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# Arabian Epigraphic Notes

## Volume 1

ΑΥΓΟΓΟΥΔΟΥ  
ΒΑΝΑΟΥ ΧΑΖΙΩ  
ΜΟΥΑΛΙΔΑΜΙΑΘΑ  
ΡΑΜΙΣΕΙΑΣΑΘΑΘΕΙ  
ΑΒΑΝΑΑΑΔΑΥΡΑ  
ΑΟΥΑΕΙΡΑΥΒΑΚΙΑ  
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# Foreword

The inaugural issue of *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* contains a balance of analytical studies and editions of previously unstudied texts. The issue opens with M.C.A. Macdonald's sophisticated discussion of the uses and misuses of paleography in the context of Arabian epigraphy. Since the conditions that are required for a meaningful paleographic study do not exist for most of the inscriptions of Central and North Arabia, Macdonald devises new categories through which to understand graphic variation in the letter forms. The next article, written by myself and my colleague A. Al-Manaser, publishes the first pre-Islamic Arabic inscription written in Greek letters. This text is revolutionary as it allows us for the first time to vocalize Arabic as it was spoken in the Syria during the 3rd or 4th century CE. The article also publishes a Greek text that seems to have been written by Arabic-speaking nomads, further confirming that even the deserts of Arabia were points of cultural contact. The following article, by S. Abbadi, publishes a new Safaitic inscription mentioning a conflict between the Nabataeans and the Ḥwlt, a nomadic group from North Arabia. This text is an important piece of evidence for the relationship between the Nabataeans and the nomads on their southern frontier. A. Al-Housan contributes an edition of sixty-one new Safaitic inscriptions from the Mafraq Museum. These texts include several important new vocabulary items, grammatical constructions, and cultural information – they are an important addition to our knowledge of Old Arabic. The great scholar of Nabataean epigraphy and archaeology, L. Nehmé, contributes an important study on the Nabataean *Strategoī* mentioned in both documentary and literary sources, concluding that the title is related to the Nabataean provincial system. The issue is closed by an innovative study by J. Lundberg on the syntactic and semantic domains of the prepositions employed in the Dadanitic inscriptions. Beyond this, the article advances our understanding of the Dadanitic lexicon, as the author proposes several new interpretations for problematic lexical items.

In addition to being the first journal dedicated to the epigraphy of Arabia, AEN is groundbreaking in another respect – it is a fully open access journal that introduces a new method to peer reviewing and a new publication format. We have teamed up with Academia.edu to provide some of the most detailed peer review possible. In addition to sending out each article to two specialists for evaluation, we employ the Academia.edu sessions tool so that the entire editorial board, as well as selected invited readers, can read the submitted article and make suggestions and improvements. The author, therefore, benefits from as many as 14 opinions on the submitted draft.

We have also by-passed the traditional academic publisher route and instead publish and archive the journal directly with the Leiden University Li-

brary. Traditional academic publishers provided only minimal services – mainly typesetting and layout – and draw their prestige from the academic community that contributes their original research to their journals, often forfeiting their right to their intellectual property. Exorbitant prices prevent a large number of scholars from accessing said research, and authors are never compensated for their contributions. This is no sin – many publishing companies have a responsibility to their shareholders to turn a profit. *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* begins with the interest of the field and its scholars. We collaborate with the Leiden University Library’s repository to archive our journal, giving it a permanent home. The journal is indexed by the Directory of Open Access Journals, making us findable through any university library search or simply through the use of Google search. Our editorial board includes the finest scholars of the field, and our peer-review process surpasses any pay-for-play journal. The relatively small cost of typesetting is borne by the Leiden Center for the Study of Ancient Arabia. This means no costs are ever laid upon the author; no one is ever charged to publish, distribute, or reprint the article; authors retain their copyright to their intellectual property and photographs. *Arabian Epigraphy* is admittedly a relatively small field, but we hope that we have made a major move in the right direction for the publication and dissemination of scholarship.

Ahmad Al-Jallad  
Leiden, December, 2015

# On the uses of writing in ancient Arabia and the role of palaeography in studying them

Michael C.A. Macdonald (University of Oxford)

## Abstract

Literacy was widespread in large areas of ancient Arabia, as shown by the huge numbers of graffiti by both settled people and nomads. But, it is still extremely difficult to establish a reliable chronology for the literate periods of pre-Islamic Arabian history. This has led to a misuse of palaeography in an attempt to create chronological sequences based on letter forms from undated inscriptions and documents, on widely different kinds of surface, with different purposes, and often separated by large distances. This practice is not confined to Arabian inscriptions but is widespread in Semitic epigraphy.

This article offers a new taxonomy for inscriptions and graffiti, examines the misuse of palaeography in Semitic epigraphy and suggests some more useful ways in which palaeography could be used in this field.

**Keywords:** Ancient North Arabian, Chronology, Graffiti, Inscriptions, Literacy, Palaeography

## 1 Introduction

From the point-of-view of literacy, pre-Islamic Arabia was one of the most extraordinary places in the ancient world. The northern, central, and south-western areas of the Peninsula have already produced well over 65,000 inscriptions and graffiti on stone, metal, wood and pottery, and it is obvious that this is only the tip of the iceberg. Clearly a very high proportion of both the settled and the nomadic populations in ancient Arabia was literate, and individuals made ample use of durable materials to practise their skills.

But pre-Islamic Arabia also had the unique distinction of developing its own family of alphabets. Sometime after the invention of the alphabet in the second millennium BC, the alphabetic tradition split into two families. One was the North West Semitic, or Phoenico-Aramaic, script from which, with one exception, all traditional alphabets in use today derive.<sup>1</sup> The other was the South Semitic,<sup>2</sup> tradition which was used exclusively in the Arabian Peninsula, until

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<sup>1</sup>By 'traditional' alphabets, I mean those in which the letter forms have developed from those of the original linear alphabet devised in the second millennium BC, as opposed to later independent inventions such as the Osmanian alphabet in Somalia or the N'ko alphabet invented for Mandekan in West Africa (see Crystal 1987: 195, and Daniels & Bright 1996: 593, respectively), or Morse code, or Semaphore.

<sup>2</sup>In the past (e.g. Macdonald 2009 III: 32, 64, n. 21), I have followed Robin's renaming of this family as the 'Arabian' script family (e.g. Robin 1991: 127). However, while logical,

it was eventually exported to Ethiopia where its last surviving descendant is still used for Ge'ez, Amharic, and several other languages of Ethiopia (see Macdonald 2008: 216). In addition, at certain times in some parts of the Peninsula, languages and scripts from beyond its boundaries were in use, notably Akkadian cuneiform, Imperial Aramaic, 'Gulf Aramaic' (Puech 1998), Nabataean, and Greek. However, there is a severe imbalance in the epigraphy of pre-Islamic Arabia, as we know it today. We have large numbers of inscriptions, and far larger numbers of graffiti but, unlike Egypt or Mesopotamia, the everyday documents which, in those areas, were usually written on papyrus, damp clay or broken pottery, are still almost entirely lacking in the North of Arabia and have only recently appeared in the South in the form of thousands of incised texts on palm-leaf-stalks and sticks (Ryckmans 1993; Ryckmans, Müller, & Abdallah 1994; Stein 2005a; b; 2010).

Finally, we have remarkably few firmly established dates for the historic periods in the literate areas of pre-Islamic Arabia. Archaeological work around the edges of the Peninsula is slowly helping to redress this, but, with one or two notable exceptions,<sup>3</sup> it is only relatively recently that large-scale excavations have begun in the heart of the Peninsula, Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup> Thus, unlike most ancient societies, Arabia has no firmly based chronology into which its written documents can be fitted. Instead, there is a patchwork of possible chronological indicators, mostly based not on hard evidence but on assumed, but unprovable, synchronisms with events or historical trends outside Arabia, or on other assumptions, some of which I shall examine below. Only very slowly, are firm dates for archaeological levels being achieved and all too often it is difficult or impossible to link these to the use of writing at a particular stage of a particular society.

I would suggest that the types of material available and the huge gaps in our knowledge mean that there is little point in asking the sort of questions which would be normal in a study of literacy in another society. Instead, quite different questions arise which make the study of literacy and its uses in ancient Arabia peculiarly fascinating. Given the nature of the material and of the gaps in our knowledge, I would suggest that a rather different methodology is required from those used in the past, if we are to ask the sort of questions for which the material is capable of providing answers. In particular, it is necessary to look carefully at the different kinds of documents available – and the ways that different types of writing were used in them – within the context of the societies which produced them, rather than as artefacts reproduced on the printed page which can be discussed and compared in the abstract, as has happened so often in the past (see Macdonald 2009 IV: 177-178).

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given its geographical range until late antiquity, this name has the disadvantage that it can be easily confused with the Arabic script (which, of course, derives from the Northwest Semitic script family), especially since in some languages (e.g. German and Italian) the distinction between 'Arabic' and 'Arabian' is impossible. I am grateful to Peter T. Daniels for arguing fiercely, but enjoyably, with me over the unsuitability of the term 'Arabian' in this context.

<sup>3</sup>The most notable exception is Professor 'A.Ṭ. Al-Anṣāry 1982's excavations at Qaryat al-Fāw in the 1970s and 1980s, which however have not been fully published (see Al-Anṣāry 1982).

<sup>4</sup>Thus, for instance, the Saudi-French excavations at Madā'in Ṣāliḥ, the Saudi-German excavations at Taymā', the Saudi-Italian-French excavations at Duma, etc.

## 2 ‘Purpose’ and ‘Register’

When discussing scripts and the documents in which they are used, some terms can often be used in confusingly different ways by different writers. I will therefore begin by explaining very briefly what I mean by the terms I shall be using in this article (see also the summary in Appendix 1).

First, it is important to distinguish between the *purpose* of an inscribed or written document and the *register of script*<sup>5</sup> in which it is executed, see Appendix 1.

### 2.1 Purpose

I would define a ‘public’ document as one which records or communicates information which is not aimed solely at one or more specific individuals. Thus, for instance, inscriptions recording the erection of a building, announcing a law, honouring a citizen on the base of a statue, or recording the deceased’s name on a gravestone, would all fall into this category, as would the so-called ‘confession’ and ‘expiation’ inscriptions in ancient South Arabia since they are public announcements of personal penitence displayed in temples. Similarly, a ‘public’ document written in ink on papyrus, parchment, a potsherd, a wooden tablet,<sup>6</sup> etc., or incised with a blade or point into wax, wood, clay, etc. might be a legal document (including wills and contracts),<sup>7</sup> a text of religious significance, a literary work, an official letter, etc., designed for public, official or otherwise non-personal purposes. Even a literary work or Book of Hours copied for a particular person would still be a public document because the content was in the public domain and was not personal to that specific individual.

