

REVOLT OF THE NABATAEAN DAMAŞÎ IN THE LIGHT OF NEW EPIGRAPHIC MATERIAL EVIDENCE

NADA AL-RAWABDEH – ABDEL QADER AL-HUSAN

Faculty of Archaeology and Tourism, the University of Jordan
Queen Rania Str., 11942, Amman, Jordan
e-mail: n.rawabdeh@ju.edu.jo
Department of Antiquities
PO. B: 88, Jebel Amman Street, Sultan al-Atrash, Jordan
e-mail: alhousan@yahoo.com

This paper sheds light on a new Ancient North Arabian (Safaitic) inscription that makes mention of the famous Nabataean Damaşî. This is the fourth known Safaitic inscription to contain a reference to Damaşî; the paper makes a comparison of the appearances of Damaşî in the known corpus and evaluates the historical context. The significance of this inscription lies in its description of the author waiting (*nʒr*) for Damaşî.

Key words: Nabataean, Dmsy, Jordan, Ancient North Arabian inscriptions.

Introduction

The stone on which this inscription was found is located at a distance of about 35 km from the town of al-Azraq in northeastern Jordan. The precise locality of the site where the inscription was found is called Wādī wa-Ġadīr Aşhīm (see Figure 1), an area in which Byzantine and Islamic architecture can be found. Specifically, there is an abundance of Ayyubid ceramics which have been found here, and a great number of Islamic inscriptions, although the majority of these are admittedly short inscriptions consisting mostly of genealogies. There are also a number of Safaitic inscriptions in this area, most of which remain *in situ*. The stone, on which our inscription appears, however, has been relocated to the Mafraq Museum on account of its significance. In spite of this attention paid to the inscription, which was “discovered” in September 2015 by Abdel Qader Al-Husan, the inscription has not yet been published.

