

# New Safaitic inscriptions from the North of Saudi Arabia

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The inscriptions involved here are displayed in al-Sudiry's private museum in al-Ġawf. In this paper we have tried to analyze them, giving their personal names special attention.

Four years ago I was given photographs of thirteen small stones bearing graffiti in the so-called "Safaitic" script (1). The stones are on display in Abdurahman al-Sudiry's private museum in al-Ġawf. Unfortunately, the quality of the photographs was too poor to permit me to read the inscriptions with any confidence and I therefore had to await an opportunity to visit the al-Sudiry museum.

With the kind permission of the museum authorities, I was able to examine the inscribed stones. Unfortunately, most of the texts proved to be in such bad condition that it would have been useless to try to rephotograph them. I therefore made hand-copies of the eight texts which I found sufficiently legible.

These graffiti form a small addition to the ever-increasing corpus of Safaitic inscriptions from northern Saudi Arabia, which at present numbers approximately 438 texts. It may be helpful to give here a full, though probably not complete, list of those published to date (2).

1909: One text was found by Jaussen and Savignac at Madā'in Ṣāliḥ

and was published but not numbered or read by them. It has only recently been identified as Safaitic (3).

1967: A. Jamme published 22 Safaitic inscriptions from near Badanah (4).

1969: A. Jamme published five more from various places (5).

1970: In an unpublished M.A. thesis [NSR], Y.A. Abdallah edited 159 Safaitic inscriptions discovered by the late Professor Mahmud al-Ghul in northern Saudi Arabia and deposited in the Museum of King Saud University, Riyadh (6).

1970: Jamme edited one new Safaitic inscription (plus three of the NSR texts), in an article on the inscriptions in the Riyadh Museum (7).

1970: Jamme published four others from the Turayf region (8).

1970: F.V. Winnett and W.L. Reed published as Thamudic a number of texts which were subsequently recognized as Safaitic (9). The exact number is disputed, since in many cases a short text with

no diagnostic features could be either Safaitic or Thamudic E. However, a conservative estimate would be approximately 20.

- 1971: Winnett published 12 new texts, (plus 10 which had already been edited by Abdallah or Jamme) (10).
- 1971: Jamme presented a collection of 189 new Safaitic inscriptions from the regions of 'Ar'ar and Ra's al-'Anā'iya, (plus 37 which had been edited in NSR) (11).
- 1972: Jamme published eight texts from the 'Ar'ar region (12).
- 1973: One text from the Ḥā'il area, published by Winnett and Reed as Thamudic E, was later recognized as Safaitic (13).
- 1984–85: V.A. Clark published two texts from the Sakaka region (14).
- 1985: Jamme published three more texts from the Turayf area (15).
- 1991: The present author published three Safaitic inscriptions from northern Saudi Arabia (16).
- 1993: The present author published eight Safaitic inscriptions in the Dār al-Ġawf museum (17).

Of the eight graffiti edited here, each occupies a separate stone, with the exception of 1a and b, and 6a and b. Unfortunately, nothing is known of their provenance but it seems probable that they all derive from one site. All but 6B have the same structure of *lām auctoris* (18) followed by the author's name and that of his father (19), followed by the words *w bny* "and he built". No indication is given of the nature of the structure(s) which the authors were building, but in the Safaitic graffiti the verb often refers to the construction of a cairn (20).

1A.

*l s'ḏ bn 'bd w bny*

By S'ḏ son of 'bd, and he built

This text and 1B are shallowly engraved on the same stone. The names are two of the commonest in Safaitic and are found in several other Semitic onomastica. S'ḏ is either a simple one-word name, or a hypocoristic of a theophoric compound. In the latter case, it could either represent the name of the divinity, cf. the Palmyrene (21) and pre-Islamic Arabian (22) deities S'ḏ, or the non-divine part of the name, cf. Nabataean ṣ'd'ḥy, etc. Both names are capable of many different vocalizations.

1B.

*l 'dnt bn mhl w bny*

By 'dnt son of Mhl, and he built

The name 'dnt, corresponds to Arabic *ūd-aina*, "little ear, or earlobe" (23). Littmann suggested that king Odenathus of Palmyra (260–267) first made this name popular and that consequently all the Safaitic inscriptions in which it occurs must date to the mid-third century or later (24). However, this view has been questioned by Winnett and Harding, who point out that it is "highly likely that the ruler of Palmyra was not the first Arab to bear the name" (25). It is found in several other Semitic onomastica (26).

The name Mhl, which has been found three times before in Safaitic is derived from the Arabic root *mhl*, which means "hard, strong" or "dearth, sterility" (27).

