NEW SAFAITIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM GHADIR ABÛ-ṬARFA/JORDAN

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The present research is an analytical study of thirteen Safaitic inscriptions collected during a recent survey at Ghadir Abû-Ṭarfa in the northeastern Jordanian desert. This group of inscriptions reveal a good deal of information regarding some linguistic and social aspects of Safaitics. Inscriptions are accompanied by rock art, showing some of the activities of the inscriptions’ authors.

Key words: Semitic inscriptions, Safaitic inscriptions, Safaitic tribes, Early Arabian inscriptions, Arabian Peninsula, nomads, bedouins.

Introduction

The term Safaitic is derived from the name Ṣafā the basalt desert (ḥarra), southeast of Damascus in Syria; the term is, however, a misnomer resulting from the initial discovery of the texts in the region in 1857. The texts frequently contain extensive genealogies that trace lineages back to eponymous ancestors called Safaites. The inscriptions of this group can be dated roughly to the period between the 1st century BC and the 4th century AD.

Inscriptions are the main source of our knowledge about the culture of the Safaitic people. Archaeological works have not revealed any considerable cultural material of other types about the Safaitic people. Safaitic inscriptions provide us with a great deal of information concerning a variety of social aspects; daily activities, grazing activities, religion, hopes and fears of the nomads who wrote them, as well as about their relations, primarily with the other Safaitic tribes, but also with the political regimes in the settled regions.

Ghadir Abû-Ṭarfa is located some 18 kilometres to the east of al-Ṣafawī on the international highway to Baghdad. The site can be reached through a narrow road
about one kilometre long to the south, forking off from the highway. Ghadir Abū-Tarfa is a small natural seasonal lake which allows a cover of vegetation to grow, suitable for winter grazing.

Most of the inscriptions were found on the top of the cairns in the study area. Others were found on either side of the valley.

No. 1:

**Transcription**: l’ncm bn ẓnn bn mr’ wḥll hdr
**Translation**: “By An’am son of Zanūn son of Mar’, and he encamped at this camping-place”.

This inscription is carved on the middle of a medium-size basalt stone. The text is written in a round form using medium-size letters. Drawings of two horses are noted in the middle of the text. The author aims at affirming his proprietary rights of the place on which he encamps.

’n’m: p.n.m. frequently attested in Saf. (Winnett – Harding 1957, Nos 3, 39, etc.), Tham. (Harding – Littmann 1952, p. 481), Min. (RES 3846), Sab. (RES 4057D) and Lih. (Harding 1971, p. 80). The name is derived from the verb *n*m ‘to lead a splendid life’ on the *j*’al form and vocalised as *n*’am, and means ‘to live in luxury or prosperity’.

ẓnn: p.n.m. well known in Safaitic inscriptions (Winnett – Harding 1957, No. 24; 1978, No. 68). It could be vocalised as Arabic *zanūn* ‘suspicious’ (Harding 1971, p. 394).


w-ḥll: v. impft. 3. p.s.m. derived from the root *ḥ*ll ‘to encamp’. It is the equivalent of the Arabic ḥalla ‘to encamp’.

h-dr: d.s.f., it is the equivalent of the Arabic َdār ‘camping place’ (Winnett – Harding 1978, p. 635).

No. 2:

**Transcription**: ḡrqb bn ’s
**Translation**: “By ḡrqb son of ’s”.

This small inscription contains only the author’s name and his paternal affiliation.

’qr: see above.

’s: n.p.m., frequently attested in Saf. (Winnett – Harding 1978, Nos 1184, 2181), could be vocalised as ’s. It attested in Tham. (Jaussen – Savignae 1909–1914, No. 229;

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No. 3:

**Transcription:** ġṛt bn ḥfy
**Translation:** “By Gurrat son of Hāfey”.
This inscription is written in thick letters. It contains only the author’s name and his paternal affiliation.

ġṛt: n.p.m., noted previously in Safaitic (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 1876a). It could be the equivalent of the Arabic غرّة Gurrat, meaning ‘white mark on a horse’s front, or, time at which anything begins’ (Ibn Manzur 2003 – ḡrr).

ḥfy: n.p.m., attested frequently in Safaitic inscriptions (Harding 1971, p. 224). It could be vocalised as ḥafey or ḥafey; names derived from the root ḥfy. ḥafey is the equivalent of Arabic خافّي ‘latent’ and ḥafey is the equivalent of خافّي ‘imperceptible’.

No. 4:

**Transcription:** ḫṛs bn brzt
**Translation:** “By Ḥāres son of Bārezat”.
A short inscription carved on a basalt stone, apparently with a sharp tool. The inscription contains only the name of the author and his paternal affiliation.

خلافة ḫafey is the equivalent of Arabic خافّي ‘latent’ and ḥafey is the equivalent of خافّي ‘imperceptible’.