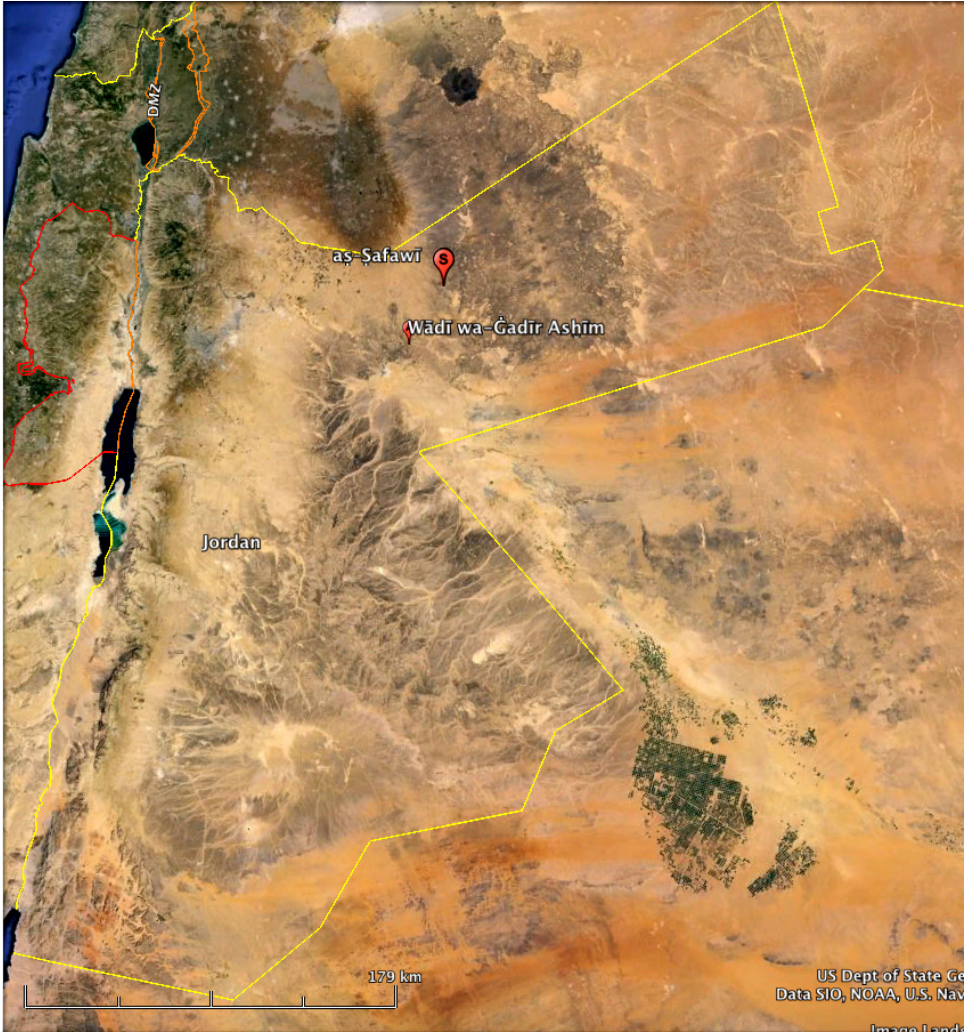


Figure 1. Map of Jordan showing the location of Wādī wa-Ġadīr Aṣḥīm
(Source: Google Earth)

The Inscription

The inscription is carved on the hard, black basalt stone which characterises the landscape of the *ḥarra* in the Jordanian Bādiya. It consists of forty-eight letters, written in a *boustrophedon* style around the shape of the rock. The inscription is easily legible, with clear letters written in a ‘square’ script which is considered to be a stylistic feature in Safaitic inscriptions, occurring in only a minority of inscriptions. There are a number of oddities in the letter forms, however. The second letter could be read either



Figure 2. The inscription

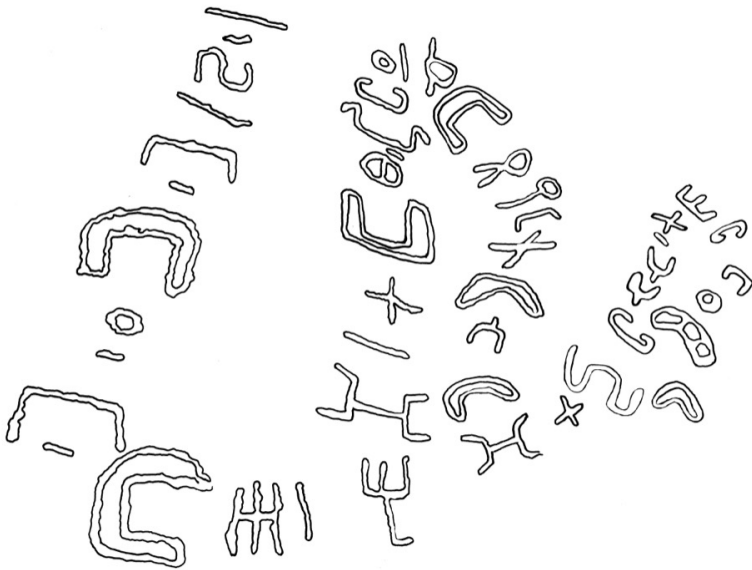


Figure 3. Tracing of the inscription (drawn by Abdel Qader Al-Husan)

as s^2 or as f , and it is difficult to decide which one should be preferred, since the resulting word, a personal name, could be either ns^2l or nfl , both of which are attested as personal names in Safaitic. We might prefer the reading with s^2 , since there is an f at the end of the inscription which does not have the same unusual shape. The letter d - in the formulaic expression d - $'l$ is interestingly adorned with a flick at the extremity of the letter, as can be seen in the tracing below. We consider this to be a form of decoration, which can perhaps support the hypothesis that the use of the square script is decorative as well. The letter d in the personal name $dmšy$ is also unusual, having a form which at first glance could be mistaken for the letter q . This appears to be on account of the uneven surface of the stone, which is not flat and in fact quite indented, especially in the area where the name occurs. Finally, the last word is $'mm$ in the phrase $h'rb 'mm$, in which the penultimate letter (the first m) is unusually filled in with additional lines. While the resulting form bears no resemblance to any particular Safaitic letter, it could perhaps be misread as a w ; this is impossible however, since there is one other occurrence of w in the text which is written normally. Furthermore, decoration of this type is not unprecedented in Safaitic inscriptions, with even whole inscriptions being written in this “stripy” script style. It is impossible to tell why the scribe chose to adorn only the m in this way, and why he did not write the following m in the same way.

Transliteration

l ns²l bn m' n bn m'łl d- 'l tm w n'zr 'l- dmšy b- hms' m' t frs' s'nt h'rb 'mm

Translation

By Ns^2l son of $M'n$ son of $M'łl$ of the lineage of Tm and he was on the look out for $Dmšy$ with five hundred horses in the year of the war of $'mm$.

