

## The Neo-Punic Text from 'Ain Zakkar

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In an interesting article Ferjaoui<sup>1</sup> publishes a photograph and a new interpretation of the enigmatic Neo-Punic text from 'Ain Zakkar. The photograph and Ferjaoui's remarks have made us review our treatment of this text in the preceding issue of DS-NELL<sup>2</sup> on a few points. In the following we want to compare our present interpretation with the one of Ferjaoui. He reads and translates:

1)	<i>b<sup>o</sup>rš š<sup>c</sup>dyt hk</i>	Dans <i>ʔrš (?) š<sup>o</sup>dyt</i>
2)	<i>nt <sup>c</sup>drt m<sup>c</sup> bt š</i>	la grande prêtresse, est morte à l'â-
3)	<i><sup>c</sup>nt šb<sup>c</sup>m wšb<sup>c</sup></i>	ge de soixante-dix-sept ans
4)	<i>wkn<sup>c</sup> š<sup>c</sup>nt <sup>c</sup>sr</i>	et elle était, (pendant) dix-
5)	<i>wšmn r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup></i>	huit ans, chef du
6)	<i>mš<sup>c</sup>rt nšb</i>	service (religieux), stèle.

Without a doubt Ferjaoui is correct in reading *hknt* in line 1-2 instead of my proposed, uncertain, *hnbt* and therefore it is the stela not of a prophetess but a priestess. For the second sign in the first line, where we were uncertain whether to read *m* or <sup>o</sup>, Ferjaoui chooses without much discussion for the reading <sup>o</sup>. But normally speaking *mem* is much smaller than *alef*, in many instances only half its size. In this text, however, this is not the case. The other indubitable *mem*-signs are of *alef*-size. The sign under discussion is a little less wide than the *mem*-signs, however, to our knowledge, in no other text the difference between the two signs is the one observed here, therefore our doubt whether to read <sup>o</sup> or *m* remains. For the rest our readings agree. In spite of the clear photograph and the greater assurance we now have for the reading of the text, some of the problems still remain.

In the first place the function of the first word of the text. Ferjaoui translates: dans *ʔrš (?)*, and remarks that the first word of this text cannot indicate a tomb or monument, as has been supposed by others<sup>3</sup> because the

<sup>1</sup>Ahmed Ferjaoui, 'Une Épitaphe Néopunique d'une grande prêtresse de Cérés provenant de 'Ayin Zakkar (Tunisie)', *Semitica* xlvi, 1996, pp. 25-35.

<sup>2</sup>K. Jongeling, 'A few remarks on some Neo-Punic texts', *DS-NELL* ii, 1996, pp. 157-167, v. p. 157-15 (unknown to Ferjaoui when he wrote the article we comment upon).

<sup>3</sup>J.-G. Février, 'Épitaphe néopunique d'une prêtresse', *Semitica* v, 1955, pp. 63-64,

monument is only mentioned in the last line as *nšb*. This is a circular argument which leads to the singular remarks on this word by Ferjaoui: "nous sommes surpris tant par l'usage (emploi) de terme *nšb* dont le déchiffrement est assuré, car le punique emploie plutôt *mnsbt*, que par son emplacement à la fin du texte. Toutefois, cette position peut s'expliquer peut-être par la présence de la locution introductive *b<sup>2</sup>rš*".

The argument should be, we are still assured, turned round. Because the noun *nšb*, meaning upright stone monument, is not to be expected as a single word, without a relation to the preceding text at the end of an inscription another interpretation is called for. Whether a noun or a verb, one expects a relation with at least one preceding word. The preceding *mš<sup>c</sup>rt* may be explained as a personal name, a nominal clause constituent, which may easily be connected to a verb. This is the reason why we chose to explain *nšb* as a verbal form, and Ferjaoui has given no argument against this solution. The occurrence of a Libyan personal name in a text like this can hardly surprise us and the verbal use of the root *nšb* is attested in North Africa. As far as we can see there is no reason whatsoever to combine this word with the preceding *r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup>*. Note also that the last line, beginning with *mš<sup>c</sup>rt*, is the only one leaving some unused space preceding the first word, which gives the impression that a new statement is starting here.

