A Study of New Discovered Thamudic E Inscriptions from Ras el-Naqab Southeast Jordan

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Abstract

This paper includes a philological treatment of newly discovered Thamudic E inscriptions from al-Mrayghah village in the region of Ras el-Naqab southeast Jordan. These texts reflect some cultural patterns of the settlers of that region until the fourth or fifth century AD.*

Introduction

The northern part of Ras el-Naqab was continuously inhabited in the Neolithic period, the Iron Age and the classical eras: Nabataean, Roman and Byzantine periods. The area is relatively high and overlooks the surroundings. The abundance of flat areas and agricultural terraces above the highlands surrounding it, together with the existence of water resources like ‘Ain Jammam spring and ‘Ain Abu Nsour spring (near the area of the inscriptions) led to sedentary life during successive historical periods.

The area was located along the famous Trajan Road (via nova Trajana) connecting Bosra esh-Sham, Egypt, and Palestine with the Arabian Peninsula, in particular in the Nabataean, Roman and contemporary periods when

* I would like to thank Dr Sultan al-Maani for allowing me to publish this group of inscriptions from the inscriptions that he collected during his fieldwork in the region in 1996–97.
the North Arabian tribes (Thamudians) chose to live in Wadi Rum, al-
Hisma Desert and Ras el-Naqab as a natural geographical extension of these
areas.¹

Since these people intensively inhabited these areas, abundant useful
documents, including Thamudic E inscriptions, were left on the stones and
rocks of the desert. These were useful in recording some of the most impor-
tant events in history.

During the recent fieldwork, some 60 inscriptions were collected from
this area. In this paper I am going to publish 10 of them. According to the
general features of the script, these inscriptions were written in Thamudic
script. This kind is classified as Thamudic E script,² or South Safaitic script.³

These inscriptions are inscribed on stones of different sizes and scat-
tered over a district near ravines. Two major recent studies have been con-
ducted concerning these inscriptions: G. King published newly discovered
Thamudic E inscriptions from southern Jordan in her doctoral dissertation
in 1990;⁴ R. Harahsheh and M. Waheeb published 16 inscriptions from
this area in the Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan in 2003.⁵

However, their translations need some modifications.

Stone 1:

This stone carries one inscription, inscribed on a smooth surface. It is
intact and well readable. There is an animal drawing, resembling a camel;
it shows the rudimentary manner of the people’s art in that period.

Inscription nº 1

Transliteration: l k l bn ˆmtczz
Translation: By k l son of ˆmtczz

Comments:

$k{l}$ is a masculine personal name, hereafter (n.p. m.), “like the god ˆl,” a
singular personal name initialed with the preposition $k$, and ˆl is the common
Semitic deity. This masculine personal name seems unattested in Thamudic

¹ Harahsheh and Waheeb 2003, p. 25.
² Winnett 1937, p. 42; King 1990, p. 11.
⁴ King 1990.
⁵ Harahsheh and Waheeb 2003, pp. 25–32.
or other ancient North Arabian inscriptions. On the other hand, there are personal names attested in the Safaitic inscriptions in which the theophoric element is preceded by a preposition, e.g. b’l,6 as well as the form b’ilh.7 Cf. also b’l in Qatabanian.8

’mţzz (n.p. m.): This masculine name is in a feminine form and meaning “maidservant of the goddess ’zz”; furthermore, it could be related to the epithet “mighty.” This theophoric personal name is hitherto unattested in Thamudic. The first element ’mt is known in Thamudic as a personal name,9 cf. also ’mtmd and ’mty’n10 and ’mţzz in Libyanite as ’mţzh and ’mthvţzt.11 Both ’mt,12 and ’zz13 are attested in Safaitic too. They are also attested in the South Arabian as ’mţzn in Sabaic,14 ’mţm in Minaen,15 and ’mt, ’mtl and ’mtm in Qatabanian.16 Here, the three radicals of the goddess name are associated with the well-known Arabic goddess al-’Uzza.17

Stone 2:

There are three inscriptions on the same basalt stone: the first was inscribed using a boustrophedon method, the second was inscribed in a semi-circular shape and the third was inscribed in two parallel lines.

