

**THE YEAR OF THE KING AND THREE QUEENS CIRCA 69-70 CE: NEW
IDENTIFICATIONS IN THE NABATAEAN KING- AND QUEEN-LIST (AND THE
QUESTION OF POSSIBLE RELEVANCE TO 2 COR 11:32-33)**

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Abstract: A Rabbel II inscription of ca. 100 CE at el-Hubta, Petra (N.060.37.01 in Hackl, Jenni, Schneider 2003), known since the early 20th century, refers to two named Nabataean queens of the first century CE, Qashmael and Shaudat. Because these two queens have not been matched to any known Nabataean king, some scholars have denied they reigned as queens on the grounds that the expression *mlkt nbṭw*, “queen of the Nabataeans”, was sometimes applied to women in the royal family who never reigned. This denial is unfounded as shown through analysis of the Nabataean inscriptions set forth in support of this interpretation, as well as of other inscriptions listed in the *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* of Hoftijzer and Jongeling (1995). In short, there is no unambiguous instance of *mlkh* plus proper name in a Nabataean inscription meaning other than a queen who reigned, just as there is no known instance of *mlk* plus proper name meaning other than an actual king. Therefore, queens Qashmael and Shaudat of the el-Hubta inscription will have been historical Nabataean queens, the only issue being when they reigned and with which kings. It is suggested that these queens’ reigns were situated between Malichus II and Rabbel II, ca. 69-70 CE at the time of the First Jewish Revolt, and that Qashmael and Shaudat were queens of a heretofore-

unrecognized Nabataean king of ca. 69-70 CE with whom the two queens shared rule (one after the other), at a time of regional tumult and upheaval. This study places the two el-Hubta inscription queens in the Nabataean queen list, a third also at ca. 69-70 CE and one earlier, making a total of four queens and one king newly added to the Nabataean king- and queen-lists. This study also opens up a new possibility for identification of the Nabataean king referred to at 2 Cor 11:32-33 in the New Testament.

This study proposes to locate in history several named Nabataean queens referred to in Nabataean inscriptions. It is proposed that named Nabataean queens were associated with a heretofore-unrecognized king of brief reign of circa 69-70 CE at the time of the First Jewish Revolt who may or may not have been “Aretas the king” of 2 Cor 11:32-33.

1. The Nabataean king list: an overview

There is no extant ancient Nabataean king list. A Nabataean king list has been reconstructed in modern times by scholars on the basis of coins, inscriptions, and references in ancient historians. Below is the system of Yaakov Meshorer of 1975, which Schmitt-Korte and Cowell (1989, 33) called “authoritative ... generally accepted”, and Alzoubi (2012, 7) characterized as “la plus acceptée par les chercheurs” (“the most accepted by researchers”). For purposes of comparison the Meshorer king list is compared below to a more recent scholarly study (Wenning 1993) and the proposed datings of the kings of the Appendix of the present study, along with their queens. The placements of one new king and four new queens developed in this study are in italics in the right-hand column.

Nabataean king list

<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Meshorer 1975</i>	<i>Wenning 1993</i>	<i>Appendix, this study (with queens)</i>
Aretas II	120-96 BCE	ca. 120/10-96 BCE	
Obodas I	96-87 BCE	ca. 96-85 BCE	
Rabbel I	87 BCE	85/84 BCE	
Aretas III	87-62 BCE	84-(62/61?)60/59 BCE	

Obodas II	62-60 BCE	(?) 62/61-60/59 BCE	
Malichus I	60-30 BCE	59-30 BCE	60/59-31 BCE ¹ <i>Queen: wife, Gamilat I</i>
Obodas III	30-9 BCE	III (II) 30-9 BCE	(II) 31-10 BCE <i>Queen: mother, Gamilat I</i> <i>Queen: wife, Hagaru I</i>
Aretas IV	9 BCE-40 CE	9/8 BCE-39/40 CE	10 BCE-38/39 CE <i>Queen: mother, Hagaru I</i> <i>Queen: wife, Huldu</i> <i>Queen: wife, Shaqilat I</i>
Malichus II	40-70 CE	39/40 CE-69/70 CE	38/39-69/70 CE <i>Queen: wife, Shuqailat II</i>
<i>King of unknown name</i> ²	---	---	69/70-70/71 CE <i>Queen: mother, Phasael</i> <i>Queen: wife, Qashmael</i> <i>Queen: wife, Shaudat</i>
Rabbel II	70-106 CE	70/71-106 CE	70/71-106 CE <i>Queen: mother, Shuqailat II</i> <i>Queen: wife, Gamilat II</i> <i>Queen: wife, Hagaru II</i>
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Meshorer's list has been corrected and updated on several points since its publication. For example, it is now believed that there was no Obodas II of 62-60 BCE, and therefore the Obodas immediately preceding Aretas IV, formerly called Obodas III, is now called Obodas II in some discussions and in the present study.³

¹ Nisan-to-Nisan (spring to spring) reckoning for the Nabataean regnal years is assumed in the present study.

² A case is made in the present study that 2 Cor 11:32-33 may allude to this king of this date; if correct he would be Aretas V.

³ Huth (2010, 216-17): "[I]t appears that all coins bearing the name of Obodas were in fact minted by one and the same king, and that the existence of a king of that name in 62-60 BCE cannot be proven on numismatic grounds . . . we shall henceforth assume an extension of the reign of Aretas III until 60 BCE, and that Obodas III (30-9 BCE), being in fact only the second king of this name, should henceforth be referred to as Obodas II." Similarly Barkay (2015-2016, 13n1): "Previously regarded as Obodas III."

Two anchor points establish fixed absolute dates in the constructed list. The first is an inscription found at Tell esh-Shuqafiya, Egypt, in which Nisan in the spring of 34 BCE in the 18th year of Cleopatra VII is dated year 26 of Malichus I.⁴ The other is an inscription found at Dumêr, Syria, in which Iyar in the spring of 94 CE in the 405th year of the Seleucid era is dated year 24 of Rabbel II.⁵

Year 1 of Malichus I is therefore 59/58 BCE, using Nisan to Nisan (spring to spring) reckoning for the Nabataean regnal years. And year 1 of Rabbel II, the last Nabataean king, is therefore 71/72 CE, Nisan to Nisan.⁶

But between those two anchor points the absolute dates for the accessions and deaths of the intervening rulers must be reconstructed. The lengths of the intervening reigns of Obodas II (21 years) and Aretas IV (48 years) are based on coin finds combined with presumption of uninterrupted annual Nabataean coin issues from the time of Obodas II in the 20s BCE through the 25th year of Malichus II in the mid-60s CE.⁷

However, there are no coins from Malichus II known later than his year 25 although there are two attestations of a year 31 for Malichus II, the latest year attested for him, from an inscription and a stone weight.⁸

While the known lengths of these three rulers' reigns—Obodas II, Aretas IV, and Malichus II—account for most if not all of the years between the two fixed anchor dates, the absolute dates of accession and death of these three rulers are actually floating in between the two anchor dates in the reigns of Malichus I and Rabbel II. The published reconstructed absolute

⁴ This inscription was originally published with a mistaken reading of Cleopatra VII's year 14 in Jones *et al.* (1988). The reading was corrected to Cleopatra's year 18 in Fiema and Jones (1990).

⁵ *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* II, No. 182.

⁶ If the regnal year reckoning was Tishri to Tishri (fall to fall) then year 26 of Malichus I would be 35/34 BCE (Tishri to Tishri), and year 24 of Rabbel II would be 93/94 CE (Tishri to Tishri).

⁷ Huth (2010, 216); Barkay (2019, 65-66).

⁸ For the inscription from year 31 of Malichus II, Meshorer (1975, 64-65). For the lead weight from year 31 of Malichus II, Barag and Qedar (2006, 62-63).

year-dates for accessions and deaths of the three rulers in between—Obodas II, Aretas IV, and Malichus II—are generally understood to carry a circa 1-2 year uncertainty.⁹

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus refers by name to Nabataean kings Aretas III, Malichus I, Obodas II, Aretas IV, and Malichus II.¹⁰ But Josephus's references are generally understood to fall short of establishing absolute dates for the beginnings and ends of the reigns of Obodas II, Aretas IV, and Malichus II at less than ca. 1-2 years uncertainty. For example, Josephus tells of the death of Obodas II and the accession of Aretas IV during the reign of Herod the Great, and provides surrounding historical narrative (*Ant.* 16.220-299). But the absolute datings of events in the reign of Herod the Great told by Josephus are notoriously contested and difficult in many cases to nail down to the exact year.¹¹

Further complicating matters, there is scholarly disagreement concerning two issues of Nabataean regnal year calculation. The first question is whether regnal years of the Nabataean kings were counted Nisan to Nisan (spring to spring), Tishri to Tishri (autumn to autumn), or from the month of the death of the preceding king. The second question is whether year 1 of a new ruler was the same regnal year as the final year of the preceding ruler who died midway in a

⁹ For example, Wenning (1993, 36) commented on an extra year that seemed to be in between the usual dating understood for the end of Malichus II's reign and the accession of Rabbel II: "Die Regierungszeit Malichus II wird durch die Daten von Aretas IV (bis 39/40 n.Chr.) und Rabbel II (seit 70/71 n.Chr.) festgelegt, wobei entgegen dem allgemeinen Ansatz (40-70 n.Chr.) wegen des gesicherten Datums des Amtsantritts Rabbel II eine Herabdatierung um 1 Jahr sinnvoll erscheint." ("The reign of Malichus II is determined by the dates of Aretas IV (until 39/40 AD) and Rabbel II (since 70/71 AD), in which, differing from the usual estimate (40-70 AD), due to the confirmed date of Rabbel II's accession a downdating of 1 year seems reasonable.")

¹⁰ Aretas III: *War* 1.103, 124-131, 159; *Ant.* 13.360, 392, 414; 14.14-33, 81. Malichus I: *War* 1.274-286, 360, 440; *Ant.* 14.370-375, 390; 15.167-175. Obodas II: *War* 1.90, 487; *Ant.* 13.375; 16.220, 279-296, 337. Aretas IV: *War* 1.574; 2.68; *Ant.* 16.294-296, 339-355; 17.54, 287, 296; 18.109-125. Malichus II: *War* 3.68.

¹¹ E.g. Barkay (2019, 43): "The rule did not pass smoothly to Aretas IV after the death of Obodas ... The year of the events is calculated on the basis of other events mentioned in Josephus' report, none of which definitely occurred ca. 9/8 BCE. Consequently, the dating of Obodas II's death and the beginning of Aretas' reign in this year is tentative."

regnal year, i.e. overlapping or not. These issues are complex and contested. This study assumes the Nabataean regnal years were Nisan to Nisan, and (with one exception, discussed in the appendix) that the accession-year (non-overlap) method of ruler-year counting was the system in use.¹²

2. Heretofore-unrecognized Nabataean queens of the first century CE

The starting point of this study is a dedicatory inscription from about 100 CE in the time of Rabbel II found at el-Hubta at Petra, known since the early twentieth century (Dalman 1912; N.060.37.01 in Hackl, Jenni, Schneider 2003). Line 9 of this inscription names two queens following Malichus II who were not queens during the reign of Rabbel II.

Rabbel II dedicatory inscription, el-Hubta, Petra, ca. 100 CE

5	[...] of Hubta for the life [of
6	[Ra]bbel the [k]ing, king of the Nabataeans, who gave life to and saved his peo[ple],
7	[and fo]r the life of Gamilat and Hagaru [his] sisters, [qu]eens of the Nabataeans (מלכת נבטו), the children of Malichus
8	the [king], king of the Nabataeans, the son of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, the lover of his people,
9	[and for the life] of Qashmael and Sha[u]dat his sisters, queens of the Nabataeans (מלכת נבטו), and fo[r]
10	[the life of ... Ma]lich[us,] the children [of] Rabbel, and Gamilat and Hagaru [...]
11	[... q]ueen (or, queens) of the Naba[taeans, and for the li]fe of Qashmael

¹² For the argument favoring Nisan to Nisan and accession-year reckoning of the Nabataean regnal years, Mahieu (2012, 21, 37-49), and compare the comments of Janif (2006-2007, 346-48). For further on chronological issues see the Appendix at the end of the present study: “A possible reconstruction of absolute dates of the last Nabataean kings.”

12	[... in year ... of Rabbel, king of the Na]bataeans, who g[ave] life to and saved
13	[his people.]

In line 6 there is Rabbel II the king. In line 7 and again in line 10 are named two wives of Rabbel II, known from coins to have been queens during the reign of Rabbel II, Gamilat and Hagaru.

Line 9 is the line of interest: “*Qashmael and Shaudat his sisters, queens of the Nabataeans*”. These two queens or former queens, Qashmael and Shaudat, are additional kin of Rabbel II.

This reading of line 9 follows the reading of Dijkstra (1995, 61), and Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003, 263-68), in which two queens are named in that line, Qashmael and Shaudat, קשמאל ושעודת אחותה מלכת נבטו. This reading differs from an earlier reading of the same line of Dalman (1912, 101-106 [No. 92]) and Cantineau (1932, 9-10 [No. 8]), followed by Meshorer (1975, 78-79) and Roche (2019, 88), in which only Shaudat is named queen in line 9. Those scholars read, קשמא בר שעודת אחתה מלכת נבטו, “[for the life of] Qashma son of Shaudat, his sister, queen of the Nabataeans”.

Mesheror further followed Dalman in transcribing singular אחתה at line 7, “his sister the queen of the Nabataeans”, and again at line 9 שעודת אחתה, “S[u]dat his sister, the queen of the Nabataeans”, consistent with reading only one queen in line 9, even though line drawings of the inscriptions’ letters published by both Dalman (1912) and Cantineau (1932) distinctly show a *waw* in both of the “sister” words making the word in both instances visibly plural, אחותה, “sisters”.

Dalman acknowledged the word in line 7 visibly reads plural “his sisters” but interpreted that as an ancient scribal error as if it should not have the *waw* that it does (“Doch ist, wie es scheint, aus Versehen, wie oben der Plural אחותה, statt des Singulars אחתה geschrieben” [“it seems by mistake ... the plural אחותה is written instead of the singular אחתה”]).