I would also class graffiti as ‘public’ statements since, although they represent individual self-expression and are not couched in an official form, they are placed in contexts in which the author can have no control over who sees or reads them. Thus, in this context, even the walls *inside* a private house are still a “public place”. Writing your feelings on a wall – even your bedroom wall – is not the same as confiding them to your diary. The expectation that their graffiti will be read by others must be greater among those who leave them in urban spaces than among those who carve them on desert rocks away from traditional routes, but even in the latter case the writer must still be aware of the possibility that they will be read by strangers (see Macdonald 2009 I: 81).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the colophons written by scribes at the end of manuscripts they have copied, which often express personal feelings,<sup>9</sup> are still public documents since

<sup>5</sup>In Macdonald 2009 I: 77, n. 91, I defined this as follows: ‘Just as linguists distinguish different “registers” in the spoken forms of a language, which are used according to the particular circumstances in which the speaker finds himself, so also, I would suggest, there are registers in the form of script which a person will use in different circumstances....’

<sup>6</sup>For instance, the official letter from Bar Kokhba written in ink on a wooden tablet, found in the Cave of Letters in Naḥal Hever, *P. Yadin* 54 (= 5/6Hev 54), see Yadin et al. 2002: 305-311. Pl. 56, and the description in Yadin 1961: 41.

<sup>7</sup>Although, wills and contracts concern the affairs of individuals, in order to carry legal force they have to be public documents which are normally framed in an authorized form and which can be scrutinised by officials in the case of disputes.

<sup>8</sup>It is clear from the numerous Safaitic inscriptions which record the discovery of someone else’s graffiti (*w wgd s’fr N*), that these, often intimate, expressions of personal feelings could be read by others.

<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, the colophon quoted by Parkes (2008: 69): *explicit secunda pars summe fratris*

the authors place them in the public domain where anyone may read them.

By contrast, I would class as ‘**personal**’ such documents as personal or business letters, whether written by a scribe on behalf of an individual or in the author’s own hand, personal notes, aides-memoire, business accounts, private or business lists, exercises, etc. Such documents are usually on papyrus, broken pottery, wax tablets, wooden tablets,<sup>10</sup> palm-leaf stalks and sticks, etc. Once again, it is important to emphasise that this terminology refers exclusively to the purpose of the document, not its script.

## 2.2 Register of script

A ‘**formal**’ or calligraphic register of a script would normally be used in both public inscriptions and graffiti (see below), and public documents on soft materials. Examples would be Syriac *Estrangelā*<sup>11</sup> and both rounded and angular Kufic, all of which are found in both inscriptions and manuscripts.

By contrast, I would call ‘**informal**’ the register of script used almost entirely for texts in ink, or for those cut with a stylus into wax or with a blade into wood, by professional scribes, civil servants and literate private individuals. These people seem only to have used the *formal* registers in very particular circumstances. The fact that a register is ‘informal’ does not preclude its use in ‘public’ documents, thus the text of a government decree, an order from a vizier, an official letter, will all be written on papyrus or incised on wooden sticks, etc. in the ‘informal’ script.<sup>12</sup> It is the *register* of the script, not the *purpose* of the document, which is being described.

I hope that this terminology avoids the confusions sometimes caused by such words as ‘monumental’ and ‘cursive’, which appear to mean different things to different people. I will try to avoid the former altogether since it is, at the same time, insufficiently precise (it refers both to the *purpose* of an inscription and to a *register of a script*) and too restricted, since it is inappropriate to describe the formal script used in a manuscript as ‘monumental’ even if it is of the same type as that used in inscriptions. I would use the term ‘cursive’ only in its most restricted and correct sense – at least in English<sup>13</sup> – to refer to a script in which some or all of the letters are joined to others (see also

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*thome de aquino ordinis fratrum predicatorum, longissima, prolixissima, et tediosissima scribenti; Deo gratias, Deo gratias, et iterum Deo gratias!*

<sup>10</sup>For example many of the Latin texts in ink on wooden tablets found at Vindolanda on Hadrian’s Wall (Bowman & Thomas 1994).

<sup>11</sup>On the coexistence of *Estrangelā* and an informal version of the Syriac script, see Healey 2000: 63-64.

<sup>12</sup>Another example would be the colophons at the end of Syriac manuscripts. The manuscript is usually written in the ‘formal’ *Estrangelā* and the colophon in the ‘informal’ minuscule script. But both are ‘public documents’ because their subject matter is in the public domain, i.e. it is the *purpose* of a piece of writing not the script register which determines whether it is private or public. See, for instance, the manuscript of AD 509 described and illustrated in Land 1862: 70-71, Pl. 5, no. 12 (an example of the text), and no. 11 (the colophon). This colophon is particularly interesting because the scribe has mixed *Estrangelā* and minuscule letter forms.

<sup>13</sup>*The Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46151>, consulted 22nd January, 2015) still has its 1893 definition “Of writing: Written with a running hand, so that the characters are rapidly formed without raising the pen, and in consequence have their angles rounded, and separate strokes joined, and at length become slanted.” However, the more up-to-date *Oxford Dictionaries* define ‘cursive’ as ‘written with the characters joined’ (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cursive>, consulted 22nd January, 2015). Similarly, *Webster* (4th ed. see Agnes 1999: s.v.).

Ryckmans 2001: 223). Thus, the normal forms of the Nabataean, Syriac and Arabic scripts are cursive in both their formal and informal registers, whereas Imperial Aramaic and Ancient South Arabian (in the forms which have survived) were non-cursive in both registers.<sup>14</sup>

The forces which produce change in the letter forms of formal and informal scripts derive from the interaction of the purpose of the text, the register of the script and the material on which, and the implement with which, it is written.

### 2.3 Formal versions of scripts favour the reader over the writer

This is because the formal version of a script is used for public documents which are expected to endure and (theoretically) to be available to many readers,<sup>15</sup> whether they are inscriptions or manuscript copies of sacred or secular texts. Since they are fully, or potentially, on public view, aesthetic considerations often play a part in their development. Thus, the desire that each example of the same letter will have an identical shape throughout the text will mean that it is carefully produced in a standard way, whether it is incised or carved in relief on stone, cast in metal, or written with ink on soft materials (e.g. parchment, papyrus, or paper). Elegance, clarity and uniformity are the prime objectives in the formal versions of a script and therefore scribes and monumental masons are taught standard ways of forming each letter and, in the case of cursive writing, each letter in each context. In the case of scribes copying manuscripts in the formal register of a script, this training requires the pen to be lifted from the page far more often than is necessary in the informal versions of the same script (see below), in order to keep the shape of each example of each letter as consistent as possible.<sup>16</sup>

If one of the guiding principles in the use of the formal register of a script is to keep accidental change to a minimum, it follows that evolutionary changes through time in the ductus<sup>17</sup> of letters and other aspects of the script will be

<sup>14</sup>It may be noted that, whereas Nabataean became an increasingly cursive script – compare, for instance, the ʾšlh inscription (Dalman 1912: 99–101, 172), with the Turkmaniyyah (CIS ii 350) – the indigenous Aramaic script of the Ḥawrān (often confusingly lumped together with Nabataean) was predominantly non-cursive, at least in its formal register, which is all that has been found so far (e.g. LSINab 2, LPNab 6, 7, 11, 22, 24, etc., and compare the scripts in Macdonald 2003: figs 30–36). See Macdonald 2003: 54–56 for a discussion of the differences between these two scripts. In exceptional circumstances and for specific purposes, the letters of a normally cursive script can also be written separately, as for instance in some Syriac inscriptions (e.g. LSISyr 8, 14, 15, 19, etc.).

<sup>15</sup>It is difficult to know to what extent public inscriptions were intended to be read. The Bisutūn inscription is only the most extreme example of texts which are clearly for show, see Macdonald 2009 I: 83. Stein (2013: 194) has suggested that the Ancient South Arabian formal script was designed, not for ease of reading, but to create a ‘visual impression’ ‘in a public place’; and one wonders whether this might not equally apply to Greek public inscriptions written in *stoichedon*.

<sup>16</sup>See Parkes 2008: 62–64, 71–100.

<sup>17</sup>‘Ductus’ is another term which is often used to mean different things. I am using it in the sense admirably set out by J. Ryckmans, ‘le “ductus”, c’est-à-dire le nombre, la direction et le mode de réalisation des différents traits qui composent chaque caractère’ (1994: 251). See also the detailed explanation of ‘basic ductus’ and ‘personal ductus’ in Parkes 2008: 59–60: ‘The act of tracing strokes (*ductus*) is a fusion of two formative processes. The basic *ductus* establishes the order and number of the strokes, and the directions of the traces required to produce configurations that form the shapes of letters in the alphabet of a particular script. A personal *ductus* determines the way in which an individual scribe executed these traces, and is a characteristic of his or her handwriting.’

greatly retarded. Change in a formal script is therefore generally based on deliberate decisions made by those commissioning the documents or in charge of their production.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.4 Informal registers of scripts favour the writer over the reader

This is because they are used for documents in which the speed of writing together with the comfort and convenience of the writer are more pressing considerations than elegance, uniformity, and sometimes even clarity. In the linear alphabets used in the ancient Near East, this register of a script was used for correspondence, both official and private, legal documents and the written ephemera of everyday life. Once again, the nature of an informal register used for handwriting is admirably expressed by Parkes:

Rapid or cursive handwriting is protean by nature: letter shapes are recognizable but not invariable, since scribes gave priority to the momentum and continuity of the movements that governed the direction of the traces. Although the need for speed and ease of movement was not confined to private individuals writing in haste, spontaneous reactions are much more obvious in their handwriting, since they were free from the restraints imposed on the handwriting of slaves, or of clerks producing official documents (which form the bulk of the surviving examples of cursive handwriting from antiquity). However, the character of the movements in the ductus that determined the ways in which the strokes were transformed in rapid writing, depended on the materials used for writing. ...

Writing with a reed pen on papyrus or parchment (or even wood sealed with a light application of warm wax) gave scribes greater flexibility of movement. They did not have to lift the pen so often (and then only slightly), and the resulting fluency enabled them to accelerate the movement of the traces more easily. They were able to combine the different strokes required for a particular letter shape, often modifying it, and recorded approach and finishing movements that were subsequently recognized as auxiliary elements of the letter form. Rapid writing also promoted ligatures between adjacent letters, which altered the structures of the letters involved, and ultimately produced new shapes which were different from those of the same letters in other collocations. ...

Spontaneous reactions by different generations of scribes under pressure to write rapidly contributed to a constant process of cursive

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Changes in the personal *ductus* of different generations of scribes are an important factor in the general development of handwriting.'

<sup>18</sup>This can be seen very clearly in the stylistic changes in the Ancient South Arabian formal script used in inscriptions. Here, the successive changes in letter forms are almost certainly the result of aesthetic decisions rather than an internal development of the script, and seem to be adhered to throughout the Ancient South Arabian kingdoms. One can contrast this with the development of the letter forms in the minuscule script which is characteristic of a scribal school, and those of the Nabataean script which clearly developed through writing in ink, a process of which we only see 'snapshots' in the official inscriptions and graffiti (see below).

development that is present in rapid handwriting in all periods. When scribes increased the momentum of their handwriting, they resolved complex traces into simpler, more fluent rotatory movements with fewer pen lifts. Cursive resolution generates the kind of uninterrupted continuity in rapid handwriting that distinguishes it from a set hand, since scribes often recorded the transitions between the traces required to construct the letter shapes, as well as those between individual letters. Cursive resolution has produced different species of ‘joined-up’ handwriting in different periods. (Parkes 2008: 72-73).