Inscription n° 2 (semi-circular)

Transliteration: l ’mr bn fyt
Translation: By ’mr son of fyt

Comments:

’mr: (n.p. m.): This personal name is derived from the root ’-m-r that is related to life, long life, asking for long life.18 It is a well-known Semitic
personal name, is attested in Thamudic as ‘mr\(^9\) as well as in other North Arabian inscriptions,\(^{20}\) as ‘mrn in Sabaic,\(^{21}\) ‘mrt in Minean,\(^{22}\) ‘mrm and ‘mrt in Qatabanian,\(^{23}\) ‘mr in Liybanite,\(^{24}\) ‘mr’ and ‘mrw in Nabataean,\(^{25}\) ‘mr, ‘mr’ and ‘mrw in Palmyrene,\(^{26}\) and ‘Umr, “life,” in Arabic.\(^{27}\) It is also mentioned as Αμρος in Greek inscriptions from Umm al-Jimal north east of Jordan.\(^{28}\)

**fyty** (n.p. m. with feminine suffix –t), “young,” is attested as *fyty* in Talmudic,\(^{29}\) *fy* in Safaitic,\(^{30}\) also *h-fy* “the youth”,\(^{31}\) and *fytr* in Sabai.\(^{32}\)

The third son of Noah was *yēpet* and *pātūʿel* is the father of the prophet Joel,\(^{33}\) *pty* in Ge’ez and in Ugaritic could be compared with Arabic *fatiya*.\(^{34}\)

**Inscription no 3**

**Transliteration:** l kms bn ykr’l

**Translation:** BY kms son of ykr’l

**Comments:**

**kms** (n.p. m.) is attested as *kms* in Thamudic,\(^{35}\) and *kms* in Safaitic,\(^{36}\) *kms* “humiliated, crush” in Sabai.\(^{37}\)

*Tāg al-ʿArus mentions al-ʾkmūs as Arabic slang from Syriac *kaymūs*, “mish-mash.”\(^{38}\) The word *kmus*, “to lead fade or languish,” is attested in Syriac.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{9}\) King 1990, p. 530.

\(^{20}\) Harding 1971, p. 436.

\(^{21}\) Abdallah 1975, p. 78.

\(^{22}\) Al-Said 1995, p. 141.

\(^{23}\) Hayajneh 1998, p. 199.

\(^{24}\) Al-Ansary 1966, p. 96.


\(^{26}\) Stark 1971, p. 106.


\(^{28}\) Al-Qudrah 2001, p. 52.

\(^{29}\) King 1990, p. 304 (nº 39).


\(^{31}\) Harding 1971, p. 462.


\(^{34}\) Leslau 1987, p. 171.

\(^{35}\) King 1990, p. 416 (nº 535).


\(^{37}\) Beeston *et al.* 1982, p. 78.


\(^{39}\) Payne-Smith 1985, p. 217.
The same usage is spread in the local dialect through the term kāmis, “lifeless face, fade color.”

*ykr* (n.p. m.) is a verbal theophoric personal name consisting of the initial element ykr and the deity ʾl. This name is new in Thamudic. ykr is an imperfect form from the Arabic root *k-r-w* “rend, purchase,”⁴⁰ and from karā(h), “to get by trade, buying and purchase,” in Hebrew⁴¹. However, it could be from the root *k-r-r* “to go back.”

**Inscription no 4**

**Transliteration:** ʿrʿr bn mqmʾl

**Translation:** By ʿrʿr son of mqmʾl

**Comments:**

ʿrʿr (n.p. m.) “Juniper tree, prickly cedar” is for the first time attested in the North Arabian inscriptions.

mqmʾl (n.p. m.) “Place of ʾl, (or) the standing of ʾl,” is a theophoric personal name consisting of the initial element mqm and the deity ʾl. It is mentioned as mqmʾl in Talmudic,⁴² in Safaitic⁴³ and in Nabataean.⁴⁴

Etymologically, the first element mqm is derived from the root *q-w-m* and it could be equivalent to the Arabic maqām, “place, situation,” or muqīm, “rank, standing.”⁴⁵

**Stone 3:**

This stone has one incomplete inscription. The first character of the personal name was inscribed as a semi-half circle, so it is preferred to read it as the “mīm”. The letter “nūn” is as full closed circle.

