New Thamudic Inscriptions from Al-Jafr Region in the Southeast Jordan

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Abstract
This paper is an analytical study of ten new Thamudic inscriptions written in the so-called Thamudic E script, collected by the authors during a survey in the region of al-Jafr (southeast Jordan). The study aims at analyzing the inscriptions, meanings and structure of the words and the proper nouns contained therein. This group of inscriptions emphasizes stating some new personal names mentioned in Thamudic inscriptions.

Keywords
al-Jaf/al-Gaf, inscriptions, Southeast Jordan, Theophoric, Thamudic, Safaitic, Lihyanite, Nabataean, Palmyrene

Résumé
Cet article contient une étude analytique de dix nouvelles inscriptions thamoudéennes, notées en graphie "thamoudéen E", rassemblées par les auteurs au cours d’une exploration dans la région d’al-Jaf (sud-est de la Jordanie). L’étude se propose d’analyser les inscriptions, les sens et les structures des mots et noms propres qui y figurent. Ce groupe d’inscriptions met en relief de nouveau noms personnels mentionnés dans les inscriptions thamoudéennes.

Mots clés
al-Jaf/al-Gaf, inscriptions, sud-est de la Jordanie, théophorique, thamoudéen, safaitique, lihya­nite, nabatéen, palmyrénien

Geography and History of the Site

The region of al-Jaf contains a number of valleys connected to each other on one side and to Wādī l-Sarḥān, the main valley in the region, on the other side. These valleys expand through the border lines between the north of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Among these valleys is Wādī Samarmada, where the inscriptions of this study were found.

It is worth noting that the region under study has been settled since the Stone Ages. Stone tools frequently used by human searching for food were
found in the region of oases, such as al-Jafr Oasis. The settlement region is characterized by its fertility. Many cairns contain inscriptions were founded in the edges of the valley.¹

The region of al-Jafr is one of the sites of Thamudic people who lived in the south and southeast Jordan (in al Hismā, Wādī Rūm, al-Ṣafīr, Ra’s al-Naqāb, Bāyir and northeast of Wādī l-Sarḥān) and in the north and northwest of Saudi Arabia (in al-Ḥiǧr, Tābūk and Taymā).

Many cairns of stones expand in the region and contain Thamudic inscriptions correspond to the so-called Thamudic E which is dated back to the second century BCE and continue to the fourth century CE.²

**Inscriptions of the Study**

The inscriptions of this study were discovered and personally copied by the authors during a recent survey in al-Jafr region. They are presented in this article in the form of transcription, translation, analysis and comparing the vocabularies with their counterparts in other Semitic languages.

**Inscription No 1**

**Transcription:** l whblh bn d . .

**Translation:** By whblh son of d . .

**Comments:** The inscription is written on a broken and heavily weathered rock, the end of the inscription which contains the patronymic of the author is broken down. The letters are relatively clear and as result it was properly read.


**whblh:** (personal name, masculine) "gift of the God", it is a theophoric compound personal name consisting of the name *whb* "gift, grant", and the theophoric element *lh* "God". This name is particularly common in Thamudic, Safaitic and Lihyanite.\(^3\) It is also mentioned as *wbllhy* in Nabataean,\(^4\) and *wbllt* in Palmyrene.\(^5\) This personal name is the equivalent of the Arabic Wahb Allāh "gift of God". The Greek cognate name is ὑαβάλλας.\(^6\)

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**Inscription No 2**

**Transcription:** l mqm bn mqmʾ l ʾwwgm l ʿ l

**Translation:** By mqm son of mqmʾ, and he grieved for ʾ l...

**Comments:** This inscription was written following the so called boustrophedon way. It consists of three lines crudely executed in large pecked out letter, apparently, with a wide sharp tool. The end of the inscription is mutilated thus we lose some of its letters.

**mqm:** (personal name, masculine), is particularly common in Thamudic as well as in Safaitic.\(^7\) It is also mentioned as *mqmwy* in Nabataean,\(^8\) *mqym* and

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\(^3\) Gerald L. Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, Toronto, University of Toronto ("Near and Middle East Series", 8), 1971, p. 652-3.


