

## Some New Safaitic Inscriptions from Dhuweila – Jordan

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**Abstract:** This research aimed to study a new group of Safaitic inscriptions collected during a recent survey at Dhuweila Region in the north eastern desert of Jordan at al Ḥarra area. These inscriptions revealed new linguistic phenomena (verbs, personal names, nouns, and a name of tribe), hitherto unrecorded elsewhere in Safaitic. This study presented transcriptions and facsimiles for inscriptions which together generated a discussion concerning the content per each<sup>(1)</sup>.

**Keywords:** Safaitic inscriptions, Dhuweila, al Ḥarra, Old Arabic.

### Introduction

Safaitic is a modern term applied to a continuum of Old Arabic dialects written in a distinct North Arabian variety of the South Semitic script, also termed Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015). The texts frequently contain extensive genealogies that trace the lineage back to eponymous ancestors. Safaitic inscriptions can be dated roughly between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The Safaitic inscriptions are concentrated in southern Syria, northern and eastern Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia. However, a few isolated finds are in Iraq, Lebanon and Italy.

The Safaitic script, as well as the Thamudic and Lihyanite, were derived, according to some studies, from the so-called *al-Musnad* script in Old South Arabia (Alzoubi et al. 2016). The texts were written in different directions; from left to right and from up to down, vice versa or in a boustrophedon direction. Its alphabet is represented by 28 letters.

### A description of the Dhuweila region

The Dhuweila Region is about 60 kilometers to the east of Al-Safawi to the south of the

Baghdad International Highway. It can only be reached through a narrow unpaved road that starts after 18 kilometers from Al-Safawi. Dhuweila includes a number of sites like, Tala'at Dhuweila, She'b Dhuweila, Qā' Dhuweila and Telelāt al-Dhwayleh. All these sites are about 640 to 725 meters above the sea level, ranging from the south to the north (figure 1).

The location of the area includes different terrains; a typical desert, plains, and high lands. Basalt rocks, lava and volcanic formations cover most of the area. The eastern desert hosts a few valleys and seasonal lakes giving a chance for a floral cover suitable for winter grazing.

### The Inscriptions:

Most of the inscriptions were found on the top of cairns, while others were found either to the sides or in the bottom of the valley. The different scenes and graffiti reflect typical Safaitic writing conventions; for example, hunting scenes, awaiting the rains, possession of animals or other items, sadness after losing a relative and religious invocations.

