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New Epigraphica from Jordan I: a pre-Islamic Arabic inscription in Greek letters and a Greek inscription from north-eastern Jordan*

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Abstract

This article studies two unique Greek inscriptions from Wadi Salma in north-eastern Jordan. The first contains seven lines of Old Arabic written in Greek letters, and is our first secure example of Arabic prose written in Greek in the pre-Islamic period. The inscription sheds light on several grammatical features otherwise obscured by the consonantal skeletons of the Semitic scripts, such as the presence of case inflection, the realization of III-w suffix-conjugated verbs, and the vowel pattern of the prefix conjugation. The second inscription is written entirely in the Greek language, but contains a long section of prose that is thematically similar to what is typically found in the Safaitic inscriptions.

Keywords: Greek inscriptions; Safaitic; Old Arabic; Graeco-Arabica

1 Introduction

The remote areas of the Harrah, the basalt desert of southern Syria and northern Jordan, have yielded thousands of inscriptions in the Safaitic script, but to date only handful of texts in other scripts have been discovered in this region. With the notable exception of a long and rather well-written Greek text from Jathum, on the Jordanian panhandle (Mowry 1953), most of the Greek inscriptions of this area seem to have been carved by nomads, and contain only names. The two Greek inscriptions from Wadi Salma under examination here differ in this respect: the first is in fact an Old Arabic text written in Greek letters. It contains a relatively long section of prose which is thematically similar to what one usually finds in the Safaitic inscriptions. The second inscription is composed in both the Greek language and script, but like the first, its contents are thematically similar to the Safaitic inscriptions. Neither text furnishes a

*This is the first in an occasional series of articles by A. Al-Jallad and A. al-Manaser studying selected inscriptions from the 2015 OCIANA survey in northern Jordan and other epigraphic varia.

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date, so we can only say that these inscriptions were carved sometime before the Islamic conquests. It is probable, although not provable, that they come from the third or fourth century CE, to which most of the Greek epigraphy in southern Syria dates. However, this can only be a guess, as no dated Greek inscriptions from Wadi Salma have been discovered. It is possible to suggest that because their content so closely mirrors the Safaitic inscriptions, they must have been carved during the period in which the tradition of Safaitic writing was alive; however, this hypothesis still does not help very much with establishing a *terminus ante quem*. While the conventional chronology assumes that the Safaitic inscriptions end in the fourth century CE, this claim is not based on any good evidence (Al-Jallad 2015b: §1.3).

Both inscriptions were photographed by Prof. Sabri Abbadi and given to Dr. A. al-Manaser, who kindly made them available to Dr. A. Al-Jallad to study. Both authors thank Prof. Abbadi for permission to publish the photographs.

2 A Graeco-Arabic Inscription (figures 2 and 3)

The first of the two inscriptions under discussion is a so far unique epigraphic example of writing Old Arabic in Greek letters. The value of this text is hard to overstate – what we have before us is the first example of fully vocalized Old Arabic prose. The notation of vowels allows us finally to answer several outstanding questions regarding the vocalization of the dialects attested in the Safaitic inscriptions. The seven-line text was incised with a sharp instrument – either another rock or a knife – on the side of a basalt slab. The size of the stone is unclear because the photograph only includes the portion bearing the text. The incised section of the rock is roughly 10cm high by 12cm wide. The author uses the rounded variant of the capital script, as is evident from the lunate shape of the Epsilon and Sigma. All of the letter forms are in line with the standard range of variation of the suggested period in which these texts could have been carved. The only atypical letter form is the Zeta of line 4: the author seems to have written the letter backwards, even though he correctly writes it on the preceding line.

Two readings and interpretations are possible for this text:

Reading 1	Translation
1) Αυσος Ουδου	1) ʾAws son of ʿūḏ (?)
2) Βαναου Χαζιμ	2) son of Bannāʾ son of Kazim
3) μου αλ-Ιδαμι αθα	3) the ʾidāmite came
4) οα μι- Σεια ζαθαοε ϙ	4) from Sīʿ to spend the winter
5) α Βαναα α-δαυρα	5) with Bannāʾ in this region
6) αουα ειραυ βακλα	6) and they pastured on fresh herbage
7) βι-Χανου[ν]	7) during Kānūn

Transliteration: *ʾAws (bin) ʿūḏ (?) (bin) Bannāʾ (bin) Kazim ʾal-ʾidāmiyy ʾatawa mis-siʿāʿ śatāw wa Bannāʾa ʾad-dawra wa yirʿaw baqla bi-kānūn*

Reading 2	Translation
1) Αυσος Ουδου	1) ʾAws son of ʿūḏ (?)
2) Βαναου Χαζιμ	2) son of Bannāʾ son of Kazim
3) μου αλ-Ιδαμι αθα	3) the ʾidāmite came
4) οα μι- σειαζ αθαοεῠ	4) because of scarcity; he came
5) α Βαναα α-δαυρα	5) to Bannāʾ in this region
6) αουα ειραυ βακλα	6) and they pastured on fresh herbage
7) βι-Χανου[ν]	7) during Kānūn

Transliteration: *ʾAws (bin) ʿūḏ (?) (bin) Bannāʾ (bin) Kazim ʾal-ʾidāmiyy ʾatawa miś-śiḥāṣ; ʾatawa Bannāʾa ʾad-dawra wa yirʿaw baqla bi-kānūn*

2.1 The onomastica

The names attested in this inscription are common in the Safaitic inscriptions and in the Greek inscriptions of the southern Levant. As expected, the Arabic names are Hellenized in the second declension, with the patronymics given in the genitive case.

Αυσος = ʾAws: This name is common in the Safaitic inscriptions, spelled nearly always as *ʾs*[1], with the expected non-representation of the diphthong [au]. There are several attestations of a name *ʾws*[1] (Harding 1971: 84), which could reflect a plene spelling of the diphthong or, perhaps more likely, a diminutive form, */ʾoways/.

