been finished and so contains a triangle with a small hole in the middle.[1] The only damage to the stela consists of a chip to the 'frame' just above the right 'ear' and to the double line just above it, a small chip just below the last line of text, and some abrasion of the frame just below the left 'ear'.

The text is in relief and, unusually for a Nabataean inscription, the lines are divided by (more or less) horizontal bars, also in relief. However, compare CIS ii 336, an Aramaic inscription on a stela from Taymā', which also has these divisions.[2] It would appear that the frame was prepared first and that the inscription and the dividing lines were not marked out on the stone in advance but instead the mason simply carved them as he went along, with the result that he had to reduce the height of the last three lines and

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[1] This occurs occasionally on other *tabulae ansatae* and it has been suggested that it represents a symbolic pin by which the *tabula* was theoretically attached to the surface on which it was carved or, in the case of a wall, into which it was fitted. See the discussion in Lewis & Macdonald 2003: 80 and n. 231. However, it is probably accidental here, or else it marks where the mason intended to start hollowing out the space.

[2] By contrast, dividing lines of this sort are almost universally employed in formal inscriptions in relief at the oasis of Dedān.

compress the text in them. On the other hand, it is understandable that the first two lines with the name of the deceased, and particularly the third line which contains his title, would be given prominence; thus, to this extent, the layout may have been intentional.

Text (Fig. 1)[3]

1. *dʾ npš ʾšʿyh*
2. *bylṭʾ* [or: *nblṭʾ*] *br ywsp*
3. *rʾš tymy dy ʾqym*
4. *ʿlhwy ʿmrm w ʿšmw*
5. *ʾḥwhy byrḥ ʾyr*
6. *šnt* 20+20+20+20+10+5+1+1+1 *lhprkyʾ*

Translation

1. This is the memorial of ʾšʿyh
2. the Councillor [or: Nblṭʾ] son of Ywsp
3. chief citizen of Taymāʾ which erected

Fig. 1.
The new inscription of AD 203 from Taymā. (Photograph by J. Kramer).

4. over him ʿmrm and {ʿšmw}
5. his brothers in the month of Iyār
6. year 20+20+20+20+10+5+1+1+1 of the Province.

More idiomatically:

'This is the memorial of ʾšʿyh, the Councillor [or: Nblṭʾ], son of Ywsp, chief citizen of Taymāʾ, which ʿmrm and {ʿšmw} his brothers erected for him in the month of Iyār of the year 98 of the Province [= AD 203].'

Commentary

The letter forms: all the letters are clear on the photograph, with the exception of the first two signs in the last word in line 4, although there is in fact little doubt about their reading.

d/r: Note that *d*, in which the head is joined to the stem at an angle (*dʾ*, *dy*), is distinguished from *r* where the two lines are joined in a curve (*br*, *rʾš*, *ʿmrm* [less so], *byrḥ*, *ʾyr* [less so]).

y: In initial position, and in medial position when not joined from the right, *y* retains a very slight backward tilt (in *ywsp* and *ʾyr*), but without the common curve or slight zigzag.

By contrast, *y* in medial position when joined from the right (in *ʾšʿyh*, *bylṭʾ* [?], *ʾqym* and *byrḥ*) is a straight vertical line indistinguishable in angle and height from initial and medial *n* (in *npš*, *nblṭʾ* [?], and *šnt*) and *b* (in *bylṭʾ* or *nblṭʾ*, *br*, and *byrḥ*). This is possibly the earliest dated example in a formal Nabataean inscription of these three letters having identical forms in these positions, as they do in even the earliest forms of the Arabic script. Interestingly, this is not the case in much later Nabataean inscriptions, e.g. Stiehl 1970 (see fig. 2 and below) of AD 356 (where medial *n* and *y* are distinguished in *šnyn* and initial *b* and medial *y* in *byrḥ*), or in Al-Ḏīyayb 2002: 311, nos 132+133[4] of AD 455/6 (in *dkyr*, *ʿbydw*). This is yet another indication that there was no smooth chronological progression in the development of the letter forms of the Nabataean script, or of its evolution into the Arabic script.[5]

The final form of *y* (in *tymy*, *dy*, *ʿlhwy* [sic], *ʾḥwhy*) is also interesting. It contrasts with the zigzag found in most first- and second-century Nabataean formal