\(^7\) Harding, *Index*, p. 560.

\(^8\) Avraham Negev, *Nabatean*, p. 41, no 679a.
mqymw in Palmyrene. This name is the equivalent of the Arabic Muqim “who makes to stand”. The Greek cognate name is Ἄθικος and Μοκιμος.

mqm : (personal name, masculine) “standing of ʾl, or Place of ʾl”. This name is frequently attested in Thamudic, Safaitic and in Nabataean.

w wǧm: w is a conjunction that means “and”; wǧm (verb, 3rd personal masculine), this verb is well known in Thamudic and Safaitic funeral and commemoratives inscriptions. It is the equivalent of the Arabic form wağama “to grieve, mourn, to be painful”.

ʾl: (preposition) “on, for, toward”.

Inscription N° 3
Transcription: ʾs b mʾrb
Translation: By ʾs son of Mʾrb

9 Stark, Palmyrene, p. 35, 96.
13 Harding, Index, p. 560.
14 Negev, Nabataean, p. 41, n° 681.
Comments: This inscription contains only one line written from left-side to right-side, it is carved in the middle of a well conserved sand stone.

ʾs: (personal name, masculine). It could be the equivalent of the Arabic aws “give, gift”. It is well known in Thamudic and Safaitic in its singular form “ʾs” and composite form.18

bn: (noun, singular, masculine), it is a common Semitic noun “son of”.

mrb: (personal name, masculine), it has not been found before in Thamudic. We can compare it with the Arabic personal name márib which means “Articulate, fluent”; name derived from the verb ‘araba. It has been found once before in Safaitic,19 and it is also occur in Nabataean.20

Inscription No 4

Transcription: l dr bn hr

Translation: By dr son of hr

Comments: This inscription is on triangle a broken rock, its end is missing. We can read clearly the author’s name and his patronymic, but the rock has been broken immediately above the end of the text we lose the last part of the text.

dr: (personal name, masculine) could be the equivalent of the Arabic durr “Jewel, copious” from the verb darra “to shine brightly, to flow abundantly”.21 It is attested in Thamudic22 as well as in Safaitic.23 It is also mentioned as theophoric compound personal name drʾl in Safaitic.24

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17 Harding, Index, p. 40.
18 See ʾb’s, ʾsʾlʾsʾḥ in Harding, Index, p. 40.
19 Willet and Harding, Inscriptions, n° 1497.
20 Negev, Nabatean, p. 41.
21 Al-Zubaydi, Tāq, vol. 6, p. 396 (darra).
22 King, Thamudic E, p. 234, n° 273; p. 247, n° 333.
23 Harding, Index, p. 238.
24 Ibid., p. 238.
hr: (personal name, masculine) is well known in Thamudic, Safaitic and Lihiyanite. It is mentioned as hrw in Nabataean, and hr in Palmyrene. It could be the equivalent of the Arabic hurr “free, unrestricted”.

Inscription No 5
Transcription: l rḏm bn zṟ bn ’sd wwg GM 1 ̣r w ́l ’bh
Translation: By rḏm son of zṟ son of ’sd, and he grieved for hr and for his father.
Comments: This commemorative inscription written on a rectangular rock and contains two texts which were written in a small and tight letters, but its reading is fairly certain.
rḏm: (personal name, masculine) hitherto unattested neither in Thamudic nor in other North Arabian Inscriptions. We can compare it with the Arabic rḏm and rḏm̱m “corpulence, embonpoint, fullness”, rḏm̱m “to flow full”. zṟ: (personal name, masculine) is attested once before in Thamudic. We can compare it with the Arabic zaṟ “plant” and we have the Arabic personal name Ẕṟ a. ’sd: (personal name, masculine). It is the equivalent of the Arabic name asad “lion”. The name is frequently attested in Thamudic, Safaitic and Lihiyanite.

