INSCRIPTIONS

Bilingual Inscription
By G. W. Bowersock

The stone is white marble and has no significant context as it was found among material in the shaft of a robbed Nabataean tomb (locus 905).

The inscription is bilingual in Nabataean and Greek, and it could be more accurately described as an incised graffito. It consists of two lines, the 1st with two words in Nabataean and the second with one word in Greek. The second line is not broken off where the Greek ends, and it is therefore possible that there was no word following. But the stone looks abraded, and I have assumed that there was a second word of Greek to match the second word of Nabataean. The following reading may be proposed:

\[\text{גרו סליתא} \]
\[\text{Αγαρη [ ]}\]

Both lines of the text begin with a feminine name, hgrw in Nabataean and Αγαρη in Greek. The restoration of the initial he in the 1st line is certain. The name Hagaru is well documented in Nabataean onomastics: (Negev 1991:21, no. 293; Healey 1993: H 13, 14, 30). Furthermore, Hagaru has long been supposed to be the Nabataean equivalent of the name Αγαρη (cf. Wuthnow, 1930:11, 135; Negev 1991: 21, no. 293). In addition to the texts cited in Wuthnow, the Greek form is documented in the Hawrān by M. Dunand (cf. Bull. épig. 1953. 228 [p. 188]) and M. Sartre, IGLS 13. 1 Bos- tra no. 9315. The new Petra bilingual proves that Αγαρη is indeed Greek for Hagaru. Breathing and accent are unclear, and both are therefore omitted here. Hagaru and its Greek equivalent are widely distributed in Nabataean Arabia, from Madā’in Šāliḥ to the Hawrān to Jawf (cf. IGR 3. 1249). It would be imprudent to associate this name with any particular region.

Unfortunately we do not have the Greek for the second word in the Nabataean, and the word in Nabataean is problematic. The last three letters can be read with relative certainty, but the 1st two present difficulties. The 1st letter most closely resembles the cursive samekh as it is known from papyri: see A. Yardeni (2000, 2:227, chart B, B/7), who generously drew my attention to this occurrence. It also resembles, though less exactly, the sade of late date with a closed loop, as can be seen in a good example from the Sinai (Yardeni 2000, 2:230 [CIS 793]; and 258–9). The tall letter after the samekh or sade, with its curve to the left at the bottom, would most reasonably be read as tamed, but
beth or nun might also be possible. John Healey, who has helpfully replied to my questions about the second Nabataean word, prefers to read the 1st letter as a tet together with the second read naturally as lamed. This would produce the word תלייה, “the girl.” But it is not immediately obvious why a feminine name would need to be qualified in this way, and I can find no example at all of a tet in which the quasi-vertical stroke downwards extends well below the right-side loop, as here. The loop, when closed, normally comes at the bottom of the down stroke, just in the Arabic tet. By contrast, samekh and sade in this form can, as indicated above, be paralleled. If we insist on sade, sense would dictate that the second letter be read as beth, i.e. “the desired one” or “the wished-for one”. But samekh seems more likely, and in this case the word might be related to the Nabataean proper name סלי (Negev 1991:45, no. 769). One of the proposed etymologies of that name is the Arabic root סל ו סל which produces I. “neglect,” “forget,” II. “console,” “comfort”). Agare may be described as a comfort or consolation. But this must remain a guess since a parallel Greek word is missing, and the root is attested in Nabataean, if at all, only in a proper name.

**References**

Healey, J. F.

Negev, A.

Wuthnow, H.

Yardeni, A.