NEW ANCIENT NORTH ARABIAN INSCRIPTIONS
FROM ĠADĪR AL-AḤMAR IN AL-ṢAFĀWĪ REGION,
NORTHEASTERN JORDANIAN BADIYA

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This essay is an analytical study of sixteen new Ancient North Arabian inscriptions collected by the author during an epigraphical survey in 2010 in the area of Ġadīr Al-Aḥmar in Al-Ṣafāwī Region Northeast Jordan. On the grounds of the shape of script and the language, these inscriptions are classified as Safaitic. The script was known in the region to the south and southeast of Damascus (including north and northeast of Jordan) and in north and northwest Saudi Arabia.

The goal of this analysis is to study the inscriptions, the semantics and morphology of the words and the proper nouns contained therein. Furthermore, the paper also identifies certain new vocabulary items, such as four personal names mentioned for the first time in the corpus of the Safaitic inscriptions.

Key words: Ancient North Arabia, Jordan, basinscriptions, Safaitic, Ġadīr Al-Aḥmar.

Introduction

Ğadīr Al-Aḥmar is a site located approximately 20 kms to the east of Al-Ṣafāwī town on the highway road to Baghdad. The site is located at the latitude and longitude coordinates 32° 07’ 54.5232 north and 37° 21’ 53.1157 east.

Many Safaitic inscriptions are carved on basalt stone surfaces, and spread on both sides of a valley called al-‘Awsajī in al-Ṣafāwī region. Our inscriptions, the subject of this study, were collected from Gadjīr al-Ahmar which is a branch of the valley. The scholars agree on dating the Safaitic inscriptions from the 1st century BC to the 4th century AD.

The tribally organised people who produced these inscriptions adapted the Ancient South Arabian script (known in Arabic as al-musnad). This fact reinforced the idea that the old North Arabian tribes emigrated from South Arabia to the North.
Although these tribes living in Al-Ḥarrah are considered to have been pastoralists, they were literate and left inscriptions such as these. This underlines the fact that they had been a sedentarised people before coming to this area.

**Stone 1**

*Inscription No. 1*

**Transcription:** 1 wrdt bn ḥrb.

**Translation:** By Wrdt son of Ḥrb.

**Wrdt:** p.n. m. unrecorded previously in this form either in Safaitic or in other Semitic inscriptions. The name occurred in Safaitic in the forms wrd, wrdn and wrd’l (Harding 1971, p. 640), wrd in Thamudic (Branden 1950, p. 528), and wrd in Sabaic (CIH 204/4). In Arabic وَرْد / ward is the lion (Ibn Durayd 1991, p. 279).


**Stone 2**

This stone contains three inscriptions (Nos 2, 3, 4).
**Inscription No. 2**

**Transcription:** lḥrb bn ḥcwḏ.

**Translation:** By Ḥrb son of Hʿwḏ.

**Ḥrb:** see inscription No. 1 above.

**Ḥcwḏ:** p.n. m. consists of the definite article ḥ and the name ‘wḏ, this form of personal name being assimilated regularly in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 618; Ababneh 2005, Nos 56, 206, 708). The parallel form ḥʿḏ is attested in Minaean (al-Said 1995, p. 172).

The Safaitic inscriptions recorded relevant forms such as ‘wḏ (al-Theeb 2000a, p. 122; Maani 2011, p. 160), ‘wḏn (Rawan 2013, Nos 214, 334), in addition to the form ḥḏ that was mentioned in Safaitic, Thamudic and in Liḥyanite (Jammī 1967, p. 92; Harding 1971, p. 411). Ancient South Arabian inscriptions show a parallel form ‘wḏn in Sabaic (Byn M1/ 1 in CSAI¹) and in Ḥḍramitic (Jammī 1963, No. 962/1).