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texts, and in Avdat 2 (AD 204), which is from the year after our inscription. In our text, final *y* has the rightward sweep found in some of the papyri of the end of the first and the beginning of the second centuries AD, and in some late inscriptions such as JSNab 17 (AD 267), the Namāra inscription (AD 328) and Stiehl 1970 (AD 356).[6] However, it is noticeable that, in contrast to these other cases, here the end of the tail runs either straight downwards or curves slightly back towards the left, a trait which may possibly be paralleled in one of the *dipinti* from Wādī Ramm (see Macdonald 2003: 53, fig. 38 line 14 and fig. 23).

s: The form in *ywsp* is similar to that in the Ruwwāfah inscription (AD 167/169), although the closest parallels are in the papyri, e.g. *P.Yadin* 3 (AD 97/98).[7]

p: While the medial *p* (in *npš*) has its traditional shape, the final form (in *ywsp*) has a hook which almost reaches the base line[8] (i.e. making it a loop with no stem) and a long, straight, (more or less) *horizontal* tail. A similar form is found in the words *ytʾlp* in H 8/7 (Ḥegra, 1 BC/AD) and *ksp* in H 30/7 (AD 7/8),[9] but is rare in other Nabataean formal inscriptions (see Macdonald 2003: 53, fig. 38; Gruendler 1993: 81, 83), though it occurs in some Nabataean graffiti from north-west Arabia.[10] Curiously, in spite of the gap of five centuries, it is very close to the form in some early Arabic inscriptions such as that in the word *yastankif* in the mosaic inscription of the Dome of the Rock (AD 692).[11] All this suggests that this form was a

long-standing alternative to those with a stem topped by a small hook or circle and a short and/or diagonal tail.

r: See under *d* above. In *br*, the *b* is joined to the *r* two-thirds of the way down the stem, whereas *y* is joined to *r* just above its foot in *byrḥ*, and at its base in *ʾyr*.

The names
With the exception of ˚šmw all the names are Jewish.

ʾšyh (line 1) is thought to be an Aramaeized form of Biblical *yšʿyh* (Isaiah). This form has been found on an ostracon at Masada (Ilan 2002: 180, no. 11) and so must predate AD 73.

Nblṭ (line 2), if this is the correct reading (see below under 'General'), is found in the form *Nblṭh* as a Jewish family name in the Midrash *Sifrē* to Deuteronomy, which dates from before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 (2002: 393). It may ultimately derive from the place name Něballaṭ which is mentioned in Nehemiah 11:34.

Ywsp (line 2) is, of course a well-known Jewish name which was widely used in antiquity (2002: 150–168). It has also been found in two Nabataean graffiti: JSNab 262 (from between Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and al-ʿUlā) where the patronym is ʿwyw which could represent the Jewish name ʿwy ('Avī', see Ilan 2002: 399), and al-Dīyayb, 2002: 298, no. 84 (from Jabal Umm Jadhayidh, between Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and Tabūk) where the patronym is ʿnmw, an Arabian name ('Ghānim') which is common in Nabataean. Apart from the name *ywsp,* there is nothing distinctive about these two graffiti.

ʿmrm (line 5) is the name of Moses' father (Exodus 6:18, 20),[12] and was borne by one of the leaders

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6 Apart from JSNab 17, see lines 15, 16, 13, 8, respectively on Macdonald 2003: 53, fig. 38. It also occurs in CIS ii 963 (AD 206) and ARNA 17 (AD 275/6), though these are graffiti, (we are grateful to Laïla Nehmé for the reference to the first of these). See the discussion in Macdonald, in press a.

7 Compare lines 7 and 15 respectively in Macdonald 2003: 53, fig. 38. For *s* in both medial and final place in the papyri see for instance Yadin *et al.* 2002: pl. 24, in the second and third words of the 12th line (= line 32 of the Lower Version).

8 The lower part is slightly damaged, but is still visible, and the fact that the hole between the two sides of the loop extends down to the tail (cf. the equivalent hole in the *p* in *npš*), shows that this must have been the intention.