Commentary

Genealogy

As is customary in Safaitic inscriptions, this text starts with the letter l , understood conventionally as a *lam auctoris* which introduces the author of the text (Al-Manaser 2008, p. 75). This l is always followed by a personal name, usually taking the form of a genealogy which can contain anything from two to ten names, and in many cases more. Here the genealogy traces three generations, all the names of which are known already from the Safaitic corpus (although see the comment on the first name, ns^2l , above). After the genealogy comes the tribal affiliation, introduced by the formula d - $'l$. Here the tribe name is Tm , which is also a known tribe from the Safaitic corpus (e.g. HCH 130, WH 711, CSNS 633, etc.).

Narrative

The narrative content of the inscription opens with the verb phrase, *w nẓr 'l- dmšy*, “and he was on the look out for *Dmšy*”. The verb is interesting because it is a well attested verb, but only occurs one other time in the known corpus with the preposition 'l-; the verb *nẓr* usually takes an object without a preposition (LP 1263; ISB 90). The verb is also interesting because it has several forms, also appearing frequently as *w tnẓr*, and also as *tẓr* which demonstrates assimilation of the *n* in the t-stem (see Al-Jallad 2015, p. 132).¹ The other inscription containing *nẓr 'l-* is HaNSB 305. The name *Dmšy* is known as a personal name from three other inscriptions (SIJ 287; SIJ 823; SIAM 36) and now in this inscription; in only one of the four inscriptions is there a genealogy, so it is impossible to prove that they do or do not refer to the same person.

The following two clauses are supplementary to the narrative. The first is *b-ħms' m't frs'*, “with five hundred horses”. It is interesting to note that we do not find the number five hundred elsewhere in Safaitic except in this inscription. There are, however, a number of inscriptions which exhibit parallels to this:

- In C 320² the author writes *w s'rt m' 'b- h {b-} m't frs'*, “and he served with his father in a cavalry unit”.
- C 2076³ has *b- 'lfrgl w m't f[r]s'*, “with one thousand foot soldiers and {a cavalry unit}”.
- KRS 1468⁴ reads *w qšš b- m't frs'*, “and he tracked with a hundred horsemen”.

¹ “If the Safaitic forms are in fact to be interpreted as tG stems, then the *t* morpheme could reflect a */ta/-syllable, as in Gz *taqatla* < *taqatila, or a */it/- syllable, as in Aramaic and Egyptian Arabic, *eqtel* and *it'atal*, respectively. A clue may lie in the T-stem of the root *nẓr*, which is most often written *tẓr*, but has a rare by-form *tnẓr*. If these spellings reflect variation in the assimilation of the *n*/ in the same form, the none could posit vocalisation */tanṭera/=tnẓr and */tatṭera/=tẓr. There are by-form *ts²yq* (KRS124) of the common verb *ts²wq* ‘to long for’ supports the presence of an /i/ vowel following C2, which would have motivated the shift of *w* > *y*, */tašwiqa/ > */tašyeqa/, just as in *myt*. Thus, combining the evidence from these two forms, one could argue for the vocalisation */taCCeCa/. Moreover, the identification of *ts²wq* as a tG stem would then indicate that, unlike Aramaic, the in fixation of the morpheme in *s²tky* was not conditioned by the sibilant, but was truly a dialectal variable. It is, however, equally possible to take *tẓr* and *tnẓr* as evidence for variation between a *t*-infix and prefix – *tẓr* */ittatē ra/ < */intatē ra/ versus *tnẓr* */itnatē ra/ or */tan(a)tē ra/, respectively. This reconstruction can also account for the form *ts²yq*, */itšayeqa/ < */itšaweqa/” (Al-Jallad 2015, p. 132).

² C 320; **Transliteration** *l whblh bn 'hrb bn ykn d- 'l kkb w bh' brkt w bnq{l} w hrbt s'nt r'y 'l 'wd n'm'l 'bd w s'rt m' 'b- h {b-} m't frs'*. **Translation** By Whblh son of 'hrb son of Ykn of the lineage of Kkb and he rejoiced at Brkt because there was fresh herbage, and returned from a place of water the year the lineage of 'wd pastured the livestock of the lineage of 'bd; and he served with his father in a cavalry unit.

³ C 2076; **Transliteration** *l lṭfty g'd bn 'bṭn w s'rt 'l- {h}dq 'bgr b- 'lfrgl w m't f[r]s' w tnẓr h- s'my b- h- d'r} f h lt r'w}h w h b'ls'lm}{n}*. **Translation** By Lṭ slave boy of G'd son of 'bṭn and he served in a troop against the walled enclosure of 'bgr with one thousand foot soldiers and {a cavalry unit}; and he waited for the rains near this place so, O Lt, let there be relief, and O {B'ls'mn}....