**Inscription No. 3**

**Transcription:** l ḥhb bn qtl.

**Translation:** By Ḥhb son of Qtl.

**Lḥhb:** p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 521; Ababneh 2005, No. 345), and Lḥḥḥ (Ababneh 2005, Nos 537, 706), and in Thamudic faʿlān form (Braden 1950, p. 533). It is equivalent to the Arabic name لَهَب / Ḥab ‘flame, blaze’ (Ibn Durayd 1991, p. 491).

**Qtl:** p.n. m. frequently attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 476; Ababneh 2005, Nos 481, 1126; Rawan 2013, No. 84), in contrast, it rarely appeared in Thamudic; it has one evidence (Winnett and Reed 1973, p. 92); name derived from the root q-t-l of the verb and noun (‘killed, homicidal, murderous’), frequently found in Ancient North Arabian inscriptions and in Classical Arabic (Ibn Manẓūr 2003: qtl).

**Inscription No. 4**

**Transcription:** l ġrbn bn sr.

**Translation:** By ġrbn son of Sr.

**Ğrbn:** p.n. m. frequently attested in Safaitic (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 219²; Ababneh 2005, No. 139). It could be vocalised as ġarbān ‘mangy, scabby’, another relevant form ġrb (CIS 4816) could be treated as a derivation of the same root. The identical pattern ġrbn is attested in Early Sabaic inscriptions (RES 4640),

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¹ CSAI: Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions = http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/

² The inscription was read by the authors as: l ḣrb bn bṣrḥn bn ḥkb bn mḍr w…. But the correct reading as it is shown in the inscription is: l ḣrbn bn ḣrḥn bn ḥkb bn mḍr w….
and there are pieces of evidence of the form ġrbyn as a personal name in Qata-
banian, and as clan/family name in Sabaeen (Abdallah 1975, p. 39), it has also
been recorded as a second name in Hadrami inscription (Frantsouzoff 1995,
p. 18). Further connected indications are in the Minaean inscriptions which
show ġ-ğrb as a toonym (Avanzini 1995, p. 103–104) and as a god epithet
Sr: p.n. m. well known in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971, p. 315; Ababneh
2005, Nos 82, 139, 290; Rawan 2013, Nos 105, 212, 221; Branden 1950, p.
539), and in Ḥaḍramite (Abū al-Ḥasan 2002, No. 269). It is equivalent to the
Arabic name سُوْر (Ibn Durayd 1991, p. 293).
The hollow -w- swr (Clark 1980, No. 372) could be considered as a various
spelling of the name sr in Safaitic. In Sabaic it occurs as a second position in the
compound name ṣdq/ṣr (RES 3088).

Stone 3

Inscription No. 5

Transcription: lṣb bn mrbh.
Translation: By Ṣb son of Mrbh.
Ṣb: p.n. m. frequently attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 365), and in Thamudic
(al-Said 2004, No. 6), and in Ḥaḍramitic (Jamme 1963, No. Ja 982/2). It is
equivalent to the Arabic name صَبّ / ṣabb ‘full of love’ (Ibn Durayd 1991, p.
423).
Mrbḥ: p.n. m. It is derived from the root r-b-h in the form mfol ‘gainful’. It is attested
in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 537). The form rḥb is recorded in Thamudic
(Jamme 1967, p. 94), in Ḥaḍramite (Abū al-Ḥasan 1997, p. 429), and in Qata-
banian (Hayajneh 1998, p. 146), rḥb’m in Sabaic (Tairan 1992, p. 123) and in
Qatabanian (Hayajneh 1998, p. 147). The compound personal name rḥb’il is
mentioned in the Minaean inscriptions (Arbach–Schiettecatte–al-Hāḍ̇ti 2008,
p. 83).
Stone 4

Inscription No. 6

**Transcription:** l ḥmcḏ bn qtl.
**Translation:** By Ḥmcḏ son of Qtl.

**Ḥmcḏ:** p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 624; Ababneh 2005, No. 605). The name consists of two elements: the definite article ḥ- and the name mcḏ which is equivalent to the Arabic name معاذ / Muʿāḍ. It is mentioned as Mḏd in Safaitic (Ababneh 2005, No. 286), Thamudic and in Liḥyanite (Harding 1971, p. 553).