9 However, compare the 'normal' *p* in *ʾlp* in the same line.

10 For instance, in the same name, *ywsp*, in al-Dīyayb, 2002: 298, no. 84 (unfortunately undated), on which see below under the name *ywsp*.

11 This word occurs in the northern section of the inner octagonal arcade.

12 See Horovitz 1925: 159 for a discussion of the forms ʿmrm and ʿImrān. Note that although a name ʿmrn occurs in a Taymanitic inscription (Ph 279ap) and possibly an Aramaic text from Taymāʾ (CIS ii 114/2–3), it almost certainly represents the name ʿmr with the suffix -n which is extremely popular in names at Taymāʾ in both Aramaic and Taymanitic inscriptions, e.g. mʿn-n (CIS ii 114/2), mʿnt-n (Beyer & Livingstone 1987: 288, no. 2), grm-n (*ibid.* no. 3), rml-n (JSNab 342); ṭrbn (JSTham 517, 522), ṣbyg-n (JSTham 522), rtt-n (JSTham 503), bṣdq-n (WTay 38), s²bt-n (Esk 6, 67), ytʿ-n (Esk 17), yʿz-n (Esk 54), rʿs¹-n (Esk 081), ʿkb-n (Esk 145), etc. Similarly, ʿmrᵐ ʿrbyⁿ in a graffito at al-ʿUqlah in Ḥaḍramawt, represents ʿʿmr [with mimation] the Arabʾ, rather than a name ʿmrm.

of raids by the inhabitants of the Peraea (east of the river Jordan) against Philadelphia (modern Amman), in the reign of the emperor Claudius.[13] It is also found on an ossuary in Jerusalem, pre-AD 70, and in the Babylonian Talmud pre-AD 200 (Ilan 2002: 203).

ʿšmw does not seem to be found in Jewish sources,[14] and seems to be rare in Arabia and elsewhere. It occurs once in a Nabataean graffito from Jabal Mismāʾ near Taymāʾ (CIS ii 340); and a rather damaged Taymanitic inscription from al-Badah near Taymāʾ reads lm ʿs²m 'By ʿs²m'.[15] There is also one occurrence of ʿs²m as a personal name in Late Sabaic (CIH 596/5).

However, Nabataean š can of course represent both Ancient North Arabian /s¹/ and /s²/. A personal name (or names) ʿs¹m occurs several times in Safaitic, and ʿs¹mᵐ occurs in Qatabanic and Hadramitic.[16] A certain Ἰαμουρ Ἀσαμου (Yaʿamur son of ʿAsam/ʿAšam ?) of Askelon also occurs in a Greek inscription of the Roman period (Lidzbarski 1902: 216, no. 92).[17]

General

The first word of line 2 is difficult to interpret with any certainty. Because the forms of medial b, y, and n are identical in this text, a number of readings are possible. Of these, only bylṭ' and nblṭ' would seem to provide plausible interpretations. Very tentatively, we would suggest that bylṭ' could represent an Aramaeization of Greek Βουλευτὴς ('senator', 'member of the βουλὴ, or city council'). This occurs in two

Palmyrene texts as bylwṭ' and blwṭ.[18] Rosenthal explains the change from -ov- to -y- as dissimilation (1936: 20). But note that in blwṭ b-ʾntky' the first vowel is not marked at all, presumably because it has been shortened. If the first word in the second line of our inscription is indeed bylṭ' one would have to assume that the second vowel (-ϵυ-) of the original had been shortened. Even if this reading is correct, it is unfortunately impossible to identify the exact office in Taymāʾ indicated by such a title, or its relationship to the title rʾš tymy.

If, on the other hand, the word is nblṭ', the use of a double personal name, or the juxtaposition of a personal and a family name, would be highly unusual in Nabataean, and has not occurred so far in the Taymanitic and Aramaic inscriptions of Taymāʾ, though it is common in Dadanitic.[19] According to Ilan, the practice is uncommon, but attested, in Jewish nomenclature (2002: 46). Given that the only previous attestation of Nblṭ' is as a family name (see above) and it is unlike the sorts of second names known from Roman Palestine (Ilan 2002: 47), we could perhaps speculate that it serves as a family name here.

