

A Nabataean Bronze Lamp Dedicated to Baalshamin¹

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Abstract

This paper presents a new inscribed Nabataean lamp dedicated by Banī Ntnw to the god Baalshamin. Though the object and text are authentic, the provenance is unknown. The text mentions Banī Ntnw, a tribe or a group of people whose name has not been attested previously in Nabataean, and also contains a new geographical name, šrt', which has never been attested in Nabataean. The forms of the letters suggest that the text may date to the first or second century AD.

Keywords

Nabataean dedicatory inscriptions, Nabataean cultic offerings, Nabataean bronze lamps, Nabataean inscribed lamps, Baalshamin.

1. Introduction

The photographs of the current inscribed bronze lamp (Figures 1 and 2) were sent to me for identification by a group of antiquities dealers who did not provide any information about where the lamp was found, but claimed that it was found somewhere in Jordan. The author was able, therefore, to study the object depending merely on the available photographs.

The object is a Nabataean bronze lamp with a dedicatory inscription. Archaeological discoveries in Nabataea have revealed that various types of cultic dedications and offerings were made including frankincense², animal bones³ and burnt grains⁴. Other religious offerings include altars, idols, cult stones and statues, pottery objects, bronze lamps and other metal items. In addition, ceramic lamps and pottery were presented as offerings in Nabataean tombs as grave goods, as well as other ceramic artefacts⁵.

Nabataean inscriptions provide us with a series of cultic dedications made or financed by ordinary citizens, such as those on cult stones, fire altars, statues and images. Donations and dedications made by ordinary citizens or priests to temples were seemingly in local currency or in kind. The Nabataean marble inscription uncovered in

Received: 24.11.2014. *Accepted:* 21.12.2014.

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Judith Mckenzie for reading this article and for her valuable comments and suggestions.

² Strabo 16.4.26.

³ STUDER 2007: 267.

⁴ McKENZIE – REYES – GIBSON 2002: 454.

⁵ PERRY 2002.

the Temple of the Winged Lions mentions various types of offerings to be given to the priests and these include “silver and gold and offerings and all provisions, and from silver and bron(ze...)”⁶.

Until recently, the known number of this kind of Nabataean inscribed metal dedications was extremely limited. The majority of Nabataean texts are inscribed on stones. Texts written on metal objects, other than coins, are uncommon. The few examples include the fragmentary inscribed bronze plaque with a Nabataean text found in the Petra Great Temple in 1998. It carries an eight-letter inscription which may have included a reference to a king or a queen⁷.

In addition, an inscribed Nabataean bronze oil burner dedicated to Obodas was found in Wādī Mūsā. The text, which is dated to the reign of the last Nabataean king Rabbel II (AD 70-106), is of great interest since it contains words that occur for the first time in Nabataean. This unique text mentions a dedication made by a priest and his son to “Obodas the god” in Gaia, modern day Wādī Mūsā⁸.

Another cultic lamp dedication has been recently published. It represents the first known Nabataean inscribed bronze lamp that was dedicated for the life of Obodas the god, by a man and a woman, probably a husband and his wife. The text inscribed on the main body of the lamp reads as follows⁹:

dnh mnrt' dy qrbt 'mt lh wtym dwšr' l' bdt 'lh'

This is the lamp which 'Amat-Allah and Taim-Dushara dedicated to Obodas the God.

2. The current lamp (Figures 1 and 2)

As mentioned earlier, the dealers who possess the unique lamp that is being dealt with here did not provide details about the lamp itself and our understanding of the object and the inscribed text is based entirely on the photographs. These indicate that the lamp is furnished with an ornamented hand, elongated spout and a discuss incised with concentric circles. However, it is not possible to distinguish adequate details from the photographs to determine the exact type of lamp, nor to enable comparison with other examples. Thus, this article will focus on the inscription alone.