Informal registers of scripts are therefore usually subject to much more rapid change than formal registers, though under certain circumstances – for instance in the Achaemenid administration – strict supervision and training can retard such change and a considerable uniformity can be achieved over a long period and a wide geographical area.

However, different media will effect the *nature* of the changes that occur (see Parkes 2008: 72-73) and, as a general principle, one might suggest that informal scripts used habitually for writing with *ink* tend towards the compression of letter forms into shapes which can be drawn with minimal lifting of the pen and often the joining or running together of letters for the same reason, while those requiring incision into wax or soft wood tend to result in disarticulation of letters into separate strokes (see below).

## 2.5 Registers in reading and writing

As I have explained elsewhere (2009 I: 52–56, 65–74), reading and writing are separate skills and in many communities were not taught together. In a society in which literacy is far from universal, where reading is learnt for particular purposes, and writing is taught only to a minority, those who can read fluently learn to recognize the different shapes letters take in different registers of the script, e.g. the formal registers in manuscripts or inscriptions, and the informal in letters or documents. They hold these shapes in their memories but if they do not write very often, or habitually write only in one register – e.g. literate individuals or some scribes accustomed only to writing personal documents – they will have little or no practice in shaping the letter forms of another register. If such a person wants to carve a graffito he will instinctively attempt to use the formal register (see below), but would have to translate his *reading* knowledge of the letter forms into writing, just as most people today would have to if they tried from memory to write accurately in the letter forms of a type face.<sup>19</sup> This may help to explain some of the curious letter shapes sometimes found in graffiti and the occasional insertion of those from an informal register.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Independently, Stein (forthcoming) has explored this idea in detail in relation to ancient South Arabian society, with most interesting results. I am most grateful to him for sending me this lecture before its publication.

<sup>20</sup>Interestingly, the exact opposite seems to occur in the period around AD 100, when ‘texts from the military sphere’ on wooden writing tablets from Vindolanda on Hadrian’s Wall employ ‘capital and cursive hands in the same text’ (Bowman 1991: 130). ‘It was of course common for military documents to be written in a mixture of capital and cursive scripts ... the capital script being used for the most part in headings’ (Bowman & Thomas 1994: 48). However, there are

### 3 Graffiti in Literate and in Non-Literate Societies<sup>21</sup>

Graffiti are personal statements carved, written or painted on a surface in a public place. Thus I would class as a graffito, a statement written on a wall such as ‘Due to public apathy tomorrow has been cancelled’ since it clearly represents a personal point-of-view, while I would class ‘Demo 2 o’clock Tuesday’ written on the same wall, not as a graffito but as a public announcement.<sup>22</sup>

Within the present context, that of the development of scripts, it is necessary to distinguish between (a) ‘**graffiti of a literate society**’, i.e. one in which literacy is used for the daily purposes of communication and record, and (b) ‘**graffiti of a non-literate society**’ in which these functions are performed by word-of-mouth, memory, or other means which do not involve the written word.<sup>23</sup>

In those sedentary and urban societies in which literacy is moderately widespread, graffiti of type (a) will be carved, written or painted by individuals in public places and form one of a large number of different manifestations of literacy in such a society. Graffiti in Greek, Latin, Nabataean, Dadanitic,<sup>24</sup> and the Ancient South Arabian scripts, would be examples of this type, regardless of whether they are found on a wall in a city or a rock in the desert.

It might be thought that type (b) represents a contradiction in terms. But between approximately the mid-first millennium BC and the third century AD,<sup>25</sup> there were nomadic societies in southern Syria and Arabia in which large numbers of people had learned to read and write in forms of the South Semitic alphabet (Macdonald 2009 I: 74-97). These distinctive scripts developed within these nomadic societies and, as far as we can tell, appear to have been little used by others. However, in contrast to settled, and particularly urban societies, the choice of writing materials available to nomads in antiquity was generally limited to the rocks of the desert. Literacy was therefore of little

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also some surprising uses of capitals in otherwise ‘cursive’ documents, e.g. Bowman & Thomas 1994: nos 118 and 206.

<sup>21</sup>In Macdonald 2009 IV: 180, I used the terms ‘urban’ and ‘non-urban’ graffiti but I now think that this misplaces the emphasis, since the difference is not so much *where* the graffiti are placed as their relationship to the use of writing in the society in which they are produced.

<sup>22</sup>It is true that this announcement lacks the ‘official form’ of most public documents (see section 2). Nevertheless, it was clearly intended as a public announcement and cannot be classed as anything else. See also J.L. Franklin, Jr’s distinction between ‘self-indulgent’ and ‘informative’ graffiti (1991: 87-92). The two graffiti quoted here appeared on a wall in Oxford in the late 1960s.

<sup>23</sup>My definitions of literacy, literate and non-literate societies (taken from Macdonald 2009 I: 49-50) can be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>24</sup>Formerly called ‘Dedanite’ and ‘Lihyanite’. For the reasons for the new terminology see Macdonald 2009 III: 33.

<sup>25</sup>These chronological limits are very approximate since it is impossible to date most of the texts carved by these nomads. Thus, while we have a handful of texts, in a script known as Safaitic, from southern Syria, north-eastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia, which can be dated to the first three centuries AD, we have no clear dating for any of the Hismaic texts of southern Jordan and north-west Saudi Arabia, and only two dates for the large number of so-called “Thamudic” texts: one, in the “Thamudic B” script from near Taymā’, can be dated to the mid-sixth century BC since it mentions the “king of Babylon”, which must certainly refer to the last king, Nabonidus, who spent ten years in Taymā’. The other is the “gloss” in “Thamudic D” (JSTham 1) carved vertically beside the Arabo-Aramaic inscription JSNab 17 which is dated to AD 267. Needless to say, we have no idea how long before the sixth century BC or how long after the third century AD these nomads were using writing, though it is customary to point out that none of the texts found so far contains any reference to Christianity.

practical use in these societies and would not have displaced speech and memory as the means of communication and record. Instead, writing seems to have been used almost entirely as a pastime for those doing jobs which involved long hours of enforced, usually solitary, idleness in the desert, such as guarding the herds while they pastured, or keeping watch for game or enemies. Of course, we can never know for certain what caused each of thousands of individual nomads to carve their names, statements, and/or prayers on the desert rocks, but enforced idleness at least provided the opportunity. The scores of thousands of texts which these men, and occasionally women, carved<sup>26</sup> are graffiti, in that they are texts of self-expression on public surfaces (rocks in the desert). The Safaitic, Himaic, and Thamudic B, C and D graffiti would be of this type. The conditions which produced this type of graffiti in antiquity normally existed only in deserts,<sup>27</sup> though of course these texts are occasionally found in settled, even urban areas, such as Umm al-Jimāl, Palmyra, or Pompeii.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.1 ‘Graffiti of a literate society’

Because graffiti of a literate society are personal documents, it has often been assumed, using a false logic, that the type of script used in them must be closer to an informal than to a formal register of writing. Thus, to take an example at random, Werner Caskel claimed that public inscriptions in what he calls the ‘Late Lihyanite’ script sometimes ‘take over cursive forms from the graffiti.’<sup>29</sup>

However, if one studies the graffiti of most literate societies, it quickly becomes clear that their authors almost always try to use the formal register of the script (when one exists), as if the very act of carving a text in a public place requires the use of the register associated with public inscriptions. In the West, this means that carved graffiti are almost always in capital letters,<sup>30</sup> and this is probably the reason why angular unpointed Kufic remained in use in public contexts, including graffiti, long after it had been displaced by other forms of the Arabic script for informal texts on soft materials, both public and personal. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it was ever in general use for secular texts on papyrus.

Thus, in a literate society, both public inscriptions and graffiti are normally carved or written in the formal register of a script, and the differences between the two lie more in execution than intention.<sup>31</sup> The amateur who carves his name on a wall is usually trying unconsciously to use the same form of the script as the professional mason, but is simply less skilled, and is using a reg-

<sup>26</sup>Very occasionally painted graffiti have been found in shelters and caves in southern Jordan, see for instance Campetti & Borzatti von Löwenstern 1983: pl. XLVIIIb.

<sup>27</sup>See Macdonald 2009 I: 82-85.

<sup>28</sup>See Calzini Gysens 1990; Macdonald 2009 II: 311, n. 50, and p. 5 of the *addenda*.

<sup>29</sup>Caskel 1954: 27 ‘Außerdem entlehnt sie, auch hier wieder unregelmäßig, einige kursive Buchstaben den Graffiti.’ Of course, he is here using the term ‘cursive’ to mean ‘informal’, since we have only minimal evidence of ‘joined-up’ writing in the Ancient North Arabian scripts at Dadan (see Macdonald forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup>As noted by Ryckmans 1993: 30. In most cases, this even applies to spray-paint graffiti.

<sup>31</sup>It is here that the comparison with the use of capital letters for graffiti in the West ceases to be exact, since today capital letters do not in themselves constitute a formal register of the Roman script and are used together with lower case letters in most informal writing. But this is a peculiarity of late mediaeval and modern Greek, Roman and Cyrillic scripts and did not apply in antiquity to the Greek, Roman or Semitic alphabets. The phenomenon in some of the Vindolanda tablets, mentioned in note 20 above, is however, quite different.

ister he is used to *reading* but not to writing. This needs to be borne in mind when one encounters unusual letter forms in such graffiti. For the formal register of a script is normally more conservative than the informal registers with which it co-exists. Thus, an unusual shape in a graffito may not always be a genuinely evolved form (in the sense that it is part of a process of development) but may represent a botched attempt at a shape which existed only in the formal repertoire and of which the amateur may well have had only a reading knowledge.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, an amateur might not be able to recall the correct shape of a particular letter in the formal register and so might substitute the equivalent letter shape from one of the informal registers of the script, and might even try to modify it to make it look more ‘formal’.

Thus, graffiti of a literate society do not usually provide evidence of the *informal* registers of a particular script, since they are attempts to use the *formal* version. For the same reason, graffiti of a literate society do not in themselves constitute a coherent category in discussing a script and so it is meaningless to make a palaeographical distinction, as Caskel did, between ‘the script of the graffiti’ and that of the public inscriptions, since the same register of script was being used in both. It follows that in a graffito any divergences from the formal letter shapes will tend to be individual rather than generic, i.e. they will differ from text to text. Carving a graffito is a personal, individual act and one would hardly expect there to be a special version of the script reserved for it.