The word rʾš in the title rʾš tymy has here its normal spelling in Nabataean Aramaic, as opposed to the variant ryš in the same title in the inscription of AD 356 from Ḥegrā/Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ (Stiehl 1970) (see below). The word has already been found in Nabataean in the title rʾš ʿyn lʿbn 'Controller of the Spring of Laʿbān', at Khirbet edh-Dharīḥ in southern Jordan,[20] and one could compare the titles rš šyrʾ ('caravan leader'), and rš tdmwr ('chief person, ruler, of Tadmur'), at Palmyra.[21] A title rš[ʾ]m̊rym 'chief of the citizens' has also been identified in a Greek-Aramaic bilingual inscription on an ossuary lid from Khirbet Zif near Hebron,[22] where it parallels the

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[13] Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* XX.4.

[14] But perhaps compare ʿsmyy ('ʿAsmai' ?) in Ilan 2002: 401?

[15] The text is illustrated but not read in Eskoubi 1999: 323 (above no. 240).

[16] Qatabanic: CSAI I, 482 and 533 (and possibly as a clan name twice in CSAI I 295). We are most grateful to Peter Stein for this information. In Hadramitic: Ryckmans 1944: 158–160 (Caton Thompson 4/1), 169 (Caton Thompson 29/1); and once in a fragmentary context: CIH 845/1.

[17] Lidzbarski compares it to Arabic aʿṣam and ʿaṣam, rather than to the root ʾ–S–M.

[18] In bylwṭ' tdmry', 'the Palmyrene senator' (CIS ii 3937/2 of AD 258) and in blwṭ b- ʾntky' 'senator in Antioch' (Inv 10. 29/2 of AD 161).

[19] The one exception at Taymāʾ is the second stela in Imperial Aramaic (see Cross 1986) in which the person setting up the inscription is called Pṣgw Šhrw. However, he specifically states that he is of the royal house of Liḥyān (a kingdom based in Dedān).

[20] See Savignac 1937, with the rereading and reinterpretation by Starcky, in Savignac & Starcky 1957: 215–217.

[21] See PAT 1373/4 and 0290/2–3 respectively.

[22] On the title πρωτοπολ(ε)ίτης see Lifshitz 1973-1974:44–46; and Vattioni 1977 who shows that it is not used exclusively in Jewish contexts (1977:25).

Greek title προτοπολείτης ('first citizen', *princeps civitatis*).[23]

The spelling *tymy* in line 3, with final *-y* as opposed to the final *-ʾ* in line 5 of the text from Ḥegrā (Stiehl 1970) and possibly in an unpublished Taymanitic graffito, is difficult to explain. It is possible that it represents *imāla*, i.e. a pronunciation *taymē rather than *taymā, but as far as we know, there is no other evidence for such a pronunciation.

The verb *ʾqym* is, of course, the *aphʿel* of the common Aramaic verb *qwm* 'to stand', with the meaning 'to erect' and has been found before in Nabataean (see Starcky & Strugnell 1966: 237, line 3 and CIS ii 164/1). Given the Jewish context of this inscription, it may be worth noting that this form is also found in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic as opposed to the form *ʾwqy* in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.

In line 4, *ʾlhwy* must be an error for *ʾlwhy* 'over him'.[24] As far as we can tell, the use of this preposition after the verb *ʾqym* has only been found once before in Aramaic inscriptions of this period, in a Palmyrene inscription CIS ii 3956/4 where the reference is to setting two statues on top of a column.

In line 5, *ʾḥwhy* presumably refers to both persons named in the line above[25] and the noun must therefore be in the plural. In Nabataean, the plural of *ʾḥ* with the 3rd person masculine pronominal suffix appears to be identical to one of the forms of the
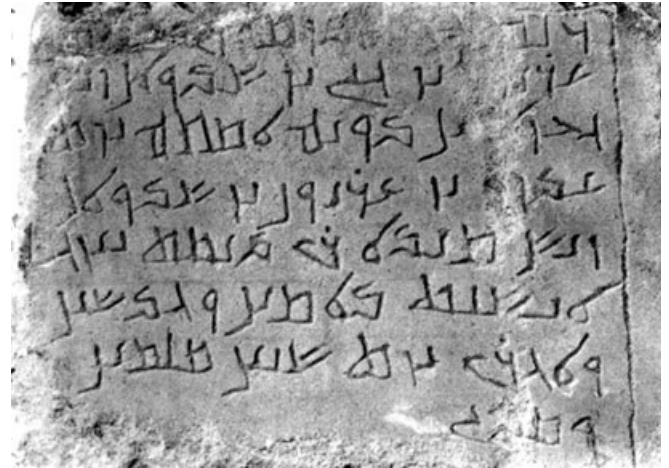