**Qtl:** see inscription No. 3 above.

Stone 5

Inscription No. 7

**Transcription:** l ṣb ḥğml.
**Translation:** This camel is for Ṣb.

**Ṣb:** see inscription No. 5.

**Ḥğml:** n. s. m. frequently attested in Safaitic and in Ancient North Arabian inscriptions (Corbett 2010, p. 427).
This stone contains two inscriptions (Nos 8, 9).

**Inscription No. 8**

**Transcription:** l ’ṯwb bn ḏwqt.

**Translation:** By ’ṯwb son of ḏwqt.

’ṯwb: p.n. m. well known in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 21) and Thamudic (Branden 1956, p. 175), the name is in *af al* form from the root *ṯ-w-h* ‘revert’. It is attested as ṭwb in Sabaic (Jamme 1956, No. Ja 467/1) and in Qatabanian (Hayajneh 1998, p. 288). The theophoric compound form ṭblḥ is mentioned in Liḥyanite (Abū al-Ḥasan 1997, No. 119; 2002, No. 234), and ṭbl ’ in Sabaic (Tairan 1992, p. 90).

Ḏwqt: p.n. m. it is derived from the hollow root ḏ-w-q with a common meaning ‘taste’, in addition it has a sense of ‘holding up the lance, and aiming by the bow at something’ (al-Ḥimyarī 1999, p. 2315; al-Zabīdī 1994: ḏwq). The root occurred in Safaitic as a verb and can be interpreted in the light of the Arabic data as ‘to die’ (Sadaqah – Harahsheh 2005, p. 58). Another instance: l ‘ndx bn nms ṭng ḏq l m[n] ṭbl hmsfr (CIS 1781)3 could illuminate this view. Therefore this personal name has a sense of ‘the death’. – It is hitherto unrecorded in Safaitic in this form, but it has been attested as ḏwq (Harding 1971, p. 260), ḏq in Thamudic (Branden 1956, p. 177), and ḏq in Qatabanian (Hayajneh 1998, p. 140).

**Inscription No. 9**

**Transcription:** ḡnn bn ḫzr.

**Translation:** By ġnn son of ḫzr.

Ḡnn: p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 169; Ababneh 2005, Nos 216, 216a, 331; Rawan, No. 236) and Liḥyanite (Abū al-Ḥasan 2002, No. 321). Thamudic

3 For ’ndx son of Nms, and he escaped from disaster “blm”, and the death “ḏq” affected the heart who destroyed “ḥlk” the inscription “hmsfr” with fright “rʾt”.

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inscriptions show the forms ġnnt (al-Theeb 2000b, No. 76), ġnt (Branden 1950, p. 525) and ġn (Maani – Kareem 2001, No. 17), in Qatabanian mňnn" (Hayajneh 1998, p. 230).

Ḫzr: p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 220; Ababneh 2005, Nos 197, 707, 988). Thamudic inscriptions consist of this name (Maani and Kareem 2001, No. 12). It is the equivalent of the well-known Arabic personal name خازر / Ḥāzar ‘narrow-eyed’.

Stone 7

Inscription No. 10

Transcription: F’d bn wṯq.
Translation: By ‘d son of Wṯq.

Wṯq: p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 635). It is equivalent to the common Arabic personal name وثيق / Wātiq ‘confident’.

