Inscriptions from Tell Rimah and its Area in North Eastern Jordan

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INSCRIPTIONS FROM TELL RIMAH AND ITS AREA IN NORTH EASTERN JORDAN

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Tell Rimah is situated in North Eastern Jordan, about half way between Deir al-Kahf and Deir al-Qinn. It is at about 1129 m above sea level. It is a small tell dominating the surrounding area (fig. 1). During my fieldwork in the area in July 2002, I made a visit to the Tell Rimah and the surrounding areas where two Greek inscriptions were located at the top of the tell and seven Safaitic inscriptions were found in a wadi called wadi al-Murayqib to the south west of the tell. During his aerial survey over Iraq and Transjordan in 1938, Sir M. A. Stein did refer to the tell after he took an aerial photograph of it, but he was unable to visit the site. In 1982, David Kennedy mentioned Tell Rimah among Roman military sites in North Eastern Jordan which, he said, needed fuller discussion and deserved future investigations.

The inscriptions being discussed here are important on three grounds. First, this is the first time that Greek inscriptions are attested in Tell Rimah. Second, some archaeological remains can be seen on the slopes of this tell. Third, at about 500 m to the south west of the tell, seven Safaitic inscriptions were found in a wadi called wadi al-Murayqib. The area of Tell Rimah is a transitory area between two other areas: to the west, the region where the Greek and Nabataean inscriptions are dominating and to

Résumé – Tell Rimah, dans le Hauran jordanien proche de la frontière syrienne, a livré deux courtes inscriptions grecques et, à 500 m de là, dans le wadi al-Murayqib, sept inscriptions safaïtiques. Tell Rimah se situe ainsi à la limite entre la zone des sédentaires employant le grec et celle des pasteurs du harra écrivant en safaïtique.

Abstract – Two short Greek inscriptions were found at Tell Rimah, in the Jordanian Hauran, near the Syrian border, and seven Safaitic inscriptions from wadi al-Murayqib, a site at 500 m away. Tell Rimah was on the borderline between sedentary people using Greek and Nabataean scripts, and the nomads of the harra, who were writing in the Safaitic alphabet.

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1. Formerly known as Nabil Atallah. I wish to thank Professor M. C. A. Macdonald who kindly read the manuscript and offered valuable comments. I also extend my thanks to Dr. Hani Hayajneh and Dr. Mohammad Ababneh for their comments and help during my work.


Syria 84 (2007), p. 287 à 294
the east, the area where the Safaitic inscriptions are the most important ones. I mean that the area of Tell Rimah is considered a contact place between the people of the harra in the east and the people using the Greek and Nabataean languages in the west.

**GREEK INSCRIPTIONS**

1. On a rock on the western part of the top of Tell Rimah. A basalt rock bearing a one-line Greek inscription. The letters are well carved but covered with very thick lichen. The text is complete (fig. 2).

   *Dimensions*: height of the letters 6-7 cm.

   Μακεδόνις
   “Makedonis”

   The inscription here contained the Greek name Μακεδόνιος. The -ιος is normally abbreviated into -ις. The name is rare in the region 4, but has already been attested in Jerash 5. We also found Μακεδόνα in an inscription in Khirbet as-Samra 6.

2. On the upper part of an entrance of a small cave on the south west slope of Tell Rimah. Greek letters deeply carved on the upper part of a basalt rock forming the entrance of a small cave. The inscription is covered with a layer of lichen, and the surface of the rock where the inscription is found is very rough, which makes it difficult to read (fig. 3).

   The inscription is high above the ground, which makes it difficult to take measures; anyhow, the height of the letters is approximately 20 cm.

I think that we have here a personal name which has already been attested in the region. It could be the Latin name Manus or the Semitic name M’n, a hypocoristic form of M’n l derived from the Semitic root ‘wn which means “help”’. It is a well known name in Safaitic inscriptions (H 556), in Thamudic inscriptions⁷, Liyanite⁸, Palmyrene⁹, in Nabataean, m’nw¹⁰, and finally in Sabaic and Qatabanic (H 556). It has also been attested as a compound theophoric name M’n l¹² and M’n l¹³.

**SAFAITIC INSCRIPTIONS**

In the wadi al-Murayqib, located at about 500 m to the south west of Tell Rimah, seven Safaitic inscriptions were found on basalt rocks in the wadi.

1. The first inscription was found on a big basalt boulder in the entrance of wadi al-Murayqib. The rock is facing south. The text seems to be complete. The shape of the characters is of square type; they are well carved on the surface of the rock (fig. 4).

