K. A. Worp

A Nabataean Ghost Name


© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn
A Nabataean Ghost Name

In a recent contribution to this periodical\(^1\) R.G. Tanner publishes a recently discovered inscription now kept in the Petra Forum Museum. He reads and translates the text as follows:

1. Ενθάδε σῶμα Θεθα + (In Christ). Here (the) body of Theta,
2. Ἁριστονόος γυναικὸς[ζ] Wife of Aristonoos, (from the staff)
3. Τῆς Πηλοῦ τῆς μεγάλη[ζ] Of the Ba’alat, the great one (or from Great Pēlos).
4. ἤπερ χαρίσσα γῆς λοχ She indeed, gracious on earth, in childbirth
5. -ἐξα κατέθεαν ἐν νεότη perished in her youth, (already)
6. -τι άοιδίμα ἐπαρχίας Respected, of the Province.
7. λαχωσία τοῦ Λ (ἐτους) YAB 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. Ενθάδε σῶμα τέθα[πται] Here is buried the body
2. Ἁριστονόος γυναικὸς[ζ] of the wife of Aristonoos,
3. τῆς πνυτῆς Μεγάλη[ζ] the prudent Megale,
4. ἤπερ χαρίσσα πέλου- who, being gracious,
5. σά κάθανεν (ἐν) νεότη- perished in her youth,
6. τι άοιδίμα παρα- having attained a glorious reputation
7. λαχωσία: τοῦ (ἐτους) 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.e. lengthened ‘metri causa’; one may compare the (lengthened) quantity of the alpha in Homeric ἀπονέεσθαι.

---

2. I should like to thank Prof. D. Hagedorn and Prof. Dr. C.J. Ruigh 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. Sartre—a person with whom I corresponded about this inscription—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