Stone 8

This stone contains two inscriptions (Nos 11, 12).
Inscription No. 11

Transcription: ltm bn mṭr ḏ'l mskt.
Translation: By Tm son of Mṭr of the tribe Mskt.
Tm: p.n. m. it is a common name in the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions. Harding (1971, p. 136) compared it with the Arabic Ṭamm ‘be completed’. It could also be the equivalent of the Arabic Ṭaym ‘servant’ (Ibn Manẓūr 2003: ṭmm).
Mṭr: p.n. m. the name is probably derived from the conditions surrounding a child’s birth. It is well known in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 551; Rawan 2013, Nos 128, 129, 245), and in Thamudic (al-Theeb 2000b, No. 94; King 1990, p. 549), mṭr and bmnṭr in Lihyanite (Abū al-Ḥasan 2002, Nos 200, 310), mṭrw and mṭyrw in Nabataean (Negev 1991, p. 43), and mṭrn in Sabaic (RES 4546/1). The name is equivalent to the Arabic name Mṭar ‘rain’ (Caskel 1966, p. 404).
ḏ'l: It is a pronominal adjective preceding names of tribes, clans or subtribes, which means ‘of the tribe X’; it consists of the particle ḏ and the substantive noun ḥ ‘family, tribe’.
It is well known in Safaitic (Macdonald 2004, p. 508; al-Theeb 2003, Nos 1, 2, 26) and Thamudic (King 1990, Nos KJA 36, KJC 42, 647). For more discussion, see Maani – Sadaqah (2003, p. 644–645).
Mskt: a tribal name. It is a well-known tribe that appears in Safaitic inscriptions (see al-Rousan 1987, pp. 256–257).

Inscription No. 12

Transcription: ṯmny ḏ'l mskt.
Translation: Ṭmný of the tribe Mskt.
Ṭmny: p.n. m. from the root ṭ-m-n ‘the eighth or precious, valuable’. This form is unattested in Safaitic, but we find the form mṭmn (Ababneh 2005, Nos 931, 977). However, such ending -y is found in other Safaitic names such as gr̄ny, ḥny (Ababneh 2005, Nos 19, 264), wṭry and ḥbdy (Clark 1980, Nos 167, 734).
Mskt: see inscription No. 11 above.

Stone 9
Inscription No. 13

**Transcription**: ltm bn šcṯm ḏ'l ḏf ṣḥyr fhlt slm.

**Translation**: By Tm son of Š c϶m of the tribe -f and he returned back, Oh Allat (grant) peace.

**Tm**: see inscription No. 11 above.

**Šcṯm**: p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971, p. 350; Rawan 2013, No. 324), in Minaean (al-Said 1995, p. 124), in Sabaic (Harding 1971, p. 350) and in Ḥaḍramitic (Pirenne 1975, Khor Rori 3/1). — This name is suffixed with -m which rarely occurred in Safaitic inscriptions, e.g. -m can be detected in names like 'blm (CIS 4227, 4831), 'ḥym (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 3000), and ghlm (Winnett – Harding 1978, Nos 2673, 2773). But the suffixation with -m is well known in Ancient South Arabian names such as 's1lm, 's1lmm, šlhm (see Hayajneh 1998, pp. 20, 70, 180). Furthermore, the same phenomenon can be observed in the traditional Arabic name such as Zurqum. Therefore, the Safaitic name, š��m, could be compared with the traditional Arabic name Šac��m (Ibn Durayd 1991, p. 349), the name is derived from the root which means ‘become shaggy or untidy, or become defiled with dust’ (al-Zabīdī 1994: š��τ).

**ḏ'l**: see inscription No. 11 above.

**Ḍf**: It is a well-known tribal name in Safaitic (Harding 1969, p. 12; Winnett – Harding 1978, p. 627). It is one of the biggest Safaitic tribes in the Harra region southeast of Damascus (al-Rousan 1987, pp. 328–329). The inscriptions show the importance of this tribe that for a while lived together with other tribes such as the ḏw which played a decisive role in strengthening the Arab tribes’ opposition to the Nabataean kingdom. They forced the Nabataeans to fight against them (CIS 2446 in Macdonald 2000, p. 51; Sadaqah 2013, p. 146).