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**Figure 4a:** Safaitic inscription no 1 (photo).

**Figure 4b:** Safaitic inscription no 1 (drawing).

*‘l’bgr bn ‘qr b.*

“For (or by) ‘bgr son of ‘qr b.”

We found two names in this inscription; the first one is ‘bgr and the second one, the patronymic, ‘qr b. The first name was found in Safaitic inscriptions (H 9). The second one, ‘qr b, has already been attested in Safaitic and Thamudic inscriptions (H 427), in Qatabanic¹⁴, in Nabataean¹⁵.

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8. JS II, p. 540, no 195.
11. CANTINEAU II, p. 117.
14. PQI 191.
15. CANTINEAU I, p. 134.
2. On a big basalt rock located at a few meters to the west of the rock carrying the Safaitic inscription number 1. The characters of this inscription are big and well carved on the surface of the rock; they are square shaped. The inscription seems to be complete (fig. 5).

l’qrb bn m’n d’l ’mrt.

“For (or by) ‘qrb son of m’n of the lineage of ’mrt.”

The first name in this inscription is ‘qrb, which has already been discussed in the first Safaitic inscription. About the second name m’n, see above in the Greek inscription no. 2.

d’l: ’l a word meaning any social group from family to nation and d’l meaning “the lineage of”; it could be translated sometimes as “tribe”

‘mrt: this is a popular Safaitic tribe name. J. T. Milik thinks that the tribe ‘mrt was settled in the centre of Jordan, especially in the Madaba region and the members of this tribe knew the Nabataean writings; but M. Macdonald disagrees with Milik’s views by giving a set of arguments which I think are correct.

3A-B. Two inscriptions were found on the same basalt rock, facing south at the entrance of the wadi. We can see below the inscriptions some drawings and a modern Arabic writing, Djasim, which is a personal name (fig. 6).

A. ls(?w’t bn[---].

“For s(?w’t son of[---]”

B. lntn bn ’b[---].

“For lntn son of ’b[---]”

The only readable part of the first inscription (A) is a personal name: sw’t. I did not find any parallel for this name in Safaitic, but I found two occurrences of sw’t in Thamudic inscriptions (H 335). It means “to neglect”. 

The second inscription (B) is formed of two personal names; the first one is *ntn*. It is derived from the root *ntn*, “to give”\textsuperscript{20}. The name *ntn* did occur in Safaitic, Thamudic, Sabaic, Minaean (H 581). It was also attested as a compound theophoric name *ntnb*’l\textsuperscript{21}, *ntn yhw*\textsuperscript{22}, ‘m *ntn* in Thamudic\textsuperscript{23}.

The second name of the second inscription is *’b*. It is a common Semitic name. It did occur in almost all north and south Arabic dialects (H 7-8). It was also attested as a compound name like *’b*’s, *’b*’mr (H 8) and *’bs’d* (H 11). But, if the text is broken, we can suggest *’bgr*, like in the first Safaitic inscription.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure6a}
\caption{Safaitic inscription no. 3 (photo).}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure6b}
\caption{Safaitic inscription no. 3 (drawing).}
\end{figure}

4. The fourth inscription was found on the same surface of the big rock where the inscriptions no. 3 were found (fig. 7).

*Lšnqn* bn *wtr* w*w*gm *’[l ---] bn qt w’l ng* bn *nfl* (or *nfls?).

“For (or by) *šnqn* son of *wtr* and he grieves on [---] son of *qt* and on *ng*’ son of *nfl* (or *nfls").”

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure7a}
\caption{Safaitic inscription no. 4 (photo).}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure7b}
\caption{Safaitic inscription no. 4 (drawing).}
\end{figure}

**Šnqn**: Šnq a personal name which has already occurred in Safaitic, it could be the Arabic name Šnaq, which means “tall, lanky” (H 359); it was attested also as Šnqt and Šnqm (H 360).

Wtr is a very well known name in Safaitic inscriptions (H 633-34); it did occur also in Thamudic\textsuperscript{24} and Sabaic (H 634). It is in Arabic wâtir which means “above or unique” (H 633). It did occur as a compound personal name wtr’il in Minaean\textsuperscript{25}.