### 3.2 ‘Graffiti of a non-literate society’

With graffiti of a non-literate society however the case is completely different. Here, there is only one register since the authors were using the only form of the script available in their society. This type of script is unlikely to have been taught in schools – there would have been no point in doing so – but would have been passed on, like the rules of a children’s game, in a casual manner from one individual to another.<sup>33</sup> As far as we know, it was used almost entirely for graffiti<sup>34</sup> and, to all intents and purposes, only on one type of surface: rocks and stones. Such a script is likely to develop in ways which are very different from those of scripts used in settled societies, where writing is taught in formal conditions and had multifarious uses on a variety of surfaces.<sup>35</sup>

This is clearest perhaps in the Safaitic graffiti, which were carved on the rocks of the deserts of southern Syria, north-eastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia possibly between the first century BC and the fourth century AD. They are the best documented and best understood of the Ancient North Arabian graffiti of non-literate societies and they represent the most extreme example

<sup>32</sup>In Macdonald 2009 I: 77, n. 91, I quoted the ‘phrase *lapidarias litteras scio* in Petronius’ *Satyrice* (58.7) [which], if it reflects reality, warns us that “public inscriptions in the Roman world provided a large-scale and abundant (if not richly amusing) reader for any child who learnt his letters informally” (Horsfall 1991: 62)’. I would suggest that in ancient Arabia even those who learnt to write in the informal register would often have learnt to read the formal register but would only have had occasion to write in it on exceptional occasions.

<sup>33</sup>See Macdonald 2009 I: 85-87; 2009 II: 386-387 for discussions of this.

<sup>34</sup>There are, of course, very occasional examples of its use for other public purposes, usually funerary, for instance HCH 1-99; JSTham 1 (the Thamudic D summary of JSNab 17, the epitaph of Rqwš mother of K’b at Ḥegrā/Madā’in Šālih); the names of the dead on the graves in the cave tomb at Dayr al-Kahf (Macdonald 2006); etc.

<sup>35</sup>On this type of graffiti see Macdonald 2009 I: 74-96.

of the development of a script used only for graffiti on a particular kind of surface, in this case mostly the twisted and irregular faces of basalt rocks and boulders.

Although the Safaitic graffiti are carved in a multitude of different ‘hands’ with no evidence of any school style, they show a remarkable consistency within a range of basic letter shapes over three or four centuries. This is probably because, after its introduction,<sup>36</sup> the script was quickly adapted to the one particular purpose for which it was used – incising, chiselling, or hammering on rocks using sharp stones. In Safaitic, writing is always continuous with no word-dividers or spaces between words. The script has no fixed direction and can run from left to right, from right to left, in horizontal and vertical boustrophedon, downwards, upwards, round in circles, or can meander around the surface and onto other faces of the stone or even other stones,<sup>37</sup> cross and re-cross previous parts of the text, etc.<sup>38</sup> Nor does it matter which way up a letter is carved, i.e. it is never upside-down.

This is writing with the minimum of rules, and it tends to favour the writer over the reader. When carving the text, the author could take up a comfortable position and use the area of the surface which was within easy reach, carving from whatever angle was least taxing. The text is continuous and because there is no reason to write in successive lines all beginning at the same ‘margin’, and because no letter is ever upside-down or back-to-front,<sup>39</sup> there was no need to alter position when he ran out of space in one direction. The fact that the script never developed word-dividers or spaces between words – a feature of texts by members of settled communities in the formal registers of the Ancient North Arabian scripts, and both registers of the Ancient South Arabian – when taken together with these other features, again suggests that clarity for the reader was not the primary force in the development of the Safaitic script.<sup>40</sup>

There is certainly a wide variation between the script of the texts produced by the most and by the least skilled, and there are a few letters such as *g* and *k* for which there are different (though clearly related) shapes. But there is nothing which could be described as a palaeographical development, for the conditions for such a development simply did not exist. The script had arrived at a form which was eminently suited to the purpose for which it was used and in these circumstances it is difficult to see what pressures would have produced palaeographical change. Instead, as we shall see below, occasional whimsical or decorative variants were created in particular texts, but had no consequences

<sup>36</sup>On this, see most recently Macdonald 2009 I: 78–82.

<sup>37</sup>An example of this was found by the Safaitic Epigraphic Survey Programme and will be published in the Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia.

<sup>38</sup>The only layout which is very rare is the one which we regard as normal, i.e. unidirectional writing in successive lines all running from the same margin, but see for example WH 2786, 3395 and possibly SIJ 351, if Winnett’s reading is correct.

<sup>39</sup>It is true that certain letters, such as *b* and *m* normally stand with their openings in the direction in which the text is going, but it is not unusual to find them turned at 90° or 180°. It should also be noted that word dividers are occasionally found in Thamudic B texts, which may reflect their authors’ knowledge of writing habits in oases such as Taymā’ and Dadan the scripts of which both employ them.

<sup>40</sup>Of course, of itself, the lack of spacing or word dividers is not evidence of this. They were not, for instance, used in Sanskrit, or generally in Greek texts before the Roman period. However, vowels are shown in these alphabets and this greatly reduces the possible ambiguities caused by *scriptio continua*.

on the development – or rather, stability – of the script itself.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, ignoring this fact, attempts have been made to distinguish ‘older’ and ‘later’ phases of the Safaitic script. Shortly after the texts were first made known to the Western scholarly world, the brilliant Prussian Consul at Damascus, J.G. Wetzstein, suggested that hammered or chiselled texts might be older than those which had been incised with a sharp stone (1860: 67). Although this was soon shown to be incorrect by the discovery of texts which had been hammered over incised ones (de Vogüé 1868-1877: 139) and others in which both techniques were employed (Dussaud & Macler 1901: 22), H. Grimme was still repeating the theory almost 70 years later and elevated the hammered letters into (an imaginary) ‘Kapitalschrift’.<sup>42</sup>

Another theory, which has survived even longer, is based on the assumption that the Safaitic alphabet derived directly from the ASA formal script. From this it is assumed that ‘squarer’, more angular, Safaitic letter forms must be closer than the ‘normal’ shapes to their equivalents in the formal ASA alphabet, and therefore must be older.<sup>43</sup> Thus, even great scholars like Littmann (1904: 106, 142; 1940: 96) and Winnett (1957: 11-12, 95) were misled into assuming that the so-called Safaitic ‘square script’ must be the most ancient form of the Safaitic alphabet. A glance at Figs 1 and 2, with the commentary in Appendix 2, will show that the ‘square’ forms have no greater resemblance to their counterparts in the ASA formal alphabet than their ‘normal’ equivalents and are simply angular or decorative versions of the latter. Moreover, there is no chronological significance in the use of ‘square’ or ‘normal’ forms since both are quite commonly found in the same inscription, where they are either mixed indiscriminately, or one part of the text is carved in the square script and the rest in normal letter forms (see fig. 2 and Appendix 2). There are also cases where the same author will write one text in the square script and another in the common letter forms.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, graffiti of a non-literate society exhibit a very unusual type of script-development in which the only pressures for stability or change are created by the exigencies of the writing materials (the surfaces of the rocks and the inscribing tools), and the personal taste, fantasy and skill of the individual inscriber. There was no external pressure to maintain a particular set of letter forms written in a certain way, as there would be in a school, a monastic scriptorium, a chancery, or a monumental mason’s workshop. There were no clients with changing aesthetic preferences. Once the script had been adapted to the only writing materials available, there was no reason for it to develop further, and, given that there were no schools, the small variations in letter form made by each individual as a result of taste, whimsy, degree of skill, or the tools or surface he was using, remained personal idiosyncrasies affecting no one else’s writing, rather than forming stages in an evolution of the script.

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<sup>41</sup>For examples of fantasy in the forms and arrangement of letters in Safaitic inscriptions see Al-Khrayshesh 1995: nos 2 and 5; and Macdonald 2009 I: 94–95, and fig. 7.

<sup>42</sup>Grimme 1929: 12. His ‘Kapitalschrift’ was not the so-called ‘square-script’ (on which see the next paragraph and Appendix 2). He regarded this as different again. See his remarks on the Safaitic texts from Umm al-Jimāl at the end of the same paragraph.

<sup>43</sup>For a discussion of the ‘square script’ see Macdonald 2006: 291-294.

<sup>44</sup>See for instance, HCH 39–41 which are virtually identical texts by the same man. HCH 41 is partly in the square script and nos 39 and 40 are in the common forms.

## 4 The Chisel, the Blade and the Pen

### 4.1 The chisel and the pen

As we have just seen, in a society in which the only texts are carved in stone, once a script has been adapted to the needs of those who use it there is little practical impetus for it to change, though it may be modified for aesthetic or playful purposes. On the other hand, in a society in which documents are also habitually written with pen and ink, the engine of functional, rather than ornamental, change in letter forms is likely to be the pen rather than the chisel.

The earliest change is probably from boustrophedon to unidirectional writing. In scripts where the letters are not joined, boustrophedon makes perfect sense to both the writer and the reader of a carved text,<sup>45</sup> and asymmetric letters (e.g. ‘E’ as opposed to ‘A’) do not have a fixed axis. If one can fit one’s inscription into a single line, all well and good, but if there is insufficient space then it is natural to turn and go back the way one came ‘as the plough is turned at the end of a furrow, or the shuttle sent back in weaving’, particularly if there are only a few letters remaining.<sup>46</sup> I have argued elsewhere that unidirectional writing is only really useful if you are writing in ink and do not want to risk smudging what you have just written.<sup>47</sup> However, in most scripts, the change from boustrophedon to unidirectional writing is visible to us only in the earliest *inscriptions*<sup>48</sup> and obviously predates by a long time any surviving manuscripts, so the reason I have suggested for this change can be no more than an inference.

The development of ligatures,<sup>49</sup> final forms of letters, of compression in letter forms, and different letters with similar or identical shapes, are all the result of the exigencies and freedoms of writing with pen and ink and there would be no impulse for a script to develop in this way if it were used purely by those carving inscriptions or graffiti on stone with no contact with a ‘pen-script’.

In Nabataean,<sup>50</sup> for instance, the script used in inscriptions is simply a more

<sup>45</sup>It is interesting to compare the many and varied uses of boustrophedon in early Greek inscriptions, on which see the masterly discussion in Jeffery 1990: 43-50.

<sup>46</sup>Jeffery 1990: 46. Note that ‘even in the last quarter of the sixth century Attic masons, for whom the system of continuous left-to-right had long been the established convention, still used the *boustrophedon* system for the last few letters of an inscription, in preference to isolating them at the head of a new line’ (*ibid.* and see p. 75-76 for examples).

<sup>47</sup>Macdonald 2009 I: 90. Jeffery also notes that in archaic Greece boustrophedon ‘could not hold out for ever against the admitted fact that to write continuously from left to right is the most practical method for a writer in ink on leather or papyrus. Had we now any such cursive documents surviving from the early sixth century, we should almost certainly see in them the germ and early growth of continuous left-to-right script; for it is significant that our earliest datable examples of this system are painted inscriptions on vases...’ (1990: 48). Her statements on writing from left to right would, of course, apply equally, *mutatis mutandis*, to writing from right to left.