The expressions מלכת נבטו in lines 7 and 9, meanwhile, in isolation could read as either singular or plural form, queen or queens, of the Nabataeans, but the syntax requires plural

meaning applicable to both the named women.¹³ The revised reading of Dijkstra (1995) and Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003) is followed here (with two queens named in line 9) because it is judged more likely to be correct, even though at present there does not appear to have emerged consensus in publications of Nabataean specialists on this reading.¹⁴ Whether there is one queen or two in line 9 of the el-Hubta inscription, the argument to follow does not change.

Going back to line 7, the two known wives of Rabbel II are named, known from coins to have been his queens, making three queens in all during his reign, but not more than one queen at a time.

First was Rabbel II's mother, Shuqailat II, queen during Rabbel II's years 1-6 according to coins.

Next was Rabbel II's first wife, Gamilat, depicted as queen on coins from Rabbel II's years 6 to 22.

Finally, in Rabbel II's last years of rule, a third queen appears on his coins, his second wife, Hagaru.¹⁵

Those are the only queens known during the reign of Rabbel II.

There has been no place in existing scholarly understanding for reigns of *queens Qashmael and Shaudat* in the first century CE. There is no mention of reigns of either of these two named Nabataean queens in any modern reference book or modern scholarly Nabataean king- or queen-list, even though the attestation of Shaudat, termed *mlkt nbṭw*, “queen of the Nabataeans”, in line 9 of the el-Hubta inscription has been known for over a century. Why is that?

¹³ Translated plural, “queens of the Nabataeans”, by Roche (2019, 75) and Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003, 264, 284). Hoftijzer and Jongeling (1995, 636) have both spellings *mlkt* and *mlkwt* attested in Nabataean for feminine plural construct “queens”. Monferrer-Sala and Ferrer (2017, 62) show the same spelling *mlkt* used for both singular “queen” and plural “queens” in Nabataean.

¹⁴ There is a parallel in a Wadi Ramm inscription of Rabbel II (O.019.01 in Hackl, Jenni, Schneider 2003), line 4, קשמאל ושעודת אחותה, “Qashmael and Shaudat his sisters”, the antecedent of “his” being Rabbel II of line 1.

¹⁵ Barkay (2019, 68).

3. A questionable explanation: a claim that *mlkt nbṭw*, “queen of the Nabataeans”, does not always mean a queen who reigned

A common scholarly explanation of the el-Hubta inscription, line 9, has been that queen Shaudat was not an actual queen, and that the word *mlkh*, “queen”, in the case of Shaudat was used as a figurative title only.

It is not contested that *mlkh* on Nabataean coins always refers to queens who reigned. And it is not contested that most uses of *mlkh* in inscriptions refer to queens who reigned. But the notion is that in a small number of instances in Nabataean inscriptions, notably the present Shaudat and a couple of others, “queen of the Nabataeans” is used as an honorary title only, applied to female members of the royal family who never reigned. This alleged alternative meaning of *mlkh*, “queen”—for which the present Shaudat under discussion has been invoked as a primary claimed proof for the alternative meaning’s existence—is then cited as the reason why “Shaudat, queen of the Nabataeans” of the el-Hubta inscription need not mean Shaudat reigned as queen.

In this interpretation, the way the exceptional cases in Nabataean inscriptions are identified in which *mlkh* does not mean a queen who reigned is this: if scholars believe a particular named queen in an inscription, such as Shaudat, cannot be identified as an historical queen, the alleged other meaning of *mlkh* (as not an actual queen) is deemed by default to apply. There is no other diagnostic method claimed or used for identifying alleged instances of *mlkh* applied to women who were called queen but who never reigned as queens.

With a great deal of circularity, this scholarly notion is invoked as the reason why an inscription reading “Shaudat, queen of the Nabataeans” need not mean Shaudat ever was a queen of the Nabataeans. Besides Shaudat, two other instances in Nabataean inscriptions have been commonly cited of women called *mlkh* who are claimed to be known never to have been an actual queen in Nabataean history, set forth as alleged proof for the existence of the phenomenon (the other instances to be discussed below momentarily).

Below is a sampling of scholarly discourse illustrating this notion’s prevalence and currency:

- Meshorer (1975, 79): “In this inscription [at el-Hubta] Se‘udat ... is called מלכת נבטו (the queen of the Nabataeans), a title which was apparently bestowed on her by reason of her being the king’s sister ... This title [‘queen’] may have been shared by more than one woman at one and the same time, that is, all the king’s sisters may have been called queen (the king’s brothers, however, were not given a corresponding royal title). The whole subject is a difficult one, there being insufficient data to enable us to arrive at a definite conclusion.”
- Wenning (1993, 36-36n89): “Alle Prinzessinnen führten der Titel ‘Königin der Nabaṭu’, während der Titel ‘Schwester’ der Regentin vorbehalten war. Eine Ausnahme bildet Sa‘udat.” (“All princesses held the title ‘Queen of the Nabataeans’, while the title ‘Sister’ was reserved for the regent. An exception is Se‘udat.”)
- Dijkstra (1995, 317): “In contrast with the title *mlk’ nbṭw*, king of the Nabataeans, *mlkt nbṭw*, queen (better princess) of the Nabataeans, may simultaneously apply to more than one female member ... the reigning king’s granddaughters are proven to carry the title as well, as in Khairy (1980 [*sic*]: 22). This line of argument may be substantiated by an Edessene inscription which cites a female as *šlmt mlkt’ brt m’nu pšgryb’*, *Shalmat, the princess, daughter of Maanu, the Crown Prince* (Drijvers 1972: 21). In this instance, *mlkt’* obviously implies nothing more than that she belongs to the royal family.”
- Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003, 267): “Als Angehörige des Königshauses trügen sie den Titel ‘Königinnen der Nabatäer’, im Sinne von ‘königliche Hoheit’ oder ‘Prinzessin’.” (“As members of the royal house, they bore the title ‘queen of the Nabataeans’, meaning ‘royal highness’ or ‘princess’.”)
- Huth (2010, 221): “the Nabataean practice of using the title ‘queen of the Nabataeans’ also for royal daughters.”
- Kokkinos (2010, 376-77): “Gamilat I is called ‘queen’ in CE 23/24, quite prematurely if she was only up to five years old in the present reconstruction, and in any case this is impossible if she was a daughter of the reigning king. Thus we have to understand ‘queen’ only as ‘princess’. The meaning of this title (like those of ‘brother’ and ‘sister’) in Nabataea is not always clear, and it may sometime be honorary, or a technical term.”

- Roche (2012, 64): “[L]es membres de la famille royale sont mentionnés dans les inscriptions et on constate l’usage de donner aux princesses les titres auliques de ‘reine’ et de ‘sœur’ du roi.” (“Members of the royal family are mentioned in the inscriptions and there is a practice of giving princesses the aulic titles of ‘queen’ and ‘sister’ of the king.”)

On the other hand, Milik and Starcky (1975) disagreed with some of the above scholars:

Milik and Starcky (1975: 113-114): “Mais il est peu probable que la princesse Paša’el ait déjà porté le titre de reine du vivant de son père. Il semble alors réservé aux épouses royales, Ḥuldu puis Šaqîlat, et peut-être à la reine-mère, si Arétas IV est le fils de ‘Hagaru la reine’ mentionnée dans un texte de fondation de l’an 18 de son règne ... Ajoutons que les enfants du roi [Rabbel II] ne portent pas de titre.”

(“It is unlikely that Princess Phasaël ever held the title of queen during her father’s lifetime. **It [the title “queen”] seems reserved for the royal wives** [of Aretas IV], Huldu then Shuqailat, and perhaps the queen-mother, if Aretas IV is the son of ‘Hagaru the queen’ mentioned in the foundation text from year 18 of his reign ... the king’s children [of Rabbel II] do not have titles.”)

Comment: Notwithstanding how common the scholarly notion may be, the claims concerning the existence of an occasional non-queen meaning of “queen of the Nabataeans” in Nabataean inscriptions are not well-supported from the evidence cited. For example, the Dijkstra citation above (1995, 312) has a reference that does not go to a source establishing the stated claim. The reference goes to Khairy (1981) and an inscription from Wadi Musa, presumably with reference to a “Gamilat, queen of the Nabataeans” of that inscription who was interpreted by the editor (Khairy) as being a non-reigning daughter—Dijkstra argued granddaughter—of the then-reigning king of the inscription, Aretas IV. But the inscription itself does not specify a daughter or granddaughter relationship of its queen Gamilat to Aretas IV. Those were scholarly conjectures, but there are grounds to know both of those conjectures are in error and that queen Gamilat was a queen before the time of Aretas IV; further on this below.

The other example claimed in the Dijkstra comment, Shalmat as the daughter of Maanu in the 3rd-century CE Edessa text (not a Nabataean text), is a contested reading. Shalmat arguably was a real queen, removing that as a counterexample able to be cited with certainty as a comparative example supporting, by analogy, the plausibility of an alleged occasional non-queen meaning of *mlkh* in Nabataean inscriptions.¹⁶

It may be suggested that the claim that there exists a routine, occasional non-queen meaning of the expression *mlkt nbṭw* in Nabataean inscriptions is fundamentally misbegotten, for this reason: upon analysis there cannot be found even one unambiguous instance of *mlkh* in a Nabataean inscription known with certainty to refer to a woman who never reigned as queen—an instance of unambiguous use as an honorific applied to a child, or to a sister or other member of the royal family who never was queen—no certain use of the word *mlkh* which does *not* connote present or past exercise of royal rule of a woman so termed.

Until recently, no one ever asserted there is an alleged occasional alternative non-king meaning for *mlk'* in Nabataean inscriptions, applied to men as a title who never were king, such that there could be multiple men called “king of the Nabataeans” by the Nabataeans at any given time even though only one was actual king, the others only fictively so titled indistinguishably.¹⁷ The *prima facie* contradictory or counterintuitive notion that *mlkh*—in contrast to *mlk'*—sometimes in Nabataean uses means a fictive not actual queen (e.g. is used as a title of royal

¹⁶ As Drijvers (1972, 20-21) noted, “A. Maricq [1965] considers it probable that Salmath is the wife of king Ma‘nu IX (214-240 [CE]); in that case line 8 may be read: *'ntt m'nw mlk'* [wife of Manu the king]”. Pognon (1907, 204-208) commented that the queen at issue “elle nous est complètement inconnue ... Chelmath, fille de Manou, était probablement la femme d'un des derniers rois d'Édessa.” (“she is completely unknown to us ... Chelmath, daughter of Manu, was probably the wife of one of the last kings of Edessa.”) Pognon rendered the line in question: “la reine Chelmath, fille de Manou, le premier ministre, femme du roi Manou (ou du roi Abgar ou du roi Wael)” (“Queen Chelmath, daughter of Manu, the prime minister, wife of King Manu (or King Abgar or King Wael).”)

¹⁷ An exceptional (first such known to this study) claim that Nabataean *mlk'* can mean “prince” (not a reigning king), not necessarily a “king” (who reigns), was published in 2017 by Monferrer-Ala and Ferrer (2017, 62), without specification of any inscription giving an instance of a non-king use of the word; see note 18 below.

family women or princesses who never reigned) must be questioned. It must be asked how secure or warranted is confidence in the notion if not a single unambiguous instance of the claim can be shown. Because a mirroring likeness of usage of the two words—*mlk'* and *mlkh*, “king” and “queen”—is intuitive, there must be a burden or threshold of proof to accept a notion of existence of a different rule-based behavior for one of the two words (*mlkh*), not applicable to the other (*mlk'*).

4. Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*

Hoftijzer and Jongeling (1995) cover inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca in Old Canaanite, Phoenician, Punic, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Hebrew, Samalian, various forms of Aramaic, and Palmyrene, as well as Nabataean, from ca. 1000 BCE to ca. 300 CE—over one thousand years of Northwest Semitic inscriptions.

Under its entry *mlk*, which includes *mlkh*, this *Dictionary* gives no meaning for *mlk* or *mlkh* as a noun applied to an individual man or woman as meaning other than “king” or “queen” (pp. 634-40 [“subst. m. king, f. queen”]). The glossary of Nabataean Aramaic of Cantineau (1932, 114) showed no meaning for nouns *mlk'* or *mlkh* applied to persons as meaning other than actual king or queen, *roi* or *reine*.¹⁸

With this in mind, what of the examples most commonly claimed of women in Nabataean inscriptions called *mlkt nbṭw*, “queen of the Nabataeans”, who are alleged never to have reigned as queen?

5. Three commonly-cited cases examined: queen Gamilat, queen Shaudat, and queen Phasael

The three most commonly-cited claims of women called *mlkh* in Nabataean inscriptions who supposedly never were actual queens appear to be: queen Gamilat of the Khairy (1981)

¹⁸ The glossary of Nabataean Aramaic of Monferrer-Sala and Ferrer (2017, 62) does now define *mlk* in Nabataean as “n. king, prince”, though in the summary nature of that work no example or bibliographic

inscription of Wadi Musa; queen Shaudat of the el-Hubta inscription of the present discussion; and a queen Phasael on a graffiti on a cave wall at el-Habis, a small mountain at Petra.

In each case an asserted impossibility that the woman named was an historical queen is cited as alleged evidence that *mlkh* was used other than with reference to an actual queen. Then these claimed cases are generalized and claimed to establish the existence of an alternative non-queen meaning of *mlkh* in Nabataean inscriptions, mixed among the larger number of undisputed references to genuine queens indicated by identical wording and phrasing. But upon examination none of the three cases cited is clearly substantial. Because of how deeply embedded this notion is—it is the basis for scholarly denial that queens Qashmael and Shaudat of the el-Hubta inscription were historical queens—it is necessary to address these cases.

When was Gamilat, queen of the Nabataeans, of the Wadi Musa inscription, queen?

This inscription of Aretas IV was found at Wadi Musa near Petra. It is dated to the 24th year of Aretas IV in Roche (2019), No. 16 (N.064.01 in Hackl, Jenni, Schneider 2003).

Aretas IV dedicatory inscription from Wadi Musa

1	[This is the statue of] the divine Malichus [. . .]
2	[. . . Aretas] king of the Nabataeans, lover of his people and for the life of Shaqilat his sister, queen of the Nabat[aeans]
3	[] Malichus and Obodas and Rabbel and Phasael and Sh‘dat their children, and for the life of Shuqail[at]
4	[] son of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, lover of his people, and for the life of Gamilat, queen [of the Nabataeans]
5	[and for the li]fe of Hagaru her daughter and Aretas her son, son of H[agaru] ¹⁹

reference is given of a claimed use of the word read with alleged non-king meaning, of a non-reigning “prince”; the basis for the claim is a mystery.