⁴ KRS 1468; **Transliteration** *l mlk bn bls' bn ys'm'l bn š'd bn 's' w qšš b- m't frs' b'd 'l dḏf f h gddf s'lm' }* **Translation** By Mlk son of Bls' son of Ys'm'l son of Š'd son of 's' and he tracked with a hundred horsemen after the 'l Dḏf and so O Gddf may he be secure'.



Figure 4. The Safaitic inscription with the personal name 'mm

It could be that the author was on the lookout for Dmšy accompanied by five hundred riders, or five cavalry units. Of course, the syntax is not lucid and it might equally be possible that it is Dmšy who is coming with the horses.

The inscription employs a well-known Safaitic dating formula, namely, the pattern *s'nt* followed by the occurrence, which took place in that year (C 2577; LP 360; SIJ 705; WH 2113). In this case it is *s'nt ḥrb 'mm* “the year of the war of 'mm”. Given that this stone was discovered in the vicinity of the inscription which reads *l ḥrb bn 'mm*, “By Ḥrb son of 'mm”, it seems plausible to understand this as a personal name (see Figure 4)⁵.

The Historical Figure of *Dmšy*

As discussed above, the name *dmšy* appears in four Safaitic inscriptions, but unfortunately without enough evidence to shed much light on the identity of the person, or persons, referred to. There is also one occurrence of a *dmš* (WH 908) and one *dmšn* (WH 1964) in the known corpus; the name is clearly very rare in Safaitic and in no

⁵ Present location: Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.

way well known. Since only one inscription furnishes Dmşy with a genealogy, all these instances cannot be securely identified as references to the same person. On account of the relatively small number of references to him in the Safaitic inscriptions, it is impossible to say even whether he was an important character; naturally this is an argument *ex silentio*. Two, however, do make reference to a revolt (*mrd*) by a Dmşy who must be the same person. The first (SIJ 287) was found in Jawa (Jordan), and reads as follows:

Transliteration

l ḥr bn 's' bn ḥr d- 'l ms'kt w wld b- h- dr s'nt mrd mḥrb w s'nt mrd dmşy w ḥrş h- s²n' fh lt s'lm w mwgd

Translation

By Ḥr son of 's' son of Ḥr of the tribe of Ms'kt. He was born in this place [Jawa] the year of the rebellion of Mḥrb and the year of the rebellion of Dmşy. He is on the watch for the enemy, so, o Lt and Ds²r.[grant] security and [continued] existence.

The second inscription (SIJ 823) referring to the revolt of *Dmşy* is from Tell al-'abd in Jordan and reads as follows:

Transliteration

l mgd bn zd bn qdm bn mr' d- 'l dḥ w q(ş)ş b'd d(f) s'nt mrd dmşy lhtm(----) 's'lm f {}(----)

Translation

By Mgd son of Zd son of Qdm son of Mr' of the tribe of Dḥ and he followed after Dḥ the year of the revolt of Dmşy...

We may compare the localities where these inscriptions mentioning Dmşy have been found: Jawa, Tell al-'abd and now Wādī wa-Ġadīr Aşḥīm (unfortunately the provenance of the fourth example is unknown, since the rock has been moved to the Irbid Museum). It can be seen that these three places are all located in the Jordanian *Bādiya*, in relatively close proximity to each other.

There is a known Nabataean inscription mentioning a character called *dmşy* who has long been associated with this Dmşy of the Safaitic inscriptions (see, for example, Winnett 1973). This inscription (CIS II No. 287; JS I 1909: 224 No. 84) is from Ḥegrā (Medāin-Şāleh) and consists of only one line. It reads:



Figure 5. SIJ 823⁶



Figure 6. The Safaitic inscription bearing the name *Dmšy*, presently situated in the Irbid museum⁷

⁶ We would like to thank the OCIANA project for permission to use this image.

⁷ We would like to thank the OCIANA project for permission to use this image.

