

# Newly Discovered Dated Safaitic Inscriptions from the Badia of Jordan

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**Abstract:** *This research aims at studying some newly discovered dated Safaitic inscriptions found at al-Aushaji al-Shamali area in the Northeastern Badia of Jordan. These inscriptions reveal interesting dating formula. They are dated by events hitherto unknown in other Safaitic inscriptions. The first and the second inscriptions are dated to the year (when) the tribe of whb'l acquitted from bt/hrt "snt br"l whb'l mn bt/hrt". The third one is dated to the year when the tribe df fought the Palmyrene "snt hrb 'l df 'l tdmr".*

**Keywords:** *Safaitic, Inscriptions, Badia of Jordan, History, Semitic Inscriptions.*

## Introduction

Thousands of Safaitic inscriptions spread over the wide region of the Northeastern *Badia* of Jordan have been recorded (see: OCIANA). Fig. 1 Although a great majority of these inscriptions are short graffiti, a considerable number of them provide a good deal of information regarding the historical events that occurred in the area. Our inscriptions, the subject of this paper, are remarkable, as they contain some new historical information related to their date.

The stones which bear the inscriptions studied here were discovered in Wadi al-Aushaji al-Shamali area, 40 km to the southeast of as-Safawi village. Wadi al-Aushaji al-Shamali stands within al-Ḥarrah region of the northeastern *Badia* of Jordan, which includes a variety of geographic grounds: desert, plains, and hills. The region is typically covered with black basalt stones and volcanic formations. Wadi al-Aushaji al-Shamali is a long and narrow valley surrounded by hills that are covered with basalt rocks. These hills rise from 20 to 30 meters above the wadi's floor

level and about 650 m. above sea level (Al Maani and Alzoubi 2018: 20). The Wadi has a few small branches that give an opportunity for the growth of seasonal plants suitable for grazing during the grazing seasons.

## Stone no 1

A big basalt stone contains two inscriptions written in the so-called boustrophedon style. The first one is written on the lower part of the stone, and was written from left to right in curved form using medium size letters. This inscription contains new nouns that appear here for the



Fig. 1: Site Map.

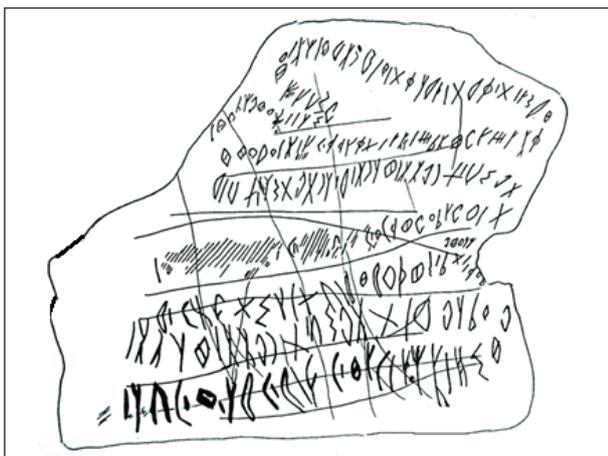


Fig. 2: Inscriptions 1 and 2

first time in Safaitic inscriptions. A detailed explanation follows.

**Inscription 1 (Fig. 2).**

**Transliteration:**

l's bn 'nhm bn mlk bn whblh d'l d'f w-r'cy hrjlt  
snt br' 'l whb'l mn bt/hrt f-hlt slm w-mjd w-gnyt  
ld d'cy [w'w]r d- y'wr

**Translation**

By 's son of 'nhm son of mlk son of whblh from the tribe of d'f, and he grazed (the animals) in autumn (or the early plants) in the narrow channel of water (or in Wādī Rāgil), in the year (when) the tribe of whb'l acquitted from bt/hrt, Ô Allāt (grant) peace and glorify and [grant] booty

to whoever reads [it] aloud, and blindness for who obliterate (this inscription).

**Comments**

The importance of this inscription comes out from the dating formula: *snt br' 'l whb'l mn bt/hrt* “(in) the year (when) the tribe of *whb'l* acquitted from *bt/hrt*” reveals noteworthy information. First, the reading of the term *bt/hrt* is challenging; the second letter could be read as *t* or *h*. Reading the term as *btrt* gives us hints to compare it with the toponym Petra, but this seems far away to be logic; we have no evidence elsewhere that the Greek noun *Petrae* was used in Semitic during the Safaitic inscriptions' time to indicate the Nabataean capital Petra. Moreover, when the Greek noun used by Semitics, it was transcribed as *ptr'* but not *ptrt*, without final *t*. Therefore, reading the noun as *bhrt* is more reasoning. It probably indicates a place name, or a tribal name.