No. 5:

**Transcription:** ḫjj bn ṣzz bn šm
**Translation:** “By Ḥajjāj son of Azīz son of Šām”.
Another inscription carved slightly on a basalt stone. The author mentions his name and his immediate patriline.
ḥjj: p.n.m. previously noted in Saf. (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 288), Lih. (Jaussen – Savignac 1909–1914, No. 133), Tham. (Harding 1971, p. 177) and Min. (Ryckmans 1953, p. 207). It is the equivalent of the Arabic ﻫﺠﺞ hajj: the emphatic form of hajj, meaning ‘to perform pilgrimage’.

‘zz: p.n.m. It frequently occurs in Saf. and Tham. (al-Qudrah et al. 2012, p. 8). It is mentioned as ‘zz and ‘zzw in Nab. (Cantineau 1932, p. 129) and ‘zz in Palmyrene (Stark 1971, Nos 44; 105). This name could be the equivalent of the Arabic ﺔﺰﻴﺰ ‘mighty, beloved’ (Ibn Duraid 1991, p. 47). The Greek cognate name is ﺔژژός (al-Qudrah 2001, p. 40).

šm: p.n.m. It is attested in other Safaitic inscriptions as well (Harding 1971, p. 375). It could be vocalised as Arabic ﺔﺸﻤﺎ sahma ‘to fast’ or ﺔﺸﻤﺎ 袢ma ‘to become deaf’.

No. 6:

Transcription: ljḥ hdmyt
Translation: “By Jāleḥ this drawing”.
A short inscription written in thin and long letters on a big basalt rock. The inscription contains only the author’s name. Drawings of camels surround the inscription. The inscription’s author seems to be referring to the drawings next to the writing.


No. 7:

Transcription: l’hm hnqt
Translation: “By Aham this she-camel”.
Another short inscription written beside a drawing of a she-camel with two human figures behind it.

‘hm: p.n.m. Attested in Saf. (Littmann 1943, p. 139; Winnett – Harding 1957, Nos 704, 823, etc.). Harding (1971, p. 82) considered it as the equivalent of the Arabic ﻧﺎﺣﻲ yhm ‘brave man, fearless’.

h-nqt: n.s.f. Well-known in Safaitic inscriptions, it is the equivalent of the Arabic ﻷﻗﺎ nāqa ‘young she-camel’.
No. 8:

Translation: lcbd bn mṯ c hfrs
Transcription: By ‘Abed son of Maṭc.
A basalt stone bears a small inscription, with the writing running vertically, accompanied by drawings of a horseman and a small horse at the extremity of the rock.

cbd: p.n.m. Well-known in Saf. (Harding 1953, p. 58; Winnett–Harding 1957, No. 264; 1978, No. 19), Tham. (Harding–Littmann 1952, Nos 39, 50, etc.), Lih. (Jaussen–Savignac 1909–1914, No. 6), Min. (RES 277/5, 2917/4) and Sab. (Harding 1971, p. 397), the name could be the equivalent of the Arabic ﻋَﺒْﺪ cabd ’servant’ or ﻋﺎﺑٍﺪْ cābid ’pious’ (Harding 1971, p. 396).

mṯc: p.n.m. noted previously in Safaitic (Winnett–Harding 1978, Nos 1430, 1471a). It could be vocalised as maṯac ’ungraceful gait’ (Harding 1971, p. 527).

h-frs: n.s.f. ‘horse’. It is the equivalent of the Arabic ﻓَﺮَس faras ‘horse’.

No. 9:

Translation: lšddt bn šrm
Transcription: “By Šeddat bn Şārem”.
Another short inscription that contains only the author’s name and paternal affiliation. The inscription was carved using a wide tool; its letters are of a big size.

šddt: p.n.m. Well-known in Safaitic (Littmann 1943, No. 596; Winnett–Harding 1957, No. 296; 1978, No. 869), it might be vocalised as Arabic ﺷٍﺪّة šidda or as ﺷﺪٍﺪة šadīda ‘severity, hardness’ (Ibn Manzur 2003 – šdd).

šrm: p.n.m. noted in Saf. (Harding 1953, p. 192; Harding 1971, No. 49218a), Lih. (Jaussen–Savignac 1909–1914, No. 338) and Qat. (RES 3521/4). It is the equivalent of the Arabic صاﺮِم šārm ‘severe, rigorous, strong’.
No. 10:

Transcription: LY bn MRH WRḤY HHḤL
Translation: “By ‘Alī son of Marah, and he pastured the Valley”.
This inscription is found on a small-size basalt stone. It was carved into the rock with a sharp tool, the letters of the inscription being thin and large. The author, ‘Alī son of Marah, mentions that he grazes his livestock in the Valley (where the inscription has been found). The name Marah is a rare name in Safaitic, this is only its second known occurrence in the Safaitic language.