¹⁹ Khairy (1981) judged the traces of the letters toward the end of line 5 continued after בר ה- to spell “Hagaru”: “...[for the li]fe of Hagaru her daughter, and Aretas her son, *the son of H[agaru...]*”. Józef Milik, in comments at the end of Khairy (1981), suggested the ה- was the first letter of a man’s name, the

6	[]-four of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, lover of his people.

In line 4 of this inscription appears a “Gamilat, queen [of the Nabataeans]”, without stated relationship to any other name in the inscription except one: she reads as the mother of Hagaru of line 5.²⁰

This queen Gamilat cannot have been a queen of Aretas IV, because the two queen-wives of Aretas IV, Huldu and Shaqilat I, are known from coins covering all of the years of his reign (in addition to a coin from Aretas IV’s year 1 interpreted as portraying his mother, Hagaru I, as queen in his year 1).²¹

Nor can the Wadi Musa inscription refer to Gamilat as queen of any king later than Aretas IV (since the inscription was written in the time of Aretas IV). That removes the reign of this queen Gamilat from the first century CE.

father of Aretas. However if the line drawing of the inscription published by Khairy (1981) is accurate, three of the four letters of the name הג[ג]ר, “Hagaru”, are readable.

²⁰ As noted correctly by Dijkstra (1995, 56) before disagreeing: “At first sight *brth* [of line 5] modifies Hagaru as a daughter of Gamilat [of line 4]”. (Dijkstra argued instead that Hagaru was a daughter of Shuqailat of line 3.) Compare Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003: 277-78): “...eine ‘Konigin der Nabataer’ genannte Gamilat, deren verwandtschaftliches Verhältnis mit Aretas IV nicht angegeben wird ... Eine Tochter Aretas’ IV kann Gamilat kaum sein, da sie von den vorhergenannten Kindern Aretas und von der folgenden Hagaru durch die eigene explizite Einleitung (‘für das Wohlleben von...’) abgesetzt ist und in der Reihe der Aretas-Kinder in der Inschrift N.060.17.01 [year 29, an-Numair] nicht erscheint ... konnte Gamilat eine Verwandte des Vorgangerkönigs, Obodas’ III (II)...” (“...Gamilat called ‘Queen of the Nabataeans’, whose family relationship to Aretas IV is not stated ... can hardly be a daughter of Aretas IV, since she is set apart from the aforementioned children of Aretas and from the following Hagaru by her own explicit introduction, ‘for the well-being of...’, and in the series of Aretas children in the inscription N.060.17.01 [year 29, an-Numair] Gamilat does not appear ... Gamilat could be a relative of the predecessor king, Obodas III/II...”)

²¹ Schwentzel (2010) and Barkay (2018, 372; 2019, 46-47, 103) interpret a coin of year 1 of Aretas IV, Barkay’s Type 85, as portraying Aretas IV’s mother, Hagaru I, as queen.

The editor, Khairy, assumed queen Gamilat was a daughter of Aretas IV not in other lists of Aretas IV's children. But nothing in the inscription states or confirms that and that can be excluded for two reasons. First, no daughter of Aretas IV named Gamilat is known from any other inscription. Identical namings of five children of Aretas IV are given in the present Wadi Musa inscription reconstructed as from year 24, and six children are named in a year 29 inscription of Aretas IV from an-Numair (with an added girl's name Hagaru at the end of the same list in year 29, evidently born in the preceding five years), and Gamilat is not among those names.²²

And second, there is nothing else in the database to support that a daughter of a reigning Nabataean king was or would have been fictively titled "queen of the Nabataeans" when she was not queen, during the reign of her father the king.

Since there was no queen in the reign of Aretas IV other than his mother and his two known queen-wives, queen Gamilat can only have been queen *before* the time of Aretas IV.

From analysis of the coins of the preceding ruler, Obodas II, Rachel Barkay concluded that Obodas II had two queens: a first queen, name never disclosed on the coins but whose image appears on coins of Obodas II starting from his year 2, and a second queen named "Hagaru" of different appearance on coins of Obodas II starting in his year 10. Barkay (2015-2016, 15-17; compare 2019, 26-27):

"The first such coin [of a queen appearing alone on one side of an Obodas II coin as opposed to jugate accompanying the king] was issued in year 10, with her name (Hagaru) written beside her. This is the first mention of any queen's name on a Nabataean coin and the only mention of a queen's name on coins of Obodas II ... The next depiction of a queen alone is in year 15 ... Surprisingly, in the next year, year 16, both depictions of the queen were issued [in separate coin issues]. One is similar to the portrait of Hagaru I on the year 10 coin, while the other resembles the depiction of the anonymous queen on the year 15 coin ... As no name accompanies the portraits, the two different depictions in the same year [year 16] raise the question of whether they are both the same queen. The anonymous queen had

²² See below for lines of the year 29 Aretas IV inscription from an-Numair.

accompanied Obodas II jugate on his coins since year 2. The mention of Hagaru's name in year 10 may suggest that she was a new queen; perhaps her name appears beside her image so she would be easily identified. Five years later, in year 15, the different portrait was most probably intended to differentiate between the two queens—Hagaru and the anonymous queen. The two different looks in year 16 emphasize the existence of two queens at the same time and may be indicative of their equal status ... Apparently, beginning in his tenth year Obodas II had two queens..."

Since queen Gamilat of the Aretas IV inscription was not queen during the reign of Aretas IV at the time the inscription was written, queen Gamilat can hardly be other than that first queen, unnamed on the coins, of the preceding ruler Obodas II, discussed by Barkay.

That an Aretas IV inscription would refer to and honor a former queen of the preceding ruler, Obodas II, has a parallel: a different, year 18 Aretas IV inscription from Petra (Starcky 1971; Roche 2019, No. 15) honors the *second* queen of Obodas II discussed by Barkay, queen Hagaru I, who would have been ca. 50 years in age at the time of writing of that Aretas IV inscription if she was still living. Queen Hagaru of that inscription was not *presently* reigning as queen at the time of that inscription's writing, but she *had been* queen and still retained the title (since she had been queen of the Nabataeans).

Similarly (it may be suggested) in the case of queen Gamilat. She was the *first* queen of Obodas II, *had been* queen, was not queen *presently* at the time of writing of the inscription but still retained the title because she *had been* queen. As the first queen of Obodas II, queen Gamilat would have been at least mid-60s in age, perhaps 70s or 80s, at the time of writing of the Wadi Musa inscription in Aretas IV's year 24 if she was still living.

Barkay's observation that Obodas II's coins reflect two queens is important. However, the notion that they both were *wives* of Obodas II might be questioned. The notion that a Nabataean king would have two wives who were both reigning queens at the same time is questionable; there is no other precedent for that. An interpretation that would better account for the facts is that the first queen on Obodas II coins from year 2 forward—queen Gamilat—was Obodas II's *mother*, preceding Hagaru I the second queen and first wife of Obodas II. In this reconstruction queen Gamilat, mother of Obodas II, might have been queen until Obodas II's year 10, when

wife Hagaru I replaced her as queen and remained queen for the remainder of Obodat II's reign. Now-former queen Gamilat might still be honored on coin issues even though after year 10 she was no longer queen (nor do any coins explicitly claim she was queen after year 10), parallel to the sequence that happened in the time of Rabbel II, in which the first queen was the king's mother (Shuqailat II), succeeded in year 6 by Rabbel II's wife (Gamilat II). That is the suggested reconstruction and sequence here for Obodas II.

Is it only coincidence that the Wadi Musa inscription has a *queen Gamilat* of line 4 as the mother of a *Hagaru* of line 5, a Hagaru otherwise identified in the inscription (and the reason for naming her) as the mother of an *Aretas*?

Given the Nabataean practice of royal marriages between brother and sister, if queen Gamilat was Obodas II's mother, queen Gamilat might also have been the mother of Hagaru I.

Could Hagaru of line 5 of the Wadi Musa inscription, daughter of queen Gamilat of line 4, be *Hagaru I*, the second queen of Obodas II?

But then who would be Hagaru's child "Aretas" of the inscription, and grandson of queen Gamilat?

Could that be other language for Aretas IV himself?

Another Aretas IV inscription, this one from Aretas IV's year 29 from an-Numair (*CIS* II, No. 354; N.060.17.01 in Hackl, Jenni, Schneider 2003), has the same distinctive and not otherwise well-explained singling out of this same Hagaru as the mother of the same "Aretas".

Aretas IV dedicatory inscription from an-Numair

2	. . . for the life of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, the lover of [his] peo[ple, and Sha-]
3	-qilat] his sister, queen of the Nabataeans, and Malichus and Obodas and Rabbel and Phasael and Shaudat and Hagaru his children, and Aretas son of H[agaru...] ²³

²³ Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003: 251) read at the end of line 3, *whrtt br h²g[rw...]*, "Aretas the son of Hag[aru...]", with a clear *he* and trace of *gimel* of the final name. Yardeni (2000, 313) read *whrtt brh[²]*, which Yardeni interpreted as, "and his/her son", without restoration of the name "Hagaru" at the

4	[yea]r 29 of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, the lover of his people.

Putting the two inscriptions together there is this three-generation sequencing of these names:

(Queen) Gamilat (f.) → Hagaru (f.) → Aretas (m.)

Queen Gamilat and Hagaru are grandmother and mother, respectively, of an “Aretas” bearing the same name as the contemporary ruler of the inscription—the famous Aretas IV, a ruler unusual among Nabataean rulers in that his paternity is never claimed and is unknown. The basic three-generation genealogy represented in the two inscriptions matches up with Aretas IV.

Queen Gamilat (of year 24 Aretas IV inscription)

- queen who reigned
- mother of Hagaru
- grandmother of Aretas
- = *queen-wife of Malichus I?*
- = *mother of Obodas II?*
- = *first queen of Obodas II?*
- = *mother of Hagaru I?*

end of the line. Roche (2014) argued on the basis of a better photograph that a trace of the *gimel* at the end of the line, the second letter in the name Hagaru, is indeed there in agreement with earlier authorities who had access to the physical artifact. It should be noted that Yardeni’s judgment that the *gimel* is not there is not in conflict, even if Yardeni was correct, with a restoration of *whrtt br h[grw]*, “Aretas son of H[agaru]”. The reading “Aretas the son of Hagaru” can be argued to be the expected reading on the basis of the parallel Wadi Musa inscription in which the same Aretas is specified to be the son of the same Hagaru.

- = *grandmother of Aretas IV?*

Hagaru (of year 24 and 29 Aretas IV inscriptions)

- daughter of queen Gamilat
- mother of Aretas
- = *Hagaru I, wife and second queen of Obodas II?*
- = *daughter of Gamilat I (wife-queen of Malichus I and mother and first queen of Obodas II)?*
- = *mother of Aretas IV?*

Aretas (of year 24 and 29 Aretas IV inscriptions)

- son of Hagaru
- grandson of queen Gamilat
- = *Aretas IV?*
- = *son of Hagaru I, wife and second queen of Obodas II?*
- = *grandson of queen Gamilat I?*

Compare:

Aretas IV

- Existing scholarly argument/restoration of a year 18 Aretas IV inscription as reading that *he was the son of queen Hagaru I*²⁴

²⁴ Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003, 249-250): “Es ist aber möglich, mit passenden Ergänzungen ein plausibles Bild zu gewinnen, so dass die Zugehörigkeit Aretas’ IV, der nicht der Sohn seines Vorgängers, Obodas’ III (II), gewesen zu sein scheint (nach Iosephus hiess er ursprünglich Aeneas [vermutlich *Hāni*’]), zum Königshaus höchst wahrscheinlich wird. Die im Text erwähnte Hagaru wird ‘Königin’ genannt, was sie als zugehörig zum Königshaus ausweist. Nach den vorgeschlagenen Ergänzungen wäre der Bau erfolgt zu Ehren Aretas’ IV und der ‘Hagaru, [der Tochter] Malichos’ (I), des Königs der Nabatäer, seiner [(Aretas’) eigenen Mutter]’. Unter der Voraussetzung, dass Obodas III (II) der Sohn

Queen Hagaru I

- Existing scholarly argument/restoration that *she was a daughter of Malichus I*²⁵
- Existing scholarly argument/restoration that *she was the mother of Aretas IV*²⁶

The correspondences above do not merely raise the question of identifications, but due to the striking matches appear to answer the question in the affirmative: “Aretas” son of Hagaru of the Wadi Musa and an-Numair inscriptions is Aretas IV. Aretas’s mother Hagaru of the two inscriptions is Aretas IV’s mother Hagaru I. These inscriptions are giving Aretas IV’s otherwise-

seines Vorgängers, Malichos’ I, war, wäre somit Aretas IV ein Neffe Obodas’ III (II) mütterlicherseits gewesen. Falls tatsächlich Malichos I gemeint ist, wären somit auch verstorbene Herrscher mit dem Titel ‘König der Nabatäer’ verzeichnet worden.” (“With suitable restorations [of the year 18 Aretas IV inscription, Starcky 1971] it is possible to obtain a plausible picture of the genealogy of Aretas IV, who was not the son of his predecessor Obodas III (II)—according to Josephus his original name was Aeneas, presumably *Hāni*—but most likely was part of the royal family. The Hagaru mentioned in this text is called ‘queen’, which indicates she belongs to the royal family. According to the proposed restorations the building would have been dedicated in honor of Aretas IV and ‘Hagaru, [the daughter of] Malichus (I), the king of the Nabataeans, his [(Aretas’) own mother]’. Given that Obodas III (II) was the son of his predecessor, Malichus I, Aretas IV would have been a nephew of Obodas III (II) on his mother’s side. If Malichus I is actually meant, then deceased rulers were also recorded with the title ‘King of the Nabataeans’.”)

²⁵ Starcky (1971) and Barkay (2018).