### Inscription No. 1 (Fig. 2):

*l-bn<sup>c</sup>bd bn msk bn <sup>c</sup>md ḡ-l ḡf w-ṣyr m-mabr*

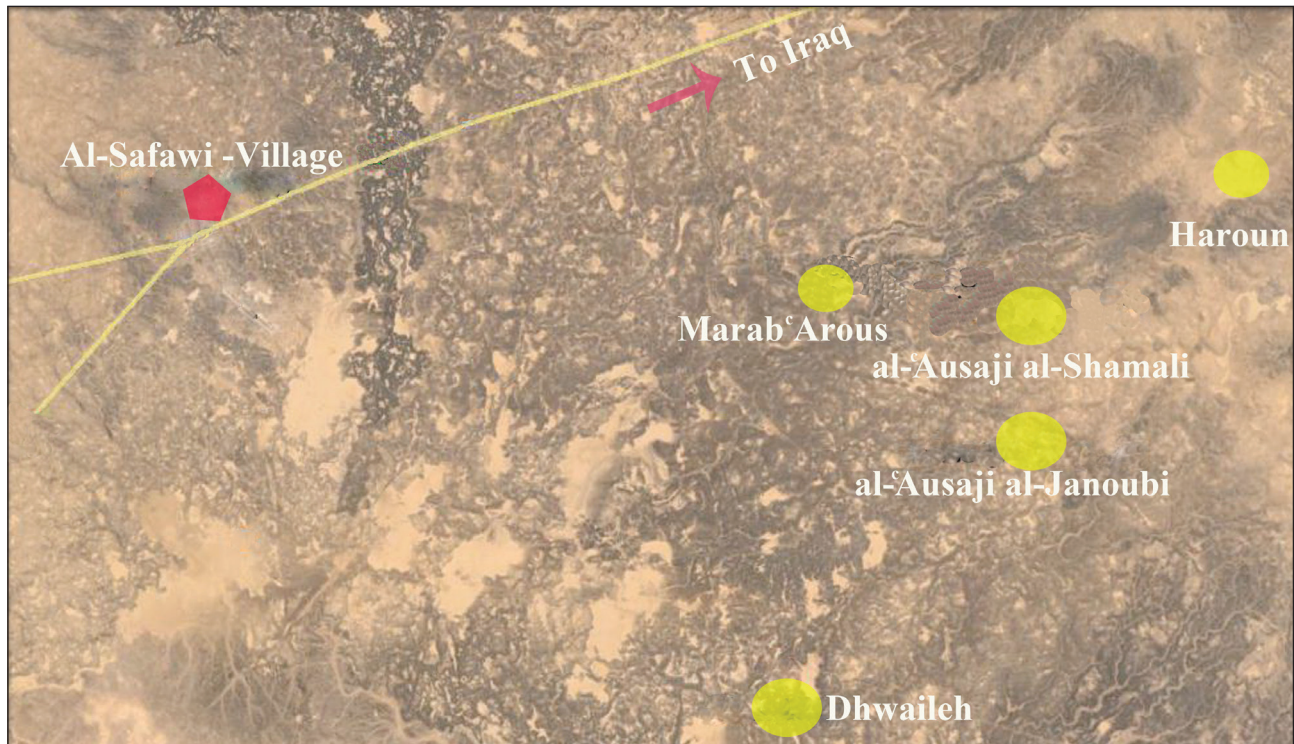


Fig. 1: Site Map

*‘m ḥs snt qtl h-mlk wdn f-qsf mn mḥl f-ḥš‘hqm  
w-gddf w-dšr w-hlt b-ḥlšt*

For *bn<sup>c</sup>bd* son of *msk* son of *‘md* from the tribe *df*, and he returned to a place of water from the inner desert in the year of scarcity, the year the king killed *wdn*. And he despaired on account of dearth, so O *š‘hqm* and *gddf* and *dšr* and *lt* (grant) deliverance.

This long Safaitic inscription is written on a basalt stone using a boustrophedon style. This inscription is rich but vague because of the new information it provides us with. It contains new nouns that appear here for the first time in Safaitic inscriptions. A detailed explanation follows.

*ḥs* is a new noun hitherto unrecorded in other Safaitic inscriptions. We can compare it with the Arabic *خس/ḥiss* meaning “decline”; a noun derived from the root *خسس/ḥasasa* (Ibn

Manzūr 2003, vol. 3: 91-92).

The noun *mḥl* appears here for the first time in Safaitic in this form. It is another alternative for the Safaitic noun *mḥlt* (Winnett and Harding 1978: 39, no. 24). It has been translated by Winnett and Harding (1978: 39, no. 24) as “misfortune”. The noun can be compared with the Arabic *محلّ/maḥl* meaning “dearth” (see: Al Ajllad, 2015: 15)

What is noteworthy is the use of the two alternative nouns *‘m* and *šnt* meaning “year” in the same inscription. The ambiguity aforementioned lies in this coming line: the saying “*snt qtl h-mlk wdn*” follows the established dating convention. This could be referring to the year king *wdn* was killed in, or it could equally mean the year the king killed a person called *wdn*. Although *wdn* occurs as a personal name in a number of Safaitic

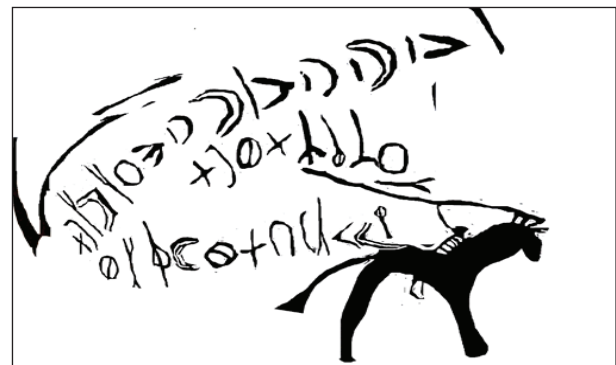
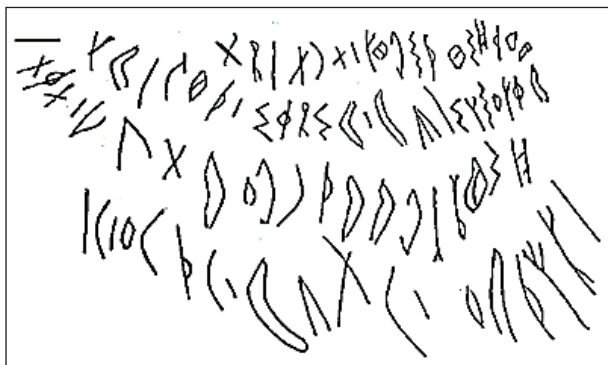


