

## **Inscriptions as a Historical Source for the Study of Ancient Jordan**

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The Study of the epigraphical heritage of ancient Jordan such as inscriptions, coins and monuments is very important in understanding the history, the civilization and the culture of human race of this region. Not a long time ago this important source has been neglected. More negatively, it is not yet recognized in Jordan as a historical source. Mainly as a result of the meagerness of data and information. This emphasizes the enormous challenge that scholars studying Jordan are facing.

The major sources of the cultural history of Jordan are represented in various epigraphical types, like Moabite, Aramaic, Ammonite, Nabataean, and old North Arabian inscriptions, Greek and Latin corpuses, Islamic inscriptions, and the Bible, are also considered as references. This variety of sources extends from the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This record of inscriptions confirms the continuity of history and civilizations in Jordan.

Fortunately, archaeologists and epigraphists have explored and studied the remains and the inscriptions of Jordan over the last three centuries, trying to reveal the mystery of Jordan. The works have been so systematic and comprehensive in scope, they could be well-used for the study of the history of Jordan.

One of the pioneering discoveries is the Moabite Mesha<sup>c</sup> stone. The discovery revealed much of the vagueness about this era of ancient Jordan. The inscription of the stone refers to a story mentioned in the Old Testament. It records the war of Mesha<sup>c</sup> against <sup>c</sup>Amri king of Israel. From the inscription it seems that the population of Moab obtained their deliverance after the forty years of Israelite oppression, and they were just founding their state, and their social life. They were also restoring the cities that were destroyed during the protracted wars. In fact they retained power among the kingdoms around. This essential inscription and others document a certain era of Jordan, and show its importance in the ancient world.

Another important inscription discovered in Jordan is the Aramaic text from Deir <sup>c</sup>Alla, dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which shows another side of ancient Jordan. It reveals some religious thought in the Southern Levant during the time of 750-850 B.C. The archaeological site itself, and the destruction that it suffered gives some indications to the earthquake (Lipinski 1997: 2) attested in the Old Testament (see Amos 1<sup>1</sup>).

In addition, cylinder stamps were discovered during the excavation of Amman Old Airport in 1955. The stamps belong to the Late Bronze Age. On one of them appears an Akkadian inscription. This shows that there was an Akkadian settlement in Jordan.

However, we are slightly better informed regarding the history of Jordan in the Iron Age (1200-539 B.C.) The findings of the excavations in Tell Siran at the site of the University of Jordan confirm that Ammonites had settled this region. The most clear and important evidence found is a bronze bottle with an inscription on it, which is dated to 720-650 B.C. This inscription, together with two human statues inscriptions mentioned the names of Ammonite kings; (*„azaq`il, cAmi Nadab and his son*). Those names were not mentioned in the Bible. The inscriptions on the bottle mentions also other aspects of the Ammonite kingdom such as agriculture; which in a way shows the important role played by agriculture in the development and flourishing of the Ammonite kingdom (Thompson 1973: 7; Thompson and Zayadine 1973: 9; Kfouf 1995: 53-54).

In the district of Jabal al-Qal<sup>c</sup>ah, there were some archaeological discoveries through the excavation conducted in 1973. We mention here two human statues dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC with an Ammonite text incised on it (Bordbreuil 1973: 37-39). It mentioned personal names, which could be considered as royal Ammonite names (see Kfouf 1995: 42). It has been suggested that these statues simulated to statues from Nimrud, and to the Phonation's dated to the Second Iron Age. However, it seems likely that the Ammonite model was unusual during the Second Iron Age at the district of Jabal al- Qal<sup>c</sup>ah (Zayadine 1973: 27-34).

The Nabataeans' earliest settlements were in the southern Jordan and Palestine, though they may ultimately have come from the east, possibly from the marginal areas to the north of modern Saudi Arabia, or they could be simply a later transformation of the earlier people of southern Jordan, the Edomites. Their earliest account for the Nabataeans as a group goes back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. However, Nabataean inscriptions begin to play an important part in Jordan's historical reconstruction only from the beginnings of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. The earliest of these inscriptions at Petra comes from the first year of Obodas I. The inscription hold a significant importance because it helped the historians to reconstruct a table of Nabataean Kings (Healey 1993: 14-15, 18-19).