Ουδου: There are several equal possibilities in the interpretation of this name. The first consonant can be any laryngeal or pharyngeal fricative, thus *h*, *ḥ*, *ʾ*, *ʿ*, or even *ḫ* and *ġ*, both of which are only rarely represented in Greek transcription. The Delta can represent either Old Arabic [d] or [ð]. With these possibilities in mind, there are a number of common names one can chose from in the Safaitic onomasticon: *ʿḏ* (e.g. C 114); *ḥd* (e.g. C 165); *ḫd* (e.g. C 622); *ʾd* (e.g. C 111); etc.

Βαναου: This name can be none other than Safaitic *bnʾ* (e.g. C 213). Harding (1971: 122) connects this word with CAr *bannāʾ* 'builder', but for this to be the case, the sound change of *āy* to *āʾ* – which is rare in the Safaitic inscriptions – must have occurred in the etymological source of this particular name. Since this sound change is typical of Aramaic, it might be the case that this name finds its origin in an urban variety of Old Arabic that was in close contact with Aramaic. The writing of the geminated /n/ with only one Nu seems to be the result of a general aversion to the representation of gemination by this author, as we shall see below.

Καζιμ//μου:[1] The great-grandfather's name can be connected with Safaitic *kzm*, which has been attested only four times so far (WH 2563; SIJ 470; BTH 96, 246; see also Harding 1971: 499 for other names derived from this root). The morphological identity of this name is difficult to establish because it is split across two lines. Harding (ibid.) connects it with the Arabic adjective *kazim* 'timid', which, if true, one must interpret the doubled final consonant

[1]It is impossible to see the μου of line 3 as beginning a new clause, as all names in this inscription have been Hellenized. This is normal when writing Arabic (and Semitic in general) names in Greek, even in graffiti; see for example the collection of bilingual inscriptions in Al-Jallad (2015a: 293–294).

as an orthographic device, namely, repeating the last letter of a line at the beginning of the next one. A similar technique would then be used in line 5–6 with the letter α. If the writing of two μ's was deliberate, then perhaps this name reflects an original reduplicated pattern, CaCiCC-, /kazimm/. This pattern is not attested in Arabic, but can be found in Hebrew, there only with an *-*at* suffix, e.g. *qəhillā* < **qahillatu*, and in Syriac, *qtəl*, without a suffix (Fox 2003: 285).

Αλ-Ιδαμι: At this point, the author seems to have exhausted his knowledge of Greek and switches to Old Arabic, while continuing to write in Greek letters, to compose the rest of the inscription. Following the patronymics, the author gives his tribal/social affiliation with a gentilic adjective, αλ-ιδαμι /ʾal-ʾidāmiyy/. This would seem to be related to Safaitic *ʾl ʾdm* 'the lineage of *ʾdm*', attested in RyD 6822. Both sources together suggest a connection with the kingdom of Edom; this will be discussed in further detail below (§2.4). *ʾdm* is also attested frequently as a personal name, but it is unclear if it should be vocalized identically to the lineage group.

2.2 The narrative

As in the Safaitic inscriptions, following the genealogy there is a narrative section describing the activities of the inscription's subject, usually dealing with pasturing and migrating. The narrative of A1 mentions both of these themes, but differs from many texts written in the Safaitic script in that it does not terminate in a prayer.

Lines 3–5: αθαοα μι- Σεια ζ α θ α ο ε ω/ῠ α Βαναα α-δαυρα

Αθαοα: This word is clearly the suffix conjugation of the root √ʾtw, 'to come', with the preservation of the triphthong in final position, cf. Ancient South Arabian *ʾtw*, Gəʿəz *ʾatawa*, etc. The collapse of triphthongs in III-y/w verbs has not yet been attested clearly in Safaitic, although *w* tends to merge with *y* in this position. The speech variety reflected in this inscription clearly attests an archaic situation, in that the etymological value of the glide is preserved. Both variants are found in the Safaitic inscriptions: *ʾty* and *ʾtw* (Al-Jallad 2015b: 121–122).

μισειαζαθαοεω/ῠ : The crux of this clause is the interpretation of this sequence of letters.

The first two letters likely transcribe the reflex of the preposition *min* 'from' with the loss of the [n]. This is common in the Safaitic inscriptions, but there are examples in which the nasal is preserved (Al-Jallad 2015b: 150–152). If this is correct, then it would seem that the loss of the [n] did not trigger gemination in the following consonant or that the author of this inscription did not represent geminated consonants in his transcription of Arabic. The second possibility may be considered more likely in light of his transcription of the assimilated form of the definite article in line 5.

Interpretation 1

αθαοα μι- Σεια ζαθαοε ω//α Βαναα α-δαυρα
a) 'He came with Bannāʾ from Sīʿ during the winter to this region'
or
b) 'He came with Bannāʾ from Sīʿ to spend the winter in this region'

αθαοα μι- Σεια ζαθαοε: The phrase *ʾty/w m-* is attested in Safaitic:

LP 171: *ʾty m- tdmr*
'he came from Palmyra'

KRS 262: *ʾty m- mdbr*
'he came from the inner desert'

If the same pattern holds true here, then the term following μι should be interpreted as a toponym. The town Sīʿ in southern Syria immediately comes to mind. This town is mentioned several times in the Safaitic inscriptions, but never as the source of travel. Its spelling as s^{1cc} (e.g. CSNS 424) coupled with the present Greek transcription suggests the vocalization /siʿāʿ/.

This interpretation leaves us with the following sequence of letters to explain: ζαθαοεω̣//α. It is tempting to parse this into two words, ζαθαοε and ω̣α. This first could be connected with Safaitic s^2ty/s^2tw 'winter', here as a temporal adverb, */śatāw(e)/ or an infinitive of the same root, meaning 'to spend the winter'. Two things challenge this interpretation. The first is that there are no examples from the pre-Islamic period that I know of in which Arabic s^2 is transcribed with Zeta. The second is the final Epsilon. The adverbial use of a noun licenses the accusative case, a final /a/. Short /a/ is only rarely represented by Epsilon in Greek transcriptions, and never in this text. One could suggest that it represents some sort of prop vowel, but such a thing has not yet been attested in the Graeco-Arabica. The absence of a final /a/ can perhaps be better explained if we take ζαθαοε as an infinitive, */śatāw/ 'to winter', and argue that the infinitive did not take case endings.[2] In this case, one must view the final Epsilon as a strategy to represent clearly the word-final glide of the Arabic original, which would naturally emerge in pronunciation during the passage from Omicron to Epsilon.