Fig. 2: Inscription No. 1

Fig. 3: Inscription No. 2

inscriptions, it is, to shed more light, perhaps worth comparing it with Littmann (1943: 107, no. 406) which is dated to *snt ng'wdn m-rm* “the year *wdn* escape from the Romans”. A plausible interpretation might be that *wdn* was a famous person to use his death year as a reference for the two inscriptions. Excluding these two inscriptions, historical resources unfortunately do not provide us with any further information concerning this individual.

**Inscription No. 2 (Fig. 3):**

*l-snmn bn slm bn hḡ h-mhrt w-'qm w-tzr h-smy  
h-gzy d-twrt*

“For *snmn* son of *slm* son of *hḡ* this filly, and he settled down and awaited the recompense of the rain which is concealed”.

A medium size basalt stone contains a long inscription written in a so-called boustrophedon form; it travels from left to right and then reverses for the next line. The inscription accompanies a drawing of a horseman holding an arrow, and riding a pony.

The importance of this inscription comes from the fact that it contains a new verb, a noun and few personal names. *snmn* is a p. n. m.; it appears here for the first time in Safaitic. This might be a variant of the well-known Safaitic name *snm* (Harding 1971: 332); it is the form *fa<sup>c</sup>lān* of the verb *snm*, the equivalent of the Arabic *سَنَمَ/sanama* meaning “huge, high”. *h-mhrt* is a noun (s. f.), the equivalent of the Arabic *مُهْرَة/muhrat* meaning a pony (Ibn Manzūr 2003, vol. 8: 387). This noun rarely appears in Safaitic; it has been

noted only twice in other Safaitic inscriptions (CIS V 1186; Al-Roussan 2005, no 9).

*w-ʿqm* is a verb (pf. 3p.m) appears here for the first time in Safaitic. This verb is the equivalent of the Arabic أقام /*qāma*; a verb (pf. 3p.s.) derived from the root قَوَّمَ /*qawama* meaning “to sojourn, encamp”.

*h-smy* is a noun (s. f) that appears in many other Safaitic inscriptions. This noun generally means “the sky”, Winnett and Harding (1978: 639) translate the phrase *w-tzr h-smy* as “he was on the look-out for or awaited the rains”. They say that “*Bedouins watch the sky to see where rainstorms are occurring and thus learn in which direction to move with their flocks and herds*” (Winnett and Harding 1978: 51). We can also compare the noun *h-smy* with the Arabic السماء /*al-samā*’ meaning “the sky, clouds or rains” (Ibn Manzūr 2003, vol. 4: 697).

*h-gzy* is a noun (s. m.) that appears here for the first time in Safaitic inscriptions. This is to be compared with the Arabic noun جزاء /*jazā*’; a noun derived from the root جزي /*jazaya* meaning “to recompense” (Ibn Manzūr 2003, vol. 2: 125). The verbal form of *jzy* has been noted in one Safaitic inscription as a verb pf. 3p.m.s. (Winnett and Harding 1978: 137. no 620). *twrt* is a verb (pf. 3p.s.f.) that appears here for the first time in Safaitic. This could be the equivalent of the Arabic توارت /*tawārat*; the form *tafāʿalat* of the root وري /*waraya* meaning “conceal, hid” (Ibn Manzūr 2003, vol. 9: 286).

#### Inscription No. 3 (Fig. 4):

*l-ʿbt bn šhb bn hl h-qsrt*

“For *ʿbt* son of *šhb* son of *hl* this Lion”

A rectangular basalt stone contains a small



Fig. 4: Inscription No. 3

inscription that is accompanied with a drawing of a hunting scene in which a pedestrian holding an arm that looks like a spear and a camel rider are both trying to hunt a lion. *qsrt* which appears for the first time in Safaitic inscriptions is a noun (s. f.) meaning “lion”. *lt* and *ʿsd* are the two nouns usually used in Safaitic inscriptions to refer to the Lion (Littmann 1943: 123. no 641). *qsrt* is the equivalent of the Arabic قَسُورَة /

*gaswarat* meaning “lion” (See: Ibn Manzūr 2003, vol. 7: 355).