2.

*l ms¹'d bn 'wg w bny*

By Ms¹'d son of 'wg and he built

The text is carelessly and shallowly engraved. *Ms¹'d* has been found in Safaitic and Thamudic E (28). It also occurs in an Aramaic inscription from Madā'in Šālīḥ as the name of a man who calls himself "the king of Liḥyān" (29). The second name is previously unattested in North Arabian. It may be derived from the Arabic root 'wg, meaning "to be bent, crooked, distorted", in which case it may be a diminutive of the name which occurs in Safaitic as 'g. (30). The name 'wyg' occurs in Hatran (31).

3.

*l mlk bn {m} 'y bn 'bd [w b]ny*

By Mlk son of {M}'y son of 'bd, [and he b]uilt

*Mlk* is known from Safaitic, Thamudic D and Thamudic E, (32) as well as from Nabataean, (33) and Palmyrene (34). The reading of the first letter of the second name is doubtful. The name *M'y* is unattested in North Arabian, though *M'y* is found once in Palmyrene (35) and cf. the name *Mā'ai* in Nehemiah 12: 36. The *w* and the *b* of *w bny* are not visible on the stone.

34

4.

*l 'rm bn ḥ{ṣ}y w bny*

By 'rm son of Ḥ{ṣ}y, and he built

The first name is known in Safaitic and may be related to Arabic 'arama "to suck the breast" or to 'arm "blackness mixed with whiteness" (36). The reading of the second name is difficult. *Ḥhy* would be an impossible combination of sounds and the second letter is unlikely to be *s¹* since every other example of *s¹* in this group of inscriptions is in a horizontal axis in relation to the other letters of the text (see, 1A, 2 and 5). It is therefore possible that this letter is a ṣ and that the circle has been lost. The name *Ḥṣy* seems to be attested only once, in Thamudic C (37). It may be noted that the small "r"s in nos 4, 5 and 6B are more typical of Thamudic E than of Safaitic, though the "g"s in nos 2 and 5 are characteristic of Safaitic and do not occur in Thamudic E. This suggests that these are "mixed" texts (38), a reasonable assumption since they presumably come from the region where the users of the two scripts met.

5.

*l 'ls¹ bn 'rd w bny*

By 'ls¹ son of 'rd, and he built

This text is the most clearly written of this small collection. The first name is attested

only twice in Safaitic and it is difficult to find a derivation for it, though Harding suggests relating it to Arabic *'alasa* "to deceive, betray" (39). The second name, which occurs four times in Safaitic, is related to Arabic *'ard* "a solid thing" (40).

6A.

1 { 1 + c . x /  
p . y ⊕

l mlt bn hll w bny

By Mlt son of Hll, and he built

This text and 6B are on the same stone. They are both shallowly engraved. Both names are known. *Mlt* may be related to Arabic *malata* "to move, shake" (41). The second name may represent a name similar to Arabic *Halil*.

6B.

l c c ϕ c . B + ⊕ c . l . x p y p ⊕

l rbq bn mtw bn hn' {h} hdw

By Rbq son of Mtw son of Hn' (the)  
caravan leader

The name *Rbq* is found here for the first time in Safaitic, though *rbqt* is known from Thamudic E (42). It is probably related to Arabic *rabaq* "a rope with which small goats are tied to prevent them from suckling" (43).

*Mtw* has not been found before in Safaitic, though there is one example of the name *Mtw* (44). However, *Mty* is very well attested there and *Mtyw* occurs in Nabataean inscriptions from North Arabia (45). Occasional variation between final *-w* and final *-y* is a recognized feature of Safaitic (cf. *rdy*/*rdw*, *s<sup>1</sup>ty*/*s<sup>1</sup>tw* (46), etc.), and it is therefore possible that *Mtw* is a dialectal

variant of *Mty*. The derivation of this name is disputed. Littmann's suggestion (47) that it is a hypocoristic of *mt'l* is plausible. However, his derivation of the *mt-* element from the Arabic root *mty* "to spread" is unconvincing, as is the proposal of G. Ryckmans that it comes from a root *mtw* "to walk rapidly" (48). I would suggest that it is related to the Semitic root *mat* meaning "man" (49), or to the Arabic root *matta* "to have long life" (50).

*Hn'* is extremely well attested in North Arabian and South Arabian, and is also found in Nabataean, Palmyrene and Hatran. Cantineau suggested that it was a simple name meaning "servant" (51), while Stark, rejecting this, believed it meant "happy" (52). Perhaps a better interpretation is from Arabic *han'* "gift", in which case it would be a hypocoristic meaning "gift of [divine name]".