Ferjaoui supposes *r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup>* to be a feminine word, which he translates as 'chef', like Février did, but the latter did this with more reason, as he supposed another division of words. From Ferjaoui's translation we infer that he supposes *r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup>* to be a singular noun in the construct state<sup>4</sup>. Although we do not have any material to prove a case like this, it is probable that the ending *-t* in words of feminine gender would have survived longer in a construct state. But even in this text the *-t* ending is written twice, without any doubt, in *hknt<sup>c</sup>drt*, both in the absolute state<sup>5</sup>. One might explain these forms as historical spellings, but why did the author of this text not use

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reads *tpš*, which he connects with greek τᾶφος; J. Hoftijzer, 'Notes sur une épitaphe en écriture néopunique', *VT* xi, 1961, pp. 344-348, see p. 345, reads *n<sup>2</sup>pš*, accepted by Röllig in *KAI* sub nr. 136.

<sup>4</sup>We suppose that Ferjaoui's explanation of *mš<sup>c</sup>rt* as a noun in the construct state is a slip of the pen.

<sup>5</sup>When *hknt* is correctly explained as the article followed by a feminine form of the word meaning priest, then one must suppose the feminine ending in this case to have been *-at*, otherwise *-n + t* would have been represented by *-t* as a result of regular assimilation, cf. *št*. This same ending is probably supposed for *r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup>*, although Ferjaoui speaks of "un substantif féminin avec terminaison *<sup>c</sup>ayin*, remplaçant le suffixe féminin *-t*, qui serait tombé".

historical orthography in line 5 too ?

Returning to the first word of this text, whether it is to be read  $b^{\textcircled{2}}r\check{s}$  or  $bmr\check{s}$ , it is interesting to note that on many elaborate funerary monuments the deceased is described with his or her father's name or even a longer genealogy. In a few instances we encounter, in stead of the father's name, the combination of two personal names linked by the marker of relativity  $\check{s}$ . This construction has been explained as X the client of Y<sup>6</sup> which leads us to the supposition that it is very well possible that this construction is also used here: B the client of C. When the first name should have to be read as  $b^{\textcircled{2}}r\check{s}$  one may compare the following Libyan names: BRS, BRSN, BRSHN, BRŠN<sup>7</sup>,  $^c dyt$  may be connected to Libyan DIT<sup>8</sup>.

The verbal forms  $mt^c$  and  $kn^c$  also lost a historical  $-t$  ending, there is no reason, however, to suppose that exactly the same development took place in nominal and verbal forms. In his presentation of this translation Ferjaoui does not comment on the etymology of  $r^c\check{s}^c$ . Most probably he thinks of a feminine derivation of  $r^{\textcircled{2}}\check{s}$ , as a counterpart of the masculine use of  $r^{\textcircled{2}}\check{s}$  with the meaning 'chief'. A feminine form like this is, however, not attested anywhere in North-West Semitic<sup>9</sup>. Grammatically Février's solution<sup>10</sup>,  $r^c\check{s}^c m\check{s}^c rt$ , where the masculine word is used to indicate a female, is acceptable of course (see however below), cf.  $rb khnt$  and even  $rb khnm$  for 'high priestess' quoted by Ferjaoui himself. Because  $rb$  has been attested several times for the one set over a group of priest(esse)s, we still have some doubt the interpretation of  $^c drt$  in line 2. The combination  $hknt^c drt$  may be an official title, and both Ferjaoui's comparison with the use of  $^{\textcircled{2}}dr$  to describe the Roman title Pontifex Maximus and his remarks on the use of *sacerdos magna* are attractive, but the possibility that near this monument a plain priestess was buried, who is described with an epitheton ornans as 'eminent' is still possible. This solution is strengthened by the explicit remark that she was during eighteen years whatever it is that is mentioned in line 5. It is probable that this was her highest, last-held function<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. DNWSI p. 1093.

<sup>7</sup>BRS RIL 1106, BRSN RIL 914, BRSHN 435, BRŠN RIL 186.

<sup>8</sup>RIL 375.