3. The text (Figure 3)

The dedication being dealt with here is important because of its content. The text is inscribed on one side of the lamp and consists of two lines. There is no difficulty in distinguishing its letters despite their uneven size and shape, and inelegant and carelessly carving. The majority of the characters can be read with certainty. The text is

⁶ HAMMOND – JOHNSON – JONES 1986: 77-80. The last word in the first line of the inscription was reconstructed as *nh(š')* “bron(ze)”. The publishers of the text concluded that this refers to “bronze coinage” even though the word “coin” is not mentioned in the text. It seems more likely that this word refers to bronze objects that were deposited inside the temple which may include coins or other bronze objects.

⁷ JOUKOWSKY 1999: 210.

⁸ AL-SALAMEEN – FALAHAT 2014.

⁹ AL-SALAMEEN – FALAHAT 2014.

undated, but based on the shape of the letters; it is roughly dated to the first or second century AD. Some of the forms of the letters resemble the form of the letters of late Nabataean inscriptions. The letters, generally speaking, reflect the characteristics of inscriptions of the first and second centuries AD¹⁰.

The way in which the inscription is written suggests that it was written by two different hands. It is most likely that the first line was written by one person and the second one was written by another person, as the style of the script is sufficiently different. This is seen in shape, size and arrangement of the letters. The forms and shapes of *t*, *r*, *m*, *d* confirms this assumption.

The text reads as follows:

Transliteration

d' mnr dy qrb bny ntnw
lb 'lšmyn dy bšrt'

Translation

This is the lamp which Banī Natnw dedicated
to Baalshamin who is in Sharta

4. Commentary

The text starts with *d'*, “this”, which is common in Nabataean¹¹.

Mnr “lamp”, which occurs once in Nabataean and was translated as “candelabrum”¹². It is attested as *mnrt'* in the recently published Nabataean lamp¹³. The occurrence of this word in our text indicates that it means “lamp”, as it refers to the dedicatory lamp. The word מנורה is well attested in Hebrew and means candlestick¹⁴.

dy well-known Semitic relative pronoun meaning “which, that”.

qrb “offered, dedicated”. This is the standard verb used in Nabataean to dedicate objects to gods and goddesses. It occurs frequently in Nabataean Aramaic, Hebrew, Palmyrene and Hatran¹⁵.

Bny “sons of”, a masculine noun in the plural construct common in Nabataean.

Banī Natnw has not been found before in any Nabataean inscription. It is not clear whether this is a tribal name or if the text refers to the sons of a certain Natnw. The name is not attested also, as far as we know, as a tribal name in Safaitic, Thamudic, Lihyanite or Palmyrene inscriptions. *Ntn* occurs as a tribe name in one of the texts uncovered in Qaryat al-Faw. A dedicatory inscription was uncovered there and commemorates cultic dedication made by tribes including *d' l ntn*¹⁶.

¹⁰ For comparison see HEALEY 1991.

¹¹ HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 333ff.

¹² CIS II 183; HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 662.

¹³ AL-SALAMEEN – SHDAIFAT 2014.

¹⁴ BROWN – DRIVER – BRIGGS: 596.

¹⁵ HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 1029.

¹⁶ AL-ANSARY – TAIRAN 2005: 104.

In Nabataean texts there are tribes which are identified as *Banī x*, such as *bny ḥnynw* which is attested in an inscription found in Wadī Nmeir at Petra¹⁷ and *bny mlkw* that is found in an inscription in al-Khubthah in Petra also¹⁸.

The name *ntn* derived from the well-known semitic root *ntn* which means “to give”¹⁹. It appears as *ntn* in north Arabic inscriptions²⁰ and Minaic inscriptions²¹. Both *ntn* and *ntnw* are attested in Nabataean²², and the one that ends with the suffix *-wāw* can be interpreted as “(God NN) has given”²³. *Ntn* appears on a Nabataean sundial from Ḥegra and Healey suggests that it is a Jewish name²⁴.