We also wonder if it could be compared with the Arabic *بأخرة/bāḥayrat* “sailing ship”; Al Salameen et al. (2018, 206-213) have published a unique and interesting Safaitic inscription from the Northeastern *Badia* of Jordan, that provides a pure evidence for seafaring among members of the Safaitic communities of al-Ḥarrah. The inscription talks about Bedouin navigation in the sea and it is accompanied with a ship / boat drawing (Al Salameen et al. 2018, 208).

**rjlt**: is a singular noun. It is the equivalent of the Arabic *رجلة/rejlat* which means “the narrow channel formed by rain water” (Ibn Manzūr: *rjl*). The form *rjl-* without out *t-* has been noted in HCH 105: *r'y d'n-h w tkym 'l-rjl* “he pastured his sheep and they were gathered on the edge of *Rjl'*”. The Term may refer here to Wādī Rāgil, which is a huge valley running from southern Syria to northern Saudi Arabia (Al- Jallad and Jaworska, 2019: 127).

**hrf**; (Al Jallad and Jaworska, 2019: 93) translate this term as “the rain of the winter”. We think that it could be simply an indication to the autumn. We may also compare it with the Arabic *حُرْف*/*huruf* which means “early corps”: where the name derived from the root *حَرَفَ*/*harafa* means “to cut and gather corps”. *hrf* could indicate here early plants or herbs used for grazing. It is the equivalent of the Akkadian *hurpu* (CAD, vol 6, 252) which means “the early corps”.

**br'**: verb. ground stem (form I). It is derived from the root *br'*, the equivalent of the Arabic *bare'a* which means “to acquit, to be free”. It has been noted previously in other Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad and Jaworska, 2019: 74.)

### Inscription 2 (Fig. 2).

This Inscription is written above the first one (No 1) on the same basalt stone. Its begging is omitted due to the damage in the stone. The inscriptions were written in small and tight letters. The reading of the text is certain.

### Transliteration

l[ ] d bn n[ ] bn °bd wr°y h-rjlt hrf snt br' 'l whb'l mn h- bt/hrt fhlt slm w-wjm °l hlš bn ddh qtlh 'l ty' w-rhth 'qwm fhlt nqmt l-dm h-qlt w-lmb's w-l-d 'l °wd hsfr fhlt °wr d-y°wr

### Translation

By[ ] son of [ ] son of °bd, and he grazed in autumn (or the early plants) in the narrow channel of water (or in Wādī Rāgil) in the year (when) the tribe of *whb'l* acquitted from *h-bt/hrt*, Ô Allāt (grant) peace, and he grieved for for *hlš*, his uncle's son that the tribe of *ty'* and his vile tribe group killed him. Ô Allāt (grant) vengeance (payback) for the blood of the killed (person) and for the harm, and this inscription is for the tribe of °wd, Ô Allāt (grant) blindness for who obliterate it (this inscription).

The inscription is engraved behind the preceding one. Its beginning is missing due to the damage of the rock. The author's name and his patronym are lost in the missing parts of the inscription.

The inscription contains the same dating formula shown in the preceding one. The enigmatic *h-bt/hrt* arise again in this inscription. They occur here as emphatic nouns (See No 1 above).

**'l ty'**; “the tribe of *ty'*” is mentioned in two other Safaitic inscriptions from Wadi al-Zalef in Syria (CIS 2795; 5089). It is a South-Arabian tribe, and it immigrated to the region after the Azydian immigration (al Roussan 1992).

**w-rhth**: “his kinsmen” (Al- Jallad and Jaworska, 2019:128) is a noun mentioned in three other Safaitic inscriptions (See: OCIANA: *rhṯ*). *rhṯ* is the equivalent of the Arabian *رَهْط*/*rahet*; a group of people or nations united by political or religious ties (Ibn Manzūr: *rhṯ*).

### Stone 2 (Fig. 3).

A big size basalt stone contains two Safaitic inscriptions. Both of them seem to be written by the same author; the style of the letter is the same in the two inscriptions.

### Inscription 3

A long text written in the so called boustrophedon style. The letters of the inscription are engraved carefully; the reading and the translation of the text are certain.