Fig. 2.
The inscription from Ḥegrā of AD 356. (Photograph courtesy of Professor Ruth Altheim-Stiehl).

singular with the same suffix.[26] For other examples *ʾḥwhy* meaning 'his brothers' see H 36/2, 5 and the commentary there, and Macdonald 2006: 288.

The month of *ʾyr* corresponds to April-May. The four symbols for 20 are followed by the curve representing 10 and the long stroke for 5, plus three shorter strokes representing units, making in total 98. The stroke representing the last of the units is continued below the line and we have been unable to find a parallel for this. It is presumably simply a decorative flourish. The form of the combined figures 10+5+1+1+1 is almost exactly paralleled by the figures for 18 in the second Nabataean inscription from Tell Shuqafiyeh in the Egyptian Delta (see Fiema & Jones 1990: 241, fig. 2), though there the final 'flourish' is absent.

The term *hprkʾ* for the (era of) the Roman Province of Arabia is found in various forms in Nabataean:

As *hprkyʾ*, it occurs in Negev 1963: 118, no. 11/2 (year 2), and probably in JSNab 159/2 from Ḥegrā (year 20?).

As *hprkyh*, it is found in CIS ii 964/2 (year 85),[27] and compare the same spelling in the Jewish

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[23] Rahmani 1972 (= SEG XXVI.1668 = XXVII.1014); Yadin 1972; Lifshitz 1973–1974: 44–46. There is in fact only one missing letter between the *š* and the *r*, and, according to Rahmani, *m* would both fit the space and match the surviving traces (1972: 115). However, *rš mrym* ('head of the masters', on the final *m* see Kutscher 1972) does not produce a suitable parallel to the Greek προτοπολείτης, so Yadin suggested the reading *rš[ʾ]ḥmrym* ('chief of the citizens') and speculated that the *ʿ* was 'probably not pronounced [and] was dropped altogether in the spelling of the title'. He refers to 'numerous examples [in Palestinian Aramaic] of the *ʿayin* being dropped altogether in spelling' (1972: 236). We are most grateful to Hannah Cotton for these references.

[24] As in H 8/7, 31/7, 34/11, etc.

[25] Theoretically, of course, one could say that it applies only to the second individual mentioned, *ʿšmw*, but this would mean that the relationship of *ʿmrm* to the deceased would be unexplained, as would be the reason why he is mentioned before (and so apparently given precedence over) the deceased's brother.

[26] Compare the forms listed on DNWSI p. 29, though note that there is no justification for taking *ʾhwhy* in ARNA Nab 30 as representing the plural since there is room for only one name between the *w* after the author's name and the word *ʾhwhy*.

[27] It has also been partially restored in *P.Yadin* 6/2 and 9/2. In both cases the year is lost.

Palestinian Aramaic papyri *P.Yadin* 7/2 (year 15) and (partially restored) in 8/2 (year 17).[28]

As *hprkʾ*, it appears in Negev 1963: 119, no. 12/4 (year 20).

As *hprk bṣr*, in Milik 1958: 243–246, no. 6/5 (year 3), where the Greek part of the bilingual suggests it stands for ἐπαρχ(ε)ία, rather than ἔπαρχος.

Since the era of *Provincia Arabia* began on 22nd March AD 106, the month of *ʾyr* in year 98 of the Province would be equivalent to April/May AD 203 (see Meimaris 1992: 146–148).

Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, this is by far the earliest evidence of a Jewish presence at Taymāʾ, let alone of Jews in positions of authority there. It is commonly stated that there was a Jewish community in pre-Islamic Taymāʾ,[29] and it has even been suggested that it might have been settled there by Nabonidus in the mid-sixth century BC,[30] but until now there has been no direct evidence for it before the early Islamic period.[31] There are reports in works of the Islamic period that a Jewish poet of the sixth century AD, al-Samawʾal b. Ādiyā, lived in the castle of al-Ablaq at

Taymāʾ (see Bauer 1995), and that an Arab tribe was forced by the inhabitants of Taymāʾ to adopt Judaism before being allowed to settle there.[32] However, these are legends recorded considerably later than the people and events they describe, rather than firm contemporary evidence.

There is an obvious parallel to our text in the Nabataean funerary inscription published by Stiehl (1970), which is said to come from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ (Fig. 2).[33]

This reads:

1. *dnh - - - - š - - - - b̊r̊tʾ dy - - - -*
2. *ʾdy - - - - br ḥny br šmwʾl ryš̊*
3. *ḥgrʾ ʾl mwyh ʾtth brt*
4. *ʿmr̊w br ʿdywn br šmwʾl*
5. *ryš tymʾ dy mytt byrḥ*
6. *ʾb šnt mʾtyn wḥmšyn*
7. *wʾḥdy brt šnyn tltyn*
8. *wtmny*

1. This is - - - - which - - - -
2. ʿdy[wn] son of Ḥny son of Šmwʾl {chief citizen}
3. of Ḥgrʾ for [lit. over] Mwyh his wife, daughter of
4. ʿmrw son of ʿdywn son of Šmwʾl
5. chief citizen of Tymʾ, who died in the month of
6. Ab in the year two hundred and fifty-
7. one [AD 356] at the age of thirty-
8. eight.

Altheim and Stiehl (1968: 306), followed by almost all subsequent writers,[34] read the first name in line 2 and the second in line 3 as *ʿdnwn* and that of the deceased as *mwnh*. However, the letter read as *n* in these names is quite distinct from medial *n* in the rest of the text (cf. *dnh, ḥny, šnt, šnyn, tmny*) and identical to medial *y* (cf. *ryš, tymʾ, mytt, byrḥ, mʾtyn, ḥmšyn, šnyn, tltyn*). This is particularly clear in the word *šnyn* (line 7) where the medial forms of the two letters are side by side. The names formerly read as

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28 See the parallels collected in Yadin *et al.* 2002: 91.

29 See the discussion of the various theories on how the Jews came to the Ḥijāz, in Gil 1984: 204–211; Newby 1988: 14–32.

30 Gadd 1958: 85–88 in a careful and seductive series of deductions in the absence of direct evidence. See also the discussion in Newby 1988: 20–21.

31 Newby attempts to argue that both St Paul and Rabbi Akiba may have visited pre-existing Jewish communities in the Ḥijāz (1988: 30–32), but this is based on a confusion of the Arabian Peninsula with the Nabataean kingdom (in the case of St Paul) and Provincia Arabia (in the case of Rabbi Akiba). Of course both the kingdom and the Province included an area of the Ḥijāz, but the New Testament does not specify where in the Nabataean kingdom St Paul went, nor does the Mishnah specify where in the Province Rabbi Akiba travelled. In both cases, it could have been anywhere from southern Syria to Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ. Newby's repeated assumption that 'Jews were present in the peninsula prior to the events of 70 C.E. [the end of the First Jewish Revolt] and 135 C.E. [the end of the Second Jewish Revolt]' and that 'Jews came into Arabia in Roman times' (1988: 32 and 49 respectively) are based not on fact but on inference. In reality, we have no firm evidence at all of Jewish communities in the Peninsula at this period. There *may* have been some, but as yet their presence cannot be demonstrated.

32 See Gil 1984: 210–211. A translation of the passage in al-Bakrī can be found in Lecker 1995: 66–67.

33 The text was first read and translated in Altheim & Stiehl 1968: 305–309, and was subsequently republished in Stiehl 1970. We are most grateful to Professor Ruth Altheim-Stiehl for kindly making the photograph available to us. In addition to the editorial symbols given in note 3, we use - - - - to mark sections of the text that are too damaged to read. In the translation [ ] enclose parts of words which are restored, or explanations.