**wϷyr**: w-: conjunction ‘and’. Ϸyr: v. pft. + suff 3p. s. m. from the root ṣyr ‘return, come’ (Ibn Manẓūr 2003: gyr).

**f-h-lt**: f-: conjunction ‘and’. -h-: It is used to express a vocative case in Safaitic inscriptions. lt: It is a well-known divine name in the North Arabian inscriptions.

**slm**: It is a common Semitic noun ‘peace, welfare’ (Beeston et al. 1982, p. 126; Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp. 1146–1152; al-Zabīdī 1994: slm). It is a part of invocation mood in Safaitic inscriptions denoting the peaceful manner that occurred, and to whom the good deeds are performed, i.e. asking dšr the safety (for their body and property) after conducting the raid. It can be pointed out also in Thamudic (al-Theeb 2002, No. 75).
Inscription No. 14

Transcription: [l] mhr bn mʾrʾt bn ḫlʾl bn ṭc wtẓr hsmy mṭr.

Transcription: [By] Mhr son of Mrʾt son of Ḫlʾl son of ṭc, and he watched the sky for rain.

Mhr: p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (Ababneh 2005, No. 742) and in Thamudic (Branden 1956, p. 47) in addition to feminine -t form ending (Branden 1956, p. 129), in Qatabanian (Hayajneh 1998, p. 241), in Minaean ḧ-mhr (RES 3849/2). It is attested in Liḥyahite with feminine -h ending mhrʾḥ (Abū al-Ḥasan 1997, No. 5/1). It could be vocalised as Mohr ‘pony’.

Mrʾt: p.n. m. attested in Safaitic (see: Ababneh 2005, Nos 121, 832), in Thamudic (Branden 1956, pp. 96, 109), in Nabataean (Negev 1991, p. 41). However, the feminine forms mʾrʾt is attested in Qatabanian (Hayajneh 1998, p. 231) and Minaean inscriptions (RES 2773), and mʾrʾh in Liḥyanite (Abū al-Ḥasan 1997, No. 50/1).

Ḫlʾl: a composite p.n. m. Well known in Safaitic and in Thamudic inscriptions (Harding 1971, p. 225; Rawan 2013, No. 108); it consists of two elements ḫl ‘friend’ + the name of the god ṭ (see Harahsheh 2001, No. 80).

畬: p.n. m. well known in Safaitic in the meaning ‘deliver, rescue’ (Harding 1971, p. 20; Ababneh 2005, Nos 420, 567, 850). The Arabic parallel name could be Aiṯā (Caskel 1966, p. 149), and corresponded to the Greek Ἰθάης (Wuthnow 1930, p. 58).

wtẓr: w-: it is a common conjunction in Semitic ‘and’. ṭẓr: it is derived from n-ẓ-r ‘on the look-out for, watched for’ (al-Zabīdī 1994: ńẓr). This verb contains the dental nasal -n-. The frequent assimilation of -n- to the following consonant reflects and confirms the weakness of this phoneme. Therefore, the studied verb here tends as: wa-intāzara, wa-ʾitāzara, wa-tāzara. It is well known in Safaitic inscriptions (Littmann 1943, p. 13; Ababneh 2005, No. 101).

hsmy: h-: definite article ‘the’. smy: n. s. f. ‘sky’, common Semitic noun.

mṭr: see inscription No. 11 above.
Inscription No. 15

Transcription: l mn’t bn ġgl ḏ’l ġrm.
Translation: By Mn’t son of ġgl of the tribe ġrm.

Mn’t: p.n. m. It is a masculine personal name with the feminine -t ending, from the root m-n-t, it means ‘strong, keep from, fortify oneself, immune, invincible’ (al-Zabīdī 1994: mn’t), therefore, it could be compared to the masculine tradition name Manī (Caskel 1966, p. 398). It is attested in Safaitic (Clark 1980, No. 80) and in Thamudic (King 1990, p. 551).