### Transliteration

ls°d bn hn' bn nṣr bn rjl bn šhm bn rjl w-r°y b-hrjlt b-ql snt ḥrb 'l ḏf 'l tdmr w-wjm °l ....whl nṣr qtl w°l tm w°l 'bh

### Translation

By *s°d* son of *hn'* son of *nṣr* son of *rjl* son

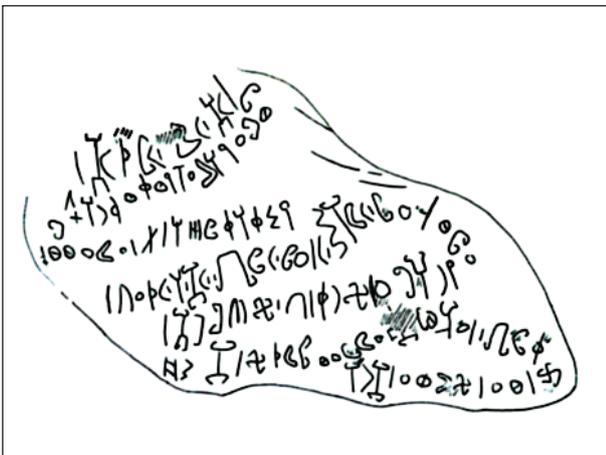


Fig. 3: Inscription 3

of *šhm* son of *rjl*, and he grazed the plants in the narrow channel of water (or in the Wadi Rajelat), in the year (when) the tribe *df* fought the Palmyrenes, and he became sad for ...*nzr* who was killed, and for *tm* and for his father.

**Comments**

This inscription is of great importance because it includes a reference to a struggle between the tribe of Dhayf and the Palmyrenes. *Tdmr* is an ancient Semitic city located in present-day in Homs Governorate in Syria (see: Figure 4). The name Palmyra is believed to be the Latinized form of the original Arabic name of تدمر/Tadmor, which is related to the word for “date palm.

Actually, the name *tdmr* “Palmyra” has been mentioned in more than ten Safaitic inscriptions,

mainly, as a toponym (see: Al Salameen et al. 2019:389). Most of these inscriptions are concerned with travel from/to Palmyra; one inscription contains a reference to a person who protected and helped Palmyrenes (Al Salameen et al. 2019:387). Only one Safaitic inscription refers to the year when the Palmyrenes fought *šrmt* (Al Namārah H 61; See also: Al Salameen et al. 2019:389). However, our inscription, the subject of this study, is the only one that refers to a struggle between a Safaitic tribe and the Palmyrenes.

**Inscription 4**

**Transliteration**

l’bdr bn tm bn ’bdr w-r’y h-m’zy w-q’d b-h-str w-wjm ‘l ḥlh ṭrq h-qfy

**Translation**

For *'bdr* son of *tm* son of *'bdr*, who shepherded the goats and sat down in this shelter. He grieved for his maternal uncle (of his beloved) and he returned back.

**Comments**

This inscription is written above the preceding one on the same basalt stone. It started by the author’s name and his father’s name. *'bdr*, the author of the inscription mentions that he grazed

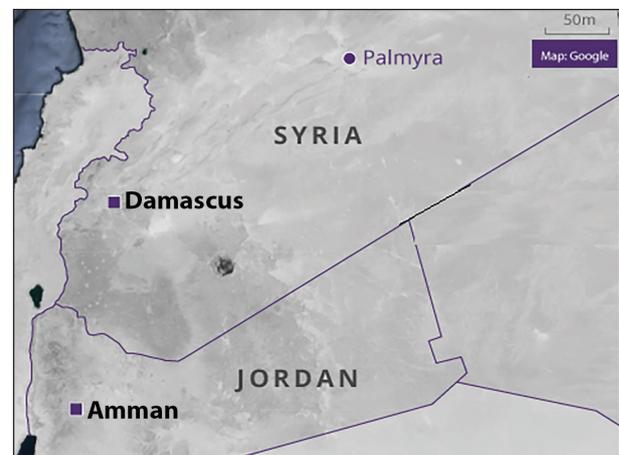


Fig. 4: Palmyra Location map

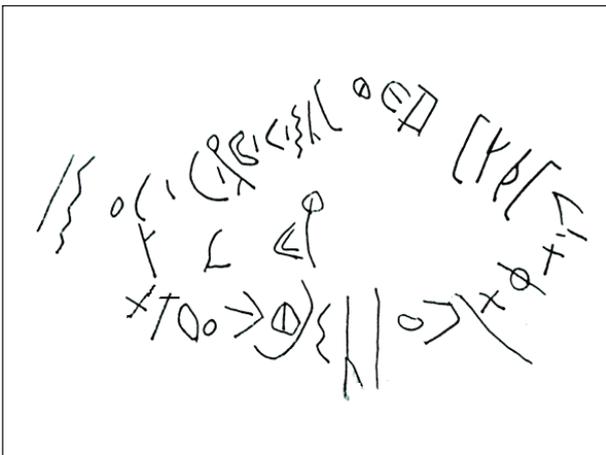


Fig. 5: Inscription No 4.