34 This includes one of the present authors (Macdonald, e.g. 2003: 53, line 8)!

ʿdnwn and mwnh, should therefore be read ʿdywn and mwyh.[35] These are both North Arabian names. The first has probably been found in the form ʿdyn in eleven Safaitic inscriptions, where no vowels are shown. The second is shared by the famous 'queen of the Saracens' who defeated the Byzantine armies in AD 378 and married her daughter to Victor, the Byzantine *magister militum* (see Bowersock 1994; Shahid 1984: 138–202). It seems to have been a popular name among Arab women in the fourth and subsequent centuries and there are a number of examples of its use in the ruling houses of the Arabs at this period (Shahid 1984: 194–197).

Although this text is more than 150 years later than the one from Taymāʾ, there is an obvious parallel in the title rʾš tymy/ryš tymʾ. In the later inscription it is matched by another title ryš̆ ḥgrʾ 'chief man of Ḥegrā', and it has been suggested that this in turn corresponds to the title *primus civitatis* in a Latin inscription found at Ḥegrā and dated to AD 175–177.[36] Thus, although we do not know the functions of this office, we can say that it almost certainly existed in Ḥegrā from at least the late second to the mid-fourth centuries AD, and certainly existed in Taymāʾ from at least the early third to the mid-fourth centuries.

A comparison of the personal names in the two Aramaic inscriptions is also interesting. In the text from Taymāʾ, all but one of the names are Jewish, without parallels in the pre-Islamic Arabian onomasticon.[37] However, 150 years later, in the text

from Ḥegrā, the names, with one exception (šmwʾl),[38] are all Arabian.[39]

Of course, this may simply be chance and we need far more evidence before we can draw any conclusions. The fact that the name šmwʾl is of Jewish origin may suggest that its bearer was also of Jewish stock, but it does not necessarily mean that he himself was an adherent of Judaism, any more than the Arabian names of his descendants mean that they were not practising Jews. On the other hand, šmwʾl could have been an ethnically Arab convert to Judaism, or the son of one. The situation is complicated still further by the use of Old Testament names by Christians.[40] The name šemûʾel — i.e. exactly the same form as in Stiehl 1970 — occurs in Syriac, not only in translations of the Old Testament but as the name of church officials, though this evidence is from later periods (Payne Smith 1879–1901: 4205). So, the occurrence of this name in Stiehl 1970 is not, of itself, proof that its bearer was a Jew, either ethnically or in religion.[41]

By contrast, in the text from Taymāʾ, ʾšʿyh, nblṭ (if this is the correct reading), ywsp, and ʿmrm are all Jewish names without Ancient North or South Arabian parallels and, with the exception of ywsp, are either rare forms (ʾšʿyh), or rarely attested names (nblṭ, ʿmrm), i.e. not the most obvious names for a convert to choose. This perhaps helps support the idea that their bearers were of Jewish origin, rather than Arab converts, and even, if the use of the Nabataean and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic form ʾqym

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[35] It is for this reason that, in the transliteration above, the *y* in these names is printed in bold. As far as we know, the only scholar to make the correct reading of *mwyh* was J. Starcky, who mentions it in passing (1978: 47). However, it is not known whether he read ʿdywn or ʿdnwn.

[36] See al-Talhi and al-Daire 2005: 213, following a suggestion by Laïla Nehmé (n. 39).

[37] *Ywsp* is, of course, found in the form ys¹f as the name of the Himyarite king who adopted Judaism. Indeed, in one inscription (Ja 1028/1,3) the name has the form Yws¹f, where the use of the *mater lectionis* may suggest a direct borrowing from Hebrew/Aramaic. As Nebes points out, the fact that ys¹f/yws¹f is never given a patronym also suggests that he took this name from Hebrew/Aramaic as a symbolic gesture (2008: 26). We are most grateful to Peter Stein (personal communication) for all this information. The supposed occurrence of a name ys¹f bn ʾbġd in ISB 330, is probably the result of a miscopying by Oxtoby. As Oxtoby himself suggests (1968: 92), the first name should probably be read ys¹k. A ys¹k bn ʾbġd is known from eight other Safaitic inscriptions.

[38] On the form of the name *Samawʾal*, see Horovitz 1925: 179. Altheim and Stiehl (1968: 307, followed in Stiehl 1970: 89) suggest that šmwʾl was the ancestor of both ʿdnwn [*scil.* ʿdywn] and mwnh [*scil.* mwyh], and while this is plausible, and perhaps supported by the fact that ʿdywn would then bear the name of his paternal uncle, this is of course unprovable.