As it is known, Nabataeans made a strategic alliance with Hyrcanus II 63-40 B.C. in the hope of regaining Jewish-held Nabataean lands to the east of Jordan (Healey 1993: 20).

Nabataean inscriptions found in Petra tells about activities in their life such as the social law, family affairs, heritage, feast festival, and the ritual rite recitations which were held by Petra citizens on the 25<sup>th</sup> January in the temple of ʕu-eā-Āaræh (al-Muheisen 1996: 20). The Nabataean inscriptions also inform us about the demography of the Nabataean state such as non-Nabataean people who lived there, especially in Petra. This is obvious through the very ornate classical tomb, which carries a Latin inscription to a Roman officer, Sextius Florentinus, who has been guessed to be an officer of the time of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius (Kennedy 1925: 76).

The Greek Petra Archives are specific records of the daily life in southern Jordan at the time of the Pre-Islamic era, and this is very rare occurrence. The archives mention the names of the people who lived there, their belief and religion, their origin and their relations to each others. The Archives also record the buildings including names, dates and the use of these buildings (al-Ghul 2002). These great archives have survived as carbonized case (partially burnt) after a fire incidence that burnt the church where the archives were found. The church entitled “*Sayidatunæ al-Mubæraaka wal-Muqaddasa Maryam Umm al-Llæh al-Bahiya al-ʕArææ`Abad<sup>m</sup> fñ al-Petra*” at Petra lies in the southern side of the tomb of Jmei<sup>c</sup>æn Mountain in the middle of Wædñ Musæ. It was built in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and rebuilt at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> A.D. (al-Ghul 2002: 4).

It is not possible for us to cement an enduring life in Petra unless we join together what Petra archives tell. On this ground the epigraphists must justly make it their paramount duty to transfer the archives as telling a vital history of Petra life. Since the principal benefit which ancient Jordan can reap from the archives was the end of the belief that Petra became isolated from life after the Roman had captured it in 106 A.D (al-Ghul 2002: 4).

The Greek and Latin inscriptions are also found over the area of Jordan, mainly in Karak, Madaba, Jerash and Umm-al-Jimal represent the classical period, from Hellenistic up to Islamic period. They are still standing forth, and are very significant in revealing much of the classical heritage in the fields of architecture, culture and clerical affairs.

Besides the Greek and Latin inscriptions, Ancient North Arabian inscriptions are also found in Jordan. They are mostly classified as memorial inscriptions, which are the most abundant in Jordan. Some of these inscriptions record incidents of escaping from the enemy or from the Roman army, or incidents of attacking of the neighboring groups. Many other events were registered by the Safaitic tribes such as their struggle with the Jews *snt nzz `l yhd* (SIJ 688).),

Winnett attempted to relate this passage with a certain war that happened in 12 BC between the Arabs of Trachonites and Herod the Great. Another inscription witnesses the history fact: *lm̄yr bn m...lm̄ bn <sup>c</sup>bd bn m[<sup>c</sup>]z b[n] m̄a[<sup>c</sup>r] bn s( )wd w...(ll) hdr snt wqr hsfr [w]b<sup>c</sup>lsm[n slm] mb`s `l yhd* "...[and] *B<sup>c</sup>lsmn* grant security from harm of the people of the Jews" (CIS 1270). It seems that the Arabs of the Syrian Desert (includes Jordan) were under the threat of the Jews during the regime of Herod the Great 37-4 B.C.(see Clark 1979: 90); for that the Safaities were not particularly impressed with their neighbors: the Jews; all this was revealed through the Safaitic inscriptions. Another inscription refers to a rebellion by the tribe of <sup>c</sup>w<sup>z</sup> against the Romans, in the year when the Persians came to Boḫra: *w-mrd <sup>c</sup>l rm snt `ty hm̄y bḫry* "and he rebelled against *Roman* the year the Persian came to Boḫra. (SIJ 78) dated to the first century B.C.