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{20}]. Tomback 1978, p. 233.
\item[\textsuperscript{21}]. JS II, p. 450, no. 81, l. 1.
\item[\textsuperscript{22}]. Fowler 1988, p. 352, 396.
\item[\textsuperscript{23}]. JS II, p. 605, no. 527.
\item[\textsuperscript{24}]. Philby, 20qr.
\item[\textsuperscript{25}]. PMI 174.
\end{itemize}
wgm: as for the translation of this verb wgm, it was given many possibilities. Some scholars consider it as “to grieve”, others “to mourn” or “to throw a stone on someone’s grave”26.

'l: a particle meaning “upon” or “on”.

Qt: this name could be the Arabic qatt which means “falsehood” (H 473); it was attested in Safaitic inscriptions27.

Ng': Harding mentioned in his index (H 582) the occurrence of this name once in Safaitic inscriptions28.

The last name in this inscription is problematic; this problem is caused mainly by the shape of the ‘ and n which are distinguished only by their size: here we have two suggestions. nfl(l?) could be a theophoric name occurring for the first time which can mean “may ’l protect” or “gift of ’l”. Or we can also read this letter as nfl(s), due to the possibility of having a horizontal stroke attached to the upper part of the last letter of the inscription. We note here that the name nfl is occurring in Safaitic inscriptions (H 597). I do not know any nfl or nfts.

5. The inscription was found on a rock in the bed of the wadi; it seems to be complete (fig. 8).

Figure 8a: Safaitic Inscription no. 5 (photo). Figure 8b: Safaitic Inscription no. 5 (drawing).

l’ys bn w’rm wgm ‘l ’lh ’s w’l hn’ bn [---]h ’mt w’l t’mr w’l sblt.
“For (or by) l’ys son of w’rm and he grieves for his brother ’s and on hn’ son of [---]h ’mt and on t’mr and on sblt.”

l’ys: this personal name is well attested in Safaitic inscriptions (H 88).

w’rm: the name w’r occurs in Safaitic inscriptions; the word wa’ir in Arabic means “rough” (H 162).

wgm: see the comments about this verb in the inscription no. 4.

’s: this is a well known personal name in Semitic inscriptions. We do find this name in Safaitic inscriptions (H 45) and it was attested in Thamudic inscriptions29. The name was also attested in Nabataean inscriptions as ’ws as well as a compound theophoric name ’ws’lhy30.

hn’: a personal name occurring in most of the North Arabic dialects; it is very well known in Safaitic (H 625), Thamudic31, Nabataean (hn’w)32 and Palmyrene33.

27. C 2483.
28. C 5142.
29. Philby 165.
30. PNIC 28.
31. Philby 27m.
32. PNIC 63.
33. STARK 1972, p. 84.
**h’mt:** the first letter h is the definite article. ‘mt is a very well known name attested in Safaitic inscriptions. According to Harding the name ‘mtt, which is also attested in Safaitic inscriptions, could be the Arabic ‘ammitah (H 435).

**t’mr:** this name was attested in Safaitic34, the popular Safaitic name ‘mr is the source of many personal names in Safaitic inscriptions (for more examples of this name, see H 436).

**sblt:** the personnal name sbl occurs in Safaitic (H 309) and the name sblt in Sabaic (H 310).

6. The basalt stone carrying the inscription is located in the north entrance of the wadi al-Murayqib. A part of the face of the stone where the inscription was carved is covered with a thick layer of lichen. It seems that the stone is incomplete in the top, left and right. The characters are of a square type and a big size, 7 to 15 cm. We cannot be sure if the inscription is complete or not because of the break in the stone carrying the inscription (fig. 9).

![Figure 9a: Safaitic Inscription no. 6 (photo).](image1)

![Figure 9b: Safaitic Inscription no. 6 (drawing).](image2)

At the beginning of the text there is a circle which could be the letter w or ‘. We note that there is one t at the end of the text. As we see in the facsimile the characters are square.

The inscription consists of a personal name srm which is a well known personal name in Safaitic inscriptions (H 371). It occurs also in Thamudic35; the name occurs also as srm and srm’il in Safaitic inscriptions (H 371).

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34. C 893 and HCH n° 43.
35. Philby 166u3.
ABBREVIATIONS

Cantineau  CANTINEAU 1930-1932.
HCH “Safaitic Inscriptions”, in HARDING 1953.
H  HARDING 1971.
JS JAUSSEN & SAVIGNAC 1909-1914.
Philby BRANDEN 1956.
PNIC F. AL-KHAYSHI, Die Personennamen in den Nabataischen Inschriften des Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum (Marburg, Dissertationsdruck, 1986).
PQI HAYAJNEH 1998.

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