²⁶ Barkay (2015-2016, 17-18): “The name Hagaru also appears in an inscription from Wadi Musa dated to year 18 of the reign of Aretas IV (c. 9/10 CE). This Hagaru is described as the daughter of Malichus and ‘queen of the Nabataeans.’ Starcky [1971] suggested that she was actually the mother of Aretas IV. The question is whether this is the same Hagaru mentioned on the year 10 coin of Obodas II ... it is not unlikely that the Hagaru in the Wadi Musa inscription was the daughter of Malichus I, wife of Obodas II, and mother of Aretas IV.”

missing ancestral claim: he was the son of queen Hagaru I and grandson of her mother, queen Gamilat I, the queen of Malichus I.²⁷

According to Barkay (2018, 372; 2019, 46-47, 103), and Schwentzel (2010), Aretas IV's mother Hagaru I is portrayed on a coin of Aretas IV's year 1 as queen. The coin at issue, Barkay's Type 85, has what are described by Barkay as jugate busts of two diademed queens on the obverse; on the reverse is a bust of Obodas II with an inscription: "Aretas king of the Nabataeans, year 1". Barkay interpreted the two queens of Type 85 as Hagaru I, Aretas IV's mother, queen in year 1 only, and Huldu, Aretas IV's wife and queen also in year 1 and in succeeding years' coin issues.²⁸ Schwentzel (2010) interpreted the two jugate figures as Hagaru I in front of Aretas IV.²⁹

²⁷ This is as opposed to the prevailing interpretation that Aretas, son of Hagaru, of the two Aretas IV inscriptions was an otherwise-unknown grandson of Aretas IV. In the two inscriptions Aretas IV would be referred to without title when associated with his mother Hagaru I presumably because the reference is to before he became king and the focus was on honoring his grandmother and mother. The conventional reading in which "Aretas" is read as a grandson of Aretas IV, and Aretas's mother, Hagaru, is identified as the daughter of Aretas IV of the same name, does not explain why that particular daughter and that particular grandson (if so), unlike any others, would be singled out for special mention or honor in that way—or why the names match *exactly* to the names of the likely mother and grandmother of Aretas IV, and to his own name, Aretas.

²⁸ Barkay (2019, 46-47): "Type 85 is extraordinary, depicting jugate queens on the obverse... there is no indication on the coins as to the identity of the queens. We may assume that one is Huldu, the wife of Aretas IV, who appears on other coins of this year. The other is most probably the queen mother Hagaru, known from inscriptions and earlier coins. This is the sole instance of a Nabataean coin depicting two different queens on the same side; if our interpretation is correct, the depiction of Queen Hagaru on coins of Aretas' first regnal year highlights her importance in his life."

²⁹ Schwentzel (2010, 245): "En l'an 1 de son règne, Arétas IV fit frapper des monnaies d'argent sur lesquelles son buste est associé à celui d'une femme anonyme. Fait remarquable et unique dans le monnayage nabatéen, la reine apparaît au premier plan, devant la représentation du roi... la position du buste féminin, au premier plan, indique un statut supérieur de la reine par rapport au souverain. Il ne peut donc s'agir que de la mère, non de l'épouse, d'Arétas IV. Les monnaies séleucides de Cléopâtre Théa et de son fils Antiochos VIII Grypos ont servi de modèle: la reine-mère y apparaît toujours devant le buste

According to restorations of the year 18 Aretas IV inscription, queen Hagaru I was the daughter of Malichus I. But by the present interpretation Hagaru I also is the daughter of queen Gamilat according to the Wadi Musa inscription.³⁰ The conclusion is queen Gamilat was the

de son fils. La ressemblance est accentuée par la reprise des symboles royaux séleucides: le voile et la *stéphané* pour la reine, le bandeau royal pour le jeune roi. La mère d'Arétas IV se nommait sans doute Hagiru. Elle pourrait correspondre à une reine de ce nom, mentionnée dans une inscription de Pétra, datée de l'an 18 d'Arétas IV. Grâce à cette inscription, J. Starcky a démontré qu'Arétas IV ne se rattachait à la famille royale que par sa mère, fille de Malichos I^{er} et sœur d'Obodas III. Arétas IV n'était donc que le neveu, non le fils d'Obodas III... La présence de la reine-mère à l'avant de la monnaie n'implique nulle régence, aucunement attestée par ailleurs. La reine Hagiru était peut-être déjà morte lorsque son fils monta sur le trône. Son image n'a pour fonction que de souligner le seul lien légitime entre Arétas IV et ses prédécesseurs. C'est la raison pour laquelle elle figure exclusivement sur les monnaies de l'an 1." ("In year 1 of his reign, Aretas IV had silver coins struck on which his bust is associated with that of an anonymous woman. A remarkable and unique fact in Nabataean coinage: the queen appears in the foreground, in front of the representation of the king... the position of the female bust, in the foreground, indicates a superior status of the queen in relation to the sovereign. It can therefore only be the mother, not the wife, of Aretas IV. The Seleucid coins of Cleopatra Thea and her son Antiochos VIII Grypus served as a model: the queen mother always appears in front of the bust of her son. The resemblance is accentuated by the resumption of Seleucid royal symbols: the veil and the stephane for the queen, the royal headband for the young king. The mother of Aretas IV was undoubtedly named Hagiru. She could correspond to a queen of this name, mentioned in an inscription from Petra, dated to year 18 of Aretas IV. Thanks to this inscription, J. Starcky demonstrated that Aretas IV was only connected to the royal family through his mother, daughter of Malichus I and sister of Obodas III [II]. Aretas IV was therefore the nephew, not the son, of Obodas III [II]... The presence of the queen mother on the obverse of the coin does not imply any regency, which is not attested elsewhere. Queen Hagiru may have already died when her son ascended the throne. Her image only has the function of underlining the only legitimate link between Aretas IV and his predecessors. This is why she appears exclusively on Year 1 coins.")

³⁰ As noted earlier, in the Wadi Musa inscription, line 3 gives five names of Aretas IV children which agree with the first five of six names of children of Aretas IV of the year 29 an-Numair inscription, but there is no Hagaru in the five names of Aretas IV's children in the Wadi Musa year 24. The year 29 inscription has the same five children's names plus an added sixth at the end of the list, Hagaru. That suggests that that daughter of Aretas IV was born after the writing of the Wadi Musa inscription five

queen-wife of Malichus I, and survived her husband's death to become the first queen pictured on the coins of the next king, her son Obodas II.

The proposal is that "Gamilat, queen [of the Nabataeans]", the mother of Hagaru in the Wadi Musa inscription, was the queen-wife of Malichus I at the end of Malichus I's reign, the mother of Obodas II, the first queen of Obodas II, and the mother of Obodas II's wife and second queen, Hagaru I. That is why "Gamilat, queen [of the Nabataeans]" is followed by "Hagaru her daughter" in the inscription, because queen Gamilat was the mother of Hagaru I, the second queen of Obodas II. The reason these women are named is because they are Aretas IV's grandmother and mother. The identification of the two women as the grandmother and mother of Aretas IV provides the simplest and best explanation for why they are named and made prominent and honored in the Wadi Musa inscription in the first place.

Queen Gamilat as the queen-wife of Malichus I, and mother and first queen of Obodas II, is a perfectly good identification. Unless both of these identifications of queen Gamilat are positively excluded on some specific, substantial grounds, queen Gamilat can no longer be asserted as an example of a *mlkt nbṭw* in a Nabataean inscription known with certainty never to have been queen.

When was Shaudat, queen of the Nabataeans, of the el-Hubta inscription, queen?

Shaudat of the el-Hubta inscription is the current case under discussion. In the el-Hubta inscription noted earlier, queens Qashmael and Shaudat of line 9 read as contemporary with their brother or kin, Rabbel II. Yet they were not queens of Rabbel II, since Rabbel II's only two wives/queens are known from coins and they are not Qashmael and Shaudat.

years earlier. But if that interpretation is correct (and the Wadi Musa inscription is from year 24), then Hagaru mother of Aretas of the Wadi Musa inscription *cannot* have been the daughter Hagaru of Aretas IV because that daughter of Aretas IV had not yet been born, and that means Hagaru, mother of Aretas of the year 29 inscription *also* was not Aretas IV's daughter Hagaru. Instead, Hagaru the mother of Aretas in both inscriptions becomes queen Hagaru I, wife and second queen of Obodas II, and Aretas her son becomes not Aretas IV's *grandson*, but *Aretas IV himself*.

Dalman (1912, 105) pointed out long ago that the el-Hubta inscription calls for reading Shaudat as the wife of a king earlier than Rabbel II: “Ware Sa‘udat die Gattin des regierenden Königs, so sollte sie vorher unter seinen Gattinnen genannt sein. So muß sie wohl Gattin eines früheren Königs gewesen sein.” (“If Se‘udat were the wife of the reigning king [Rabbel II], she should have been named among his wives. So she must have been the wife of an earlier king.”)

However it can be excluded that queens Qashmael and Shaudat were queens during the reign of Malichus II, because Malichus II’s wife Shuqailat II was his queen for as long as he had coin issues, which was his first 25 years. It is known that Shuqailat II was still living when Malichus II died a few years later (since she reappears on coins of Rabbel II as queen for the first six years of her son’s reign). There is a presumption that Shuqailat II finished out Malichus II’s reign as queen, with no room for Qashmael and Shaudat to have been queens in the reign of Malichus II. If that presumption is correct there is no room for a conclusion other than that queens Qashmael and Shaudat were queens of a king that *succeeded* Malichus II who in turn was succeeded by Rabbel II.

That is, the reigns of queens Qashmael and Shaudat *postdate* Malichus II. But their reigns *predate* Rabbel II. Their reigns were situated *between* those two rulers.

The el-Hubta inscription does not say how long Qashmael and Shaudat reigned nor does the inscription name their husband and king. But those two queens *will have had* a husband who was king when they were queen.

It has been assumed that the rule of Malichus II was immediately followed by that of his son Rabbel II. But no coin, inscription, or narrative told by an ancient witness confirms that assumption. Nothing in terms of actual evidence excludes the existence of a short-lived reign of a king and queens between Malichus II and Rabbel II, ca. 69-70 CE.

Because the el-Hubta inscription names two queens of mid-first century CE who were not queens of either Malichus II and Rabbel II but who reigned (because the inscription says they did), they must be attached to a short-lived reign of a king between Malichus II and Rabbel II, a husband and king of those two queens, ca. 69-70 CE.

Unless this reconstruction is positively excluded on the basis of specific evidence, queen Shaudat cannot be cited as a certain or known example of *mlkt nbṭw* in a Nabataean inscription

used of a woman who is known never to have been queen, and attention becomes focused on the last example claimed, Phasael.

When was Phasael, queen of the Nabataeans, queen?

A queen Phasael was read in an inscription published by Milik and Starcky in 1975: שלם פצאל מלכת נבטו, “*Shalom!—Grace and peace to Phasael, queen of the Nabataeans!*”, written high on a cave wall at el-Hibis, Petra, seen through binoculars and photographed.³¹

According to Milik and Starcky, on palaeographic grounds the writing of this inscription had the style and characteristics of inscriptions of the middle of the first century CE.³²

Milik and Starcky established three correct facts: the date of the inscription (mid-first century CE); that queen Phasael was the daughter of Aretas IV of that name; and that the time when Phasael bore the title “queen of the Nabataeans” post-dated the death of Aretas IV. Milik and Starcky (1975, 112-115):

“[L]’écriture a l’élégant calibre des inscriptions du milieu du 1^{er} siècle de l’ère. Or les deux autres mentions nabatéennes du nom Paša’el vise un enfant d’Arétas IV (9 à 40 ap. J.C.), ce qui convient à notre datation et nous permet de présumer qu’il s’agit du même personnage,

³¹ Milik and Starcky (1975, 112): “Sur la paroi orientale d’el Habis, l’archéologue P.J. Parr nous a signalé il y a quelques années un groupe de courtes inscriptions gravées très haut au-dessus de la grotte aménagée en colombier. Elles avaient échappé à la perspicacité de Dalman, et ce n’est qu’à l’aide de jumelles et de photos prises au téléobjectif que nous avons pu en assurer la lecture.” (“On the eastern wall of el Habis, the archaeologist P.J. Parr pointed out to us a few years ago a group of short inscriptions engraved very high above the cave converted into a dovecote. They had escaped Dalman’s notice, and it was only with the help of binoculars and photos taken with a telephoto lens that we were able to read them.”)

³² Milik and Starcky (1975, 112): “Les L sont encore à double courbure (sauf celui de MLKT) et l’écriture a l’élégant calibre des inscriptions du milieu du 1^{er} siècle de l’ère.” (“The Ls are still double curvature, except that of MLKT, and the writing has the elegant style of the inscriptions from the middle of the 1st century of the era.”)

en rectifiant l'interprétation de ces deux textes, où PŠ'L était considéré comme un nom masculin. Dans ces deux textes, Paša'el apparaît comme la fille aînée du roi et on retiendra volontiers la suggestion de G.F. Hill de reconnaître ce nom dans les lettres PŠ de bronzes à l'effigie d'Arétas IV. Nous possédons deux exemplaires, avec PŠ entre deux cornes d'abondance. Mais il est peu probable que la princesse Paša'el ait déjà porté le titre de reine du vivant de son père. Il semble alors réservé aux épouses royales, Huldu puis Šaqilat, et peut-être à la reine-mère, si Arétas IV est le fils de 'Hagaru la reine' mentionnée dans un texte de fondation de l'an 18 de son règne. Ajoutons que les enfants du roi [Rabbel II] ne portent pas de titre. Il ressort de ses textes que notre Paša'el fut appelée reine après la mort de son père Arétas IV, et probablement à simple titre honorifique. Il est en effet peu probable que son frère Maliku II l'ait épousée. Les monnaies datées au nom du roi et de la reine Šuqailat II son épouse vont de l'an 3 à l'an 23 du règne (42-62), mais à ce hiatus de huit ans (63-70) répond le silence des inscriptions après l'an 25, et en 63 ap. J.-C., Paša'el ferait une reine quinquagénaire! ... Mais l'intérêt principal de nos inscriptions est historique: Paša'el, enfant d'Arétas IV, est une fille, et elle porta le titre de reine, sans doute sous le règne de son frère Maliku II (40-70)."