<sup>9</sup>A relation with  $r(^{\textcircled{2}})\check{s}t$ , 'choice', 'best quality' is hardly possible, as this is the same word as Hebrew  $r\check{s}\check{i}t$ , which, once  $-t$  is lost, could not be written with  $^c$  as a representation of its vocalic ending.

<sup>10</sup>J.-G. Février, o.c., p. 64.

<sup>11</sup>One might also think of a combination of  $hknt$  in construct state followed by an abstract noun  $^c drt$  ( $^{\textcircled{2}}addir\check{u}t$  or something like this), the priestess of eminence, but the use of the article preceding the first word of this combination would be suspect, although

We just noted that Février's interpretation of  $r^c\check{s}$  is grammatically acceptable. One point, however, needs extra consideration here. Février saw the problem posed by his solution when he remarked: "avec mater lectionis a". Although it is difficult to be quite sure the form NASOT in Plaute's Poenulus gives the impression that for Punic the following rule (also operative in Hebrew) must be supposed:  $/a^\circ/ > /ā/ > /ō/$ . This would lead to a form  $/rō\check{s}/$  also in Punic for the original  $*/ra^\circ\check{s}/$ , for which the vowel indication  $^c$  is not to be expected. This is the reason that until now we are not convinced that  $r^c\check{s}$  is easily connected with  $r^\circ\check{s}$  'head, chief'. Sometimes, of course, the use of vowel letters in Neo-Punic inscriptions is more or less erratic. Therefore it is useful to have a look at all the possible vowel letters in this text. As the reading and interpretation of the first word of this text remain a problem the supposed  $^\circ$  in  $b^\circ r\check{s}$  may be a vowel letter or not, we cannot use it in this discussion. The same holds true for  $^c$  in  $\check{s}^c dyt$ . As long as we do not know which name is to be found in this sequence of signs it cannot be of any use either. This is also correct for  $^c$  in  $r^c\check{s}^c$  and  $m\check{s}^c rt$ , so we are left with the following words with  $^c$  as a vowel letter:  $^c drt$   $m^c$   $\check{s}^c nt$  (twice)  $kn^c$ . Twice we may be quite sure that  $^c$  indicates  $/a/$ :  $^c drt$  pro  $/addir(a)t/$ ,  $\check{s}^c nt$  pro  $/\check{s}anut/$ . In  $m^c$  and  $kn^c$  we have the representation of the fem. ending of the 3d p. sing. fem. of the perfect tense. In Hebrew this ending was realised as  $/ā/$ , but for Phoenician and Punic  $/ō/$  has been supposed<sup>12</sup>, through a development  $/at/ > /ā/ > /ō/$ . To strengthen this supposition Punic and Neo-Punic forms are adduced where a vowel letter  $^\circ$ ,  $^c$  or  $h$  is extant. This position is also taken by Sznycer<sup>13</sup>, who quotes several perfect forms 3d p. sing. fem. ending in  $-^\circ$  and  $-^c$ <sup>14</sup>. In the discussion of these perfect forms, however, he does not really tackle the problem when he remarks<sup>15</sup>: "Les exemples vocalisés de 3e pers. sing., masc. et fém., sont .. éclairants:  $\check{s}^c m^\circ$ ,  $b^c n^\circ$ ,  $hw^\circ$  et  $^c w^\circ$  supposent la prononciation  $\check{s}am\check{o}$ ,  $ban\check{o}$ ,  $hav\check{o}$ ". It is clear that these forms cannot be adduced to shed light on the problem of the pronunciation of the forms we are discussing. The verbs  $bny$  and  $hwy$  end in a half consonant and may have been treated in a different way.  $\check{s}m^c$  ends in an  $^c$ , lost in pronunciation, also needing a specific treatment. So we are left with quite a number of forms of the verb  $ndr$  exhibiting both  $^\circ$  and  $^c$

not impossible.

<sup>12</sup> J. Friedrich & W. Röllig, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik*, Roma 1970, p. 57 and S. Segert, *A Grammar of Phoenician and Punic*, München 1976, p. 130, 131.