The name *ntn* is not attested as a tribal name in the north Arabian texts or in other epigraphic materials published from northern Arabian or from the Levant. It is therefore difficult to confirm whether this name is a tribal name or a name of the sons of a certain *ntnw*.

b’lšmyn, Baalshamin “Lord of Heaven” is one of the deities worshipped by the Nabataean and his name is attested in a number of texts found north and south of the Nabataean kingdom. It was known in the Levant as early as the second millennium BC²⁵, and his cult was popular in many Levantine regions²⁶. Teixidor says that “the title ‘Lord of Heaven’ is to be understood as signifying the god to whom the heavens belong. Baalshamin is thus neither the Moon god nor the Sun god, but rather the equivalent of the Greek Zeus Olympios or the Roman Jupiter”²⁷.

Some scholars argue that Baalshamin was a foreign god within the Nabataean kingdom²⁸ as his cult spread extensively in Syria and was not common in northern Arabia, Healey concludes that “since Baalshamin was a pre-eminent sky-god in Syria, one might have expected him to be identified with Dushara”²⁹.

It is evident that the occurrence of the name of Baalshamin in the southern Nabataean texts is very limited. Its name is attested here twice: one in a text found in Wadī Rum dated to the reign of Rabbel II, and his name is mentioned with Dushara-A‘ra of Boşra³⁰. His name is found also in the Nabataean dedicatory text that was found in Wadī Mūsā and published by Nabil Khairy in 1981. In this text Baalshamin is described as *’lh mnkw* “the god of *mnkw*”³¹.

¹⁷ CANTINEAU 1978: 5-6.

¹⁸ CANTINEAU 1978: 9-10. In addition, *bny mrzḥ* “members of the Marzeḥ” occurs in one of the Nabataean inscriptions uncovered in Oboda in the Negev. See NEGEV 1963: 114-118.

¹⁹ HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 766-770.

²⁰ HARDING 1971: 581.

²¹ AL-SAID 1995: 167.

²² NEGEV 1991: 45.

²³ HAYAJNEH 2009: 213.

²⁴ HEALEY 1989: 334.

²⁵ HEALEY 2001: 124.

²⁶ For more details see NIEHR 2003: 265-279.

²⁷ TEIXIDOR 1977: 27.

²⁸ TEIXIDOR 1977; HEALEY 2001: 124.

²⁹ HEALEY 2001: 126.

³⁰ SAVIGNAC 1934: 576-77: no. 19.

³¹ KHAIRY 1981.

Despite the occurrence of many deities in the Nabataean tomb inscriptions of Ḥegra in southern Nabataea, Baalshamin's name is not attested there which indicates that his cult was not practiced in this part of Nabataea. Teixidor suggests that the title *mr' 'lm'*, "Lord of the World", that is attested in an inscription from Ḥegra may refer to Baalshamin³².

It seems that the cult of Baalshamin was fairly widespread and flourishing in the northern parts of the kingdom and this god was known in Nabataean through the Ḥawrānites (the inhabitants of Ḥawrān). His name occurs in Nabataean cultic dedications uncovered in this region. A fragmentary inscription was found on a lintel of a house in Simdj in Hawran and commemorates a dedication made by the tribe of *qšyw* "to their god Baalshamin"³³.

An additional Nabataean text mentioning Baalshamin was found in Boşra and probably dated to the first century AD. It mentions the dedication of *msgd'*³⁴ "cult-stone, stele" to this god³⁵.

Another object dedicated to Baalshamin was found in Şalkhad dated to AD 72-73. It commemorates the dedication of *msgd'* "cult-stone, stele" by *'bydw* son of *'typq* to Baalshamin the god of *mtnw*³⁶. This *mtnw* may be the village of Imtan not far from Şalkhad³⁷.

A Nabataean inscription dated to the reign of Rabel II was found in al- Mşayfra in the western Ḥawrān and commemorates the construction of a chapel, *ḥmn'*³⁸, to Baalshamin³⁹.