("[T]he writing has the elegant style of the inscriptions from the middle of the 1st century AD. However, the two other Nabataean mentions of the name Phasael refer to a child of Aretas IV (9 to 40 AD), which suits our dating and allows us to assume that it is the same individual, by correcting the interpretation of these two texts, in which PŠ'L was considered as a masculine name ... In these two texts, **Phasael appears as the king's eldest daughter** and we will readily accept G.F. Hill's suggestion to recognize this name in the letters *PŠ* of bronze coins bearing the image of Aretas IV. We have two specimens, with *PŠ* between two cornucopias. But it is unlikely that Princess Phasael ever held the title of queen during her father's lifetime. That title seems reserved for the royal wives—Huldu then Shaqilat [I]—and perhaps the queen-mother, if Aretas IV is the son of 'Hagaru the queen' mentioned in a dedicatory text from year 18 of his reign ... Let us add that the king's children [of Rabbel II] do not have titles. **It appears from her texts that our Phasael was called queen after the death of her father Aretas IV**, and probably simply as an honorary

title. It is indeed unlikely that her brother Maliku II married her. The coins dated in the name of the king and queen Shuqailat II his wife go only from year 3 to year 23 of the reign (42-62), but this eight-year hiatus (63-70) is matched by the silence of the inscriptions after the year 25, and in 63 AD. Phasael would make a fifty-year-old queen! ... the main interest of our inscriptions is historical: **Phasael, child of Aretas IV, is a female, and she bore the title of queen**, undoubtedly under the reign of her brother Maliku II.”)

It is accepted here in agreement with Milik and Starcky that queen Phasael bore the title “queen of the Nabataeans” after (not before) the death of her father, Aretas IV. But the further assertion of Milik and Starcky that Phasael probably never reigned (“probablement à simple titre honorifique”) cannot be accepted.

Phasael will have become queen of the Nabataeans after the death of Malichus II. Phasael will have been queen with the *next* king, the short-lived king before Rabbel II—the one indicated to have existed ca. 69-70 CE from the evidence of Qashmael’s and Shaudat’s reigns as queens which can only be placed in that time frame.

The proposal here is not that ca. 74-year old Phasael was the short-lived king’s wife, but that she was that new king’s *mother* and first queen—like queen Gamilat I, mother and first queen of Obodas II; like queen Hagaru I, mother and first queen of Aretas IV; like queen Shuqailat II, mother and first queen of Rabbel II—at the start of that king’s reign, just as in the other three cases of mothers of new kings reigning as those kings’ first queen.

In agreement with Milik and Starcky, queen Phasael was the daughter of Aretas IV and she bore her title “queen of the Nabataeans” at some point in the first century CE after the death of her father Aretas IV. But the notion that Phasael bore the title “queen of the Nabataeans” without *being* queen, *at the same time that* Shuqailat II bore the same title “queen of the Nabataeans” because *she* (Shuqailat II) actually *was* queen of Malichus II, does not make sense, lacks plausibility and must be corrected to this: Phasael began to bear the title “queen of the Nabataeans” *when she became queen and reigned as queen*, and there is no other time that can have occurred than after the death of Malichus II. Queen Phasael becomes the first queen of the short-lived reign of the king of ca 69-70 CE, her son.

That is, Malichus II, son of Aretas IV, was succeeded in power by his sister, Phasael, the oldest daughter of Aretas IV, as queen, and Phasael's son as king. This will be before Qashmael and Shaudat, wives of that king, became that king's second and third queens (one after the other) in the course of that king's short reign. Phasael became queen after the death of Malichus II, was the mother and first queen of the new king, ca. 69-70 CE. Then Phasael died or was replaced by Qashmael, the wife of the new king, the second queen of that king. Qashmael also died soon after becoming queen and was replaced by a third queen and second wife, Shaudat. Then the king himself died or was removed from power sometime in the year 70/71, and that ended the term of Shaudat as queen.

The argument here is very basic: Phasael was queen after the death of Malichus II and the first queen of the otherwise-indicated short-lived king of ca. 69-70 CE. And this agrees with the palaeographic dating of the cave writing referring to Phasael as queen. Shuqailat II, wife of Malichus II, was replaced as queen by Phasael after the death of Malichus II. But Shuqailat II returned to reign again as queen, along with her son as king, after the death of Phasael's son, the short-lived king of ca 69-70 CE. There is a suggestion in this of upheaval and untimely deaths in the Nabataean royal family in the late 60s CE, at the same time as the First Jewish Revolt raged in the region and rival claimants vied violently for control of the Roman empire itself—all of this taking place at a time of a gap in Nabataean coins and a lack of any known narrative-history writing concerning Nabataean history, such that there is hardly any information as to what was going on with the Nabataean royal family and successions at that time.

Whatever happened inside the palaces at Petra in the successions of those years of no recovered coins and no information, there will have been a reign of queen Phasael, and reigns of queens Qashmael and Shaudat, in that time frame associated with some king, because inscriptions testify there were.

Queen Phasael replaced by two queen-wives during the reign of her son is exactly comparable to queen Gamilat I replaced by one queen-wife during the reign of her son, queen Hagaru I replaced by two queen-wives during the reign of her son, and queen Shuqailat II replaced by 2 queen-wives during the reign of her son. The only difference in the case of the short-lived king of ca. 69-70 CE and his three queens—his mother followed by two wives—is

his three queens happened in a shorter time frame, ca. a single year, compared to longer spans of time for the other three kings. But the principle is the same.

This reconstruction of the reign of queen Phasael in turn may explain how a king who was not Rabbel II, the king of brief reign of ca. 69-70 CE, came to power. It was because he was the son of queen Phasael. It provides an explanation how the intervening king between Malichus II and Rabbel II came to power to begin with, at the death of Malichus II.

Further comment on queen Phasael and the question of paternity of her son the king

As discussed by Meshorer (1975) and Barkay (2019), coin issues from Aretas IV's year 5 have the letters פצא, abbreviation for Phasael, and on one coin issue of that year the name is spelled out in full, פצאאל, Phasael. Those coins have a special design with a palm branch, a design known only once again from coins a quarter-century later shortly after Shaqilat I became the second queen of Aretas IV. Year 5 of Aretas IV, the year of the coin issues, by the reconstruction of the Appendix of this study was 6/5 BCE. The explanation of Barkay makes the best sense in explaining the celebration of the name Phasael reflected in that year's coins. It was the birth of the first child of Aretas IV and his queen-wife Huldu: Phasael, a girl.

“The inscription [year 18 of Aretas IV] and the coins piecing together the family origin of Aretas IV suggest that he was a grandson of Malichus I, a son of Hagaru I and a stepson of Obodas II, and most probably grew up in Obodas II's court. Being the offspring of Malichus I, he would have been royalty and therefore must have been considered a legitimate heir to the throne after the death of Obodas II... Phasael was most probably the first-born of Aretas IV and Huldu and was likely born in that year [year 5]... on the basis of our calculation that Aretas was around 16 years of age upon becoming king, he would have been around 21 years of age in his 5th regnal year and then could have had a newborn daughter, but not a daughter of marriageable age.” (Barkay 2019, 44, 49)

The listings of Aretas IV's children in the inscriptions do not have Phasael's name placed first but that is explained in that they list the sons first, even if the sons were born later, followed

by the daughters of which Phasael is the first named of the daughters, Phasael having been in fact the first child born to Aretas IV and Huldu.

A number of scholars have long speculated that Phasael may have been the unnamed daughter of Aretas IV of long-time marriage to Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, before Antipas's divorce of the daughter and then war between Aretas IV and Antipas in the 30s CE, told by Josephus (*Ant* 18.109-115). As marriages typically happened at ca. 12-14 years of age for girls, an arranged marriage of Phasael to Antipas (if it was Phasael) would have occurred ca. 7-9 CE, soon after Antipas was settled in Galilee after the Roman settlement of disturbances in 6 CE following the death of Herod Archelaus.³³ Josephus says that at the time of the divorce in the 30s CE Antipas and the daughter of Aretas IV had been married "a long time". The daughter returned to her father in Petra after escaping Antipas learning of his plans to divorce her.

³³ There are two distinct arguments why the "Phasael" coins of Aretas IV's year 5 did not commemorate a wedding of Phasael to Herod Antipas in that year, apart from nothing in the year 5 coins themselves mentions Antipas or confirms a wedding was the cause of the happiness, nor is it obvious why an arranged marriage of a king's daughter to a not-too-important neighboring ruler would be an occasion for a celebration on coinage issued by the king. The first reason year 5 was the birth, not a wedding, of Phasael, is the logic brought out by Barkay on the Aretas IV accession and his age. Aretas IV was the son of Hagaru I but he was not the son of Obodas II. That means Aretas IV must have been the son of Hagaru I by a previous husband of Hagaru I before Hagaru I married king Obodas II in about Obodas II's year 10. That hardly allows time for Aretas IV and Huldu to have had time to have been married long or have had children before Aretas IV came to power upon Obodas II's death in Obodas II's year 21, whereas the reconstruction that Phasael was born in Aretas IV's year 5 as the first child of Aretas IV and Huldu is an excellent fit chronologically when the circumstances of Aretas IV's ancestry are taken into account. And the second reason is that if year 5 of Aretas IV had been a wedding of Phasael, that would make Phasael about 86-87 years old in ca. 69 CE at the time she became queen which is of doubtful plausibility due to the advanced age. Phasael becoming queen at ca. age 74 in ca. 69 CE, on the other hand, is very plausible. (Life expectancy in antiquity was about the same as modern humans before 1950 according a study of Montagu [1994], which found the mean age of death for groups for which there was data such as Greek philosophers and poets before 100 BCE was about 72.)

If Phasael of the Nabataeans was that former wife of Herod Antipas now back at Petra, there is no reason why she could not have gone on to become queen after the death of her brother Malichus II in the 60s CE, if there was support in the royal family at Petra for that. It would raise a curious question though: the short-lived king of ca. 69-70 CE has been reconstructed as the son of queen Phasael but his father is unknown. Would that mean his father could have been Herod Antipas?³⁴

6. Correction of a reading of a year number of an inscription: Wadi Ramm

An inscription from Wadi Ramm is dated “the [17th] year of king Rabbel” (Dijkstra 1995, 68; Hackl, Jenner, Schneider 203, 284). In lines 4-5 Dijkstra has, citing earlier authorities:

byrh 'yr šnt [17] lrb 'l mlk' mlk nbṭw dy 'hyy wšyzb 'mh

“... in the month of Ayyir of the [17th] year of king Rabbel, the king of the Nabataeans, who brings life and deliverance to his people”

The original editor, Savignac (1933), read year 12 or 13 of Rabbel II. Roche (2019, 75) transcribes *byrh 'yr šnt X+II[...]*, “au mois de 'Iyyar l'an 12/13+”. All publications of this inscription have read a “10” sign plus two or three “1” marks for the number; the uncertainty has been only over whether there is an additional “5” sign before the “1”s.

Meanwhile, in line 2 of the same inscription, visible names Gamilat and H[agaru] are followed by a lacuna which may have had a missing third woman's name followed by “[his sisters]” at the end of line 2, resuming to visibility with *mlkwt nbṭw*, “queens of the Nabataeans”, starting the next line, line 3.

³⁴ Kokkinos (2010, 231-32): “Despite its long duration this marital union [Herod Antipas and Phasael] produced no children who are explicitly recorded, but possibly a son and a daughter may have existed...” Josephus's account of the flight and escape of the daughter of Aretas IV from Antipas in the 30s CE makes no mention of a child or children with her in that flight, though members of her retinue might have gone unmentioned in Josephus's source, or children by that time could have been grown and not necessarily living with her at the time of her flight.

However Rabbel II's first wife Gamilat was queen from his year 6 to at least his year 22, the last known dated year of a Rabbel II silver coin and the last year of attestation of Gamilat as queen on coins in Rabbel II's 36-year reign (Barkay 2019, 68). Gamilat is believed to have died and to have been succeeded by her sister Hagaru as queen based on Hagaru's name and image appearing with Rabbel II on undated bronze coins. The question is raised whether the Wadi Ramm inscription is referring to Hagaru as queen before Hagaru became queen, since Hagaru cannot have begun her reign before year 22.

The solution to this puzzle is that the published year number readings of the Wadi Ramm inscription have all been mistaken. The upright long vertical mark which has been read as a "10" sign is perpendicular and upright, not the stance of the horizontal "10" sign; it is not a "10". But it also is not any other number sign either even though number signs are expected. In fact it is the letter *het*. That can be confirmed by visual comparisons with the eight other *hets* in the five-line inscription itself and the discussion of Yardeni (2000, 183, 246) of the palaeographical development of *het*.³⁵

There is a *het* preceding the number of the year in an identical date formula in another inscription from about the same time of Rabbel II, from Mṣayfra, published by Laila Nehmé in 2010 (also published with photo in Roche 2019, 84, and Plate 26). The Mṣayfra inscription reads at its line 3 according to the editor's transcription:

[b]yrḥ sywn šnt ḥxXX +III+III lmlk' mlk [nbṭw],

"... [in] the month of Siwan, the year *ḥ* <number signs> of the king, king of the [Nabataeans]"

Nehmé (2010, 463) commenting on the *het* in the Mṣayfra inscription year-date formula:

³⁵ Yardeni (2000, 246): "[F]inally the letter-form [of *Het*] became identical with that of *Gimel*. This form consists of only two strokes, the right down-stroke, which slants down to the right, and another stroke which starts near its center and gently slants down to the left." Compare the 7th exemplar from the right in Yardeni's row of examples and the *het* shown from Naḥal Ḥever 57 (Yardeni 2000, 183).

“Après *šnt*, qui est parfaitement lisible, il y a un *h*, suivi d’une lettre ou d’un chiffre en forme d’escalier à deux degrés, peut-être le chiffre 10 ou 20 mal formé... Suivent deux groupes de trois unités, c’est-à-dire 3 + 3... L’interprétation du *h* et du signe qui le suit est difficile. Il s’agit peut-être d’une abréviation dont nous avons trouvé un parallèle dans l’inscription de Tell ash-Shuqāfiyya, dans le delta égyptien où, à la fin de la ligne 5, une lettre isolée, très probablement un *t*, suit la date, *šnt* 26. Cette lettre n’a cependant fait l’objet d’aucun commentaire dans la publication...”

