

K. A. Worp

A Nabataean Ghost Name

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In a recent contribution to this periodical¹ R.G. Tanner publishes a recently discovered inscription now kept in the Petra Forum Museum. He reads and translates the text as follows:

1 + Ἐνθάδε σ[ῶ]μα Τεθα +	(In Christ). Here (the) body of Theta,
2 Ἀριστονόου γυναικὸς[ς]	Wife of Aristonoos, (from the staff)
3 Τῆς Πηλοῦ τῆς μεγάλης[ς]	Of the Ba'alat, the great one (<i>or</i> from Great Pēlos).
4 ἥπερ χαρίεσσα γῆς λοχ	She indeed, gracious on earth, in childbirth
5 -έα κατέθανεν ἐν νεότη	perished in her youth, (already)
6 -τι ἀοίδιμα ἐπαρχίας	Respected, of the Province.
7 λαχοῦσα τοῦ Λ (ἔτους) ΥΛΒ	Having attained as her lot the year 432

Tanner comments upon the form Πηλοῦ and its possible geographical implications and he remarks that the lady's presumably Nabataean husband Aristonoos had, like Zenon the chiliarch, a Greek name, whilst she herself has the Nabataean name Tetha.

All of this sounds very interesting, but a check of the plate convinces me that the text should be read differently, viz.

1 † Ἐνθάδε σῶμα τέθα[πται]	Here is buried the body
2 Ἀριστονόου(ο) γυναικὸς[ς]	of the wife of Aristonoos,
3 τῆς πινυτῆς Μεγάλης[ς]	the prudent Megale,
4 ἥπερ χαρίεσσα πέλου-	who, being gracious,
5 σα κάτθανεν (ἐν) νεότη-	perished in her youth,
6 τι ἀοίδιμα παρα-	having attained a glorious reputation
7 λαχοῦσα· τοῦ (ἔτους) υλβ	as her lot . In the year 432.

Rather than dealing with an inscription showing a number of rather odd things (cf. e.g., the Nabataean personal name Tetha) one is dealing with a set of 3 hexameters of the following metrical pattern:²

—̣̣ —̣̣ —̣̣ / ˘ —̣̣ —̣̣ > ˘ —̣̣	(/ = change between ll. 1/2)
—̣̣ —̣̣ —̣̣ / —̣̣ —̣̣ —̣̣ —̣̣ / ˘	(/ = change between ll. 3/4/5)
—̣̣ < —̣̣ > ˘ —̣̣ / ˘ —̣̣ ˘ / ˘ —̣̣	(/ = change between ll. 5/6/7)

It is evident that in line 6 the metrical quantity of the sort first syllable παρα- has been changed, i.c. lengthened 'metri causa'; one may compare the (lengthened) quantity of the alpha in Homeric ἀπονέεσθαι.

¹ Cf. ZPE 83 (1990) 190-192 + pl. V.2.

² I should like to thank Prof. D. Hagedorn and Prof. Dr. C.J. Ruijgh for their kind advice in this matter and for their help in general with the correct interpretation of this inscription.

Obviously there are no Nabataean names occurring in this inscription. As far as the personal name Megale is concerned, Prof. M. Sartre³ kindly reminds me that it is well attested in this part of Syria; cf., e.g., IGLS V 2035 (Hama-Epiphaneia), PAES IIIA 618 (Ghasm, near Bostra); cf. also the name Megalous in Emesa (IGLS V 2488). Prof. Sartre also informs me that the adjective *πινυτός* is attested at Bostra for a veteran (IGLS XIII 1 9429), but that he is not aware of its being used for a woman. Finally, it should be remarked that year 432 mentioned in the inscription (i.e. year 432 of the Era of the provincia Arabia) equals the year A.D. 537/538.

Amsterdam

K.A. Worp

³ With whom I corresponded about this inscription. I am grateful to him for his kind informations sent in various letters.