The last notable epigraphic example associated with Baalshamin comes from Sī' which is located few kilometers south-east of the city of Canatha, modern day Qanawāt in the Ḥawrān. The Nabataeans constructed a temple in Sī' for Baalshamin who was the main god worshipped in there (see Figure 4)⁴⁰. The text that commemorates the construction of a temple to Baalshamin is dated to the period between 33-12 BC. The text reads⁴¹:

dkrwn ṭb lmykt br 'šw br m'yrw dy hw bnh 'l b'šmyn byrt' gwyt' wbyrt' bryt' wtyr' d' wmt[llth]...šnt 280 'd šnt 300 (311?) w'd ḥyyn bšlm

In pious remembrance of Malikat, the son of Aus, the son of Mughaiyir, who built for Baalshamin the inner temple and the outer temple and this portico and its

³² TEIXIDOR 1977: 84-85.

³³ LITTMANN 1914: no. 11.

³⁴ The word *msgd'* is attested frequently in the Nabataea Ḥawranite inscriptions and it has been interpreted as: cult stone, a place of prostration, or a temple. See LITTMANN 1914: nos. 23, 24, 96; HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 663.

³⁵ CIS II 176.

³⁶ LITTMANN 1914: n. 23.

³⁷ It might be a name of a person or a tribe. See LITTMANN 1914: 22.

³⁸ The word *ḥmn'* occurs in Nabataean inscriptions from Ḥawrān and it has been interpreted as fire altar, sun-column, incense altar or chapel with such an altar. See LITTMANN 1914: nos. 27, 97; HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 382.

³⁹ NEHMÉ 2010: 463-466.

⁴⁰ LITTMANN 1914: 13.

⁴¹ LITTMANN 1914: no. 100.

covering...[from] the year 280 until the year 300 (311?). May those who still live be in peace (?).

The aforementioned available epigraphic materials in the Ḥawrān mentioning Baalshamin and the limited occurrence of his name in Petra and its surrounding regions strongly suggest that Baalshamin was a major god in Ḥawrān and a minor god in central Nabataea.

dy bšrt', “who is in Sharta”. This phrase follows the name of Baalshamin in the text. The whole phrase can be read with certainty except the letter that follows *d* which is defaced but most likely to be read as *y* and the word is therefore the well-known Nabataean relative pronoun *dy* “who”. Then comes *bšrt'*, *in šrt'*, with feminine plural emphatic noun ending.

The word *šrt'* is a geographical name. To the best of my knowledge, a name with this spelling has not been found before in any Nabataean inscription. We may propose two different locations of this site: *šrt'* = Sharāt or *šrt'* = Khirbet Sharta (in northern Palestine).

The name *šrt'* may be vocalized as Sharāt. Sharāt is a commonly attested toponym in the Arab geographical chronicles as the name of a region of southern Jordan which forms a part of Gibāl Ash-Sharāt, Sharāt Mountains, a mountain range located in the southern part of Jordan and extending from Ash-Shawbak in the north to Ras an-Naqab in the south. It has been suggested by some scholars that Dushara's name means “the god (dhu) of ash-Sharā”⁴².

Healey, while discussing the meaning of the name of Dushara says “in Arabic sources the god’s name is given as Dū Šarā and this fits much better with the Nabataean version, since the Nabataean version of the name presupposes that the noun involved is masculine not feminine. The Nabataean reflex of Arabic ذو الشراة ought to be *dwšrt* or *dwšrt'*”⁴³.

It is clear that there were two major regions where the cult of Baalshamin was present: the Ḥawrān and Edom. The current text, in addition to the other texts found in Wādī Mūsā and Wādī Rum, suggests that its cult was not restricted to the northern parts of the Nabataean kingdom.

It could be suggested that *šrt'* in our current text might have been associated with Khirbet Sharta (Serta) in northern Palestine in the region of Kefer Ata (Qiryat Ata) east of Haifa in the lower western Galilee. Archaeological fieldwork conducted in the Kefer Ata region revealed settlement evidence dated to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods⁴⁴. However, no Nabataean material has been found there. Furthermore, Khirbet Sharta lies beyond the geographical boundaries of the Nabataean kingdom.

Thus, *šrt'* in the text discussed here, apparently refers to Ash-Sharāt mountains extending from Ash-Shawbak, north of the Nabataean capital Petra, to Ras an-Naqab in the heart of Nabataean territory in Jordan.