The final word appears to read {h}-*hdw*. I would suggest that this is a variant form of the word which normally appears in Safaitic as *hdy*, showing the same fluctuation of the final radical *-y* and *-w* as in the name *Mtw* discussed above. If this suggestion is correct, it would be the first example in Safaitic, of the author of a text claiming to be a *hdy* in this way, though in SIJ 88, the author says *w hdy* which Winnett translates "and he acted as a guide". In all other cases the *hdy* is mentioned by someone else. In South Arabian *hdy* (both as a substantive and a verb) refers to the leader of a caravan (53), and that would seem to be a likely meaning for the instances in Safaitic too.

## References

1. I am most grateful to Dr. Kh. al-Muaiikel of the Department of Archaeology, King Saud University, Riyadh, who generously gave me these photographs.
2. It is not possible to produce a complete list since among the thousands of "Thamudic" graffiti found in Sa'udi Arabia there are a number which

- could be either Safaitic or Thamudic E, or texts in which there seems to be a mixture of letter forms, and opinions will differ as to how these are to be categorised.
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  4. Jamme A. Safaitic inscriptions from Saudi Arabia. *Oriens Antiquus* 6: 1967: 189–213 [=JaS 2–23].
  5. Jamme A. New Safaitic and Hasean inscriptions from Northern Arabia. *Sumer* 25: 1969: 141–152 [JaS 24–38].
  6. Abdallah YM. *Al-nuqūš al-ṣafawiya fī maḡmū'at ḡamī'at al-riyāḍ, 'ām 1966*. Unpublished M. A. thesis submitted to the American University of Beirut, 1970. This work is normally known by the siglum "NSR". Note that many of the text numbers are subdivided. Three of these inscriptions were subsequently published by Professor Abdallah, see Abdallah YM. *Talāṭa nuqūš ṣafawiya min 'ar'ar wa-badana. Maḡallat kuliyat al-'abdāb, ṣan'ā'*, 3: 1979: 61–77. Other texts edited in this work were also edited by other scholars, see below.
  7. Jamme A. The Pre-Islamic inscriptions of the Ri-yādh Museum. *Oriens Antiquus* 9: 1970: 129–132 [JaS 39–43]. Three of these texts had already been edited in NSR.
  8. Jamme A. Four new Safaitic texts. *Al-Machriq* 64: 1970: 587–590.
  9. Winnett FV & Reed WL. *Ancient records from North Arabia*. Toronto: Near and Middle East Series, 6: 1970. The texts published as "Thamudic" in this work are usually known by the siglum "WTI". For the recognition that some of these inscriptions are Safaitic, see Abdallah YM. in *Al-Ġasir, H. Fī šamāl ḡarb al-ḡazīra*. Riyadh: Dār al-Yamāma, 1970: 63–65 [re-reading WTI 81–84]; Jamme A in *JAOS* 92: 1972: 524; Harding GL in *ADAJ* 17: 1972: 5; Macdonald MCA in *ADAJ* 24: 1980: 188, etc.
  10. Winnett FV. An Arabian miscellany. *AION* 31: 1971: 452–454.
  11. Jamme A. Safaitic inscriptions from the country of Ar'ar and Ra's al-'Anānīyah. In: Altheim F & Stiehl R. *Christentum am Roten Meer*, 1. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971: 41–109, 609–637. [=JaS 44–176]. Note that many of these text numbers are subdivided.
  12. Jamme A. *Miscellanees d'ancien arabe III*. Washington, D.C. [privately produced], 1972: 113–114. [JaS 189–190].
  13. Winnett FV & Reed WL. An archaeological-epigraphical survey of the Hā'il area of Northern Sa'ūdi Arabia. *Berytus* 22: 1973: 53–113, no. 21. It was identified as Safaitic by Knauf EA in *ADAJ* 27: 1983: 592–593.
  14. Clark VA. New Safaitic inscriptions from Sakaka and Azraq. *Abr-Nahrain* 23: 1984–1985: 14–17.
  15. Jamme A. *Miscellanees d'ancien arabe XIV*. Washington, D.C. [privately produced], 1985: 38–41. [JaS 192–194].
  16. Al-Theeb S. Nuqūš ṣafawiya ḡadīda min šamāl al-mamlakat al-'arabiyat al-sa'ūdiyya. *Al-'Uṣūr* 6, part 1: 1991: 34–41.
  17. Al-Theeb S. Nuqūš ṣafawiya ḡadīda min mathaf dār al-ḡawf li-l-'ulūm. *Addarah* 4, year 18: 1993: 130–160.
  18. For a discussion of the use and meaning of the *lām auctoris*, see al-Theeb in *Al-'Uṣūr* 6, part 1: 1991: 37 and n. 16.
  19. In nos 2 and 6B the authors give the names of their grandfathers as well.
  20. See, for instance, Littmann E. *Safaitic inscriptions*. Leiden: Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–1905 and 1909, IV/C: 1943: nos 540, 673, 678; Harding GL. The Cairn of Hani'. *ADAJ* 2: 1953: nos 26, 36; Winnett FV & Harding GL. *Inscriptions from fifty Safaitic cairns*. Toronto: Near and Middle East Series, 9: 1978: nos 421, 929; etc. However, it also occurs with other objects, see Littmann, *Safaitic inscriptions*: nos 683, 685; Winnett FV. *Safaitic inscriptions from Jordan*. Toronto: Near and Middle East Series, 2: 1957: nos 296, 321, 682; and Winnett & Harding, *Fifty cairns*: 631 s.v. bny.
  21. See Teixidor J. *The Pantheon of Palmyra*. Leiden: Brill, 1979: 82–83.
  22. See Ibn al-Kalbi. *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, Ahmed Zaki Pasha ed. Cairo: 1914: 37.
  23. See Ibn Duraid al-Azdi, Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-Hassan. *Kitāb al-Istiḡāq*. Cairo: 1958: 155.
  24. Littmann E. *Thamūd und Ṣafā*. Leipzig: Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, XXV/1: 1940: 104.
  25. Winnett and Harding, *Fifty cairns*: 8.
  26. In Thamudic E, see King GMH. *Early North Arabian Thamudic E*. Ph. D thesis submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990: 470; Thamudic C, see Tham JS 749; Palmyrene, see Stark JK. *Personal names in the Palmyrene inscriptions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971: 2, 65; in Nabataean, see Khaysheh F. *Die Personennamen in den nabatäischen Inschriften des Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*. Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Marburg, 1986: 27. See also, al-Theeb in *Addarah* 5, year 18: 1993: 139.
  27. Ibn Manẓūr, Abu al-Faḍl Muhammad. *Lisān al-'arab*, 9. Beirut: Dār Ṣāder, 1956: 41–47.