**Inscription no 5**

**Transliteration:** (l)mrt bn w…

**Translation:** (By) mrt son of w…

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⁴² King 1990, p. 283 (n° 133).
⁴³ Harding 1971, p. 560.
⁴⁵ Al-Zabidi 1994, vol. 17, p. 545 (*qwm*).
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Comments:

mrt (n.p. m.) is attested in Thamudic, Safaitic and Sabaic.46 mrt is also mentioned as a feminine name in Sabaic.47

Stone 4:

The reading of the inscription is certain, though a character of the letter “dāl” of the first personal name is unusual compared to the third one. The “ʿain” was represented as a small circle, in contrast to the letter “gim” that is formed as a big circle.

Inscription no 6

Transliteration: lʿd bn ʿlm bn ḍgn bn kml
Translation: By ʿd son of ḍgn son of Kml

Comments:

ʿd (n.p. m.) is attested in Thamudic and Safaitic, dʿd as a tribal name in Minaean,48 but as a theophoric personal name, ʿdʿl, in Sabaic and Minaean only.49 ʿd is also mentioned as ʿlḏʿs and ʿzḏʿs, a Semitic personal name, in Greek inscriptions from Umm al-Jimal.50 ʿlm (n.p. m.) occurred in Thamudic, Safaitic, Sabaic and Liḥyanite,51 and ʿlmn in Sabaic and Minaean.51 In Arabic, it is derived from the root ṣ-l-m.53 ʿḏgn (n.p. m.) is a masculine personal name from the root ḍ-g-n,54 in Northwest Semitic, “grain (of cereals).”56 It is also mentioned in Hebrew as a divine name ḍʿgm.56

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46 Harding 1971, p. 538; Al-Theeb 2000a, n° 1; Abdallah 1975, p. 88; Iskoubi 2007, p. 471 (n° 270).
50 Al-Qudrah 2001, p. 38.
51 Harding 1971, p. 432; King 1990, p. 375 (n° 329).
kml (n.p. m.), “perfect,” is mentioned as a well-known personal name in Thamudic, Safaitic and Qatabanian,⁵⁷ kmlwm in Sabaic.⁵⁸

Stone 5:

The left upper side of “pâ” was an incomplete closed circle, the letter “tâ” was raised up out of the inscription level.

Inscription no 7

Transliteration: lhz̄yt bn tm`l
Translation: By lhz̄yt son of tm`l

Comments:

lhz̄yt (n.p. m.) is a personal name mentioned in Thamudic and Safaitic.⁵⁹ It is also attested as lhz̄ and lhz̄l in Safaitic,⁶⁰ and lhz̄m in Qatabanian.⁶¹ We have evidence in Aramaic for the masculine name Ḫez’yôn, “vision,” the ancestor of Benhadad, king of Aram, and Ḥz̄h’ēl, “Ēl sees” and Ḥz̄i’ēl, “vision of Ēl,” as theophoric personal name.⁶² It could be equivalent to the Arabic personal name al-Ḥāzi, “the priest,”⁶³ from the root ḥ-z-y, “to divine, perceive with the inner vision, to foretell.”⁶⁴ lhz̄yt may be the other form of lhz (see inscription no 9 in this article), and it is common in Northwest Semitic lhz̄y, “to see; seer, prophet,”⁶⁵ in Hebrew Ḫāzā(h), “see, behold.”⁶⁶ tm`l (n.p. m.) is a theophoric masculine personal name that consists of the initial element tm “slave, servant” and the common Semitic deity ’l. It occurs commonly in Thamudic and Safaitic,⁶⁷ tymlt in South Arabic,⁶⁸ tym`lhy in Nabataean,⁶⁹ tymlt in Palmyrene,⁷⁰ and tymlt in Hatra.⁷¹ It also occurs as a

⁵⁸ Sholan 1990, p. 128.
⁵⁹ King 1990, p. 244 (n° 318); Harding 1971, p. 188.
⁶⁰ Ryckmans 1950–1951, 1065; Hazim 1986, p. 27.
⁶² Brown et al. 1974, p. 303; Maraqten 1988, p. 163.
⁷⁰ Stark 1971, p. 117.
tribal name in Safaitic. In addition, Θξυμαλαξζ is a Semitic personal name in Greek inscriptions from Umm al-Jimal north east of Jordan.