<sup>48</sup>For the proto-Canaanite inscriptions see Naveh 1982: 40-42, and Sass 1991: 97. For the Greek alphabets and the Semitic prototypes from which they were borrowed, see Jeffery 1990: 45: ‘the Greeks who adopted the North Semitic alphabet were never really well-grounded in the process of writing continuously retrograde, and so from the beginning, when more than one line was required, they used instinctively the *boustrophedon* system, regarding the signs as reversible profiles.’

<sup>49</sup>For my use of this term see Appendix 1.

<sup>50</sup>I would distinguish between the Nabataean form of the Aramaic script and the local Aramaic script of the Ḥawrān which is often lumped together with it, but which has significant differences, not least a strong tendency to avoid ligatures in formal inscriptions (the only register which is so far known). For a discussion and illustration of this distinction see Macdonald 2003: 52-56, figs 28-36.

formal (sometimes calligraphic)<sup>51</sup> version of the *informal* script used for writing in ink. The changes in the letter forms and the increasing use of ligatures seen in the formal script only make sense as the transference to stone of features developed through writing swiftly with pen and ink. There would have been no reason for them to have developed independently within the process of carving on stone.<sup>52</sup> But this continuous evolution of the informal version, in documents most of which have disappeared, is only visible to us as a series of isolated and randomly selected stages shown in the calligraphic dress of the formal version used in inscriptions. It is like a series of snap-shots of a person at different ages, but always dressed in his or her ‘Sunday best’.

## 4.2 The chisel and the blade

But, in contrast to the Nabataeans, there are societies where formal and informal scripts seem to have had distinct parallel developments. As we have seen, in South Arabia informal versions of the script were engraved with a blade on palm-leaf stalks and short sticks,<sup>53</sup> a process which one might have thought was much closer to inscribing on stone than to writing with a pen. Yet, in ancient South Arabia, separate formal and informal scripts co-existed and, though they ultimately stemmed from a single origin,<sup>54</sup> they followed very different courses of development, under different pressures.

For stone-masons, the only pressure for change in letter forms would have been the varying aesthetic perceptions of their patrons and master masons. Thus, in the *musnad*, or formal South Arabian script, the letter forms remain extraordinarily stable over approximately a millennium and a half with, in most cases, changes being made not to the basic shape of the letter but only to the way in which it was ornamented (Fig. 3).

On the other hand, for those using the informal script, speed, ease of incising and the need for compression in the limited and awkwardly shaped space available, must all have affected the development of letter forms.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the contrast between the dramatic evolution of the *zabūr* and the conservatism of the *musnad* over the same period is striking (Fig. 3).

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<sup>51</sup>See, for instance, the scripts of the ‘Turkmaniyyah’ inscription at Petra (CIS ii 350) or the Ruwwāfah inscription in north-west Arabia (Milik 1971; Macdonald 2009 VIII).

<sup>52</sup>For a more detailed discussion of this see Macdonald 2003: 51-54.

<sup>53</sup>See Ryckmans 1986: 187-188; 1993: 20-23; Ryckmans et al. 1994: 27-29; Stein 2005b: 124-133; 2008: 775-777; 2010: 24-27, for descriptions of the writing surfaces, the tools and the process of incising.

<sup>54</sup>By this I mean that they are both clearly forms of the South Semitic script family. In the past, I have questioned whether the minuscule script (*zabūr*) was necessarily derived from the formal script of the inscriptions (*musnad*) as proposed by J. Ryckmans (2001: 224, 226). However, Peter Stein has assured me (pers. comm.) that his study of many hundreds of the sticks has convinced him that Ryckmans’ derivation of the *zabūr* from the *musnad* is fundamentally correct, even if it needs to be modified slightly in detail, and I am happy to accept his judgement.

<sup>55</sup>See Parkes 2008: 72 on incising on wax tablets. ‘The wax surface offered more resistance than that of papyrus or parchment, and strokes were inscribed with a stylus. Writing required a considerable degree of pressure and traction .... This extra traction limited the movements of arm, elbow and shoulder, and a stylus could not be applied with the degree of dexterity or rhythm possible with a pen. ... The point of a stylus produced strokes of uniform dimensions, and a scribe had to lift it frequently in order to change the direction of a trace. This frequent lifting of the stylus produced a “stabbing” movement in the *ductus*.’ On the possibility of the use of wax tablets in ancient South Arabia see note 64 below.

It is also worth noting that of the approximately 7000 inscribed palm leaf stalks and sticks known so far, none bears a text in boustrophedon. Even the oldest,<sup>56</sup> in which the letters have the *musnad* forms, bears a text of three unidirectional lines.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, some two or more centuries later, boustrophedon is common in the earliest formal inscriptions on stone such as those of Yīṭa<sup>o</sup>amar Watar bin Yakrubmalik and Karib'il Watar which are now almost certainly datable to the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC respectively.<sup>58</sup> It has been suggested that boustrophedon was employed in inscriptions with extremely long lines as an aid to the reader (Naveh 1982: 49). However, while it would certainly have had this advantage, it seems to me unlikely that this was the primary reason for its use in these texts since it was also employed in inscriptions with short lines.<sup>59</sup>

I would suggest that the reason for the difference lies in the way these different types of inscription were produced. The direction of a non-cursive text makes little difference to the mason who is copying a model. On the other hand, incising a small curved surface with a sharp blade is a much more awkward process and I would suggest that for a right-handed person it is easier to carve from right-to-left than in the opposite direction which involves turning the hand and the blade to a position which gives less traction and is less comfortable. Of course, this does not make it *impossible* to incise from left-to-right, but I would suggest that for those right-handed people fortunate enough to be using a sinistrograde script, it was enough to make boustrophedon more trouble than starting a fresh sinistrograde line. In the earliest texts on sticks, the *musnad* forms of the letters were used, so letter shape is unlikely to have influenced the direction.

Thus, if, as seems to be the case with other non-cursive alphabetic scripts, boustrophedon preceded unidirectional writing as the norm in the early use of the ASA alphabet, then it must very quickly have been found to be inconvenient for incising on palm-leaf stalks, and have been abandoned in favour of unidirectional sinistrograde lines. For texts carved on stone, we can only speculate that, since there was no such inconvenience, boustrophedon continued to be used until perhaps the practice of unidirectional writing in everyday documents incised on palm-leaf stalks finally influenced the layout of public inscriptions on stone, just as the layout of pen and ink documents seems to have done in other cultures.

### 4.3 The blade and the pen

Ryckmans suggests with regard to the informal South Arabian script (*zabūr*) incised on palm-leaf stalks and sticks, that ‘peut-être en raison de la résistance du support le scribe a tendance à décomposer en coups de lame distincts et isolés le tracé des courbes, des oeillets ou d’autres éléments de lettres. La cohésion originelle de certains caractères s’en trouve désarticulée.... Ce processus d’éclatement des traits va s’accroître et le tracé des caractères va se réorganiser progressivement sur ces nouvelles configurations....’ (1994: 251).<sup>60</sup> If I

<sup>56</sup>This is Leiden 24, which was dated by <sup>14</sup>C to between 1073 and 902 BC (Drewes et al. 2013)

<sup>57</sup>I am most grateful to Peter Stein (pers. comm.) for the information in the last two sentences.

<sup>58</sup>See the convincing arguments in Nebes 2007.

<sup>59</sup>For instance, at random, CIH 383, RES 4226, etc.

<sup>60</sup>He adds that the letters in Ethiopian manuscripts are formed from several separate strokes

have understood him correctly, this is a very interesting idea, and logically what one might expect. However, as far as I can tell, only *d* and *ḏ* in the *zabūr* are regularly formed from ‘coups de lame distincts et isolés’, with a few scattered examples of other letters which may well be due to accidents or the idiosyncrasies of a particular scribe.<sup>61</sup>

Ryckmans also once suggested that ‘l’écriture sur bois conservait la souplesse de ses formes en partie ... parce qu’elle se calquait sur l’écriture utilisée sur des supports plus “rapides”, comme la tablette à cire ou le parchemin’.<sup>62</sup> However, incising letters on small curved surfaces made of soft wood<sup>63</sup> makes very different demands on the inciser from those of writing with pen and ink. I agree that it is easy to envisage most of the letter forms of the *zabūr* as having developed in writing with pen and ink, but on the other hand whatever kind of blade was used to incise the sticks,<sup>64</sup> it was clearly supple enough, and the surface soft enough, to create the curves and flowing lines of the *zabūr*, or to copy them if they were originally developed through writing in ink. It seems to me, however, that the key point is the lack of ligatures. Ligatures are only an advantage to someone who can write more quickly in ink if he does not have to lift the pen between letters. There is no reason why they should develop in a script used only for incising. In the development of the *zabūr*, the letters for the most part acquire tails sweeping to the left as part of the sinistrograde ductus of the script. However, the fact that throughout its development the *zabūr* remained a non-cursive script<sup>65</sup> suggests that it was used almost entirely for incising texts on sticks rather than for writing in ink where it would have been almost impossible not to turn the ‘tails’ of the letters into ligatures. Had

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and suggests that this might be an argument against his proposal (1994: 251, n.2). However, as suggested above, the reason for constructing letters in this way in copying manuscripts in a formal script is quite different from that which may have produced the changes in the letter forms in the South Arabian minuscule, and thus would not, as such, be an argument against Ryckmans’ explanation.

<sup>61</sup>These are most prevalent in Ryckmans’ Phase IIIb, which Ryckmans describes as a ‘hybrid writing style’ (2001: 230) and which may be the product of a particular scribal centre. See the discussions in Stein 2010: 45, n. 184; 2013: 192; Drewes et al. 2013: 206.

<sup>62</sup>Ryckmans 1986: 188. It should be noted, however, that on a wax-covered tablet one is still incising, rather than writing.

<sup>63</sup>It should be emphasized that the surface of fresh palm-leaf stalks when the covering has been removed and of freshly cut sticks when the bark has just been peeled off, is fairly soft and only hardens as it dries out. Thus, while the resistance to the blade would perhaps be greater than that of wax to the stylus, it is in no way comparable to attempting to incise dry wood. The different effects of incising fresh and dry wood can be seen by comparing genuine ancient *zabūr* texts with the inscriptions incised by modern forgers on ancient, previously unincised, sticks. I am most grateful to Peter Stein for this information (pers. comm.). See also Drewes et al. 2013: 200.

<sup>64</sup>The best evidence for methods of writing in daily life in pre-Islamic South Arabia is a number of ivory styli illustrated on Ryckmans, Müller, & Abdallah 1994: 82, pl. 5A. As Ryckmans points out (1993: 21-22; Ryckmans, Müller, & Abdallah 1994: 28) these could not have been used for incising on wood and presuppose the use of tablets hollowed out and filled with wax. He also notes, however, that the other styli found so far, in iron, bronze or lead-tipped wood, have points the shapes of which would not be capable of producing the fine incised lines on the sticks and palm-leaf stalks which he attributes to the use of ‘une lame très effilée’ (Ryckmans, Müller and Abdallah 1994: 28). The question of what implement was used to inscribe the sticks and palm-leaf stalks would seem still to be open, and the function of the styli that have been found so far does not yet appear to be settled.