Another evidence of a considerable import is *snt ...rb hm̄y `l rm bbḫr* (CIS 4448), it refers to the war between Parthians and Romans (see Clark 1979: 86, 89). Other inscriptions claim that Safaities were involved with *Rm* (Romans), such as: LP 57: *wngy mn rm* "and he escaped from *Rm*. SIJ 351: *<sup>c</sup>gl yt mn rm* "he hurried, coming from *Rm*. LP 709: *wḫrḫ `l rm* "he killed the Romans. CSNS 424: *mrd <sup>c</sup>l `l rm f-h-b<sup>c</sup>lsmn `lh s<sup>cc</sup> slm* "and he rebelled against the Romans, and so O, *B<sup>c</sup>lsmn*, god of *S<sup>n</sup>* [grant] security. LP 435: *snt wsq `lqdm `l rm* "the year *`l qdm* attacked against the Romans". Moreover, we have an inscription -from outside Jordan- from *Wædñ as-S<sup>f</sup>* Southern Syria mentions a rebellion against Laḫminians and the person who inscribed the writings; he attacked and carried out a raid against them: <sup>c</sup>Aloulou 351: *l-gmm bn `nt w-mrd <sup>c</sup>l `ḫnyn w-ḫrq h-msrt f-ngy m-...rb w-`q<sup>z</sup>w-dbr `ḫnyn b-h-mdnt*.

Some of the Safaitic inscriptions refer to the Nabataean wars that occurred in the region; which could give a hint for nomadic tribes were attempting to play a role in the region; for example, *lwjdt bn ønn bn mhr wøzz snt ...rb nbf fhy<sup>z</sup>* "... and he fought in the year of the Nabataean war" (WH 2113) the inscription shows the danger of the foreigners at the time. Another inscription refers to invasion of Petra: *l<sup>n</sup><sup>c</sup>m bn q...ā wænm snt ...rb nbf* "... and he took booty in the year of the Nabataean war" (CIS 3680). As known, the Romans took over the Nabataean capital 'Petra' in 106 A.D. This possibly could mean that the Nabataean war is the revolt of Damaḫñ against Rb`l II in 71 A.D., (Winnett and Harding 1978: 325, see 7; Clark 1979: 90).

Thus understanding the heritage of the region, which is presented through social and environmental organizations, requires study archaeological remains and inscriptions. These inscriptions provide valuable information about the lives of people in Jordan throughout the history, such as their organized religion, trade and aspects of their cultures.

The study of inscriptions as a source of Jordan's history could be the first step towards making inscriptions a tourist attraction. This requires illuminating the inscriptions as a basic element in the study of the history, otherwise, epigraphists' knowledge will become "as poor as a church mouse". Achieving this would require Archaeology and Cultural establishments to "go from door to door" trying to get the scholars in the field of epigraphy to study, analyze and examine the inscriptions in terms of history, tourism, heritage and environment. In addition to that, the presence of epigraphy in archaeological and heritage museums would be required.

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### Abbreviations

<sup>c</sup> Aloulou	Gh. <sup>c</sup> Aloulou, <i>dirʿasatu noqouš ʿafawiyyah ʿadīdah min Wʿadī as-Syʿ ʿanoub Souriyah</i> , 1996.
CIS	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> , pars v, Safaitic Inscriptions (Paris, 1950-1).
CSNS	V. Clark, V. 1979, <i>A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions From Jordan</i> , Department of Middle Eastern Studies, (University of Melbourne. 1979).
HCH	G.L. Harding, The Cairns of Hani`. ( <i>ADAJ</i> II 1953).
LP	E. Littmann, <i>Safaitic Inscriptions</i> (Leiden: Brill, 1943).
SIJ	F. V. Winnet, <i>Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan</i> (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1957).

WH F. Winnett, and I. Harding, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press.1978).

WH F. Winnett, and L. Harding, 1978, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns*, (Toronto, University of Torontto Press, 1978).