Stone 6:

This stone carries only one readable inscription.

Inscription no 8

Transliteration: lsrl
Translation: By sr'l

Comments:

sr'l (n.p. m.) is a theophoric personal name which is composed of the initial element sr and the common deity l. It is probably attested in Thamudic in a short form as srl. It can be compared with šr'l'ly and šr'l'hy in the Nabataean inscriptions. The first element sr appears in Thamudic and Safaitic, as well as sr and sry in Palmyrene.

The element sr probably originated from an Assyrian root š-r-r, šarru, "king," which is used as a title for the deity in the middle Assyrian period. The analogous name is attested in Assyrian as šar-ilān-ilīa and šar-ištar. In Hebrew šr means “chief, official, prince”; in Arabic, sîr “the best.” It is also mentioned as Σξυμαλαξζ, a Semitic personal name, in Greek inscriptions from Al-Karak, south of Jordan.

Stone 7:

This stone carries two inscriptions; one of them, no 9, was inscribed in two lines. The letters were not inscribed in the same way; some are thicker than the others.

73 Al-Qudrah 2001, p. 100.
74 Iskoubi 2007, p. 269 (n° 146).
75 Al-Khraysheh 1986, pp. 184, 185.
76 Harding 1971, p. 315; King 1990, p. 283 (n° 133).
77 Stark 1971, p. 102.
79 Fowler 1988, p. 244.
80 Tallqvist 1966, p. 216.
83 Al-Qudrah 2001, p. 178.
Inscription no 9

Transliteration: lhn’lh bn hz
Translation: By lhnl’son of hz

Comments:

lhnl’ (n.p. m.), “gift of god,” is a masculine theophoric personal name consisting of the initial element lh, “gift; to give; pleasant,” and the deity h. This name is common in Safaitic, Talmudic, and in Libyane.84 lhnl’ is also mentioned as wβερλνος, a Semitic personal name, in Greek inscriptions from Al-Mafraq, northeast of Jordan.85

hz: For this name, see hzvt (inscription no 7).

Inscription no 10

Transliteration: lhn’h bn yns
Translation: By lhnl’son of yns

Comments:

lhnl’h (n.p. m.) is a masculine personal name derived from the root h-n-’. This form is new in Thamudic. However, it is attested in Liyanite,87 therefore it could be a variant form of lhnl’, which is frequent in North Arabia.88

The name hnyt occurs in Talmudic,89 lhnl’ in Safaitic90 and in Liyanite,91 lhnl’y in Palmyrene,92 and hny in Hatra.93 In Old South Arabian: lhnl’ in Minaean94 and Qatabanian.95 Hâni’ in Arabic.96 It is also mentioned as wβερλνος in Greek inscriptions from Umm al-Jimal, northeast of Jordan.97

85 Abu al-Hasan 1997, p. 298 (n° 115).
86 Al-Qudrah 2001, p. 53.
89 Van den Branden 1950, p. 450 (Jsa 655).
92 Stark 1971, p. 84.
93 Abbadi 1983, p. 100.
96 Ibn Durayd 1979, p. 364.
Another example of a personal name ending with –h as a variant of –t, ‘udh and ‘udt. See bn’lh, Photo 10: inscription 10

yns (n.p. m.) is mentioned in Thamudic as ’ns. It can be read as Yūnīs and Yūnūs in Arabic. This name could also be the equivalent to the Greek Ιωάννης.

Conclusion

This study aimed to publish ten new Thamudic inscriptions written in the so-called Thamudic E script. This shape of script was known in the region of south and southeast Jordan and north and northwest Saudi Arabia. These inscriptions included personal names representing the name of the person, his father and sometimes his grandfather and the tribe. Some of these names were theophoric compounds like srʾl, bnʾlh and mtʾzz. The study reveals some new personal names like kʾl, mtʾzz, ykrʾl, ’rʾr, ’dgn, srʾl, bnʾlh and yns. Moreover, it has figured out more information about the linguistic phenomena and shapes of the script. These inscriptions together with the new personal names are considered a useful addition to the corpus of Pre-Islamic North Arabian inscriptions in general.

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