‘LY: p.n.m. Well-known in Saf. (al-Harahsheh 2010, No. 28), Tham., Lih. and Sab. (Harding 1971, p. 433). It is the equivalent of the well-known Arabic name ʿAlī ‘lead up to a higher position, be higher’ (al-Harahsheh 2010, p. 25).

MRḤ: p.n.m. Attested only once in Safaitic (Winnet–Harding 1978, No. 1887), it is the equivalent of the Arabic حَرَم marah ‘gaiety, joyous’.

WRḤY: v. Impft. 3.p.s.m. derived from the verb ṭ̄ay meaning ‘to shepherd, pasture upon’ (Winnet–Harding 1978, p. 637).

HHḤL: n.s.m. It means ‘flood, valley’; noted in Saf. (al-Harahsheh 2010, No. 8), Hebrew (Drijvers–Healey 1999, p. 636) and Syriac (Smith 1903, p. 33).

No. 11:

Transcription: LDḥ bn QTL
Translation: “By Dad son of Qātel”.
Another short inscription carved on a basalt stone. The letters are of a large size written from left to right.

DD: p.n.m. Attested in Saf. (Littmann 1943, pp. 259, 979; Winnett–Harding 1978, Nos 848, 1870), Lih. (Jaussen–Savignac 1909–1914, Nos 2/2, 73/2) and Tham. (Harding–Littmann 1952, pp. 510, 511) Harding (1971, p. 236) thinks that this name is the equivalent of the Arabic دَد dad, meaning ‘fun, diversion’.

QTL: p.n.m. Well-known in Saf. (CIS 1576, 1818; Littmann 1943, p. 1151; Winnett–Harding 1957, No. 69); the name is derived from the root qtl, meaning ‘murderous’ (Ibn Manẓur 2003, Vol. 11, p. 547).
No. 12:

**Transcription:** ln‘mn bn ṣnnt bn ‘mhmn

**Translation:** “By Nu‘mān son of Ṣanānat son of ‘Amham”.

**n‘mn:** p.n.m. Well-known in Saf., Lih, Qat., Aram., Min. and Sab. (Abadi 2006, p. 95). It is the equivalent of the Arabic نُعْمَان nu‘mān ‘who lives in comfort and luxury’; the name is derived from the root n‘m (Ibn Manẓur 2003, Vol. 12, p. 579).

**ṣnnt:** p.n.m. It has been noted in Safaitic (Winnett – Harding 1978, Nos 441, 1765), and is the equivalent of Arabic ṣanān ‘pleasant smell’ (Ibn Manẓur 2003 – ṣnn).

**‘mhmn:** p.n.m. Attested in Saf. (al-Harahsheh 2010, No. 171) and Sab. (Ryckmans 1953, 461/4–5), the name consists of two elements ‘m ‘grandfather’ and suff. 3.p.p., ‘their grandfather’ (al-Harahsheh 2010, No. 171).

No. 13:

**Transcription:** lbnt bn ẓll bn mḥjn bn ‘ṣlḥ

**Translation:** “By Bent son of Šalāl son of ‘Aṣlāḥ”.

**bnt:** p.n.m. Well-known in Safaitic. Harding associates it with Arabic banna ‘fragrant’ (Harding 1971, p. 119).


**mḥjn:** Hitherto unrecorded, the word is the equivalent of the Arabic مِحِجْن mihjan ‘a carved or eagle-like’ (Ibn Manẓur 2003 – ḥjn).

**‘ṣlḥ:** p.n. md in Saf. (Winnett – Harding 1978, No. 126) and Tham. (Harding – Littmann 1952, p. 321). The name could be vocalised as attested in Arabic أصلح ašlah, which is the form ‘f’al of ṣlḥ ‘to make right’.
Conclusion

Most of the inscriptions have been found on the top of the cairns in the study area, while others have been found either on the sides or at the bottom of the valleys in the area.

The inscriptions have been presented here in both transcription and facsimile (v.i.), accompanied by a brief discussion of a number of points which the study of these texts have raised. Furthermore, studying the texts has yielded some valuable information about the linguistic phenomena as well as the social and religious lives of the people who left these inscriptions. This group of inscriptions have a particular significance in that they appear to contain some new terms which occur for the first time ever in Safaitic inscriptions. The present study of the texts has focused on identifying the meanings and structure of the words, with special attention to the proper nouns, contained therein.

Abbreviations

Aram. – Aramaic
gt. – Qatabanic
Lih. – Lihyanite Sab. – Sabean
Min. – Minaean Saf. – Safaitic
Nab. – Nabataean Tham. – Thamudic

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