The final letter of this sequence is cut off in the photograph, and so its exact identity is unclear. The glyph can be read as an Ypsilon, with slight damage to its right side, or equally as an Omega; the latter is the preferred reading for the present interpretation. The letter is the onset of the conjunction *wa*, which continues on the next line. The rest of the clause is: ω̣α Βαναα αδαυρα. The personal name Bannāʾ is the same as the author's grandfather in line two. The extra α should be explained as an accusative case, thus allowing us to identify this *wa* as having a comitative function, the so-called *wāwu l-māʿiyyah* (Fischer 2001: §328b). The next term αδαυρα is the common Safaitic expression *h- dr*, but here probably with the assimilated *ʾal*-article, thus */ʾad-dawra/, with perhaps again the non-representation of gemination. Opinions

[2]There is one example in the consonantal writing of Safaitic where this can be argued; see Al-Jallad (2015b: §5.3.1).

remain divided as to the meaning of this word, but I have followed Macdonald's neutral translation as 'place', 'region' (Al-Jallad 2015b: 312). The final α should be explained as the accusative, indicating goal of travel according to interpretation 1.a or static location according to 1.b. The use of prepositions for this function is rare in the Safaitic inscriptions (ibid., §4.6.1).

Interpretation 2

αθαοα μι- Σειαζ αθαοευα Βαναα α-δαυρα
'he came because of scarcity; he came to Bannāʾ in this region'

The aforementioned spelling anomalies can be resolved if we parse the words differently. Instead of understanding μι as an ablative, one could interpret it as introducing reason, and the following word as Safaitic *sʾḥṣ* 'want', 'scarcity' (Al-Jallad 2015b: 345). The transcription of *ṣ* with Zeta is attested, but only rarely. Perhaps it is significant that it occurs in a Greek-Safaitic bilingual text, namely, C 2823–2824 (+Greek) (Al-Jallad 2015b: §3.9.1). The pharyngeal *ḥ* is not represented in Greek transcription from the pre-Islamic period (Al-Jallad 2015a: §3.5).

The author then starts a new clause with the verb *ʾatawa*, but this time spells it differently than in the first line, clearly showing that he was struggling with the sequence foreign to Greek. Since the sequence αο is not a digraph, the author may have then chosen to use the diphthong ευ, which was likely pronounced as [eu] in this period. Regardless of how we interpret this strange series of letters, it does seem to be a deliberate attempt to indicate the foreign sequence [awa], and we can only guess as to why the author would have abandoned the concise, yet clear, spelling employed just one line above.

The terms Βαναα and αδαυρα can be interpreted in much the same way as in the first interpretation, that is, as accusatives, the first indicating goal and the second location.

Lines 6–7: αουα ειραυ βακλα βι- Χανου[ν]
'and they pastured on fresh herbage during [Kānūn]'

This sentence mirrors the common Safaitic pasturing formula: *w rʿy bql b-time period*, 'and he pastured on fresh herbage during *time period*'(Al-Jallad 2015b: §22.9).

αουα: The spelling of the conjugation *wa* as αουα may again reflect the general discomfort this author had with rendering [w]. The placement of the α before it could be an attempt to mark deliberately the consonantal value of the sequence ου rather than its normal value in the Greek of this period as [u]. On the other hand, if the first letter of line three is in fact just a repetition of the last letter of the previous line, the same thing may be at play here.

ειραυ βακλα: This is the prefix conjugation of the root √rʿy. Two remarkable things *could be* attested here. The first is the possibility of Barth's law – that is, when the theme vowel of the prefix conjugation is high, the preformative vowel is /a/ and when the theme vowel is low the preformative vowel is /i/. With only one example, however, it is impossible to say if this distribution obtained or whether the /i/ vowel had been leveled as in many modern dialects of Arabic. The second remarkable fact is that this verb would seem to have a preterite meaning, in line with the previous verbs. This would suggest that

in Old Arabic the preterite use of the prefix conjugation survived outside the context of negative and conditional clauses. However, it is also possible to read this as a non-past, 'they are pasturing' or 'will pasture', but this requires us to assume the loss of modal inflection, or at least the distinction between the short and long prefix conjugation based on the presence of *n*-terminations in the masculine plurals and 2nd feminine singular. In support of the former interpretation, one may point out that the Safaitic inscriptions, after which this one seems to have been modeled, tend to be set in the past tense. The term βακλα is Safaitic *bql* in the accusative case.

βι Χανου[ν]: The phrase *bi-kānūn* is attested in ASWS 217, *wld h- mʿẓy b-knn* 'he helped the goats to give birth during *Knn*'. While the Syrian calendar had two Kānūn's, the Safaitic version may have had only one, or perhaps the author simply neglected to specify the exact Kānūn. The month probably corresponds to December–January, which would suit the interpretation of ζαθαοε as 'winter'. The absence of the final [n] should probably be explained through Greek influence, where this sound change is common, but an Arabic-internal pausal phenomenon cannot be ruled out either.

2.3 Linguistic Remarks

2.3.1 Phonology

There are a few points in the transcription of the Arabic that are worth discussion. If we opt for the reading and interpretation σειαζ in the fourth line as */śiḥāṣ/*, then it would appear that a voiced realization of **ṣ* was possible in this variety, suggesting further that this consonant was pharyngealized and realized as [zˁ].[3] The second interpretation requires an explanation of the transcription of *s²* in **śatāw* with Zeta. In Safaitic, it seems clear that the value of *s²* remained [ɬ], which is hard to reconcile with this representation. Perhaps this consonant had a conditioned voiced allophone, but no evidence for this seems forthcoming in the inscriptions or in other transcriptions. In addition to the consonants, the vowels of this inscription require some discussion. In all of the Greek-Safaitic bilinguals, the high vowels **i* and **u* were realized as [e] (= ε or η) and [o] (= ο or ω), respectively. Only the reflex of **i* is attested here, and it is transcribed with ι [i] suggesting that its original quality obtained. This is found rarely in the Graeco-Arabica (Al-Jallad 2015a: §4.1.2), but mostly in stressed closed syllables.