(“After *šnt* which is perfectly legible, there is an *h*, followed by a letter or a number in the form of a two-step staircase, perhaps a poorly formed number 10 or 20... Two groups of three units follow, that is to say 3 + 3... The interpretation of the *h* and the sign which follows it is difficult. This is perhaps an abbreviation for which we found a parallel in the inscription of Tell ash-Shuqafiyya in the Egyptian delta [Fiema & Jones 1990] where, at the end of line 5, an isolated letter, most probably a *t*, follows the date, *šnt* 26. This letter was, however, not the subject of any comment in the publication...”)

The parallel stand-alone letter *het* preceding the year number in the Mšayfra inscription, and the clear reading of the stand-alone *het* in the same position in the date formula in the Wadi Ramm inscription, make it unequivocal that the scholarly readings of the “10” sign have been in error.³⁶ The correct reading in the Wadi Ramm inscription is the number signs follow the *het*,

³⁶ Roche (2019: 84-85) commenting on the Mšayfra inscription: “[L]e *heth*, très lisible et le signe suivant sont difficiles à interpréter... il est très probable qu’il faille interpréter le *h* comme une abréviation de *hd*, ‘un’, et de le considérer comme un multiplicateur, ce qui se pratique à l’époque avec le chiffre 1; le signe suivant pourrait donc être un 20... les trois barres ligaturées représentent vraisemblablement le chiffre III. On peut comprendre ainsi la date: un x 20 + III, 23 de Rabbel II.” (“The *heth*, very readable, and the following sign are difficult to interpret... it is very likely the *h* should be interpreted as an abbreviation of *hd*, ‘one’, and considered as a multiplier, which was practiced at the time with the number 1; the next sign could therefore be a 20... the three ligatured bars probably represent the number III. We can understand the date thus: one x 20 + III, 23 of Rabbel II.”)

and that is a sign for “20” followed by a “10” and what may be one or two “1” marks, giving a reading of 31 or 32 for the number, i.e. year 31 or 32 of Rabbel II.³⁷

With this correction, the date of the Wadi Ramm inscription is not inconsistent with Hagaru II having begun her reign as second queen of Rabbel II sometime after year 22.

7. Conclusion of assessment of alleged instances of non-queen meanings of “queen of the Nabataeans” in Nabataean inscriptions

None of the claimed examples stand. There is no confirmed example in a Nabataean inscription of *mlkt nbṭw* used in reference to a woman who never reigned as queen. When examined in the light of actual evidence the notion disappears. *Based on the database, all named Nabataean queens* in inscriptions were actual, not fictitious, *queens who reigned* in Nabataean history, with the only issues being their identifications and datings.

To return to the original point at issue, after this necessary deconstruction of the erroneous notion that has been built up around the meaning of *mlkh*: when the el-Hubta inscription is read

³⁷ Compare the middle of three exemplars of “20” at Schmitt and Cowell (1989, 53) with the photo at Savignac (1933, Plate XXIV) for the clear reading of “20”. After the *het* and “20” there is a second number sign, a “10”. This second number-sign, the “10”, was described and noted by Savignac in the original publication even though he could not believe it was true! Savignac (1933, 410): “Les chiffres de l’année sont plus difficiles à identifier, par suite de leur forme insolite et plus encore de leur mauvais état de conservation. Le premier ne peut être que le chiffre 10 accompagné, semble-t-il, de trois unités dont les deux dernières penchées à droite forment comme une sorte de V avec la première. Peut-être y a t-il encore à la suite une barre droite (?). Sur un des deux estampages, la troisième unité, à gauche, paraît faire un crochet, dans le bas, lui donnant l’aspect d’un petit 10. Nous pensons qu’il n’y a pas lieu d’en tenir compte...” (“The figures for the year number are more difficult to identify, due to their unusual shape and even more so due to their poor state of conservation. The first can only be the number 10 accompanied, it seems, by three marks, the last two of which leaning to the right form a sort of V with the first. **Perhaps there is still a straight bar [?]. One of the two marks, the third one on the left, appears to have a hook below it, giving it the appearance of a small 10. We think that there is no reason to take this into account...**”)

in terms of the known meanings of *mlk'* and *mlkh* in the database, queens Qashmael and Shaudat were mid-first-century CE historical queens of the Nabataeans.

8. Accession of the king of ca. 69-70 CE

Starting in the spring of 67 CE the Nabataean king Malichus II, along with the Roman-allied kings of Emessa and Commagene, and Roman client king Agrippa II, king of the Jews, supplied armed forces as auxiliaries to the Roman general Vespasian and his son Titus in command of Roman legions in Galilee, Transjordan, and Judea, assisting the Romans in crushing a revolt of the Jews (*War* 3.68).

The First Jewish Revolt had begun in 66 CE with the declaration of a Free State and a provisional government in Jerusalem. There were riots and unrest between Jews and Syrians in many of the cities of the region at this time. The Roman emperor Nero sent Vespasian and Titus to suppress the Jews' revolt and pacify the region. Upon arrival Vespasian collected contributions of army units from Rome's client and allied kingdoms in the region including the Nabataeans (*War* 3.64-69). The Jewish historian Josephus, himself a rebel commander before he surrendered and turned to the side of the Romans, wrote that in 67 CE, "the Arab Malchus sent a thousand cavalry and five thousand infantry, mainly bowmen" (*War* 3.64-69).

At some point not earlier than Malichus II's year 31, either in or after his 31st year of rule, Malichus II died. If he died in his year 31, the year 69/70 CE according to the chronological reconstruction of the Appendix of this study, the short-lived king succeeding Malichus II will have come to power in 69 or early 70, before he in turn was succeeded by Rabbel II sometime in the year 70/71 prior to the start of Rabbel II's year 1 of 71/72.

In 69 CE Vespasian with the backing of his legions in Egypt and Syria was successful in a bid to become supreme ruler of the Roman empire, the final emperor in what is called the Year of the Four Emperors when Rome was wracked with civil wars and ran through three changes to new emperors in the course of a single calendar year, with violent deaths of emperors Galba, Vitellius, and Otho, following the violent death of Nero the previous calendar year.

The succession following Malichus II occurred in the midst of these circumstances of regional tumult and upheaval including internal to the world power, the Roman empire, itself.

The suggestion is there could also have been some turmoil in the rulership of the Nabataean royal family in these years, just as there was in the leadership of the Jews' bid for independence and in the struggle of Roman commanders for control of the Roman empire.

It may be noted the evidence indicates the Nabataeans, not the Romans, were in control of Nabataean successions, and that the Nabataean state although allied with Rome was not in a client-kingdom relationship with Rome like the Herods of neighboring Judea, but more independent.³⁸

9. Death or removal of the king of ca. 69-70 CE from power

After several deaths not necessarily all from natural causes—queen Phasael; queen Qashmael; the short-lived king of ca. 69-70 CE, Phasael's son, himself—the potential new dynasty of Phasael's son ended after only ca. 1 year of rule, and there was a return or restoration to rule of queen Shuqailat II, this time with her son Rabbel II as king.

If it be considered unusual that a Nabataean king's reign might last only a year or so in contrast to longer-lived Nabataean kings' reigns, the same phenomenon applies to the rulers of the Roman empire the same year. In 68 CE, after emperors of many-year reigns, Nero was assassinated, or committed suicide before he would have been assassinated whichever it was,

³⁸ E.g. Grof (2022, 64): "[T]he evidence for Nabataean relations with Rome is sparse and sporadic. The key elements of a client-state also are missing. There is no account of their recognition (*appellatio*) of a Nabataean king by Rome, as there was in the case of Herod ... as far as we know, no Nabataean king travelled to Rome or consulted with Augustus or Marcus Agrippa elsewhere, as Herod did on multiple occasions. Nor does any Nabataean king profess to even being a 'friend of Rome' (*philorhōmaios*) in his inscriptions, as is the case with most allied and subject kings. Nor is there any city founded or a temple erected in honour of the emperor or the imperial family anywhere in the Nabataean realm. Nor is there any evidence of the distinctive Roman building techniques being employed in Nabataea as in the Herodian realm. And finally, as far as we know, no Nabataean king's children ever were sent to Rome for their education. All of Suetonius's hallmarks for allied kings are absent in Nabataea. On this basis, it seems logical to conclude, with Stephan Schmid, that the Nabataeans never constituted a 'client state'. But...Nabataea was an accepted allied kingdom, both before and after Augustus..."

ending his 14 years as emperor, following which the Roman Empire ran through three more changes of emperor in calendar year 69 CE, for that reason giving rise to that year, 69 CE, being called “the Year of the Four Emperors”.

The parallel illustrates how unexpectedly long-lived reigns can be followed by brief ones in rapid succession in a monarchy or monarchic-like state. In the absence of information—of coins or documents or a contemporary narrative account—the rapidity or speed of royal successions, whether of the Nabataeans or any other kingdom, cannot be known. Therefore the notion of one king and multiple queens of the Nabataeans in perhaps only a year, ca. 69-70 CE, while atypical, is no more unlikely than that there might be three changes in Roman emperors in a single year, 69 CE.

The reign of the reconstructed Nabataean king of ca. 69-70 CE with his three queens—a mother, Phasael, and two wives, Qashmael and Shaudat—did not last long. Queens Qashmael and Shaudat will both have been wives of the king of ca. 69-70 CE but not simultaneously, rather one after the other. At some point in the year 70/71, the year before Rabbel II’s regnal year 1 of 71/72 CE, the short-lived king will have died or been removed from power. This king’s death or removal therefore will have occurred at some time between Nisan (spring) of 70 and Nisan (spring) of 71.

It happens that the spring and summer of 70 was the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem at which Nabataean forces were present and participants. Not all was roses and sunshine between the Romans and their Nabataean allies. According to Josephus, at one point during the Jerusalem siege, in the summer of 70, Titus became so enraged at his Nabataean auxiliaries that he threatened to have their commanders all executed (*War* 5.550-561).

In this reconstruction, sometime between spring 70 and spring 71 the short-lived reign of the king who succeeded Malichus II came to an end and Rabbel II, son of Shuqailat II, was inaugurated as king, co-ruling with his mother returned to being queen, the former queen Shuqailat II restored to power with her son Rabbel II as the new king.

Again, Milik and Starcky’s analysis was sound in identifying queen Phasael as a daughter of Aretas IV who bore the title of queen of the Nabataeans at some point after the death of Aretas IV. But Milik and Starcky’s denial that Phasael ever reigned as queen was not correct.

That there could have been a brief ca. 1 year reign of a Nabataean king between Malichus II and Rabbel II is not in conflict with any known evidence. As has been noted, after Malichus II's year 25 in the mid-60s CE there are no Nabataean coins known until the first year of Rabbel II, 71/72 CE. That means there would have been no means of discovery of the ruler's existence in ca. 69-70 CE or knowledge of that ruler's name by modern scholars on the basis of study of coins.

There could be in the future better-argued reconstructions or modifications of the reconstruction analysis offered in the present study. But the existence of historical reigns of first-century CE queens Phasael, Qashmael, and Shaudat, and first-century BCE queen Gamilat, are facts. The dating and identification of their reigns, and relationships with which kings, may be amenable to correction and/or improvement in the light of better future information or better analysis of presently existing information, *so long as queens Gamilat, Phasael, Qashmael and Shaudat are explained as Nabataean queens who reigned in history, whenever those queens were situated.*³⁹

10. Is it possible “king Aretas” of 2 Cor 11:32-33 was a Nabataean king of ca. 69-70 CE?

Historians in the fields of New Testament, Greco-Roman, and Nabataean studies have long been vexed by an allusion at 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 in what is considered one of the authentic letters of the apostle Paul in the New Testament.

³⁹ As noted earlier (note 9) Wenning (1993, 36) noticed an unaccounted-for ca. one-year additional space of time between the end of the reign of Malichus II in his year 31, as conventionally dated, and the fixed start date of Rabbel II's year 1, and therefore suggested lengthening Malichus II's reign by an additional year to close that gap. But instead of lengthening or stretching Malichus II's reign, the gap allows space for the indicated king of short-lived duration of ca. 69-70 CE developed in the present study.

“In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.” (2 Cor 11:32-33, New American Standard Bible)

The reference has been assumed to be to Aretas IV. But there have been acknowledged difficulties in making sense of the allusion in terms of Aretas IV.

Damascus was part of the Roman province of Syria throughout the time of Aretas IV and nothing in known history supports that Aretas IV invaded or would have invaded the Roman province of Syria, or, alternatively, that Aretas IV was voluntarily ceded control of Damascus by the Romans.⁴⁰

One proposal has been that Aretas IV conquered Damascus in the context of the war in the 30s CE between Aretas IV and Rome-backed Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. In this view Aretas IV invaded the Roman province of Syria and held Damascus briefly, perhaps only a few months, before voluntarily withdrawing again. The brevity of Aretas IV’s supposed time in control of Damascus is given in explanation why there is no evidence of it in history apart from invocation of 2 Cor 11:31-32 itself.⁴¹

Others have proposed that the Roman emperor Gaius Caesar (37-41 CE) voluntarily gave Aretas IV some cities in Syria including Damascus, although there is no historical justification for that proposal either apart from invocation of 2 Cor 11:31-32 itself.⁴² Still others have

⁴⁰ Taylor (1992, 724): “There is in fact no direct evidence for Nabataean control of Damascus at any point in the period we are considering outside 2 Cor 11,32-33, and the question would not even be raised if it were not for the Pauline text.”

⁴¹ The brief conquest idea is argued (with differences in details in the reconstructions) by, among others, Bowersock (1983, 68-69), Campbell (2002), and Bunine (2006a & 2006b). Riesner (1998, 83n60) notes that “if one considers the [planned] chastising expedition of Vitellius [against Aretas IV in his war with Herod Antipas] to be historical, then its route over Ptolemais and Galilee to Petra (Josephus, *Ant.* xviii.120-22)—without taking back Damascus—seems strategically incomprehensible [if Aretas IV controlled Damascus].”