⁴² TEIXIDOR 1977: 83; STARCKY 1966: 986.

⁴³ HEALEY 2001: 88.

⁴⁴ GOLANI 2003; ABU HAMID 2010; VENTURA – SIEGELMANN 2004.

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Figures



Fig. 1: The lamp (detail)



Fig. 2: The lamp

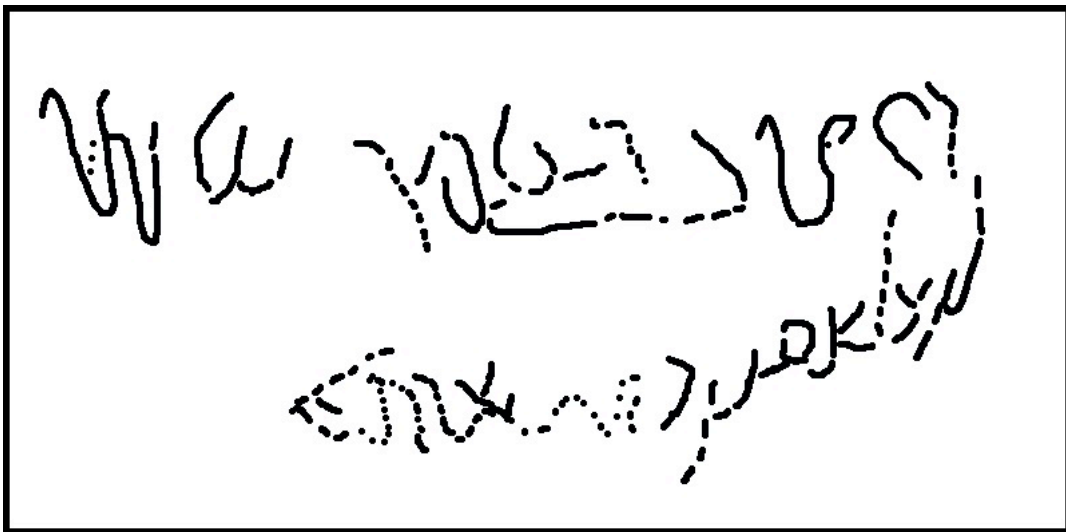


Fig. 3: Drawing of the inscription
(Drawn by the author based on photographs)

