

# New Nabataean Inscription from al-<sup>c</sup>Ulā\*

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## **Abstract**

This article focused on a Nabataean inscription found in al-<sup>c</sup>Ulā province, northwest of Saudi Arabia.

The importance of this inscription, which consists of five lines, lies in the appearance of the noun, singular, masculine, emphatic “*wklw<sup>ج</sup>*” for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions. Its historical significance lies in the period it was written, which was during the thirty-ninth year of the rule of *alḥrtt*, the King of the Nabateans, one year before his death.

## **Keywords**

*klw<sup>ج</sup>*, al-<sup>c</sup>Ulā, Inscriptions, Nabataean, *alḥrtt*.

## Introduction

This inscription was found on a huge rocky frontage of about ten meters high, near an old road linking the city of Dadān, the capital of both Dadān and Lihyān Kingdoms formerly known as Dādān, with the North of Arabian Peninsula, through Taymā<sup>ḍ</sup> city which was considered the main headquarters for years by the last king of the Chaldean State (Neo-Babylonian) Nabonidus. The inscription was discovered in the north-eastern part of al-<sup>c</sup>Ulā city, 36 kilometers away from al-<sup>c</sup>Ulā and about 16 kilometers from al-Hijr city, the famous site of the Nabataean cemeteries. The mountain is located on the edge of a valley parallel to the al-Hijr valley, on the western edge of which the city of al-Hijr is located. Between these two valleys, there is a group of low-rise sandy mountains, some of them standing isolated in the form of rocky masses while others are near each other, forming sandy rock plateaus. Downhill, many mountain paths and valleys descend from it towards the west, pouring into a wide fertile plain where palm and orange tree farms are abundantly grown.

Regarding the rock frontage, here are three remarks:

1. In addition to the Nabataean inscription, we recorded a group of short Thamudic inscriptions and some animal drawings, such as camels and ostriches.
2. The grave of the person, who we believe inscribed this inscription, has been sabotaged and vandalized since the time of its creation, approximately 2000 years ago.
3. The inscription is dated to the thirty-ninth year of the rule of the Nabataean King ‘*ḥrtt* IV’, (9 BCE – 40 CE) known by his epithet ‘the lover of his people’ (*rḥm* <sup>c</sup>*mh*). With the

discovery of this inscription, the number of inscriptions dated to King ‘*ḥrtt* IV’ has now exceeded forty.

## The Inscription

1. *ḍ<sup>ḍ</sup> n f s<sup>ḍ</sup> w k l w<sup>ḍ</sup> d y*
2. *<sup>c</sup>b d <sup>c</sup>y d w b r <sup>c</sup>b y d w b r f r<sup>c</sup> w*
3. *l<sup>c</sup> b y d w b r h b y r h t ṣ r y s n t*
4. *ṭ l ṭ y n w t s<sup>c</sup> l m r<sup>ḍ</sup> (n<sup>ḍ</sup> ḥ r t t m l k)*
5. *n b ṭ w r ḥ m<sup>c</sup> (m) h*

This grave and the fence were built by *c y d w*, son of *c b y d w*, son of *f r<sup>c</sup> w*, for his son *c b y d w*, in the month of *t ṣ r y* in the thirty-ninth year of the reign of our lord *ḥ r t t*, the King of the Nabateans, who loves his people.

The inscription contains five lines, the fourth and fifth lines are affected by weather factors, which makes these two lines hard to read. Still, our estimation of these words which were negatively affected by environmental and weather factors is correct. The most important word in this inscription is the third in the first line which is read easily as *klw<sup>ḍ</sup>*, noun, singular, masculine, emphatic. However, although the word was easily legible, we have not been able to accurately translate it. From our perspective, we think that it had been derived from the Arabic root *kll* which closely means silos and domes that are built over graves, surrounded by, veil/cover.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the closest meaning to this noun in question is ‘fence or wall’. It is also noteworthy that this is the first time that this word *klw<sup>ḍ</sup>* appears in Nabataean inscriptions. It could also be compared with the Syriac root ܟܠܘܢ which means ‘to withhold, forbid, restrain, hinder’.<sup>2</sup> The root is also attested in the Talmudic sources as (כלי, כלל) to give the same meaning.<sup>3</sup>

The first line started with the demonstrative pronoun *d<sup>D</sup>*.<sup>4</sup> Followed by the noun, singular, masculine, emphatic *nfs<sup>D</sup>* meaning ‘the grave’, known in this form in other Nabataean inscriptions.<sup>5</sup>

The second line consists of three personal names separated by the noun, singular, masculine, construct by *br*, ‘son of’ which is common in Western Semitic writings.<sup>6</sup> *cbd* is the perfect, *fe<sup>C</sup>al* form, *3p. s.m.*, ‘built’.<sup>7</sup>