⁴² E.g. Jewett (1979, 30-33); Kokkinos (2010, 269). The only argument outside of 2 Cor 11:32-33 claimed in support of this proposal has been a numismatic one: that an absence of Roman coins minted in Damascus from the 30s to the 60s CE reflects Nabataean control of Damascus during some or all of that

suggested that the *ethnarchos* of king Aretas of 2 Cor 11:32-33 was a Nabataean trade representative or consul or head of a Nabataean ethnic quarter in Damascus, who was acting extrajudicially against the apostle Paul in the allusion.⁴³

None of these proposed explanations regarding Aretas IV and Damascus has attained consensus from other scholars, although all have agreed on the baseline starting assumption that 2 Cor 11:32-33 alludes to Aretas IV. If it were not for *that assumption*, no one would ever have supposed Aretas IV controlled Damascus.⁴⁴

Could there be another possible way of reading 2 Cor 11:32-33, not previously considered? Could it be “Aretas” of 2 Cor 11:32-33 was not Aretas IV, but instead a different Nabataean king of the first-century CE, a king of the Nabataeans of ca. 69-70 CE at the time of the First Jewish Revolt, an Aretas V?

period. But Riesner (1998, 81-82) showed that argument was insubstantial: “the gap in the numismatic evidence between the years A.D. 33/34 and 62/63 must for two reasons be eliminated as an argument regarding the status of sovereignty in Damascus: (1) Coins from the early Roman period are extremely rare in the city in any case. In addition to several bronze pieces of Augustus, we can variously confirm numismatically three years of Tiberius (A.D. 33/34 as the last) and of Nero (A.D. 62/63 as the first). There is no known numismatic evidence for either Caligula and Claudius or for Vespasian and Titus, indeed not even for Nerva and Trajan. (2) A different picture, of course would emerge through findings of Nabatean coins from the period between A.D. 37 and 62/63. [Since] such coins are as yet completely absent, this is all the more noteworthy in view of the high minting activity in the second half of the rule of Aretas IV.”

⁴³ As brought out by Taylor (1992), the word *ethnarchos* at 2 Cor 11:32 in Nabataean inscriptions refers to a tribal sheikh or chief and was not a title of a military commander or an official of state. Taylor’s point was not that the figure in the allusion referred to as an ἐθνάρχης at 2 Cor 11:32-33 was not functioning as a military commander (as the passage reads) but that the word *ethnarchos* itself is not a source of information in support of that.

⁴⁴ E.g. Riesner (1998, 83-84): “The history of scholarship makes it clear ... the main reason for assuming renewed Nabatean sovereignty over Damascus after its inclusion in the Roman province of Syria ... was not actually evidence from outside the New Testament, but rather a certain understanding of 2 Cor. 11:32f.”

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Of interest are points of comparison between what is termed the story of the Gerasene demoniac of Mark 5:1-20 and the story of the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus told at Acts 9:1-26; 22:4-21; 26:9-20, some form of which seems alluded to by Paul himself at Gal 1:15-18.

As the story goes in the Gospel of Mark, a terrified, insane prisoner, who from his name in the story, “Legion”, may be associated with a Roman legion, runs to Jesus begging Jesus not to torture him. Jesus spares the man’s life and restores him to his sound mind. The man, overwhelmed with gratitude and devotion, wants to accompany Jesus leaving the area in a boat after the locals ask Jesus and his men to leave.

But Jesus does not permit the man to get in the boat with the rest of his men. Instead, Jesus sends the man away as an apostle or messenger (the word “apostle” is not used in the Gospel story but it is the sense) to tell of Jesus’s deeds and mercy. The man does that, so the story goes—“and he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed” (Mk 5:20).

The Decapolis was a league of ten or more Greek-founded cities in Transjordan south of the Roman province of Syria but under the protection of the Roman governor of Syria. According to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 5.74), Damascus in the mid-first century CE was part of the Decapolis, the only city of that league within the borders of the Roman province of Syria.

In both stories (the Gerasene; the conversion of Paul) there is a traumatic encounter of an individual with Jesus in contexts of violence resulting in a dramatic conversion. In each case the man’s life is spared by Jesus and Jesus instructs the object of his mercy to be his apostle (messenger) to *gentiles*, to spread his reputation *to gentiles*. Both stories are set in geographical relationship to the pagan-controlled, gentile-controlled, cities of the Decapolis. In the Acts story, the encounter of Paul with Jesus occurs on the north-south King’s Highway which passed through the other cities of the Decapolis on its way north to Damascus, the northernmost city of the Decapolis, the “road to Damascus”.

Both are stories of the call of a figure remembered as formative in the spread of the Christian gospel in that region. In each story, this apostle is unlike the others of Jesus in that *this* apostle does not accompany Jesus but is told by Jesus to go to *gentiles* (the Decapolis cities were

majority non-Jewish), in contrast to Jesus sending the disciples who accompanied him to fellow Jews only (Matt 10:6).

Both stories tell of supernatural manifestations associated with earthly violence and trauma. The Gerasene prisoner was cut and bleeding (all self-inflicted, his captors somewhat questionably claimed) before he was brought to Jesus. Paul's Damascus road story reads as a ramped-up story of a violent attack or hostage-taking of some sort.⁴⁵ In the Acts story a Greek proverb is applied to Paul likening Paul to an animal kicking against the persuasive effects of a sharp-pointed cattle-prod (Acts 9:5). Paul himself may allude to violence associated with his ordeal cast in the language of an ascent to heaven involving a demonic tormenter, and Paul's futile (at first) pleas to the Lord (Jesus) to tell his tormenter to stop, at 2 Cor 12:2-9. At Gal 6:17 Paul may allude to still bearing physical scars years later from that encounter ("I bear on my body the marks of Jesus").

Both stories—of the Gerasene demoniac, and Paul—feature a merciful deliverance and release of the prisoner. In both stories the grateful victim spreads the wondrous story of Jesus's mercy and reputation.

"And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed." (Mk 5:20)

"[H]e was with the disciples who were in Damascus. And immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'." (Acts 9:20)

As suggested long ago by Otto Schmiedel (1906, 114-117), the Gerasene story reads as a variant version of the conversion of Paul transmitted through an independent trajectory of legendization, stories arising from a common originating context which took on lives of their

⁴⁵ Compare the similarities in a story at 2 Macc 3:23-36 of an unsuccessful attempt in 178 BCE by a Greek official, Heliodorus, to collect taxes from the Jewish temple and the violence that befell him, told with trappings of angels, supernatural wonders, and a miraculous conversion on the part of the one receiving the violence to the point of view of the ones who inflicted the violence.

own in the worlds of the gospels and Acts, stories whose common origin went largely unrecognized not only anciently but to the present day.

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The significance of the above goes to the date. For the story of the Gerasene demoniac has been shown in a series of scholarly studies, so convincingly that it is uncontroversially recognized, to reflect a context of Roman military activity at the time of the First Revolt, specifically a campaign of Placidus, the Roman commander of the Tenth Legion under Vespasian, in Transjordan, March 68 CE.

Kimondo (2018, 157-162): “Jesus’ encounter with the Gerasene demoniac took place in a Gentile region of the Gerasenes... the legion story has to be located in the context of Roman imperial rule in Palestine, particularly with respect to the Roman-Jewish War of 66-70 CE... The link between the legion and the pigs may have evoked memories of the Roman forces in that the tenth legion had an emblem of a wild boar.”

Lau (2007, English abstract): “The military background of Mk 5,1-20 points to the Legio X Fretensis, which has been active in the Jewish War and whose ensign, a boar, matches the swine mentioned in Mk 5,1-20... In 66 AD a vexillation of this Legio X, consisting of 2000 soldiers, was involved in fights with Jewish insurgents (Jos., *Bell.* 2,499-506). These details go well with the allusions in Mk 5,1-20 to the Legio X and can explain the figure 2000. From this perspective, Mark’s Jesus is portrayed as a powerful warlord and liberator rather than an occupier.”

Myers (1995, 191): “*Legion*... this term had only one meaning in Mark’s social world: a division of Roman soldiers. Alerted by this clue, we discern that the rest of the story is filled with military imagery. The term used for ‘herd’ (*agele*, 5:11)—inappropriate for pigs, who do not travel in herds—often was used to refer to a band of military recruits. Derrett also

points out that the phrase ‘he dismissed them’ (*epetrepsen*) connotes a military command, and the pigs’ charge (*ormesen*) into the lake suggests troops rushing into battle (5:13).”

The Roman campaign in Transjordan at the time of the First Jewish Revolt is the only time there was historical Roman military activity and presence in Transjordan in the first century CE. A linkage or association between the Gerasene demoniac story, and the story of the conversion of Paul, to the same originating context would date the Damascus road story of Paul also to the time of the Roman campaign of 68 CE.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Scholarly analyses attempting methodological rigor in dating the biography of Paul have been fundamentally influenced, more than by any other single factor, by a starting baseline assumption that the Aretas of 2 Cor 11:32-33 was Aretas IV. As Crossan and Reed (2004, 31) put it, the assumption that Aretas IV is the referent at 2 Cor 11:32-33 is “the only Paul-derived date for his biography”, that is, the only allusion in the letters of Paul to which it is believed an actual date could be attached. If the *assumed* Aretas IV identification of the reference of 2 Cor 11:32-33 were removed, no *other* evidence internal to the authentic Paul letters would establish or call for a pre-70 as opposed to post-70 CE date of composition for the letters of Paul. There are allusions to the Jerusalem temple cult in the letters, but the destruction of the temple of 70 was not regarded as ending the temple cult by observant Jews. There were hopes to rebuild the physical building under a favorable emperor, and the temple cult continued to be discussed in Jewish texts post-70 as if it were still operable, e.g. Josephus’s *Against Apion* written ca. 100 CE refers in the present tense to the temple and its worship and offerings of sacrifices as if they are ongoing (2.1, 8-9, 24). The Pauline letters’ “spiritualized” interpretations of temple prayers, offerings, and sacrifices to be lived out allegorically in the lives of Christian believers in the form of virtuous behavior (e.g. Rom 12:1) are in keeping with wider themes of supercessionist ideology of the Pauline letters such as Galatians and Romans, which read as part of a spectrum of post-70 responses in the aftermath of the destruction of the physical temple. Thus the allusions to the temple cult in the letters of Paul read well as post-70 CE, and are not evidence of a pre-70 CE date of composition. Meanwhile, scholarly studies of Paul have been filled with cautions that the biography of Paul should be built up from the data in the letters and to avoid, as Phillips (2016, 195) put it, “the corrupting influence of Acts” on reconstruction of a biography of Paul. There have been a few voices suggesting post-70 dates of composition of the Pauline letters, e.g. Wells (2015, 22, 102): “Paul’s missionary life extended over a period of twenty years, roughly from 75 to 95 CE, the Corinthian community and Clement’s Roman section were in continuity”; and

The forced running of the pigs off the cliff to drown in the Jordan River at the verbal instruction or permission of Jesus, in the Gerasene episode, evokes a similar-sounding description told by Josephus involving the Tenth Legion under Placidus of the campaign of 68 CE. In that description large numbers of Jewish refugees originating from the Decapolis city of Gadara, with their families and livestock, were trapped by the Roman army and forced over embankments or cliffs into the Jordan River to their deaths (*War* 4.419-437), a massacre which became legendary. Josephus described the number killed in this way as “incalculable”, in the thousands, a disaster that was “the greatest that had befallen the Jews ... Lake Asphaltitis [the Dead Sea] was filled with bodies, masses of which were carried down into it by the river”.

Josephus’s account is some approximation of the historical reality. However, in the Gospel of Mark a different version of the story is told. In contrast to the Romans wiping out the Jewish refugees told in Josephus, the Gospel of Mark story of the pigs going off the cliffs reads like a version of the same story told differently, in which the massacre instead wiped out a sizeable part of the Roman Tenth Legion, for which Jesus was given credit. Perhaps the Gospel of Mark version represents a conflicting claim concerning who won that battle depending on who later was telling the story, in keeping with ancient battles in which both sides afterward would claim victory in their stelaes and inscriptions.

The Christian Lactantius writing in the early 4th century CE quotes an author believed to be Sossonius Hierocles of the late 3rd century CE, a polemicist against Christianity, as having written that Jesus had commanded a force of nine hundred which engaged in banditry (*Divine Institutes* 5.3 [“he affirmed that Christ himself was put to flight by the Jews, and having collected a band of nine hundred men, committed robberies”]). That appears to be an independent tradition, told by a critic of Christianity, that Jesus had been active at the time of the First Jewish

George (2020, 235): “The humiliation and defeat of the Jews is a past event in Paul’s writings [1 Thes 2:14-16; Rom 2:9; 11:1, 20]. Four years after the end of the Great War in 1918, Pope Pius XI issued his first encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*. In this work of about 11,500 words the Great War is mentioned 14 times. Nine years later the same term gets only one mention in his much longer *Quadragesimo Anno*. Both encyclicals deal with similar themes. Using the writings of the Pope as a guide and noting the indirect references to the War in Paul, we can reasonably speculate that he was writing about 10 years after the event.”

Revolt, since it corresponds to a reference by Josephus to a First Revolt figure “Jesus, the brigand chief on the borderland of Ptolemais... with his force, which numbered eight hundred” (*Life* 104-111). That Jesus (whom Sossonius Hierocles claimed was the Jesus of history underlying the Jesus of faith embraced by the Christians) appears elsewhere in the writings of Josephus as active in Galilee against the Romans at the time of the Revolt—Josephus knew him well and had covert dealings with him (*War* 2.566; 3.450-452, 457, 467-469, 498; *Life* 66-67, 105-111, 134-135, 200).

It is a scholarly commonplace to interpret a large number of themes and strata in the Gospels, regarded without dispute as reflecting the time of the First Revolt—such as the Olivet prophecy (Mk 13), or the theme of the temple having become “a den of robbers” (Mk 11:17, a Josephus/Roman characterization of zealots in control of the temple during the Revolt)—as fictionally added on to allegedly earlier layers of tradition going back to a Jesus in the 30s CE as traditionally dated. However, Vermeiren (2017), noting that evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus in the 30s CE is weak at best from external sources, argued that *all* of the stories of Jesus in Galilee in the Gospels—to the extent here was a Jesus of history underlying the stories—were stories built up from Jesus ben Sapphat active in Jerusalem and Galilee at the time of the First Revolt. That is, Vermeiren argued that that Jesus, one of the leading figures of the First Revolt told by Josephus, *was* the Jesus of the Gospel stories, and *none* of the Gospels’ Jesus stories are from a Jesus dated to the 30s CE, i.e. Jesus had been misdated in the early formation of Christian foundation stories. Upon reflection, that interpretation is really only a further extension of the already-existing and fairly uncontroversial scholarly recognition of the date context of the Gerasene demoniac story (references above).