2.3.2 Case

This inscription provides proof that some sort of case inflection was operative in the northern dialects of Old Arabic. As I have stated in the preliminary discussion of the inscription in Al-Jallad (2015b: 294–295), the survival of the accusative case alone suggests the loss of high vowels in final position first, similar to what happened in Gəʿəz. This phenomenon invites comparison with the dialect upon which Qurʾanic orthography was based. In non-diptotic and indefinite nouns, only one case is indicated graphically, the accusative, written with a final ʾ. Going on the orthography alone, it would seem that

[3]For a discussion on the realization of the **ṣ* and other emphatics in the Graeco-Arabica, see Al-Jallad (2015a).

the accusative case survived in such situations, a distribution which can be explained through the following set of sound changes:

1. nunation gives rise to final nasalized vowels, **an# > ã*, **in# > ĩ*, and **un# > ũ*
2. final *ã* becomes *ā*
3. final short and nasalized vowels are lost

The variety attested in the present inscription seems to have taken a different path: short high vowels were lost in final position, in contrast to all short vowels in the dialect of the orthography of the Qur'an, as the accusative ending on the definite noun *ʾa(d)-dawra* 'the place, region' attests. Finally, the spelling βακλα indicates that nunation was lost in non-pausal environments.

2.3.3 Verbal morphology

The inscription allows us to vocalize III-w/y forms in the Safaitic inscriptions, proving that the writing of the glide reflects a triphthong and not a *mater lectionis* for /ā/ or the loss of final short vowels and an ensuing diphthong /ay/ or /aw/. As discussed under ειραυ above, no definitive conclusions can be drawn from the prefix conjugation. One remark on agreement, however, is possible. The antecedent of ειραυ seems to be the author and Bannāʾ. If the latter is a single person, then the verb would seem to have lost dual agreement. However, it is possible to identify Bannāʾ as a social group, perhaps a body of kinsmen descended from the author's grandfather. In this case, the plural agreement is expected.

2.3.4 Definite article

Unlike most attestations of the article in the Graeco-Arabica and the Nabataean inscriptions (see Al-Jallad 2015a: §5.5), the coda of the *ʾal* here does exhibit assimilation to the following coronal, or at least, /d/. The Safaitic inscriptions attest several examples of an ʾ-article, many times before coronals, and so in such cases, we may be witnessing the assimilation of the *l*-coda as well (ibid., §4.8). But both the non-assimilated *ʾal*-article and an ʾ-article which precedes all classes of consonants are attested, and so it is impossible to identify in most cases which variety lies behind the ʾ- + noun.

2.4 On the lineage group *ʾidām*

It is tempting to connect the gentilic adjective *ʾidāmiyy* to the kingdom *Edom*, whose territory spanned south-central Jordan and the Negev, south of Judaea and Moab. However, the quality of the vowel in the word's second syllable gives pause. All of our attestations of the word Edom have a rounded vowel in the second syllable, the outcome of the Canaanite shift of **ā* to *ō*: Hebrew *ʾĕḏôm*; Assyrian *Udumi*; Greek Ιδουμαία; Latin *Idūmaea*. The attestation of this name in its current form would then reflect a *pre-Canaanite shift* situation! Similarly, several Transjordanian toponyms that exhibit the Canaanite shift

in Hebrew are found in neo-Assyrian sources in their original form, e.g. *ma-a-ab-* /māʾab/ (but once with *mu-*) = Moab, Hebrew *môʾāb* and *a(m)-ma-(a-)na* /ʿammān/, Hebrew *ʿammôn* (see Parpola 1970). No attestations, however, of this phenomenon with Edom exist.

If the Canaanite shift was indeed a Proto-Canaanite feature, then we must assume that the aforementioned toponyms do not have a Canaanite source. Alas, we know pitifully little about the Transjordanian languages, and from what is available, it is difficult to assess their linguistic character, much less the extent of linguistic diversity in the area.[4] The language of the Edomites is known only from a small number of ostraca, seals, and inscriptions, and there is virtually nothing to distinguish it from other Canaanite dialects (Vanderhooft 1995: 156–157). It is possible that segments of the Edomite population were Arabic speaking, and that the ethnicon Edom continued into the Safaitic inscriptions as *ʾl ʾdm*. Thus, the present *ʾidām* may have its source in a purely vernacular dialect spoken by some of the Edomites, perhaps a form of early Arabic, while the term *ʾedōm*, by which the kingdom was known to the outside world, was drawn from the chancellery language, a Canaanite dialect. There is some evidence for the presence of 'Arabs' in the southern Levant during the Iron Age (see Eph`al 1982), but all that is known about their language comes from the handful of anthroponyms in Cuneiform transcription.

3 A Greek Inscription (figures 4 and 5)

This inscription is composed fully in Greek but, like the previous one, is thematically close to the Safaitic inscriptions. It is incised with a sharp instrument on a slab of basalt. The left edge is 12cm high while the right is approximately 16cm; however, the photograph cuts off the lower part of the rock so a precise measurement is impossible. The inscribed face is approximately 26cm at its widest. The script is also the rounded variant of the capital script, but unlike the previous inscription, the text exhibits both the majuscule and uncial forms of the Alpha. We read and translate the text as follows:

1) Αβγαρος Ματταιου
2) ἔπεμσεν αὐτὸν Μαλεχος
3) ἐνὸν ἄρχῃ Σαειδηνῶν
4) ἵνα κυκλεύει καὶ τηρήσει τὰ πρόβατα
5) καὶ ἔθυσαν θύματα[5] δέκα
6) Ακραβος Αλαφου

1) Abgaros son of Mattaios
2) Malechos sent him
3) being under the authority of the Saidites
4) in order to surround (put in an enclosure?) and guard the sheep
5) and they sacrificed ten offerings
6) ʿAqrab son of Ḫalaf

[4]For a concise summary of the state of the art, see Beyer 2012.
[5]We thank Robert Daniel for reading this word.