25 Ibid., p. 181.
26 Husayn Abū l-Ḥasan, Qirā’a bli-kitābāt lihāniyya min ḍabal ʿAkma bi-minṭaqat al-ʿUlā, Riyadh, Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-wataniyya, 1997, no 35.
27 Negev, Nabataean, p. 31, no 483.
28 Stark, Palmyrene, p. 23, 90.
31 Harding, Index, p. 297.
32 Ibn Durayd, ʾitiqāq, p. 277.
33 Ibid., p. 56.
34 Harding, Index, p. 42; G. King, Thamudic E, p. 471.
it is also known as ʾšdw in Nabataean, and ʾšd and ʾšdw in Palmyrene. The Greek cognate name is Ἄσαδος.

wwgm I: see above no 2.

hr: (personal name, masculine), see above no 4.

bh: (noun, singular, masculine + suff. 3rd p.s.m.) “his father”. It is attested once before in Thamudic, but it is frequently mentioned in Safaitic.

Inscription No 6

Transcription: ʿzz bn ᵃs ᵃs bn ᵃs ᵃs

Translation: By ʿzz son of ʿs son of ʿs

Comments: This inscription is found in the same rock with the precedent one. The author was evidently a relative of the author of the other text but the exact relationship cannot be determined.

ʿzz: (personal name, masculine). It is frequently occurred in Thamudic and Safaitic. It is mentioned as ʿzz and ʿzzw in Nabataean and ʿzz in Palmyrene. This name could be the equivalent of the Arabic ʿAzīz “mighty, powerful, beloved”. The Greek cognate name is Ἄζιζος.

ʾs: (personal name, masculine), see above no 5.

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36 Stark, Palmyrene, p. 7, 73.
37 Al-Qudrah, Semitic, p. 62.
39 Harding, Index, p. 16.
40 Ibid., p. 418.
41 Cantineau, Nabatéen, p. 129.
42 Stark, Palmyrene, p. 44, 105.
43 Ibn Durayd, Ittiqāq, p. 47.
44 Al-Qudrah, Semitic, p. 40.
ʿbr: (personal name, masculine) is derived from the root ʿbr “pass-by”. The name is mentioned in Thamudic, and Safaitic. The name ʿĀbir “passer-by” is referred to the son of Sam son of the prophet Noah.

s: (personal name, masculine), see above no 1.

Inscription No 7

Transcription:  l nšš bn mg ̣ yr bn ʾys
Translation: By nšš son of mg ̣ yr son of ʾsd son of ʾys
Comments: This inscription is written from left to right in curved form. The letters were written carefully, so its reading is certain.

nšš: (personal name, masculine) is occurred once in Thamudic. There are no parallels for this name in the other North-Arabian inscriptions. We can compare it with the Arabic našīš “sound of the effused water or the boiled water”.

mg ̣ yr: (personal name, masculine) is attested here for the first time in Thamudic, but it is well known in Safaitic. It is also attested as mʿyrw in Nabataean, mʿyr in Palmyrene. This name could be the equivalent of the Arabic Muɡira which is derived from the root ǧwәr, әɡәra “to rade”. The Greek cognate name could be Mọepoɔ.
ʾys: (personal name, masculine) is frequently attested in Thamudic and Safaitic. It is mentioned as ḵyw in Nabataean, and ḵf in Palmyrene. This name is could be the equivalent of the Arabic Iyās which is originally derived from the name ḥws “gift, reward”. The Greek cognate name is Iošos.

Inscription No 8

Transcription: . . q bn zyd bn ʾysʾl
Translation: . . q son of zyd son of ʾysʾl
Comments: The Sandstone contains two short inscriptions. The beginning of the first one (n° 8) is missed, which makes it difficult to read the first name. The reading of the rest inscription is fairly certain.

zyd: (personal name, masculine) is particularly common in Thamudic and in Safaitic as zd and zyd. It is also attested as zydw in Nabataean, and zd in Lihyanite. It is also mentioned frequently as a theophoric compound personal name as zdʾl and zydʾl in North Arabian Inscriptions. It is the equivalent of the Arabic name Zayd which is derived from the root zāda “to increase, grow”. The Greek cognate name is Zaiðos.