**Inscription No. 4 (Fig. 5):**

*l-mḥrb bn nšr bn ʿtm d'l tm w-wgd 'tr ʿmh  
fndm*

For *mḥrb* son of *nšr* son of *ʿtm* from the tribe *tm*, and he found the inscription of his uncle and so he despaired.

This inscription is written in boustrophedon form using medium-size letters. The letters *d* (the first one) and *f* in the second line are written back-to-front inversely (reversing the shape of the letter) with other letters of the inscription. This way of writing is extremely an unusual feature in Safaitic writings.

The author of the inscription is from *Taim* tribe.

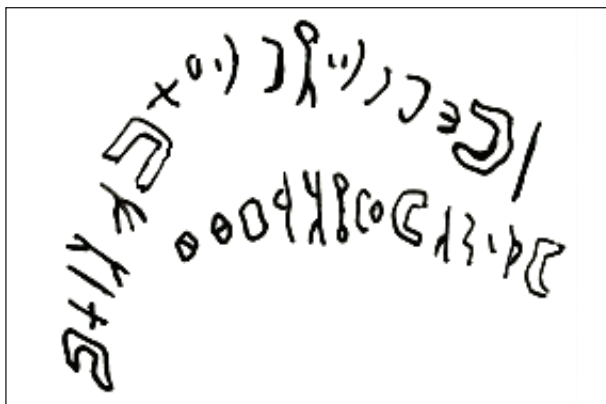


Fig. 5: Inscription No. 4

This tribe is known in Safaitic inscriptions from H5, Burqu<sup>c</sup>, Um-al-Jimāl in Jordan, Al-Zalef in Syria and Badnah in Saudi Arabia (Al-Roussan 1992: 282).

**Inscription No. 5 (Fig. 6):**

*l-'bjr bn sly w-'šrq b-'tr ḡnm h-bd'f-hl[t]..l  
w-dšr slm w-b-bn' mn qfyt*

For *'bjr* son of *sly* and he migrated to the inner desert in the trace of *ḡnm*, O *lt*...l and *dšr* (grant) security and (so) for my sons from behind.

This inscription is carved in cursive script in the middle of a basalt stone. It reveals new terms that appear for the first time in Safaitic. First, *h-bd'* is a feminine noun equivalent to the Arabic بادية/*bādyat* that means “the desert”. Second, *w-b-bn'* is a unique plural form of the

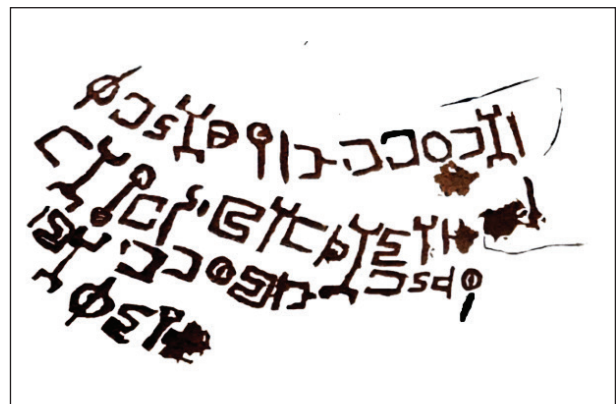


Fig. 6: Inscription No 5

singular *bn* meaning “son”. The uniqueness of this term lies in its appearance here in a new form that is different from what it was used to in Safaitic inscriptions; the dominant and widespread form for the plural was *bnyh*. This form is similar to the Arabic plural form *أبناء/abnā'* which means “sons”. Finally, *qfyt* is a noun (s. f.) that appears here for the first time in Safaitic inscriptions. It is equivalent to the Arabic *قفي/cafā* and *قفية/qefyat* that means “from behind” (Ibn Manzūr 2003, vol.7: 458)

#### Inscription No. 6 (Fig. 7):

*ljrm 'l bn 'bjr bn wtr d-'l šrt*

For *jrm 'l* son of *'bjr* son of *wtr* of the tribe *šrt*

This short inscription is written in the middle of a small basalt stone. It reveals a new tribe name hitherto unrecorded in other Safaitic inscriptions; *šrt* is a new tribe name that is

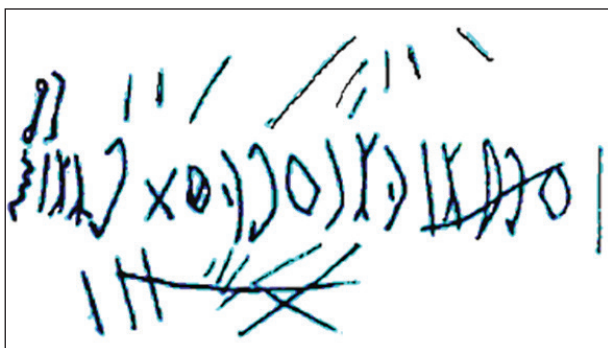


Fig. 7: Inscription No. 6

mentioned here for the first time, too. No further information is possible due to the fact that it is mentioned here for the first time.