3.1 The narrative

Αβγαρος is transparently Arabic *ʾabgar*, frequently attested in the Safaitic inscriptions as *ʾbgr*, and common elsewhere.[6] The patronymic Ματταιου can be interpreted in two ways. It could be a rendition of the Arabic name *mṭy* found in the Safaitic inscriptions, perhaps a CaCCāC pattern of the root √mṭy 'to journey in haste'. On the other hand, it is possible that the form reflects a misspelling of the name Matthew, Greek Ματθαῖος, where the sequence τθ is simplified to ττ (Gignac 1976: 67). The name Μαλεχος in the second line is well attested and renders Semitic *Mālik*, cf. Safaitic *mlk*.

Line 2: ἔπεμσεν αὐτὸν Μαλεχος

While completely grammatical in Greek, the syntax of this line may betray Arabic influence as the verb is placed in first position, followed by the object pronoun and with the subject in final position. This word order is common in the Safaitic inscriptions, triggered by the fact that the object pronouns are clitics (Al-Jallad 2015b: §13.1). The 3rd singular aorist indicative ἔπεμσεν 'he sent' is a misspelling of ἔπεμψεν, with σ instead of ψ.

Line 3: ἐνὸν ἄρχῃ Σαειδηνῶν

This line poses the greatest interpretative challenge. In the Greek epigraphy from this region, ἀρχή is found in contexts in which someone performs an act under the 'authority' of others, e.g. Ἐπί ἀρχῆς [---]μηθου Γερμανοῦ καὶ Σαμεθον...Σόπατορος οἱ κοδλόμος ἐ(ποίη)σα "Under the authority of [---]mēthos son of Germanos, of Samethos…Sopatros the builder has constructed this monument" (IGLS XIII-2, 9821). In this light, it is probably best to take ἐνὸν as a misspelling of ἐνὼν, the present participle of εἰμί, meaning 'being under the authority of'; however, what this exactly means in the context of the Saidites is unclear. Twenty years ago, M.C.A. Macdonald argued that the phrases παρεμβολὴ νομάδων and ἔθνος νομάδων referred to Roman military units raised from the nomads, and that στρατηγὸς νομάδων refers to Roman officers charged with liaison with the nomads, and then goes on to identify the verb *s¹rt* as meaning 'to serve' in such a troop (Macdonald 2014: 156).

RWQ 347: *l s¹krnn bn grmʾl ḏ̲ ʾl s²wʾ s¹nt s¹rt ʾl ḏf l- ʿwḏ̲*
'By S¹krnn son of Grmʾl of the lineage of S²wʾ, the year the lineage of Ḍf served in a troop for the ʿwḏ̲ (another lineage group).'

If this interpretation of RWQ 347 is correct, then it would suggest that members of one lineage group – or perhaps an entire lineage group – would serve militarily under the command of another group. Such may have been the case here, where Malechos went off to serve under the authority of the Saidites. In this context, then, Greek ἐνὸν = (ἐνὼν) ἄρχῃ may render Old Arabic *s¹rt ʿl-* 'to serve in a troop under (the command)':

[6]For example, Αβγαρ IGLS XXI-2, 118a.

KRS 1024: *…w s¹rt ʿl- ḫr hdy s¹nt qttl hrdṣ f h lt s¹lm w ġnmt l- ḏ dʿy…*
'…and he served in a troop under the command of Ḫr, the commander, the year Hrdṣ waged war, so, O Lt, may he who would read aloud have security and spoil…'

Another possibility is that the phrase refers to an area which was under the authority of the Saidites, to which Malechos had gone and relegated the guarding of the sheep to Abgaros during his absence. This explanation, however, is difficult to justify grammatically. Finally, it is possible that the author intended to render Safaitic *ḏ ʾl* 'of the lineage (i.e. tribe)', but such a construction finds no parallels in other Greek texts.

Lines 4–5: ἵνα κυκλεύει καὶ τηρήσει τὰ πρόβατα

After the particle ἵνα 'so that', one expects a subjunctive verb, but the author instead supplies a present indicative, κυκλεύει, in place of κυκλευῃ. The next verb τηρήσει seems to be a 3rd singular future indicative, which is sometimes confused with the subjunctive, τηρήσῃ. However, one must keep in mind that the Greek of this period very often confuses η and ει (Gignac 1976: 239), and so the author many have correctly intended the subjunctive in both cases.

The Safaitic inscriptions attested both 'surrounding' *ʿyd*, *ʿwd* and 'protecting', 'keeping guard' *nẓr*, *ḫrṣ* of livestock.

KRS 1706: *w ʿyd h- ḍʾn b- ḥrn*
'and he put the sheep in an enclosure in/near the Ḥawrān'

SIT 52: *nẓr bʿd- mʿzy -h*
'he stood guard on account of his goats'

Pasturing animals on behalf of another social group, and in the context of serving in a troop, is also attested in the Safaitic inscriptions, e.g.:

C 320: *s¹nt rʿy ʾl ʿwḏ nʿm ʾl ʿbd w s¹rt mʿ ʾb -h b- mʾt frs¹*
'the year the lineage of ʿwḏ pastured the livestock of the lineage of ʿbd; and he served with his father in a cavalry unit'

It is unclear whether Abgaros was a hired man working for another tribe or whether he was a kinsman of Malechos. The term *ʾgr* 'hired man' is attested a few times in the Safaitic inscriptions. In KRS 1563, for example, the author keeps watch (*ḫrṣ*) for the lineage of Ḍf as a hired man (*ʾgr*) and then asks for livestock as his compensation.

Line 6: καὶ ἔθυσαν θύματα δέκα
'and they sacrificed ten offerings'

The switch to the plural here is unexpected, and may suggest that the author was in charge of a group of people looking after the sheep. The sacrifice of ten θύματα 'victims' is open to several interpretations. It could be that the author and his group sacrificed ten sheep, but this would be an unexpectedly

large number of animals. One may assume an offering of some other type, perhaps birds captured or even simpler foodstuffs. Safaitic inscriptions mentioning sacrifice occur but none mention the number of animals killed. An ambiguous text mentions the slaughter of either a single ewe or a number of sheep, but is unclear if the slaughter was ritualistic or practical.