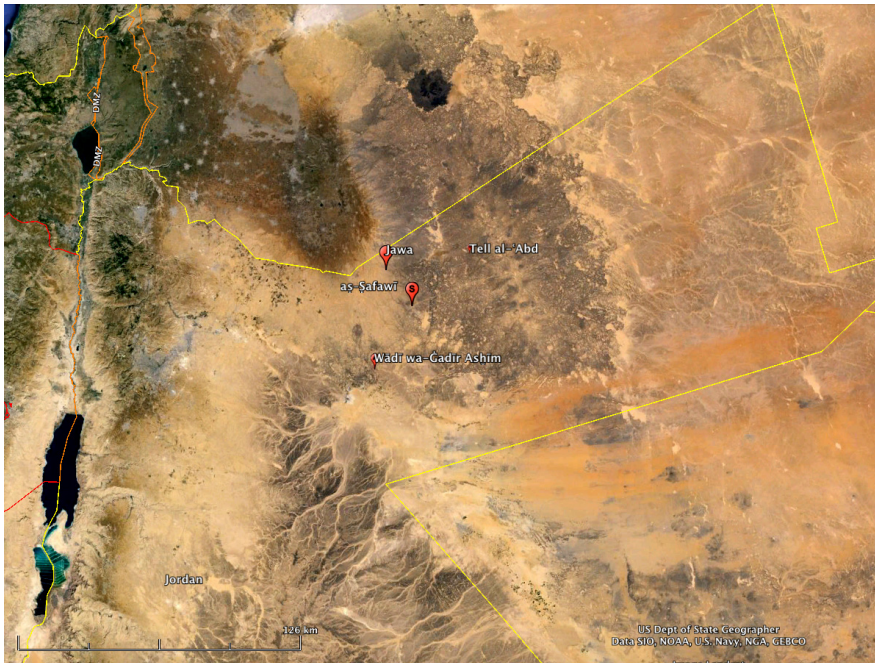


Figure 7. Map of Jordan, showing the location where the other two inscriptions were found

dkyr dmsy br rbyb 'l 'srtg' bṭb

“In memory of Dmsy, son of Rbyb 'l, the *strategos*, for good.”

It will be immediately noticed that the Nabataean inscriptions use the letter *s* (*samekh* / *semkath*) where the Safaitic has *ṣ*, but this is possible to reconcile since, as Winnett (1973, p. 55) writes, “the name DMSY is of Greek origin and Greek *sigma* might well be reproduced by *ṣ* in Safaitic and by *s* in Nabataean”. The name Winnett is referring to is the Greek Damasippos (hypocoristic of *dmsps*, Greek Δαμάσιππος), of which the Nabataean form Dmsy is an apparent hypocoristic. Hackl–Jenni–Schneider (2003, p. 342) suggest that the Dmsy of the Nabataean inscription is “wahrscheinlich identisch mit Damašī”, an assertion which is perhaps more indicative of the uncertainty than it is of the identification itself.

The Nabataean Dmsy was, as the above inscriptions show, the son of a *strategos* from Ḥegrā. His grandfather was the aforementioned Damasippos whose sons were Ganimu and Rabib 'el, the latter being the father of Damasi and a certain Maliku (see Winnett 1973, p. 55; Graf 1997, p. 199). Winnett’s hypothesis is that Dmsy revolted on account of his father overlooking him as a successor, in spite of his seniority, and promoting his younger brother Maliku as governor of Hegra in his place. This contention is based on the fact that JS 34nab refers to Maliku as *strategos*, but, as is clearly evident, the term is absent from the above memorial inscription to Dmsy.

Scholars have attempted to produce evidence connecting the apparent rebellion of Dmsy as recorded in the Safaitic examples with what can be reconstructed of

the narrative of Dmšy from the Nabataean sources. Al-Otaibi (2011, p. 91) remarks that “Damašî’s revolt was serious enough to be taken as a basis for dating in Nabataea (*snt mrd dmšy*)”. However, this reasoning is less convincing when one considers that the same dating formula in Safaitic usually references far more banal (although, in all likelihood, just as serious to the writers) occurrences, such as the arrival of rains or hyenas. Bowersock (1983, p. 156) cites a title, given to the last Nabataean king Rabbel II (70–106 CE, a contemporary of Dmšy), of *dy ’hyy wšyzb ’mh*, “he who brought life and deliverance to his people”; he suggests that this description is an open reference to the “crisis of his accession” (Ibid.), characterised by the rebellion of nomadic leaders such as Dmšy. Al-Otaibi (2011, p. 91) takes this even further, suggesting that it is a specific reference to the success of the former in putting down the revolt of Dmšy. As outlined by Graf (1997, p. 199), the Safaitic inscriptions give evidence of Dmšy being supported by nomadic tribes, the names of which are known from Safaitic inscriptions: Df, Ms’kt, Mh’rb. The evidence is not wholly compelling, however. If Dmšy was truly an important figure interacting on a large scale with the nomadic tribes, some of whom apparently carved Safaitic inscriptions, then why should there be so few references to him in the corpus?