ʾysʾl: (personal name, masculine). This form hitherto attested neither in Thamudic nor in other North Arabian inscriptions. But it could be a variant

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54 Harding, Index, p. 88.
55 Negev, Nabataean, p. 12, n° 75.
56 Stark, Palmyrene, p. 4 and 67.
57 Al-Zubaydi, Tāḡ, vol. 8, p. 195 (aww); see also Enno Littmann, Safaitic Inscriptions, Leiden, Brill [Publication of Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904-5 and 1909], 1945, p. 298.
58 Al-Qudrah, Semitic, p. 107.
59 See Harding, Index, p. 296, 304.
60 Negev, Nabataean, p. 26, n° 384.
61 Jaussen and Savignac, Mission, n° 63.
62 Harding, index, p. 296, 304.
63 Ibn Durayd, Itiqāq, p. 20.
64 Al-Qudrah, Semitic, p. 94.
of the common theophoric compound personal name ’ysʾl consisting of two elements: ’ys “gift” and the divinity name ’l. Thus we can translate the name as “gift of the god ’l” (see above no 7).

Inscription No 9
Transcription: ʾl msk bn ’wdlh
Translation: By msk son of ’wdlh
Comments: A small commemorative inscription found on the same rock with no 8. This inscription is placed in the middle of the sandstone under the precedent one. The direction of writing started from left to right, the letter is deeply scraped and the reading is fairly clear.

msk: (personal name, masculine) is well-known in Safaitic, but it is attested as mskt in Thamudic. This name is mentioned as msk in Lihyanite, mikw in Nabataean, and Palmyrene. It is also mentioned as a theophoric compound personal name mskʾl and mskʾlh in Old North Arabian Inscriptions. The Greek cognate name is Μάσεχος. It could be the equivalent of the Arabic personal name Másik from the verb mataka “to catch, gras.”

ʾwdlh: (personal name, masculine) is consisting of the initial element ’wd “protect, refuge”, and the divinity name lb meaning “protection of God”. It is

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65 Harding, *Index*, p. 545.
69 Harding, *Index*, p. 545.
the first time mentioned in Thamudic, but it is mentioned in Safaitic. However, the form ’uḏ is often mentioned in North Arabian Inscriptions. The similar Arabic name could be ’Āḏ Allāh.76

Inscription No 10
Transcription: l zyd bn srb bn w'lv
Translation: By zyd son of srb son of w'l
Comments: A commemorative inscription carved in a smoothen sandstone. A portion of the rock has been damaged, but this doesn’t affect on the clarity of the text.
zyd: (personal name, masculine), see above no 8.
srb: (personal name masculine) hitherto unattested in Thamudic, but it is known in Safaitic where Harding compare it with the Arabic “to go forth, pasture freely”.75
w'lv: (personal name, masculine) is a well-known personal name in Thamudic as well as in Safaitic and Liyanite.76 It signifies the Arabic wa'la“mountain-goat, antelope”, and it is mentioned as the masculine personal name Wa'la.77

72 Harding, Index, p. 448.
73 Ibid., p. 448.
75 Harding, Index, p. 315.
76 Ibid., p. 645.
77 Al-Zubaydī, Tāg, vol. 15, p. 782.
Conclusion

This study aimed to publish new ten Thamudic inscriptions written in the so-called Thamudic E script. This shape of script was known in the region of south, southeast Jordan, 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 *whblḥ*, *mqmʿl*, *yiʿl* and *wqlḥ*.

The study reveals also some new personal names like *mrʿb*, *rgm*, *zxʾ*, *nšš* and *mgyr*. Moreover, it has figured out more information about the linguistic phenomena and shapes of script.

These inscriptions all together with the new personal names are considered as a useful addition to the corpus of Pre-Islamic North Arabian inscriptions in general.