C35: *l s^{1}ʿd bn ḥnʾl w ʾhl{k h- ḏʾnt}----*
'By S^{1}ʿd son of Ḥnʾl and {he slaughtered the ewe or a number of sheep}'

While the verb *ʾhlk* does not require a ritualistic context, other examples such as *ḏbḥ l- rḍy* 'he made a sacrifice for Rḍy (divine name)' are clearly religious. More often than not, the verb *ḏbḥ* is attested alone without a direct object or benefactive object, which may parallel the present expression.

Line 7: Ακραβος Αλαφου

The final line probably records the name of the author of the inscription. Ακραβος corresponds to Safaitic *ʿqrb*, and Αλαφου to either Safaitic *ḫlf* or *ḥlf*; both names are well attested among the nomads and in the settled areas.

4 A single word (Figures 4 and 5)

On the same rock as A2, a single word is inscribed to the right of lines five and six. The obvious reading is Θοργων, which does not to my knowledge mean anything. Unlike the other inscription on the rock, the Theta, if correctly identified, has an angular shape. If Theta is not the correct reading of the first glyph, then one may suggest that it is a vandalized Gamma, and the word should instead read Γοργων, or perhaps even Γεοργων, if is some sort of ligature of Gamma and Epsilon. In this case, we may have a misspelling of the word Γεωργῶν 'farmers' (masculine plural genitive). Even if this interpretation is correct, it is hard to make sense of its purpose here, and whether it has anything to do with the inscription A2.

5 Bilingualism

Both inscriptions attest to a varying degree of Arabic-Greek bilingualism in the Harrah. A1 could have been composed by a person with knowledge of the Greek alphabet, but not much more, while A2 gives us an example of some fluency in Greek. The mistakes made by the author of A2 are not out of the range of the expected in this period, although some of the phrasing is rather awkward. The contents of this inscription are strikingly similar to what is normally found in the Safaitic inscriptions, which may support the idea that the author of A2 was a nomad, and perhaps was aware of, or even a practitioner of, the tradition of Safaitic writing. But neither the genealogy *ʾbgr bn mṯy* nor *ʿqrb bn ḥlf/ḫlf* has yet been attested in Safaitic. Why both authors decided to write Greek inscriptions, however imperfectly, is impossible to know. A case for limited literacy in Greek in the desert can be made, as a few nomads wrote

their names in both scripts. But also the Greek inscription I1 (Macdonald, Al Muʾazzin, & Nehmé 1996: 484)[7] seems to have later been read by another person who wrote in response to it: I2: *wgd mly s²ᶜr* 'he found the words of *S²ᶜr*'.[8] This seems to prove that some nomads could read Greek inscriptions.

Where the nomads would have learned Greek is open for discussion. Macdonald (2009 II: 346) surveys the evidence for contact between the nomads of the Harrah and the settled folk of the Hawran. His conclusions are conservative: the epigraphy does not yield evidence for widespread contact between the authors of the Safaitic inscriptions and the Greek- or Aramaic-speaking population of the Hawran. At the time of its publication, only a handful of Greek and Aramaic graffiti had been found in the desert, and even fewer bilinguals. While this general number has increased slightly, as is clear from the publication of these texts, Macdonald's conclusions remain valid. It is possible that the handful of Greek inscriptions from the desert reflect the knowledge of a very small group of people who would have spent time in settled areas or in the military. If ἄρχη Σαειδηνῶν designated the command of military unit of nomads raised by the Romans, then Greek would have no doubt been used in this context as a medium of communication between the two groups of people. It is possible then that Malechos and Abgaros belonged to a tribe that interacted frequently with Greek-speaking authorities. This contact naturally resulted in a functional knowledge of the language, and perhaps ultimately in the ability to produce texts such as these.

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[7]The inscription states: Σααρος Χεσεμανου Σαιφηνος φυλὴς Χαυνηνῶν 'S²aʿar son of Keḥsemān, the Ṣayfite, of the lineage of Kawn'.

[8]The edition read and interpreted the text as *l ʾtm bn rb w gd mly s²ᶜr* 'By ʾtm son of Rb and the words of S²aʿar were good', but this expression is unattested, while *wgd* + term for an inscription + personal name is very common (Al-Jallad 2015b: §22.5). The absence of a conjunction between the name and the narrative is probably a mistake, or perhaps *wgd* should be taken as a participle /wāged/ 'having found'.