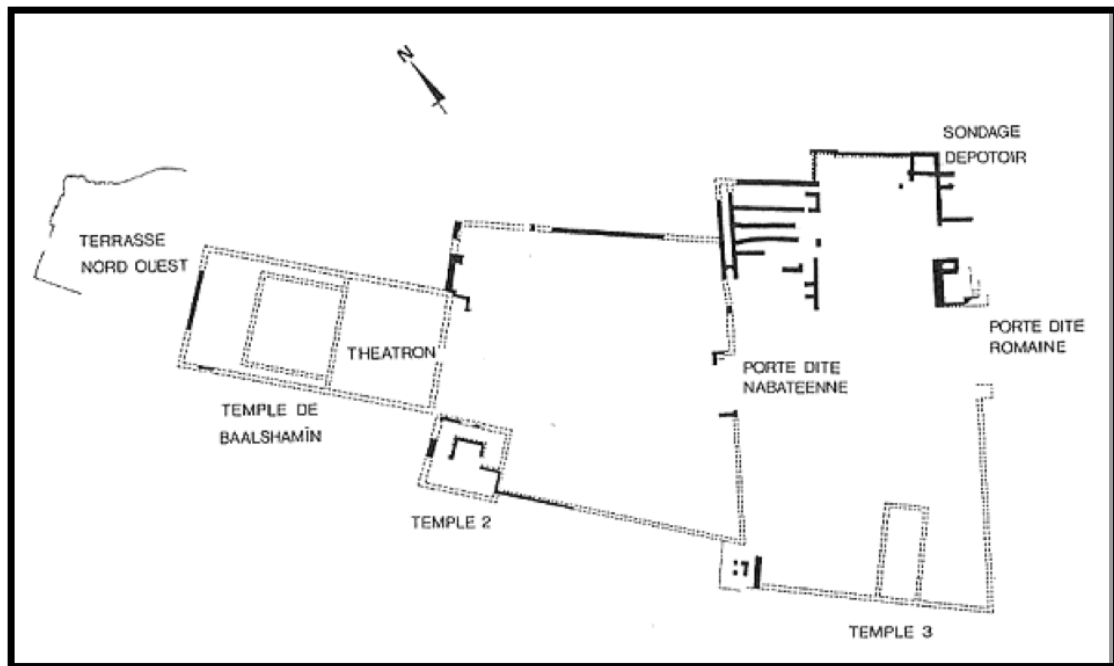


Fig. 4: Plan of the Baalshamin temple in Sī'

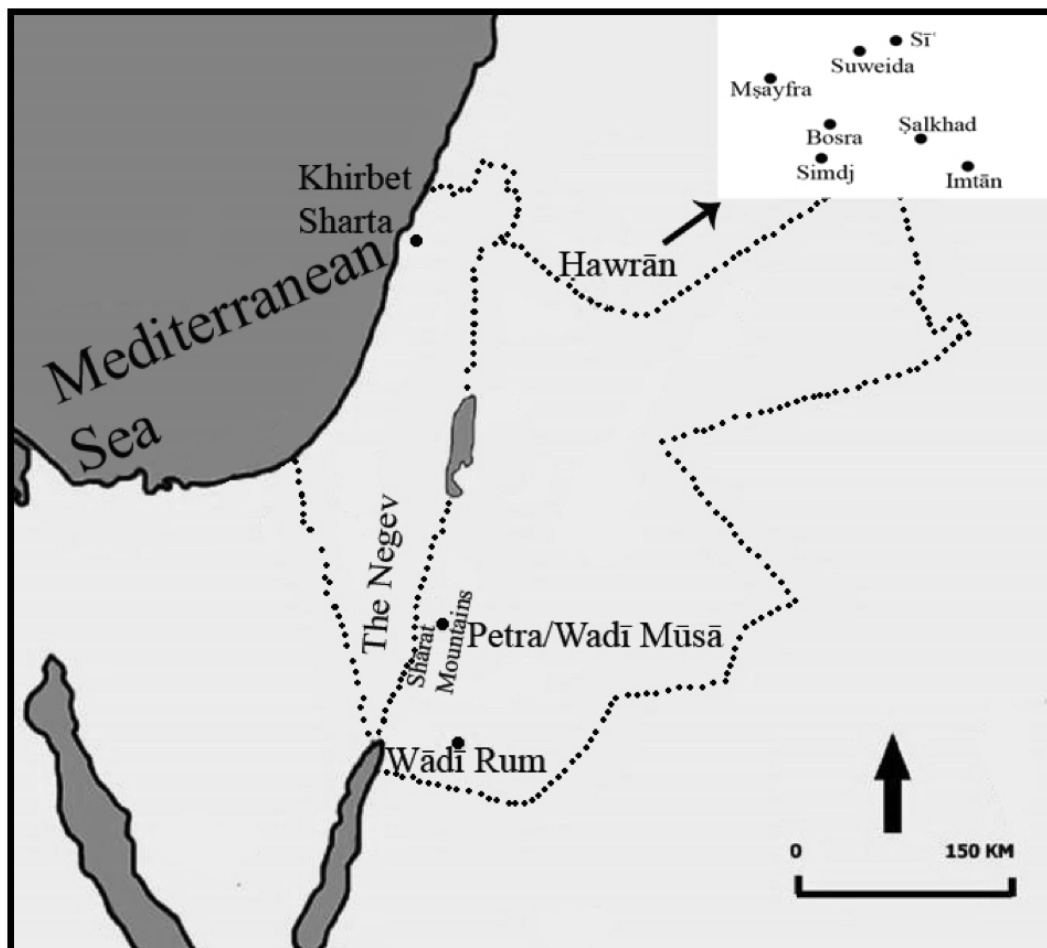


Fig. 5: Map showing the sites mentioned in the text