<sup>65</sup>For my use of this term see Appendix 1. The impulse towards the cursive can occasionally be seen even in less careful texts on sticks, where although there are no ligatures, the tail of one letter sometimes accidentally runs into or even across the first line of the next, as, for instance, in some cases in Stein 2005b: 150, Abb 3.

this happened, one would have expected to see a transfer of the ligatures to the script used on sticks, just as the increasing number of ligatures in Nabataean were transferred from documents in ink to inscriptions on stone. However, at present this explanation must remain speculation since up till now we have not a single example of writing in ink from ancient South Arabia and we cannot know whether this absence of evidence is evidence of absence.<sup>66</sup>

If, as seems likely, the vast majority of the inscribed palm-leaf stalks and sticks were carved by professional scribes (Ryckmans 1994: 257-258; Stein 2005b: 147-150; 2010: 32-33), we need also to take into account the effects of schooling on the development and use of the script. For instance, was a standardized form of the *zabūr* taught to trainee scribes and, if so, how far did individuals depart from it? Do the changes in letter forms signify an orderly and gradual evolution, kept to a minimum by master scribes, or the more fragmented development of innumerable individual hand-writings? If the texts which have appeared on the market have all come from one archive at Nashshān, it would seem probable that we may have the products of a single scriptorium stretching over some 1500 years. Once we have more (and more refined) absolute dates for the sticks to test further Ryckmans' proposed sequence of letter forms, we may then have for the first time the conditions for a true palaeographical study of the development of one of the ASA scripts.

## 5 Palaeography

Palaeography originated as the study of the handwriting of Greek and Latin manuscripts, and was only later extended to texts in other scripts. It is concerned with every aspect of writing, of which the comparative dating of letter forms, individually and in context, is only one part. The latter is only possible when there is a large corpus of already dated material, produced with similar tools on comparable surfaces,<sup>67</sup> and for similar purposes,<sup>68</sup> which has come from a defined area in which a tradition of writing in a particular way has been

<sup>66</sup>There are a handful of examples of letters painted on bone and as part of the decoration on pots (see Stein 2005b: 131, n. 47), but these use forms of the *musnad*. The classic study of writing materials at the time of the Prophet and later is Grohmann 1967: 66-131. On the writing materials available and used in ancient Arabia, see the excellent discussion in Stein 2005b: 121-133. In an earlier survey, Maraqtan (1998: 292) stated that palm-leaf stalks (*'usub*), when dry, could be written on 'with pen and ink, just like writing on papyrus', but gives no references and does not state whether there is any evidence of this practice in pre-Islamic Yemen. His reference (293) to writing on palm-leaves (*jarā'id*), for which ink would presumably have been used, appears to relate to the Islamic period and is anyway contained in an anecdote parts of which al-Hamdānī clearly considered apocryphal (*hādā hadīṭ fi-hi hayf*, Al-Hamdānī 1986: 222). Finally, Maraqtan refers to the line *'arafta 'l-diyāra ka-raqmī 'l-dawāṭi // yazbiru-hā 'l-kātibu 'l-ḥimyarī* in a poem of Abū Dhu'ayb al-Hudhaylī as an example of writing in ink in Yemen (304). However, the term *al-dawāḥ* surely means a case of writing implements, which in most regions would have held pen and ink, but which presumably could have held simply a stylus or blade. Ryckmans (1963: 458, n. 3) cites a reference to *raqq* 'parchment' in South Arabia in a poem attributed to Qudam b. Qādim (said to be fifth century AD). However, note that his statement (*loc. cit.*) that the *Periplus* mentions the import of papyrus to South Arabia is incorrect since the word *κόπερος* in § 24 refers not to papyrus but to the medicinal plant *Cyperus rotundus* or *Cyperus longus* (see Casson 1989: 153).

<sup>67</sup>For instance, with pen and ink on papyrus, parchment, leather, or paper; or with a sharp blade on wood; or with hammer and chisel on stone, etc.

<sup>68</sup>Thus, for instance, there are clear differences between 'book hands' used for the copying of manuscripts for libraries, and the hands of scribes employed to produce and copy everyday documents.

passed on from one generation to the next.<sup>69</sup> This means that ephemeral personal idiosyncrasies in the hands of two writers who are already known to be contemporary can be identified, and distinguished from fundamental changes that reflect the historical development of the script tradition.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, there are clearly two essential prerequisites for any dating on palaeographical grounds. Firstly, one must have, or be able to create, a sequence of material, comparable in purpose and execution, in a chronological order based *entirely* on good ‘external’ (i.e. non-palaeographical) evidence. There may be a number of reasons for the differences between two attempts at producing a particular letter shape, but if they are not in a comparable context<sup>71</sup> and one does not even know which is the older, it is unsafe to explain these differences purely as a chronological development.<sup>72</sup>

The second prerequisite is that one must have a large number of documents covering the whole period so that it is possible to distinguish those features which represent real trends in the development of the script from ones which are simply due to local or temporary circumstances (the scribe was getting tired, his fingers were numb with cold, atmospheric conditions were affecting the writing surface, etc.). Once again, it has to be emphasized that this can only be done within a pre-existing chronological sequence of the documents which is firmly based on non-palaeographical data.

Thus, because a large number of dated manuscripts from the monastic scriptoria and dated documents from the chancelleries of mediaeval Europe have survived, it is possible to place them in chronological sequences and to trace the changes which the scripts underwent over a long period of time in the same or neighbouring environments. Such a framework is a fundamental prerequisite for attempting to assign an undated and/or unprovenanced text to a position in the sequence.

It will be obvious from this that there are remarkably few occasions in Semitic epigraphy – at least in the linear alphabets – when the circumstances would be appropriate for chronological judgements to be made on the basis of letter forms. However, over the last two centuries, this has not deterred innumerable attempts to ‘adapt’ palaeography for the dating of Semitic texts.

## 5.1 ‘Comparative palaeography’

The most drastic misuse of palaeographical method is what has been called ‘comparative palaeography’.<sup>73</sup> This seeks to make an evolutionary sequence

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<sup>69</sup>Thus, scribal schools, monastic scriptoria, the chancelleries of states with centralized and well-organized bureaucracies, etc.

<sup>70</sup>Ada Yardeni has already made this point very well: ‘The evolution of the script is marked by systematic changes in the letter forms taking place within a certain script-style, used by a given school of scribes belonging to a certain social group in a certain place. These changes must be distinguished from the idiosyncrasies of individual hand-writings’ (2000: 148).

<sup>71</sup>By this I mean, produced with similar tools, on similar surfaces, for similar purposes.

<sup>72</sup>See, for instance, the schemata produced by Jamme for the forms of certain letters in a collection of Safaitic texts from North Arabia (1971: 611–612, and see p. 53) and by Knauf for Hismaic inscriptions in general (1983: 590–591), both supposed to show the development of certain letter forms into others, but both based on letter forms in undated and undatable texts.

<sup>73</sup>To take just two examples, Pirenne used ‘la paléographie comparée’ (1956: 16, 91 and *passim*) to try to tie her sequence of letter forms very tightly to the evolution of Greek formal scripts as well as into a general development of the Semitic alphabets. This vitiated much of the usefulness of her work, see below. Naveh uses ‘comparative palaeography’ in his study of the early history of the

out of letter forms plucked from (usually brief) texts, the interpretation of which is often disputed, which come from widely scattered sites (or are of unknown provenance), which are mostly of uncertain date, are on different materials, and in different forms of a script, or even in different scripts. These letter forms are compared in the abstract and it is then claimed that one must have derived from another. The intervening stages between the forms have to be supplied by the imagination (see Fig. 4)<sup>74</sup> and no attempt is made to demonstrate a chain of contact between the authors of the texts from which these forms are taken. Yet, without such contact the idea of an *evolutionary sequence* of letter forms is meaningless.

It is on this – to my mind – fundamentally flawed methodology that most studies of the origin and development of the alphabet have been based. This is especially true in the work of W.F. Albright,<sup>75</sup> and his followers such as Cross<sup>76</sup> and more recently Sass.<sup>77</sup> The great value of a book such as Sass's

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alphabet and states that it 'will accompany our approach to several problems that are discussed in the following chapters of this book' (1982: 6).

<sup>74</sup>Fig. 4 shows an example of how easy it is to postulate almost any sequence of development simply by treating letter forms in a vacuum. At the beginning of the twentieth century, M. Lidzbarski (1902: 122) and F. Praetorius (1904: 717-718), using the same materials, proposed precisely opposite sequences for how each thought the Safaitic and South Arabian forms of *alif* had developed from '(alt)kanaanäisch' which they considered to be the source of both the North West Semitic and the South Semitic alphabetic traditions.

<sup>75</sup>To take, at random, one of many examples: Albright 1963: 54 where he compares letter forms in script tables published by Jamme from rock inscriptions in Wādī Ḥaḍramawt (Jamme 1963: 43, 47) with letters on stamps from Bethel in Palestine, by which he *dates* the former to 'between the tenth and the eighth centuries [BC]'. His conclusions on the basis of these very partial script-tables are breathtaking (not a single photograph of an inscription was published): 'The new texts prove almost conclusively that graffiti antedated monumental inscriptions in South Arabia. They also suggest the spread of Late Bronze linear alphabetic script as early as the 13th (or even 14th) century, before the characters ʿ and ġ, ḥ and ḫ had fallen together.... This means that camel caravan trade may have spread very rapidly in the 13th century, followed in the late 12th by the Midianite irruptions in the north.' This series of nonsequiturs is vintage Albright. It should be remembered that this construction was based on the forms of letters in texts which had not yet even been conclusively deciphered and for which his only 'evidence' consisted of the shapes, inevitably removed from their context, in Jamme's script-tables. This passage is alas typical of the extraordinarily sweeping comparisons Albright made between letter forms in texts from completely different cultures, thousands of kilometres apart, and the historical hypotheses he would then build on the basis of them.

<sup>76</sup>For instance, at random, Cross 1967: the table on p. 15\* and the discussion on pp. 14\*–24\* where the 'early evolution of the alphabet' is based on comparing letter forms and letter-stance in scattered single documents which he dates between 1500 and 1000 BC (though on little, or very dubious, external evidence). Note, for instance, such statements as 'Proto-Arabic [which he defines as 'the [putative] ancestor of the Old South Arabic scripts, including Old Dedanite and Chaldaean', 1967: 19\*, n. 67] ... preserved some graphemes which fell out of Proto-Canaanite in the course of the thirteenth century...' (1967: 19\*). Some of the letter forms in this putative ancestor 'are extremely archaic reflecting forms of the late fourteenth or early thirteenth century.' All this is based on the two script tables extracted from some rock inscriptions from Wādī Ḥaḍramawt published by Jamme (1963: 43, 47, and see previous note) compared with letter forms in Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, Proto-Phoenician or Proto-Canaanite letters scratched on arrow-heads found in Palestine and Lebanon, a dipinto on a pottery ewer from Palestine, etc. I am here criticizing only Cross's application of this so-called 'comparative palaeography', not, of course, his detailed studies on the orthography and the palaeography (in the true sense) of Hebrew and Aramaic documents, etc.