ġgl: p.n. m. It is a masculine personal name from the root ġ-ġ-l and attaches to ġl a personal name in Arabic (Caskel 1966, p. 353). It is very probable that the name has the meaning of ‘calf’ (al-Ḥimyarī 1999, vol. 7, p. 4379). This form ġgl is mentioned in Safaitic (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 2896), and in Thamudic (Branden 1956, No. Ph 266), in Sabaic (Arbach 2002, p. 52), and in Qatabanian (Abdallah 1975, p. 76).

ḏ’l: see inscription No. 11 above.

ġrm: It is a Safaitic tribal name (Harding 1969, p. 8). It is also mentioned in Thamudic (Winnett – Reed 1970, No. 84) and in South Arabian inscriptions (Mikyash 1993, p. 38). The tribal form ġrm’l is also attested in Safaitic (Winnett – Harding 1978, p. 21).
Inscription No. 16

Transcription: l nšl’l bn w₃d h-dmyt.
Translation: This picture is for Nšl’l son of W₃d.
Nšl’l: p.n. m. It is a theophoric personal name that consists of nšl and the divine element ‘l. The name could be considered a nominal sentence. In view of this, the first element could be compared to the Classical Arabic al-našīl ‘thin, flimsy sword’ (al-Zabīdī 1994: nšl), or as a verbal sentence in perfect tense and compared to našal ‘extricated, get out, carry off’ (al-Ḥimyarī 1999, vol. 10, p. 6603). Therefore, this name can be interpreted as ‘the sword of God’ or ‘God saved, extricated’. Thus, the name reflects God’s ability to carry out good deed. It is recorded in Safaitic inscriptions (Hazim 1986, p. 124), and also attested as a personal name nšl in Safaitic, Thamudic, Sabaean, Liḥyanite and Nabataean (Sadaqah – Harahsheh 2005, No. 5; Ababneh 2005, Nos 72, 185, 917).

W₃d: p.n. m. It is a masculine personal name from the root w-c-d. It is possible to equate it with the Classical Arabic noun wiš‘id ‘good omen promise’ (al-Ḥimyarī 1999, vol. 11, p. 7218). It is attested in Safaitic (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 1469) and in Thamudic (King 1990, p. 562; al-Theeb 2000a, No. 81).

h-dmyt: n. m. It is a feminine noun preceded by the definite article ‘h, from the root d-m-w/y. It has many evidences in Safaitic (Ababneh 2005, No. 2). It can be compared to dumyat ‘statue, picture’ in Classical Arabic (al-Ḫimyarī 1999, vol. 4, p. 2154).
Conclusion

The majority of Safaitic inscriptions and rock drawings are found in the volcanic basalt region called Al-Harrah in northeastern Jordan. Archaeologists have found inscriptions recording pastoral activities such as grazing camels, goats and sheep and relate that they migrated or encamped or spent the spring or winter in a particular place.

This study aimed to publish sixteen new Ancient North Arabian inscriptions written in the so-called Safaitic script which had been explored by the author through a fieldwork survey in northeast Badiya of Jordan during the year 2010. These and other texts are often found in association with cairns which were sometimes built over graves.

The inscriptions present scenes of Safaitic everyday life and they yield precious information about linguistic phenomena and the variant forms of the Safaitic script. The vocabularies in the inscriptions were compared with their parallels in other old North Arabian inscriptions (such as Thamudic and Liḥyanite) as well as in South Arabian ones (such as Sabaic, Mineaan and Qatabanian).

The study recorded some common personal names, nouns, tribes, verbs and prepositions, in addition to some new proper personal names like wrdt, ḏwqt, and ṭmny, and one new theophoric compound personal name nšlʾl.

Abbreviations

ADAJ Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.
CIH Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum 1889–1932.
CIS Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum 1951.
CSAI http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/
RES Répertoire d’Epigraphie Semitique publié la Commission du Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum.

Bibliography


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Photos

Stone 1, inscription No. 1

Stone 2, inscriptions Nos 2, 3, 4

Stone 3, inscription No. 5

Stone 4, inscription No. 6

Stone 5, inscription No. 7

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