[39] Newby (1988: 134, n. 21), suggests that the name ḥny in this text represents the Jewish name *Ḥônî*, but this would have been spelt *ḥwny, and it is much more probable that it represents the Arabian name ḥny, which is extremely common in Safaitic (cf. Arabic *Ḥunay*, see Caskel 1966, ii: 333b, and *Ğābir b. Ḥunaiy* (p. 250a) the Taghlibī poet. We are most grateful to Michael Lecker for this latter reference).

[40] See for instance, the cases of the names *Yūnus* and *Ilyas* discussed by Horovitz (1925: 26–27).

[41] The name is still found at the time of the Prophet, in the form *Samawal*, as the name of a Medinan Jew, beside another form, *Šamwīl* (Horovitz 1925: 35).

rather than the Babylonian Jewish Aramaic ʾwqy is of any significance, that they were of Palestinian origin.

Gil attributed to Nau the statement that 'almost all Jews mentioned during the Prophet's lifetime have Arab names'.[42] But this is too simplistic and, as Horovitz shows, the situation is far less clear-cut than this suggests,[43] and should warn us that the *automatic* identification of religion and/or ethnicity on the basis of names is likely to be extremely misleading (see Macdonald 2009 II: 377–382; III: 47; IV: 187–189).

This new inscription from Taymāʾ is of considerable interest, both historically and for what it contributes to our understanding of Nabataean palaeography and onomastics in North Arabia. However, like any new discovery, it raises more questions than it answers. It is hoped that there will be many more such finds in Taymāʾ which will increase our knowledge, and point to further avenues of enquiry.

Sigla

ARNA Nab	Nabataean inscriptions in Milik & Starcky 1970.
Avdat 2	Nabataean inscription in Jaussen, Savignac & Vincent 1905: 238–241.
CIH	South Arabian inscriptions in *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum.* Pars IV. *Inscriptiones ḥimyariticas et sabaeas continens.* Paris: Reipublicae Typographeo, 1889–1932.
CIS ii	Aramaic (including Nabataean and Palmyrene) inscriptions in *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum.* Pars II. *Inscriptiones aramaicas continens.* Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889–1954.
CSAI	Ancient South Arabian inscriptions in Avanzini 2004.
DNWSI	Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995.
Esk	Taymanitic inscriptions published in Eskoubi 1999.
H	Nabataean inscriptions in Healey 1993.
Inv 10	Palmyrene inscriptions in Starcky 1949.
ISB	Safaitic inscriptions in Oxtoby 1968.
Ja 1028	Sabaic inscription in Jamme 1966.
JSNab	Nabataean inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909–1922.
JSTham	Taymanitic and Thamudic inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909–1922.
PAT	Palmyrene inscriptions in Hillers & Cussini 1996.
Ph	Taymanitic and Thamudic inscriptions copied by H.StJ.B. Philby and published in Van den Branden 1956.
P.Yadin	Papyri published in Yadin *et al.* 2002.
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (vol. XXVI 1976–1977; vol. XXVII 1977).
WTay	Taymanitic inscriptions in Winnett & Reed 1970.

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[42] Gil 1984: 151. Nau did not actually say this, though he does quote Heller as saying that 'sur soixante-sept noms de Juifs qui ont discuté avec Mahomet, trois seulement … sont hébreux' (1933: 116, but see the next note) and his thesis is that the Jews of Arabia at the time of Muḥammad were almost entirely Arab proselytes and that their influence on the formation of Islam was far less than that of the Christians (1933: 113–122).

[43] Horovitz 1925: 28–29, 35–37. We are most grateful to Michael Lecker for pointing out to us the Jewish names ʾAšyaʿ (possibly < Yešayāhu), Bāṭā, Finḥāṣ (< Pînĕḥās), Ṣūriyā, and Yahūḏā (< Yĕhûdâ) in the Sīrah of Ibn Hišām (pp. 351–352), on all of which see Horovitz 1925: 35–36. These names occur in a long list of Jews 'who used to annoy the Apostle', in which the vast majority of the names are ones also borne by Arabs.

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