<sup>77</sup>See Sass 1991, especially pp. 73–90, where he compares the shapes of letters carefully carved in reverse on seals bearing Mesopotamian and other iconography, with letters crudely scratched on potsherds found in Jerusalem, at Tell el-Kheleifah near Aqaba, and at Ḥajar bin Ḥumeid in Yemen, and with letter forms on a commemorative stela from Marib, a tablet from Nippur, an arrowhead from Palestine, a bowl from Ur, etc. The techniques, purposes, surfaces, provenances

*Studia Alphabetica* lies in the fact that it brings together photographs and all the available information on the material. However, while his discussion of the individual texts is careful and often enlightening, I can see no value whatsoever in trying to make ‘palaeographical’ judgements about the development of the South Semitic script, and its relationship with the Phoenico-Aramaic alphabets, on the basis of a handful of brief documents of widely differing types, from sites scattered from the Levant and Mesopotamia to Yemen, or of unknown provenance, many of which are of very uncertain date and even interpretation. It is surely better to admit what we do not know rather than to make such wide-ranging deductions on the basis of so little evidence.

Similarly, in his attempt to find the origin of the Libyco-Berber script, Pichler compared ‘an *idealized* [Libyco-Berber] alphabet with right-angled forms’ (Pichler 2007: 21, my italics), with letter forms taken from script-tables of the ‘Oasis North Arabian’ [ONA] alphabets and the ‘Old Phoenician’ [OP] alphabet, to which he gave artificially angular shapes. The fact that such an entirely artificial comparison – which he himself admits is ‘no objective analysis’ (2007: 21) – threw up ‘seven signs of totally identical form’ in the comparison with Old Phoenician and five in that with Oasis North Arabian convinced him that ‘the L[ibyco-]B[erber] script was more probably derived from the OP alphabet than from ONA alphabet’ (2007: 21),<sup>78</sup> whereas, in fact, it simply shows apparent similarities between his ‘idealized’ and ‘artificially angular’ forms, and proves nothing about the relationship of one script to another.

All such studies treat each letter form as an isolated artefact existing in a vacuum. The first stage in this treatment is to extract each letter shape from its context and to place it in a script-table. Within the script-table, divorced from all the diverse forces which produced each one, letter forms suddenly seem comparable and it can even seem reasonable to attribute their differences solely to chronological development, as if they had all been produced on the same materials by generations of monks copying manuscripts in the same scriptorium.

But in the real world, the letter forms that are being compared are taken from a handful of texts created by individuals hundreds of kilometres – and often hundreds of years – apart, working in widely different contexts, on dif-

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and dates (even when these can be determined) of these objects are so varied that there is no basis for comparison and the only thing that can be said with any certainty is that it is highly unlikely that the same version of the alphabet was being used by all the people who produced these ‘documents’ at such different times in such widely separated places.

<sup>78</sup>It should be noted that Pichler cites caveats which he then ignores in practice. Thus, ‘There is not just one single Phoenician alphabet or one single “Thamudic” alphabet.... In any case, it is not appropriate to compare characters from totally different periods’ (2007: 21). Yet he takes one particular form of each letter from script tables of Old Phoenician and the ONA alphabets, ‘regularizes’ them and compares them with ‘idealized’ forms from unspecified Libyco-Berber inscriptions. There is only one dated Libyco-Berber inscription (RIL 2, 139/138 BC) and he does not make clear whether he is using letter forms from this for his ‘idealized alphabet’. Yet he is comparing it with letters from script tables of ‘the Old-Phoenician (OP) alphabet from the eleventh to the eighth centuries BC’ (*loc. cit.*), and letters selected from five different lines of a script table of Oasis North Arabian alphabets (Macdonald 2009 III: 34, fig. 3). The only relatively securely dated examples of the latter (i.e. the brick from Ur, possibly the three sherds from Jerusalem, see Sass 1991: 40, and 58-50, and a handful of Taymanitic inscriptions) are from the late seventh–early sixth centuries BC, onwards. Similarly he writes, ‘It is not possible to define in exact terms the criteria that make something similar’ (*loc. cit.*), and yet he seems to be unaware that this undermines the whole basis of his comparisons; etc., etc. On the impossibility of dating the Dadanitic inscriptions at present, see Macdonald forthcoming.

ferent materials with greater or lesser skill.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, in dealing with the early stages of the alphabet, the letter forms available are few and far between and there is no way of knowing whether each one is in any way representative of the same letter in contemporary texts which happen to have been lost. In these circumstances, it is not possible to compare like with like, and the results of such comparisons can only be meaningless. Moreover, any suggestion that a form in one of these texts ‘grew out of’ a form in another needs to explain how this would have been possible in practical terms when one is dealing not with the products of a scriptorium or chancery but with the work of individuals scattered over great expanses of space and time, using writing for different purposes on different materials.

Moreover, there are innumerable examples in the epigraphy of Semitic (and other) linear alphabets, of letters in one script developing forms identical with, or very similar to, those of letters representing completely different sounds in other scripts. This is very clearly shown on Pirenne’s table comparing the (‘regularized’) shapes of Greek letters of the fifth and sixth centuries BC with (similarly ‘regularized’) South Arabian characters, entirely disregarding the respective values of the letters.<sup>80</sup> These apparent similarities do not mean that there has to have been a connection between the development of the two scripts, as Pirenne claimed – indeed, in this case, it is highly unlikely that there was. Any such claim would have to show convincingly the exact processes by which it came about that *all* the writers<sup>81</sup> in two widely separated and scattered societies *decided* – for this diffusionist theory implies a conscious decision – to use identical letter forms to represent completely different sounds.

Within the Ancient North Arabian family of alphabets, the letters *n* in Thamudic B, *r* in Thamudic D, *s*<sup>2</sup> in Hismaic and *l* in Safaitic are all represented by a simple straight vertical line, but clearly each arrived at this shape by a different process of development. This clearly shows that similarity of form is no guarantee of any relationship, even within closely related scripts. Similarly, in Dadanitic, the form of *s*<sup>1</sup> was sometimes represented by a ‘V’ with a short vertical line protruding from the centre of the opening. In some cases, however, (e.g. JSLih 70/5) this short stroke is attached to the left side of the ‘V’, making the letter almost identical to an Imperial Aramaic (and indeed to a Phoenician) *šīn* (see fig. 5). Thus, by completely independent processes and completely different routes, a Dadanitic letter and an Imperial Aramaic letter – which, by chance, represent the same etymological phoneme PS /š/<sup>82</sup> – have developed very similar forms. Fortunately, the processes by which Dadanitic *s*<sup>1</sup> developed this form are clearly illustrated in numerous Dadanitic texts. Indeed the more common form – ‘V’ + unattached vertical stroke – occurs in the same inscription as the form in which the stroke is attached to the left side of the ‘V’ (see fig. 5). But if for Dadanitic, Phoenician and Aramaic we had the same scarcity and uneven quality of material as we do for the early his-

<sup>79</sup>For one example at random, among innumerable others, see the table on Sass 2005: 121, Table 8.

<sup>80</sup>Pirenne 1955: 118. She purposely ignores the problem that the similar shapes represent completely different sounds in the two scripts (1955: 116, n.4).

<sup>81</sup>Since she is dealing with the basic shapes of letters, her theory must assume that the decision to maintain this continuous connection was made not just between all the scribes in the two cultures, but between all those who carved the thousands of graffiti in the two societies.

<sup>82</sup>On this see Macdonald (2004: 499; 2009 II: 45-46, fig. 5).

tory of the alphabet it is obvious how easy it would be to build a grand, and completely incorrect, theory on this accidental similarity using ‘comparative palaeography’.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, if we had for the linear alphabets of the ancient Near East the same quantity and quality of dated written material that we have for mediaeval Europe, it would never occur to us to make the type of comparisons that, alas, are commonplace in West Semitic ‘palaeographical’ studies. Yet, the absence of such abundance does not make these comparisons and the conclusions drawn from them any more valid.

Some years ago, a number of Semitic epigraphists were approached by two enthusiastic amateurs who had found in the Colorado plains of the USA petroglyphs which they thought resembled some of the letter shapes in Ancient North Arabian alphabets as shown on published script-tables. In some cases there was a certain resemblance, but this did not make the North American petroglyphs into Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, nor did it mean that they had any connection with Old World alphabetic traditions. In this case, the barrier posed by the Atlantic Ocean induced an immediate scepticism in the scholars (though not the enthusiasts),<sup>84</sup> which was confirmed by examination of the petroglyphs in context. But exactly the same scepticism should be applied to those academic theories that treat Middle Eastern letter forms in a vacuum and use similarities in shape as ‘evidence’ of a connection. I would repeat that it is surely better to recognize what we cannot at present know, and wait for new data, than to create ‘dating tools’ which are presented as based on rigorous methodology but in fact stem from subjective impressions and ‘reasoning’ without evidence.

## 5.2 Palaeography and the ‘Graffiti of a non-literate society’

We have seen how the letter forms in the graffiti of a non-literate society are perfectly adapted to the circumstances in which the texts are composed and the surfaces on which they are carved. To compare a letter form extracted from one of these texts with a shape taken from a public inscription in the formal versions of the Phoenician, Aramaic, Dadanitic or South Arabian scripts is equivalent to comparing not merely apples with pears, but artichokes with parrots.

Indeed, despite the huge body of material, graffiti of a non-literate society are of their very nature inappropriate for the construction of developmental sequences. The work of Van den Branden on ‘Thamudic’ highlights the problems. When his work was published in 1950, of the thousands of ‘Thamudic’ inscriptions then known,<sup>85</sup> only one was firmly dated, that is JSTham 1, the

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<sup>83</sup>A different example can be found in a Safaitic inscription in which the author is clearly playing with the letter names and their shapes (Macdonald 2009 I: 95, fig. 7). The *ʿayn* has been given a ‘pupil’. Sass (2005: 120) writes that ‘In a putative Proto-Canaanite *ʿayin* of the thirteenth century or earlier the pupil would have been prevalent, but it became ever more scarce afterwards, finally disappearing in the ninth century.’ If we had only this Safaitic text and perhaps a handful of others (as we have only single, or scattered texts from the very early periods) this inscription might be dated to before the ninth century BC on the basis of the dot in the *ʿayn*, or even earlier since the *y* (i.e. *yōd* or *yaman*) in the same text has been given fingers!

<sup>84</sup>See McGlone et al. 1993: 271-296.

<sup>85</sup>At that time, the Taymanitic and Hismaic inscriptions were still included in the ‘pending file’ of ‘Thamudic’, see Macdonald 2009 II: 43-45.