#### Inscription No. 7 (Fig. 8):

*šll bn 'bdn h<sup>c</sup>rn*

The two asses are for *šll* son of *'bdn*

This inscription is accompanied by a drawing of two asses. *h<sup>c</sup>rn* is the dual form of the well-known noun *'yr* that means “ass, donkey”.

The dual form of this noun rarely occurs in Safaitic, while the singular (*'yr*, *'r*) and the plural form (*'rt*, *'yr*) are more frequent (Oxtoby 1968: 59, no 117; Winnett and Harding 1978: 642).

*'bdn* is a personal name that appears here for the first time in Safaitic. It is the form *'<sup>f</sup>al* of *bdn* which means “be or become fat and heavy”.

#### Inscription No. 8 (Fig. 9):

*l-hls bn mlk w-r<sup>c</sup>y f-tzr h-mzr f-hr<sup>d</sup>y gnmt m-nbt  
(w)<sup>c</sup>qbt*

By *hls* son of *mlk* and he grazed (the animals), and waited (on) the watching tower. Ô Radhy, (grant) booty and vengeance from the Nabataeans.

Another inscription is carved slightly on a basalt stone. The author, *hls* stated that he grazed the animals and waited on a watch point. This may have occurred at the time of the Nabataeans conquer of Safaitic tribes, where the author of the inscription asked the god for booty and retribution from the Nabataeans

*hls*: (p.n.m.) previously attested in Saf. (Harding 1971: 189). It is the equivalent of the Arabic *hāles* “courageous”(Ibn Manzūr 2003



Fig. 8: Inscription No. 7

vol. 2: 553). *mlk*: (p.n. m.) is well known in Saf. as well as in other semitic inscriptions. It is the equivalent of the Arabic *Mālik*; a name derived from the root *malaka* which means “possessor, owner” (Ibn Duraid 1991: 26). *rʿy*: (v. pf.) is derived from the root *rʿy* which means

“pasturing, grazing”. It is a well-known Safaitic transitive basic verb on the first form *faʿala* “graze”.

*f-tzr*: (v. pf.) is derived from the verb *nzr* “to wait”. *h-mzr*: (n.s.m.) is a noun that means “look-out, watch tower”. Winnett (1957, no 549) translated it as a name of a tribe. On CIS (nos 2753, 2765) *mzr* has been connected to the Arabic *mizrarrah* “flint”. Winnett and Harding (1978: 82, no 245) suggested that *mzr* is more probable to be a contraction of *manzar* that means “look-out, watch-tower”. *f-h-rdy* is a divinity name, and it generally appears in Safaitic in three forms: *rdy*, *rdw* (Clark, 1978, nos. 2, 48 ) and possibly *rdʿ* (Clark 1978, no. 304). Oxtoby (1968: 21) pointed out that *rdw*

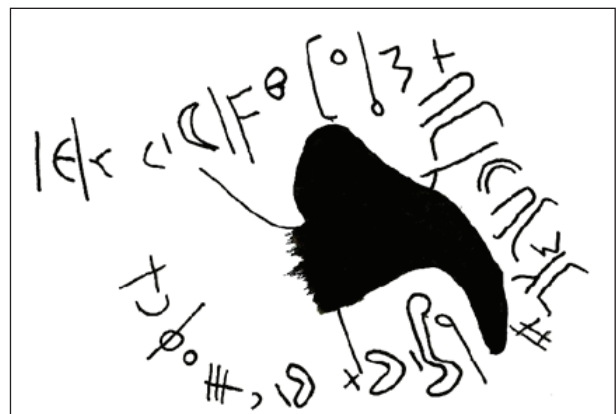


Fig. 9: Inscription No. 8

corresponds to *ardy* of the Palmyra pantheon. By saying so, he agrees with Littmann that *rđw* represents the planet Venus. According to Littmann, *rđw* may have been masculine, and *rđy* may be feminine (1940, 106-107). Oxtoby (1968) tried to include his idea by noting that the female figure accompanying CIS 4351 may be taken as depicting *rudā*. Later on, Winnett and Harding renewed Littmann's suggestion and added that *rđy* was the most warlike deity, running over their own collection. *m-nbt*: *m* is a preposition that means "of". *nbt*: (n.m.pl.) means Nabataeans. *qbt*: (n.s.m.) is derived from the verb *qb* "retribution"