*<sup>C</sup>ydw* is a personal name: ‘the one who was born on *<sup>C</sup>ayd* day’, related to the well-known Arabic name *<sup>C</sup>ayd*. The personal name is known, in this form, in other Nabataean inscriptions.<sup>8</sup> Also, it appeared in another form as *<sup>C</sup>yd* in Dadanitic inscriptions.<sup>9</sup>

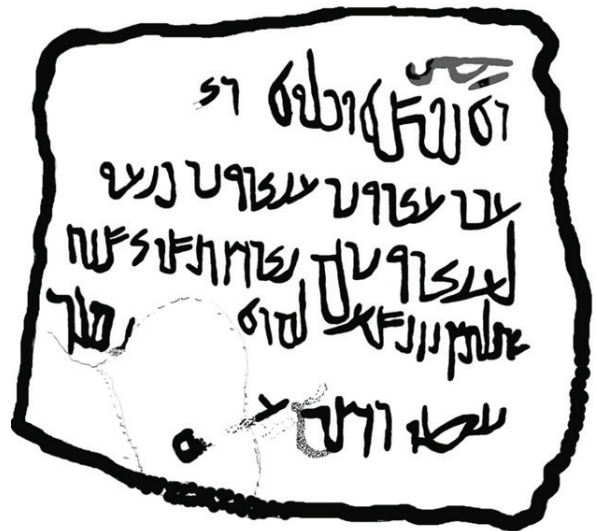
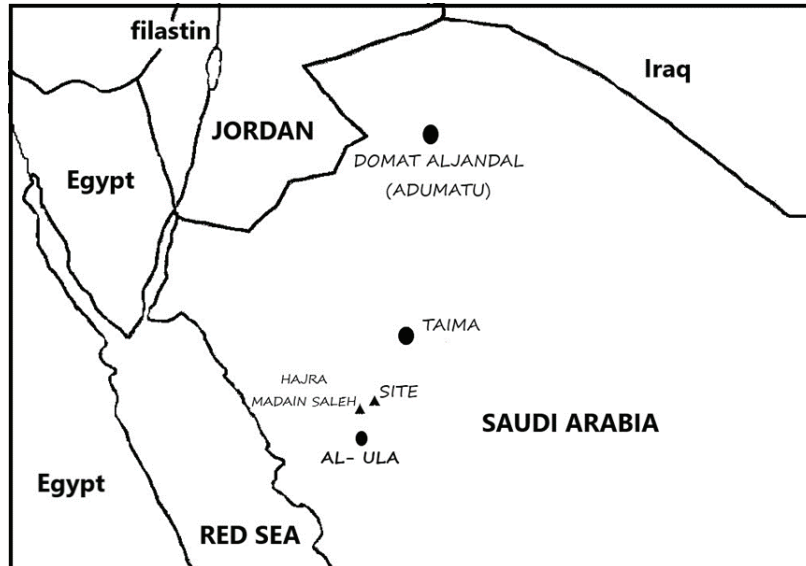
*fr<sup>C</sup>w* I should point out that this simple personal name could be read as *kb<sup>C</sup>w*, but we prefer the first reading which is in *fā<sup>C</sup>il* form, which appears, as far as we know, for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions, but it was known by a similar formula as *fr<sup>C</sup>*.<sup>10</sup> It appeared in this form in the Safaitic inscriptions. While it has been registered as *fr<sup>C</sup>t* in both Qatabanian<sup>11</sup> and Minaean.<sup>12</sup> We think that this simple personal name is derived from the Arabic root *fr<sup>C</sup>*, thus it means ‘tall, high’, which, by the way, is still in use to the present time among the Arab people.

The third line starts with *<sup>C</sup>bydw* which is a personal name preceded by the letter ‘l’, in *fa<sup>C</sup>il* form, which means ‘little servant’. It is known in the Nabataean inscriptions,<sup>13</sup> followed by the noun, singular, masculine, construct + suffix. *3p. s.m.*, *brh* means ‘his son’.<sup>14</sup> The third word is the noun masculine singular, construct, preceded by the preposition ‘b’, *yrh* ‘in the month of’.<sup>15</sup> Following it is a month name (*tšry*) and the noun singular feminine construct sent ‘year’, which is a common Semitic noun.

The fourth line: For this line, we did not manage to accurately read its last part because it was affected by environmental factors which made it uneasy to read. However, using the beginning of the line and the clear part of the third word, in addition to the last letter in the last word ‘*kaf*’ which was legibly clear, our estimation of the missing part is: (*lmr<sup>D</sup>n<sup>D</sup> hrtt mlk*), meaning ‘of our lord al-Hārtat, the king’.