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Josephus dated the arrival of the Tenth Legion to Gadara of the Decapolis in Transjordan, presumably drawn from some Roman record or document, to the 4th day of Dystrus, which was March 3, 68 CE, in the final month of the year in the Jewish calendar, Adar (*War* 4.413; Cornfeld, Mazar, Maier 1982, 293n413d).

Another chronological indication is found at Gal 1:15-18, in which Paul makes a backward allusion to his call to be an apostle to the gentiles:

Gal 1:11-18: “For I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel which was preached by me is not of human invention. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵ But when He who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might **preach Him among the Gentiles**, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; **but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.** ¹⁸ **Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem** to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him for fifteen days.”

Paul separates his call to be an apostle (of Gal 1:15-16 above) from his departure from Damascus to go to Jerusalem by a time interval, μετὰ τρία ἔτη, “three years later”, sometimes translated “after three years” (1:17-18), counting the “three years” as starting from the revelation from God of his Son to Paul of 1:16, the time corresponding to the Damascus-road conversion story of Acts.

The expression at Gal 1:18, μετὰ τρία ἔτη, “three years later”, in Greek idiom can be equivalent to “in (or, during) the third year”, “after the start of the third year”, etc.⁴⁷ If the departure from Damascus of Gal 1:17-18 is identified with the departure from Damascus of 2 Cor 11:32-33, then the departure from Damascus and trip to Jerusalem of Gal 1:17-18 occurred at a time when “Aretas” was king, a time “three years” after the road-to-Damascus conversion of

⁴⁷ Compare Perry (1986, 649-50): “... Greek usage current in the Hellenistic world, which sometimes employed expressions like *meta treis hemeras* (after three days) and *te trite hemera* (on the third day) as equivalent”.

Paul and the Gerasene demoniac story, set in the context of the Roman campaign in Transjordan of March 68 CE.⁴⁸

But it was not possible for anyone to enter the city of Jerusalem after the Roman siege of Jerusalem began mid-Nisan 70, April 70, which trapped the swollen population of pilgrims inside the city for Passover, now shut up inside the city, not allowed by the Romans to leave or anyone further to enter.

Therefore, a departure from Damascus and visit to Jerusalem on the part of Paul could not have occurred *later* than April 70 when the Roman siege of Jerusalem began. April 70 becomes a *terminus ad quem* (latest possible date), in this scenario, for the departure of Paul from Damascus.

The *terminus a quo* (earliest possible date) in this scenario for the departure from Damascus and arrival to Jerusalem would be the death of Malichus II sometime in the year 69/70 CE, since the name of the Nabataean king of 2 Cor 11:32-33 is not Malichus. But the name of the king of 2 Cor 11:32-33 is not that of Rabbel II either, who began rule sometime in the year 70/71. By this reconstruction “king Aretas” of 2 Cor 11:32-33 becomes the Nabataean ruler who succeeded Malichus II but preceded Rabbel II, whose existence has been shown indicated in this study. By this interpretation the proposed king *after* Malichus II but *before* Rabbel II, of ca. 69-70 CE, becomes *king Aretas* of 2 Cor 11:32-33, supplying the name of that king, *Aretas V*.

As noted, Josephus dated the Tenth Legion’s arrival to Gadara in Transjordan to March 68 CE (*War* 4.413).

If the count was based on starting from the actual time of the event in March 68, with “after three years” as idiom for “in (or, during) the third year after that”, March to March 68-69 would be the first year. March to March 69-70 would be the second year. If Paul arrived at Jerusalem in April 70, that would be after the beginning of the third year, “three years later” in the idiom.

If the count was based on Roman calendar years, Jan-Dec 68 would be year one, Jan-Dec 69 would be year two, and April 70 would be in year three.

⁴⁸ Riesner (1998, 77): “It is extremely likely that the flight from Damascus occurred shortly before the apostle’s first visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17f.), and this is also the conclusion of [University of Copenhagen professor Niels] Hyldahl.”

If the years were counted in terms of Jewish calendar years, Roman military activity in Transjordan of March 68 was in the year 67/68 (Nisan to Adar), year one. Nisan to Adar 68/69 would be year two. If the arrival to Jerusalem from Damascus occurred just before access to Jerusalem was closed off by the start of the siege in mid-Nisan (April) 70, that would be after the start of the next calendar year 69/70 (Nisan to Adar), year three in this count, “three years later” in the idiom.⁴⁹

Granting a slight ambiguity in the idiom as it is translated into English as “three years later” for an interval which was actually only slightly over two years as we would count it, from March 68 to April 70 CE, the time interval of Gal 1:17-18 is in agreement with two absolute date pegs independently fixed at both ends with linkages to external datings.

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Returning to the scholarly problems in making sense of 2 Cor 11:32-33 in terms of Aretas IV, the argument for the existence of the Nabataean king of ca. 69-70 CE raises a new possibility for an historical context for the passage.

Josephus tells of a devastating massacre of Jews at Damascus in late 66 CE at the time of the outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt (*War* 2.560-561). That could have prompted a Roman military presence sent to Damascus to restore order and remain for peacekeeping. A reading of 2 Cor 11:32-33 might be considered in which the reference to the Nabataean commander hints at Roman military presence at Damascus. The *ethnarchos* of Aretas the king might be subordinate to Roman command. This solution does not require the rule of a Nabataean king over Damascus as does the argument for Aretas IV in the 30s CE since the First Jewish Revolt gives a context for Nabataeans in alliance with Romans in the Decapolis.

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⁴⁹ At Gal 1:18 Paul says he spent fifteen days in Jerusalem visiting a leader in Jerusalem, Cephas. If Paul arrived no earlier than Nisan 1 and spent fifteen days inside the city meeting with that leader, it could suggest Paul exited the city and ended his diplomacy or contacts with that leader in the city perhaps within hours of when the Roman siege began.

“King Aretas” of 2 Cor 11:32-33 assumed to be Aretas IV has been regarded as a chronological linchpin in a critical reconstruction of the life of Paul on the basis of the letters. The assumption that that Aretas can only have been Aretas IV has been foundational undergirding scholarly perception that the conversion of Paul must be dated to the 30s CE. The present study opens up a different possibility in which 2 Cor 11:32-33 could allude to a different Nabataean king of ca. 69-70 CE who may have been an Aretas V.

It must be emphasized that if 2 Cor 11:32-33 *does*, however, in the end, allude to Aretas IV as traditionally held, that does *not* weigh *against* the present proposal for the existence of the heretofore-unrecognized Nabataean king of ca. 69-70 CE, which derives from analysis of Nabataean materials. In that case, it would only mean 2 Cor 11:32-33 would be without relevance to the name of the proposed Nabataean king between Malichus II and Rabbel II, of ca. 69-70 CE. It would have no bearing or force in refuting the proposal for that king’s existence in itself.

Appendix: A possible reconstruction of absolute dates of the last Nabataean kings

The following is an attempt at reconstruction in keeping with known facts. Nisan to Nisan reckoning is assumed for the regnal years, and the accession-year (non-overlapping) method of counting is assumed as the usual procedure of the Nabataean kings with possible exceptions. This means new rulers typically will have taken power and begun rule for part of the year before their regnal year 1. The suggested chronology from Malichus I forward, followed by comments on some details:

59/58 BCE	Yr 1	Malichus I
34/33	Yr 26	Malichus I = <i>Nisan 34 BCE</i> (double calendar date)
31/30	Yr 29	Malichus I death 31 BCE, battle of Philadelphia
30/29	Yr 1	Obodas II
10/9 BCE	Yr 21	Obodas II = Yr 1 of Aretas IV
38/39 CE	Yr 48	Aretas IV
39/40	Yr 1	Malichus II
69/70	Yr 31	Malichus II (replaced by a king of unknown name during this year)
70/71	Yr 1	<i>King of unknown name</i> (replaced by Rabbel II during this year)
71/72	Yr 1	Rabbel II
94/95	Yr 24	Rabbel II = <i>Iyar 94 CE</i> (double calendar date)
106/107 CE	Yr 36	Rabbel II; Roman annexation

Malichus I

Coins of Malichus I have been found only for his years 26, 27, and 28 (= 32/31 BCE). His date of death was before August of 30 BCE since Josephus says Cleopatra VII had Malichus I killed, and Cleopatra died in August of 30 (*War* 1.440). But Plutarch, *Life of Marcus Antonius*, 259, wrote of Malichus I sending forces to the battle of Actium which occurred in September of 31 BCE, indicating Malichus I was alive as late as the fall of 31. That leaves 31/30 or 30/29 BCE as choices for the final regnal year of Malichus I. The best evidence indicates the earlier of those two, 31/30, based on the likelihood that Malichus I died in or at the time of the battle of Philadelphia in 31 BCE in which the Jewish king Herod the Great defeated the Nabataeans. Although Plutarch says Malichus I fought at Actium (September 31 BCE), Josephus says Malichus I's forces were diverted to fight instead at Philadelphia at close to the same time. As some historians have noted, an allusion at *War* 1.440 to Cleopatra having had Malichus I killed may mean according to events rather than directly, i.e. Malichus I as a victim of Cleopatra who

instigated Mark Antony to order Herod to defeat Malichus I in battle.⁵⁰ Following Herod's victory over Malichus I at the battle of Philadelphia, "the nation [Nabataeans] chose [Herod] for its Protector" (*War* 1.385).

Obodas II and Aretas IV

The accession of Aenaeus, or Aretas IV as he became known, who was not a son of Obodas II, was contested by Obodas II's prime minister Syllaeus who sought the succession himself. Syllaeus, in Rome at the time, at first was backed by Roman emperor Augustus for the succession. But Aretas IV at home in Petra took the throne and accused Syllaeus of having murdered Obodas II. The coins of the first four years of Aretas IV, especially the coins of Aretas IV's year 1, reflect this contested succession. Aretas IV issued an astonishing variety of nine types of coins in his year 1, including an unprecedented coin with Roman emperor Augustus's image on it (with his own name, Aretas, on the same side, and Huldu, his wife and queen, on the reverse). Other year 1 coins of Aretas IV have the image of Obodas II, instead of Aretas's own image, accompanied by Aretas's name and year.⁵¹

In addition to this variety of Aretas IV year 1 types there are additional types which have been called "Syllaeus coins", so called because they have Obodas II's portrait accompanied by Syllaeus's initials or full name.⁵² Martin Huth has shown that these Syllaeus coins, which do not themselves bear dates, are all to be dated after the death of Obodas II, i.e. in the same first years of Aretas IV that Aretas IV was issuing coins at the time the succession was contested, not before Obodas II's death as formerly had been supposed.⁵³ The Syllaeus coins do not assert that

⁵⁰ Wenning (1993, 32n57).

⁵¹ Barkay (2019, 35-47).

⁵² Barkay (2017); Barkay (2019, 35-42).

⁵³ Huth (2010, 220): "As the existing accounts imply an element of surprise (certainly on behalf of Syllaeus) in Aretas' sudden appearance in Rome and his ensuing rise, we may exclude the existence of a joint issue in the names of Aretas and Syllaeus minted during the last year(s) of Obodas. On the other hand, if these coins were the product of an unresolved situation at the head of the Nabataean state, the use

Syllaeus is king, but they add additional coin types to those of Aretas IV in the first years of Aretas IV. The picture is of a contested succession in which coin issues, among their other purposes, functioned as propaganda, with the rivals, Aretas IV and Syllaeus, each claiming to represent the legitimate continuation of the late Obodas II.

An inscription found at Delos, Greece, associated with a voyage of Syllaeus to Rome at the time of the inscription, was followed by the death of Obodas II back at Petra. The Delos inscription reads as dated in the month of Shevat (Jan-Feb) of Obodas II's year 20 according to a reading of Milik. However there are coins dated year 21 of Obodas II, the last year of Obodas II coins. Some scholarly discussions of the Delos inscription, including Milik, therefore assumed an emended or restored year "2[1]" for the Delos inscription, influenced by reasoning that "year 20", the visible reading, must be incorrect.⁵⁴ The analysis here accepts the reading of the inscription as year 20, and concludes that Obodas II died early in his regnal year 21 (after Nisan) and that a full range of Obodas II year 21 coins continued to circulate after the death of Obodas II even as Aretas IV was competitively minting year 1 coins in his own name that same year, as a further instance of the unusual numismatic phenomena already associated with this particular contested succession.⁵⁵

By this reconstruction Obodas II died early in his year 21, perhaps in the spring or summer after Syllaeus's arrival in Rome. Upon Obodas II's death Aretas IV in Petra was declared king,

of the portrait of Obodas—from whom both competitors pretended to derive their respective legitimacy—can be neatly explained."

⁵⁴ On the reading by Milik of the year number in the Delos Syllaeus inscription as year 20, see Milik (1976, 146n11). Milik reported on the basis of study of a squeeze of the inscription *reading* (what his eyes saw), at the end of the Delos inscription's line 4, year "20" in his *transcription*. But Milik rendered "2[1]" in his French *translation* of the line, with the bracket notation indicating the "1" was restored, not visible to the eye. The same reading was reported in 2017 from Ada Yardeni, by Barkay (2017, 70), as "2[1]", again with the notation indicating the "1" was restored on grounds other than what was visible. Hackl, Jenni, Schneider (2003), A.004.01, have "20" at the end of the Delos inscription's line 4 in both transcription and German translation, with a footnote noting Milik's restoration of "2[1]".

⁵⁵ Compare Kokkinos (2010, 375): "Aretas IV king of Petra began his reign in 11/10 BCE (this year also being the twenty-first, and last, of Obodas 'III'; read II)."

then sought to win Augustus's approval. The year 1 coin type of Aretas IV which had Augustus's image becomes interpreted as designed to win favor with Augustus, rather than after-the-fact gratitude to Augustus for something. The time when Aretas IV needed to win favor with Augustus was immediately, not a wait of nearly a year until the start of the next full regnal year. The reconstruction is that Aretas IV minted his year 1 coins with Augustus's image, and therefore all of his year 1 coins, in the same year he came to power, the same year as year 21 of the Obodas II coins.

King of unknown name of ca. 69-70 CE

The king of ca. 69-70 CE is reconstructed as having come to rule some time in the year 69/70 CE upon the death of Malichus II in that year, with this king's year 1 being 70/71 which this king did not complete.

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