Figures

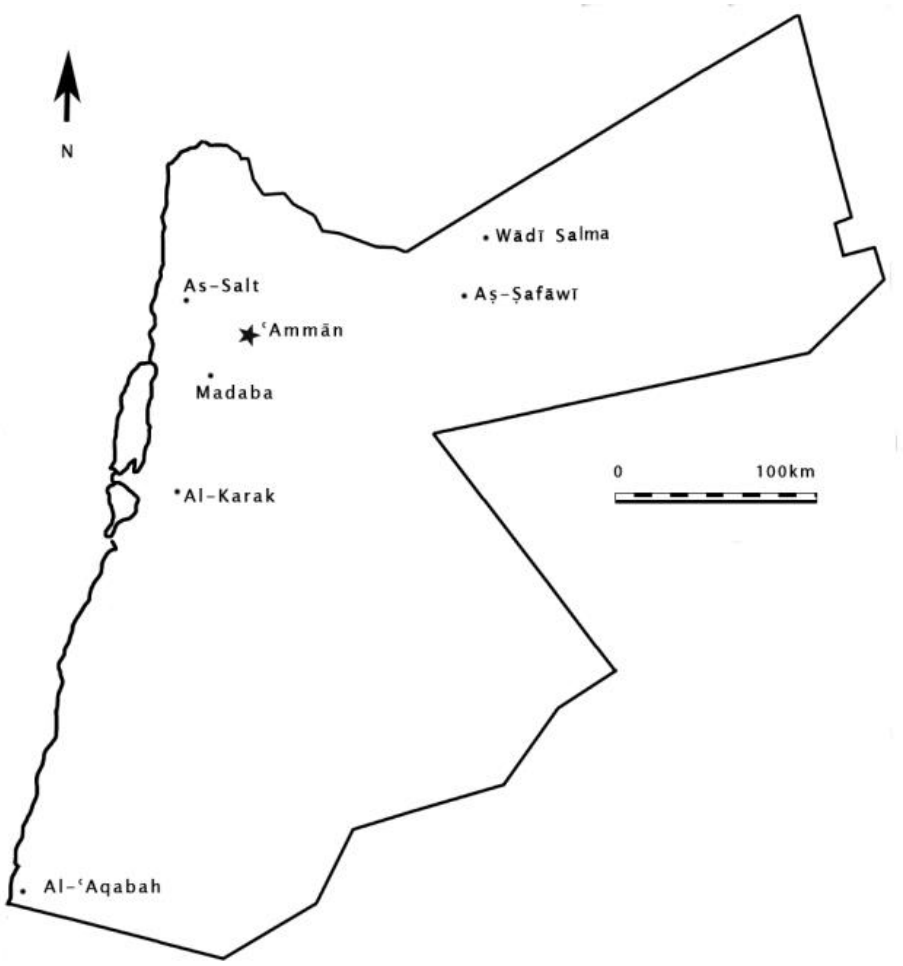

Figure 1: Map of Jordan

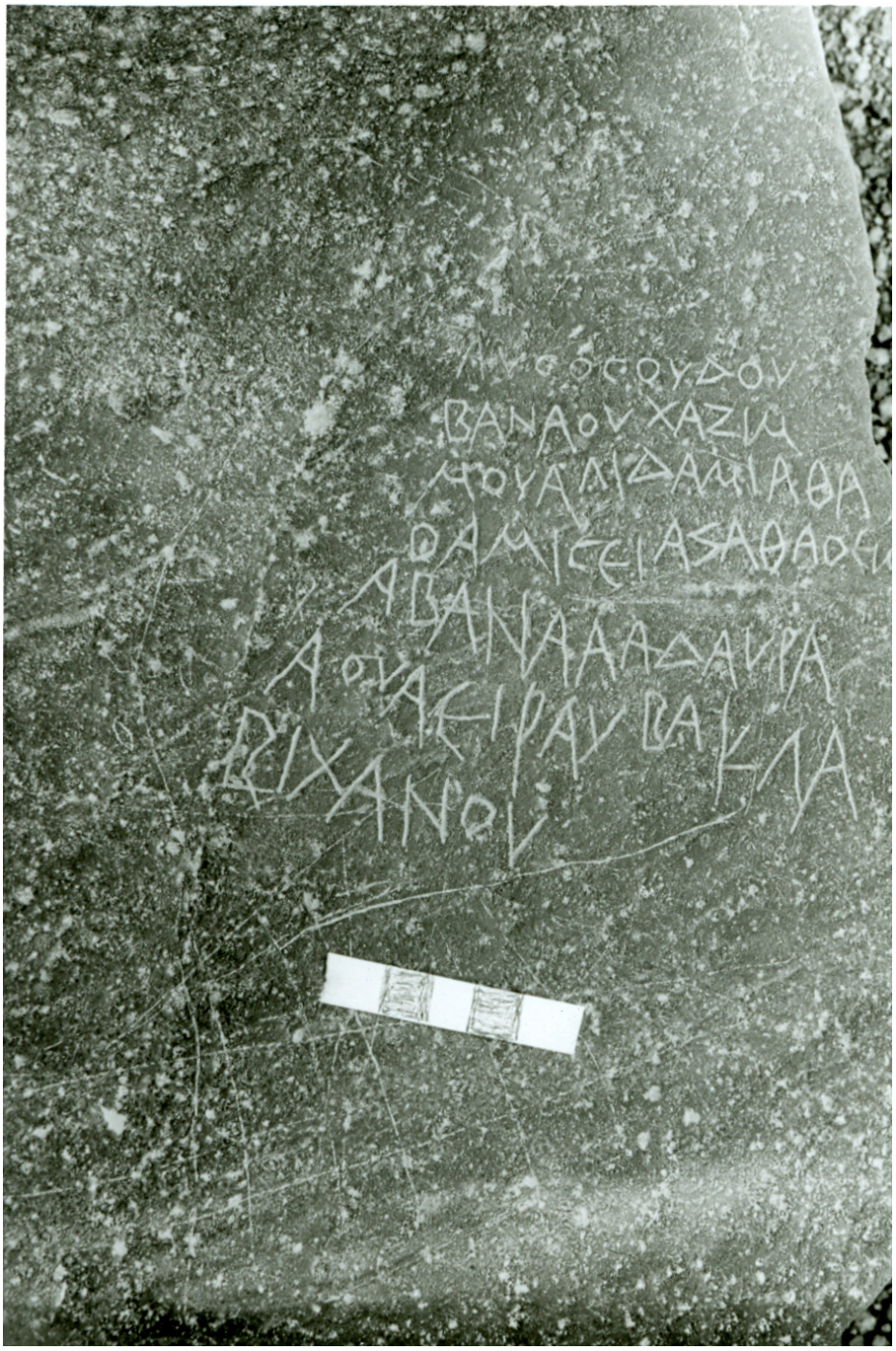

Figure 2: A1 (courtesy Sabri Abbadi)