The line starts with the numeral, *tllyn w ts<sup>C</sup>* which means ‘thirty-nine’. Both are known in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions, for more parallel.<sup>16</sup>

The fifth line contains the reference to the *nbtw*, the ethnicon of the Nabataeans, followed by the well-known epithet of King al-Hārtat IV, *rhm Cmh*, ‘who loves his people’.<sup>17</sup>



## Endnotes

- \* The credit for discovering this inscription goes to Dr. Madallah al-Hishan during his visit to the region in 2018.
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- 1 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 11 (Cairo, 1994), 590–598. Perhaps the closest root in other Semitic languages such as Phoenician, Punic, and Hebrew: J. Hoftijzer, K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, 1995), 510–512, and Syriac (J. Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford, 1967), 214) is ‘Kli’, which means ‘completed or finished’. The rock tumulus was accustomed for tombs in the pre-Islam era, but the Messenger forbade the crowning/using the silos and domes that are built over graves.
  - 2 Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 215.
  - 3 M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature* (London, 1903), 641.
  - 4 Appeared in Nabataean (S. al-Theeb, *The Nabataean Dictionary* (Riyadh, 2014), 124) and Liḥyānite inscriptions (H. Abu-al Hassan, *Qirā‘ah gadīdh likitabāt laḥyāniyyah min Ġebel ‘akmāh bimantiyyāt al-‘ula* (Riyadh, 1997), nos.142, 147).
  - 5 Al-Theeb, *The Nabataean Dictionary*, 267. For more see S. al-Theeb, *Mu‘gam al-mufrdāt al-Arāmiyyah alqādima: dirāsāt mūqārnah* (Riyadh, 2006), 190; A. Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, 2015), 330.
  - 6 Hoftijzer, Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 188–195.
  - 7 The verb <sup>c</sup>bd is known in other Semitic inscriptions, such as Phoenician (R. Tombaek, *Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (New York, 1974), 235), ancient Aramaic (al-Theeb, *Mu‘gam al-mufrdāt al-Arāmiyyah alqādima: dirāsāt mūqārnah*, 208), Aramaic dialects: Hoftijzer, Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 806–816, Liḥyanite (H. Al-Qudrah, *Dirasat mu‘gamiyyah li‘ālfāz an-nuqūš al-liḥayaniyyah fi ‘iyār al-lūgat as-sāmiyyah al-ġanūbiyyah* (Irbid, 1993), 140), Old Testament (F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford, 1906), 712, 1104; Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim*, 1034), and Syriac language (L. Costaz, *Dictionnaire Syriaque-Français, Syriac-English Dictionary* (Beirut, 1963), 240), while it appeared in Classical Ethiopic in a different form as ‘Gabra’, which means ‘worked’.
  - 8 J. Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1978), 129; A. Negev, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm* (Jerusalem, 1991), 51.
  - 9 H. Abu-al Hassan, *Nuqūš laḥyāniyyah min mantiyyāt al-‘Ula: dirāsāt taḥlīliyyah muqārnah* (Riyadh, 2002), 24; for more parallels see H. Hayajneh, *Die Personennamen der qatabanischen Inschriften* (Hildesheim, 1998), 205.
  - 10 Negev, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm*, 56.
  - 11 Hayajneh, *Die Personennamen der qatabanischen Inschriften*, 210.
  - 12 S. al-Said, *Die Personennamen in den minaischen Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 220.
  - 13 S. al-Theeb, *Mūdwnat al Nuqūš an-nabaṭiyyah* (Riyadh, 2010), 1120.
  - 14 So far, this noun was registered, in this form, at least eight times in Nabataean inscriptions (al-Theeb, *The Nabataean Dictionary*, 94) and known in several Aramaic dialect, such as the international Aramaic (G. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford, 1957), 2: 2; A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford, 1933), 30:7), Palmyrain (CIS3931: 3), and the Hatrean inscriptions (F. Vattioni, *Le Iscrizioni di Hatra*, Supplement n: 28, agli Annali, vol. 41 (Napoli, 1981), 4–6).
  - 15 In addition to the Nabataean the noun was registered in other Semitic inscriptions, such as Ugaritic, Phoenician and Hebrew, for more parallels see al-Theeb, *The Nabataean Dictionary*, 194; al-Theeb, *Mu‘gam al-mufrdāt al-Arāmiyyah alqādima*, 129. We may point out that a similar formula is *wrh* appeared in South Arabian dialect, see A. Beeston, M. Ghul, W. Müller, J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1982), 162; S. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* (Roma, 1989), 55; M335: 2.
  - 16 Al-Theeb, *The Nabataean Dictionary*, 398, 405.
  - 17 For more parallels see al-Theeb, *The Nabataean Dictionary*, 361, 403.