the goats and he grieved for his uncle and he dropped back on the night.

w-q<sup>c</sup>d: verb. ground stem (form I) + third person singular masculine derived from the root q<sup>c</sup>d which means “to sit down”. trq: verb. ground stem (form I)+ third person singular masculine, it could be the equivalent of the Arabic طَرَقَ/ṭaraqa which means “drop on a night”. h-qfy: a singular noun, is the equivalent of the Arabic قَفِي/qafaya which means “to return back”.

### Stone 3 (Fig. 5)

#### Inscription 5

#### Transliteration

lš<sup>c</sup>bn bn šmn bn šhr w-ḥḍr ḥdr snt qtl b<sup>c</sup>lh  
f-rwḥ ʿjzt h-smy

#### Translation

By š<sup>c</sup>bn son of šmn son of šhr, and who camped by permanent water here the year (when) b<sup>c</sup>lh (or his Lord) was killed, so (god) let there be ease (from) the sky lacked (of rain).

#### Comments

The inscription is written in the middle of a basalt stone in a boustrophedon style. The reading and the translation of the inscription are certain. The author of the inscription mention that he encamped by permanent water, the year (when) b<sup>c</sup>lh (or his Lord) was killed, and he asks (god) to let there be ease from the sky lacked of rain.

The inscription is dated to the year when b<sup>c</sup>lh was killed “snt qtl b<sup>c</sup>lh”. We propose two suggestions for the interpretation of the name b<sup>c</sup>lh; First: it could be a personal name derived from the root b<sup>c</sup>l, as it has been noted only once on other Safaitic inscription (see: al-Roussan 2004, no 189). Second; b<sup>c</sup>l “Lord” + h: 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular masculine pronoun “his Lord”.

š<sup>c</sup>bn, šmn and šhr are Safaitic well-known personal names (See: OCIANA). ḥḍr: verb. ground stem (form I), Root: ḥḍr means “to camp by water”. h-dr: h is the Safaitic definite article. n. sing. area; place; region. Root: dwr. qtl : inf.g-stem. to (be) killed. Root: qtl. f- rwḥ: f: conj. “and; so; then (expressing sequence); rwḥ: n.abst. “relief; ease”. Root: rwḥ (Al- Jallad and Jaworska, 2019: 68;118). ʿjzt: n. sing. “drought”. Root: ʿgz. (Al- Jallad and Jaworska, 2019: 68;118).

#### Conclusion

This study was to shed light on a new collection of dated Safaitic inscriptions collected during a recent survey on the Northeastern Badia of Jordan. It figures out more information about the linguistic phenomena, social and religious lives of the people who left these inscriptions.

These inscriptions expose remarkable dating hitherto unknown in other Safaitic inscriptions; two inscriptions are dated the year (when) the tribe of *whb'l* acquitted from *bt/hrt*, and the

year when the tribe *df* fought the Palmyrenes. However, the last one dated the year when *b'lh* (or his Lord) was killed.

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### Sigla

C : Ryckmans, G. *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum: Pars Quinta, Inscriptiones Saracenicæ Continens: Tomus I, Fasciculus I, Inscriptiones Safaiticæ.*  
 CAD: The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute

of the University of Chicago.

HCH: Harding, G.L. 1953, "The Cairn of Hani".

OCIANA: Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia.

**ملخص:** يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة مجموعة جديدة من النقوش الصفوية المؤرخة، عُثر عليها أثناء مسح ميداني في منطقة العوشجي الشمالي، بالبادية الشمالية الشرقية في الأردن. تتمثل أهمية هذه النقوش في كونها تؤرخ بأحداث فريدة ترد لأول مرة في النقوش الصفوية المنشورة حتى الآن. فيؤرخ النقشان الأول والثاني إلى حادثة نجاة آل وهب ايل من ب خ/ت رت «س ن ت ن ج ي ال و ه ب ال م ن ب خ/ت رت»، ويؤرخ النقش الثالث إلى سنة حاربت قبيلة ضيف تدمر «س ن ت ح ر ب ال ض ف ال ت د م ر».

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