The scene has therefore been reconstructed of Dmšy as an influential Nabataean, involving the nomadic tribes in the vicinity of southern Nabataea in the political affairs of the kingdom and even using them in a revolt which he started against the northern part of the kingdom. The implication is that the Nabataeans before Dmšy had also formed alliances with the desert nomads and that Dmšy incited them to join his rebellion. The Nabataean approach is summarised by Bowersock (1983, p. 156) as “a reasonable, if occasionally risky policy of using nomadic groups as allies of the government of the sedentary nation at the edge of the desert”.

Conclusion

The importance of this inscription lies in its being the fourth occurrence of the name Dmšy in Safaitic, and therefore sheds light on the so-called revolt of Dmšy as known from the other three instances. It could be the case that Dmšy came to the area, as this inscription suggests, with an entourage of five hundred riders; alternatively, it could merely be Dmšy with five hundred horses or, as we discussed, the horses could already have been at this location. The inscription cannot prove the theories already circulating in scholarly literature about the connection between Safaitic Dmšy and the Nabataean kingdom; it should, however, inform all future consideration of this topic as new evidence.

Sigla

- C Ryckmans (ed.) (1951)
 CIS *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars II Inscriptiones Aramaicas continens*. Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1889–1954.

CSNS	Clark (1979)
HCH	Harding (1953)
ISB	Oxtoby (1968)
JS	Jaussen – Savignac (1909)
KRS	Safaitic inscriptions recorded by G. M. H. King on the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey (now published in OCIANA).
LP	Littmann (1943)
OCIANA	The Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia Project at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford (http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/index.php)
SIAM	The Safaitic inscription in the Irbid Museum
SIJ	Winnett (1957)
WH	Winnett – Harding (1978)

References

- Al-Jallad, A. (2015): *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*. Leiden–Boston, Brill (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 80).
- Al-Manaser, A. (2008): *Ein Korpus neuer safaitischer Inschriften aus Jordanien*. Aachen, Shaker Verlag (Semitica et Semitohamitica Berolinensia / SSHB 10).
- Al-Otaibi, Fahad Mutlaq (2011): *From Nabataea to Roman Arabia: Acquisition or Conquest?* British Archaeological Reports (April 15, 2011).
- Bowersock, G. W. (1983): *Roman Arabia*. Cambridge, Mass.–London, Harvard University Press.
- Clark, V. A. (1979): A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan. Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Melbourne. Ann Arbor, MI, University Microfilms International.
- Graf, D. (1997): Qura 'Arabiyya and Provincia Arabia. In: Graf, D. (ed.): *Rome and the Arabian Frontire: from the Nabataeans to the Saracens*. Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 171–211.
- Hackl, U. – Jenni, H. – Schneider, C. (2003): *Quellen zur Geschichte der Nabatäer. Textsammlung mit Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Mit Beiträgen von D. Keller. Freiburg Schweiz, Universitätsverlag–Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus, 51).
- Harding, G. L. (1953): The Cairn of Hani'. *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* Vol. 2, pp. 8–56.
- Jaussen, A. – Savignac, M. R. (1909): Mission archéologique en Arabie. I. (Mars–Mai 1907) De Jérusalem au Hedjaz, Médain Saleh. [Reprinted: Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1997.] Paris, Leroux (Publications de la Société Française des Fouilles Archéologiques 2).
- Littmann, E. (1943): *Safaitic Inscriptions, Syria*. Leiden, Brill (Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–1905 and 1909. Division IV, Section C).
- Oxtoby, W. G. (1968): *Some Inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin*. New Haven, American Oriental Society (American Oriental Series 50).
- Ryckmans, G. (ed.) (1951): *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum: Pars Quinta, Inscriptiones Saracenicæ Continens: Tomus I, Fasciculus I, Inscriptiones Safaiticæ*. Paris, Imprimerie nationale.
- Winnett, F. V. (1957): *Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press (Near and Middle East Series 2).

- Winnett, F. V. (1973): The Revolt of Damaṣi: Safaitic and Nabataean Evidence. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* No. 211, pp. 54–57.
- Winnett, F. V. –Harding, G. L. (1978): *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press (Near and Middle East Series 9).
- Winnett, F. V. –Reed, W. L. (1970): *Ancient Records from North Arabia*. With contributions by J. T. Milik and J. Starcky. Toronto, University of Toronto Press (Near and Middle East Series 6).