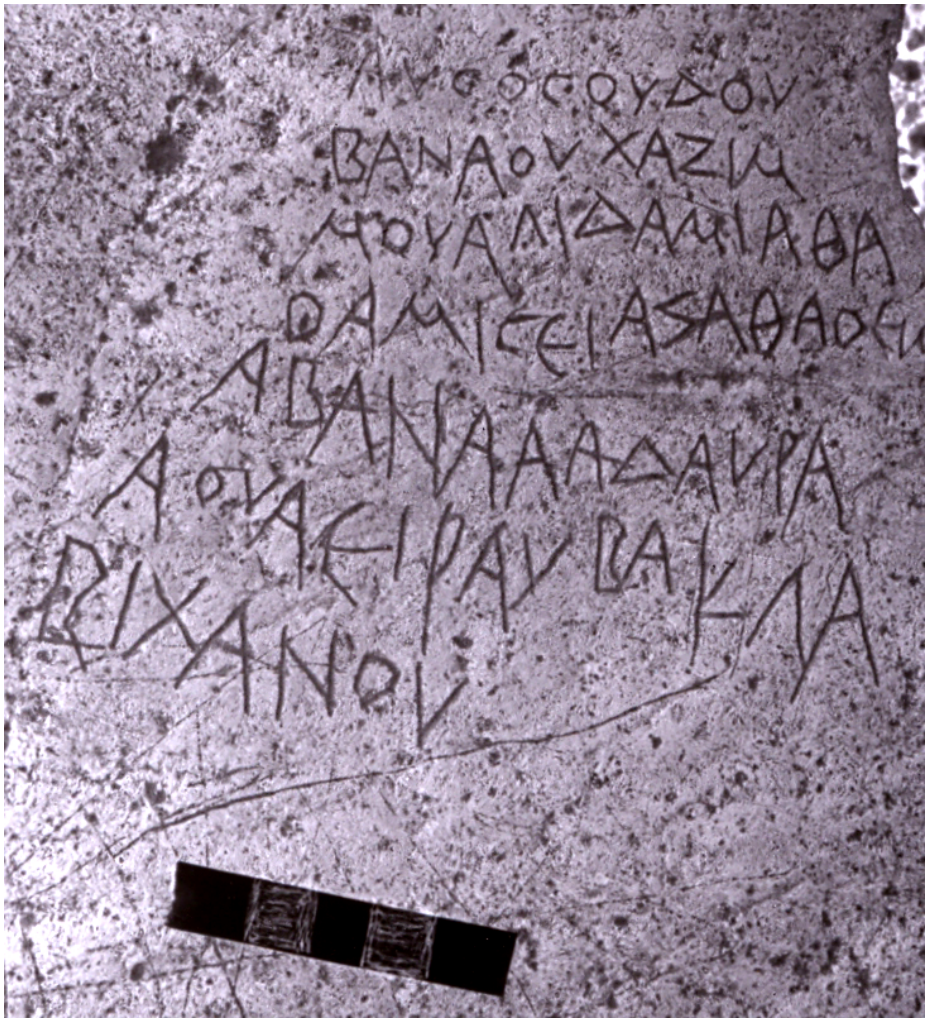

Figure 3: Digitally enhanced A1

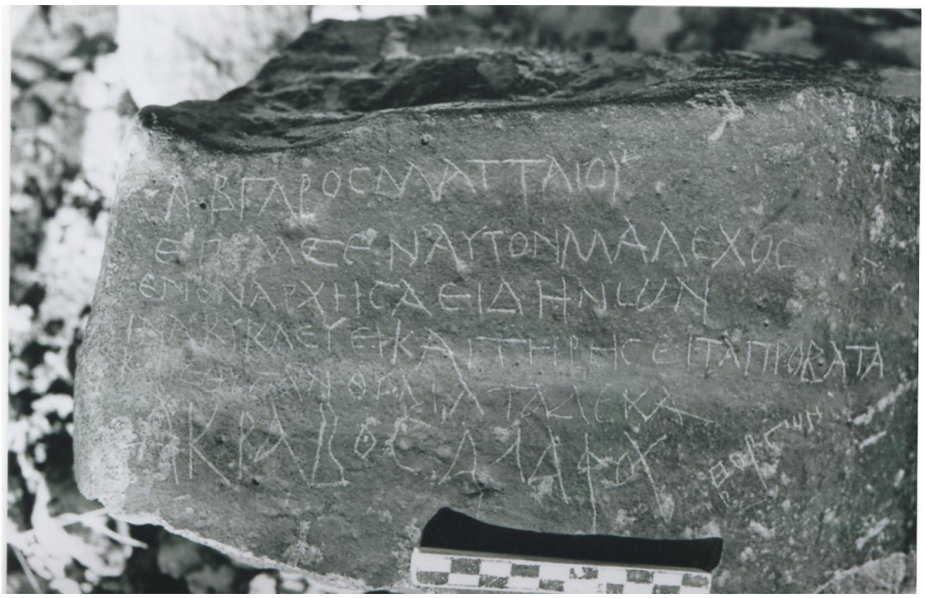

Figure 4: A2 (courtesy Sabri Abbadi)

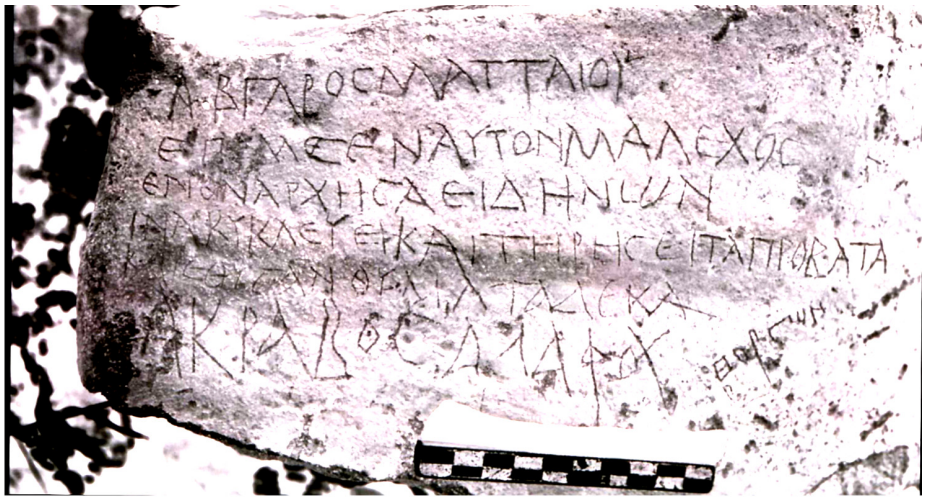

Figure 5: Digitally enhanced A2

Sigla

BTH	Van den Branden 1960.
C	Ryckmans 1950-1951.
HCH	Safaitic inscriptions in Harding 1953.
IGLS XIII-2	Sartre 2011
KRS	Safaitic inscriptions in King unpublished.
LP	Safaitic inscriptions in Littmann 1943.
RWQ	Al-Rousan 2005
RyD	Ryckmans 1951
SIJ	Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett 1957.
SIT	Harding 1972

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