<sup>13</sup> M. Sznycer, 'La vocalisation des formes verbales en Néopunique', in: A. Caquot & D. Cohen (eds.), *Actes du premier Congrès international de Linguistique Sémitique et Chamito-Sémitique*, Paris 16-19 juillet 1969, The Hague - Paris 1974, pp. 209-219.

<sup>14</sup> Sznycer, p. 212, 214f., 216.

<sup>15</sup> Sznycer, p. 218.

as ending. Elsewhere we have expressed our doubts on the idea that the vowel letters in Neo-Punic texts are used indiscriminately<sup>16</sup>. We still think it more probable that <sup>c</sup> is mainly used to indicate /a/, and that there is no reason to suppose that in the inscription under discussion <sup>c</sup> is used both for /a/ and /o/, but only that in the Punic dialect here represented the ending /-at/ in 3d p. sing. fem. forms of the perfect tense had been reduced to /a/ (possibly a long vowel) and had not moved on to /ō/. Compare for instance the text CIS 3244 (= NP 118), a straightforward votive text, which is read:

- |    |   |                             |
|----|---|-----------------------------|
| 1) | <i>l<sup>c</sup>dn lb<sup>c</sup>l<sup>c</sup> c<sup>c</sup>mn n<sup>c</sup>d<sup>c</sup></i> | <i>ladūn ləbalamūn nada</i> |
| 2) | <i>r ʔš ndr<sup>c</sup> b<sup>c</sup>lpg<sup>ʔ</sup></i>                                      | <i>r əš nadara balpiggo</i> |
| 3) | <i>š<sup>c</sup>m<sup>ʔ</sup> ql<sup>ʔ</sup> brk<sup>ʔ</sup></i>                              | <i>šamō qulō barakō.</i>    |

<sup>ʔ</sup> is systematically used for /o/, <sup>c</sup> at least in several instances clearly for /a/ (in *l<sup>c</sup>dn*, *c<sup>c</sup>mn*, *n<sup>c</sup>d<sup>c</sup>r*, *š<sup>c</sup>m<sup>ʔ</sup>*) or representing a historical spelling (as in *b<sup>c</sup>l(-)* and *-pgc*)<sup>17</sup>.

To complete our remarks we give here our reading of the text from Ain Zakkār, with a translation for as far as we think the text is understandable:

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|----|--|---|
| 1) | <i>b<sup>ʔ</sup>rš š<sup>c</sup>dyt hk</i>             | <i>b<sup>ʔ</sup>rš client of c<sup>c</sup>dyt (?) the pr-</i> |
| 2) | <i>nt c<sup>c</sup>drt m<sup>c</sup> bt š</i>          | <i>iestess eminent, she died at the a-</i>                    |
| 3) | <i>c<sup>c</sup>nt šb<sup>c</sup>m wšb<sup>c</sup></i> | <i>ge of seventy seven</i>                                    |
| 4) | <i>wkn<sup>c</sup> š<sup>c</sup>nt c<sup>c</sup>sr</i> | <i>and she was during eight-</i>                              |
| 5) | <i>wšmn r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup></i>                 | <i>teen years r<sup>c</sup>š<sup>c</sup> (?)</i>              |
| 6) | <i>mš<sup>c</sup>rt nšb</i>                            | <i>mš<sup>c</sup>rt erected [this stone].</i>                 |

<sup>16</sup>Cf. e.g. K. Jongeling, 'Survival of Punic', in: H. Devijver & E. Lipinski (eds.), *Punic Wars*, Leuven 1989, pp. 365-373.

<sup>17</sup>Other texts containing fem. forms of *ndr* ending in <sup>c</sup> (*ndr<sup>c</sup>*, *dr<sup>c</sup>*, *bdr<sup>c</sup>*, *n<sup>ʔ</sup>dr<sup>c</sup>*) occur in texts without any interesting use of vowel letters, apart from one instance, CIS 232, which contains *c<sup>c</sup>št* pro *ʔšt* 'wife'; we suppose this to be a hypercorrection, seeing that the rest of the text is correct in historical spellings: *ʔdn*, *b<sup>c</sup>l*, *h<sup>c</sup>mn*, *c<sup>c</sup>zrb<sup>c</sup>l*.

Drawing based upon photograph in Ferjaoui, o.c., planche 4.