28. See Harding GL. *An index and concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian names and inscriptions*. Toronto: Near and Middle East Series, 8: 1971: 544 and King: *Early North Arabian*: 546.
29. Jaussen & Savignac, *Mission*, 2: 1914: nos. 334 and 335.
30. See Harding, *Index*: 407. The Safaitic name 'g could, of course, represent names from both the roots 'gg and 'wg.
31. See Abbadi, S. *Die Personennamen der Inschriften aus Hatra*. Hildesheim: Olms: 1983: 148.
32. See Harding, *Index*: 565; King, *Early North Arabian*: 550.
33. Negev A. *Personal names in the Nabataean Realm*. Jerusalem: Qedem, 32: 1991: 39.
34. Stark, *Personal names*: 32–34, 95.
35. Stark, *Personal names*: 34, 95.
36. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, 4, 3914.
37. Winnett & Reed, *Hā'il*: 203 (c).
38. See Macdonald in *ADAJ* 24: 1980, 188, and King, *Early North Arabian*, 46–48.
39. Harding, *Index*: 66.
40. Ibn Duraid, *Istiqāq*: 552, Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*: 4, 2872.
41. Harding, *Index*: 562.
42. See King, *Early North Arabian*: 502, and cf. Hebrew *ribqā*.
43. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*: 3, 1750.
44. *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum Pars V*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1950–51: no. 5081.
45. Al-Theeb S. *Aramaic and Nabataean inscriptions from North-West Saudi Arabia*. Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1993: nos 9, 10, 18.
46. For *štu*, see Clark VA. *A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan*. Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Melbourne, 1979: no. 324.
47. Littmann, *Safaitic inscriptions*: 267, 327.
48. Ryckmans G. *Les noms propres sud-sémitiques*, 1. Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, 2: 1934: 133.
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50. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*: 5, 272.
51. Cantineau J. *Le Nabatéen*, 2. Paris: Leroux, 1932: 87.
52. Stark, *Personal names*: 84. Abbadi follows this interpretation for the Hatran name *Hny* (*Die Personennamen*: 100).
53. Beeston AFL, Ghul MA, Müller WW, Ryckmans J. *Sabaic dictionary*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982: 55).

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