#### Inscription No. 9 (Fig. 10):

*l-jbl bn yf*

For *jbl* son of *yf*

This inscription is deeply engraved on a basalt stone. It contains only the author's name and his affiliation. Seven dots were engraved on the top of the inscription. The name *jbl* is rare in Safaitic inscriptions.

*jbl*: (p.n. m.) is attested only twice in Safaitic inscriptions. The name *jbl* is the equivalent of the Arabic word *Jabal* that means "mountain". *yf*: (p.n. m.) is attested previously in Saf. (Winnett and Harding, no 1593), and in Lih. (Jussen and Savignac, no. 1192) and in Min. (al-Said 1995: 22). It may be vocalized as the Arabic *yata* that means "became expanded and straight" (Ibn Duraid 1991: 418)

#### Conclusion

This endeavor started with ambitious expectations to reveal more about the Safaitic culture whatever the hardships are. The researchers took the risk of searching remote

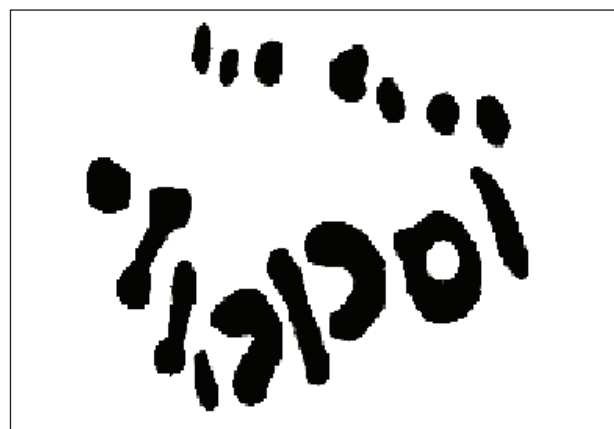


Fig. 10: Inscription No 9

sites where they had to drive for long hours to reach their distance; not only that, but being vulnerable to wild animals is strongly possible. Rewarding enough, the effort revealed rich and interesting data depicting linguistic, social and religious dimensions of the lives of the locals.

In order to reach their goals, the researchers targeted the inscriptions by first reading and translating them in order to reach some understanding. Then, tracing took place for each inscription followed by general comments focusing on the writing style. Furthermore, etymological and semantic analysis took place for each new word since this is the main driving force for the research study. Consequently, new or rare nouns, verbs, and personal names appeared for the first time in this collection.



Moreover, a noteworthy linguistic phenomenon is the singular-dual-plural format. It is very interesting to find *bn* ‘sons’ used as a plural for the singular *bn* ‘son’; the same is true for *h-<sup>c</sup>rn* ‘donkeys’ which is used as the dual, the well-known noun ‘*yr* ‘ass, donkey’. The dual form of this noun rarely occurs in Safaitic.

Another interesting result is concerning verbs: the verbs ‘*qm* that means “to sojourn, encamp”

and that means *twrt* “conceal, hide” are hitherto unrecorded in other Safaitic inscriptions. Finally, *šrt* is a new tribe name that is mentioned for the first time in Safaitic. What is left to recommend here is the note concerning *wdn* (n°1); using his death as a reference needs more clarification. Unfortunately, historical resources don’t provide any use with any further information concerning this *wdn*.

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**ملخص:** يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة مجموعة جديدة من النقوش الصفوية التي جُمعت خلال المسح الميداني الذي قام به الباحثان لمنطقة الضويلة في البادية الشمالية الشرقية في منطقة الحرة الاردنية. وتضمنت هذه النقوش ظواهر لغوية جديدة، منها: أفعال، وأسماء أعلام، وأسماء عامة، واسم قبيلة ترد لأول مرة في النقوش الصفوية. وقد عملت هذه الدراسة على تقديم صور ورسومات تفرغيه للنقوش، كما أفردت تحليلاً لغوياً ودالياً لمحتوى النقوش كل على حدة.

### Notes

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