Thamudic D summary of the Nabataeo-Arabic<sup>86</sup> Raqōš inscription (JSNab 17) at Ḥegrā / Madā'in Šāliḥ, which is dated to AD 267. Ironically, the Thamudic D script contains some of the most 'archaic-looking' letter forms<sup>87</sup> of any of the Thamudic scripts and without JSTham 1, these would almost certainly have been placed much 'earlier' in Van den Branden's hypothetical 'development'.

Van den Branden's idea that 'Thamudic' – a 'hold-all' category invented by nineteenth-century scholars – represented a single script which, 'soit en raison d'une tendance au cursif [*sic*], soit par suite d'une déformation des lettres due à la négligence ... a évolué d'une façon sensible durant son existence de 7 à 8 siècles' (1950: 17), was based on a purely subjective ordering of letter forms from undated inscriptions, using his imagination to fill in the gaps in the supposed development from one form to the next. The order could only be subjective because he had no external evidence to show that one form was older than another. Worse still, he was working entirely from hand-copies, many of very dubious accuracy, with hardly a single photograph, so there was no way of knowing whether the forms in his sequences were genuine or simply copyists' standardizations or errors.

But the problem goes deeper than this. The various scripts which we place in the artificial category of 'Thamudic', as well as those we call 'Safaitic' and 'Hismaic' are all 'graffiti of a non-literate society', i.e. they were carved on the desert rocks by innumerable individuals, each with his/her own idiosyncrasies and personal epigraphic habits. As I have suggested elsewhere, it is unlikely that these individuals learnt their letters in schools, indeed all the evidence suggests that they picked them up from each other in a casual manner (Macdonald 2009 I: 85–91), so there would have been no way of imposing any uniformity in the way they formed their letters. To these individual features were then added such things as the ease or difficulty of carving on a particular rock surface, and ephemeral circumstances which we can never discover (e.g. how irritating the flies were that day, whether the carver had problems with his eyes, whether or not the instrument he was using was particularly suitable, etc.). All these factors which remain unknowable, make it impossible to compare like with like within these graffiti. This is in marked contrast to texts from one, or at most several closely related, scriptoria or masons' workshops, in which the surfaces and tools were identical and the aim was to produce a consistent form of the script.

This is why it will probably never be possible to say a great deal about the historical development of the Safaitic, Hismaic and various 'Thamudic' scripts, though there are plenty of other, more interesting, aspects of these alphabets to study.<sup>88</sup> It also makes it impossible, at least in present circumstances, to chart in any detail the relationships of the different Ancient North Arabian alphabets to each other and to the Ancient South Arabian scripts.

<sup>86</sup>For this term see Macdonald 2009 III: 37, 53.

<sup>87</sup>See especially the forms of ' and n.

<sup>88</sup>For instance, how each alphabet was adapted to the materials on which it was habitually used. Are there differences, for instance, between those normally used on basalt and those used on sandstone? The way in which authors 'play' with their inscriptions; or the use of inscriptions as decoration, etc, etc.

### 5.3 Palaeography as a basis for chronology?

In 1956 Jacqueline Pirenne published an analysis of the letter forms of the Ancient South Arabian formal script. Unfortunately, none of the inscriptions before the Himyarite period had an absolute date and in most cases even relative dating was impossible. The problem with her work is therefore twofold. One is the danger of subjectivity in creating a palaeographical sequence entirely from undated documents with unknown or widely scattered provenances,<sup>89</sup> a problem which she herself recognized.<sup>90</sup> The other stems from some of the methods she employed to compensate for the lack of dating material.

Some of the latter were very sensible, for instance her attempts to tie in transitions from one of her 'stades' to another with the short sequences of royal genealogy available (1956: 92). However, this was clearly insufficient and so she turned to a particular version of comparative palaeography (see above) to provide an historical framework for her sequence (1956: 16, 91). Her form of 'la paléographie comparée' was made up of two different processes. The first consisted of speculative comparisons of Ancient South Arabian letter forms with those in Ancient North Arabian scripts (specifically Dadanitic and occasionally 'Thamudic')<sup>91</sup> and those of Phoenician. Quite apart from the methodological flaws in this sort of comparison which have been noted above, she unfortunately believed that the South Semitic script family was derived directly from Phoenician (e.g. 1956: 131),<sup>92</sup> whereas it now seems very probable that the split between the Phoenico-Aramaic and the South Semitic branches of the alphabet took place at a much earlier stage. Since she dated the 'regular use' of the Phoenician script to the 10th century BC (*loc. cit.*), this belief encouraged her to place the earliest South Arabian inscriptions at a relatively late date.

The second foundation of her 'paléographie comparée' was based on her belief that the South Arabian formal script developed under the close and constant influence of the Greek formal alphabet.<sup>93</sup> She was struck by the great symmetry and elegance of the South Arabian letter forms, so unlike those of the North West Semitic inscriptions of the first millennium BC, and felt that South Arabian society could not have achieved such perfection in its formal writing system without what she called 'une impulsion grecque, sans doute

<sup>89</sup>See Pirenne 1956: 83-90 on her method, which she sums up in the words, 'Les types graphiques une fois décelés et définis, il reste à établir leur ordre de succession dans le temps,' i.e. one arranges the letter forms into groups first and then seeks to tie them to (in this case, relative) chronological data.

<sup>90</sup>On peut sans doute proposer des séquences qui paraîtraient vraisemblables et satisfaisantes. Mais rien n'est plus sujet à caution....En tout état de cause, la vraisemblance ne fournit aucune preuve et ne peut donc servir à fonder aucune conclusion' (1956: 90).

<sup>91</sup>See for instance, Pirenne 1956: 99-100, though it should be noted that, like Van den Branden (see above), she did not distinguish between the different scripts lumped together under the rubric 'Thamudic', despite the fact that she was aware of Winnett's preliminary sorting (1955: 133, and see below). It is interesting, however, that at one point she suggests that the 'lettres aberrantes', which she identifies as 'thamoudéens' (1956: 99 and fig. 9), might instead be early 'local' forms which were later ousted by 'la forme définitive s'imposant peut-être à la faveur d'une autorité et d'une unification politique' (1956: 100-101), as with the regional alphabets of pre-Classical Greece. Some of these 'aberrant' forms appear in the *hilm* (alphabetic primer) on Leiden 37 (Ryckmans 1997: 15), note particularly the stemless forms of *h* and *h*, the back-to-front *s*<sup>2</sup>, the 'hatchet-shaped' *g*, and the *g* with a short downward stroke on *both* sides.

<sup>92</sup>This was a common view at the time she was writing, though she was still propounding it thirty years later (1988: 117, pl. I).

<sup>93</sup>Cet art graphique suit toutes les étapes de l'évolution de la graphie grecque, sans cesse soumise à de nouvelles « modes » (Pirenne 1955: 175; see also 1956: 114-116).

directement reçue'.<sup>94</sup> This, she thought, must then have continued to guide the later evolution of the script in parallel with that of the Greek alphabet used in formal inscriptions.<sup>95</sup> She had already divided the development of the Ancient South Arabian script into various 'stades' on purely stylistic grounds. Without any proof of Greek influence on the script – and the most minimal circumstantial evidence for Greek influence in South Arabia at all<sup>96</sup> – she then proceeded to arrange her 'stades' so that they appeared to parallel the development of versions of the Greek formal script of the fifth century BC onwards (e.g. 1956: 96-97).

She used this supposed Greek influence to bolster her belief that 'le dedanite'<sup>97</sup> offrait une graphie qui pourrait être considérée comme ancêtre du sabéen' (1955: 130). She regarded certain letter forms in 'le dedanite' and others plucked from dispersed Oasis North Arabian alphabets<sup>98</sup> as 'presque sud-arabes' and concluded that 'la paléographie comparée nous ferait ... attribuer ces écritures à la famille graphique grecque et non à la famille phénico-araméenne ... mais cette fois d'un grec du VIe siècle et non plus du Ve' (*loc. cit.*). Since she believed that the formal Ancient South Arabian script did not develop until the fifth century BC, she used this supposed similarity between 'la dedanite' and sixth century Greek letters to 'confirm' that the formal ASA alphabet developed from 'la dedanite'. However, because the match in letter forms between these two was far from exact, she proposed that 'on pourra voir dans le thamoudéen ce « missing link » entre le Nord et le Sud, le dedanite et le sabéen' (1955: 32–133 and see the chart on p. 131). It hardly needs to be noted that the dispersed Oasis North Arabian group consists of random letters or short texts, many of which are poorly understood, on objects the vast majority of which are undated, while 'Thamudic' is not a script but a pending file of as yet uncatalogued letter forms.<sup>99</sup> Pirenne was aware of this in as much as she refers to 'une des graphies thamoudéennes' which Winnett had isolated (probably 'Thamudic A', later 'Taymanitic') but in the next sentence she assumes that 'Thamudic' is a single category when she combines this supposedly early date for a particular kind of Thamudic with the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition's discovery of (unspecified) 'Thamudic' inscriptions in southern Saudi Arabia. By this means she convinces herself that 'Thamudic' was the 'missing link' between 'dedanite' and the ASA formal alphabet (1955: 133).

<sup>94</sup>Pirenne 1955: 190. See also 'Or il est évident qu'un alphabet sémitique était usité auparavant, puisque leur alphabet monumental donne aux lettres la valeur que les Sémites, et non les Grecs, leur reconnaissaient. Ils ont hellénisé une graphie locale....' (1955: 129).

<sup>95</sup>'Nous nous servons ici encore de la référence aux graphies grecque et romaine pour déterminer quel est le plus ancien des types graphiques sud-arabes attestés, pour vérifier l'ordre des grands stades de l'évolution et pour les situer approximativement dans le temps;' (Pirenne 1956: 16); and 'sous ses traits spécifiquement sud-arabes, on verra la graphie suivre exactement les grandes étapes que connut l'évolution de la graphie grecque' (1955: 127).

<sup>96</sup>Her final theory that a large number of Greeks formed part of a migration of Sabaeans from Tigre to Yemen in the sixth–fifth centuries BC (1989: 266-269) is better passed over in silence. See the critique in Beeston 2005.

<sup>97</sup>This was the script in which the tomb inscription of a king of Dadan was written and which was identified by Grimme (1932) as a separate script from 'Lihyanite'. However, this division has turned out to be artificial and confusing and both 'Dedanite' and 'Lihyanite' are now subsumed under the term 'Dadanitic'. See Macdonald 2009 III: 33; and forthcoming.

<sup>98</sup>See Macdonald 2009 III: 33 for this term.

<sup>99</sup>At the time Pirenne was writing, Winnett (1937) had already made his rough division of Thamudic into five types (A–E). Much later, 'Thamudic A' and 'Thamudic E' would be recognized as distinct scripts (Taymanitic and Hismaic respectively) and removed from the pending file.

It will be clear from this that ‘comparative palaeography’ lacks any academic rigour and is little more than guesswork based on perceived superficial similarities. This would not appear to be a secure basis on which to build the chronology of ancient South Arabia. Nevertheless, Pirenne’s sequence continues to be used, *faute de mieux*, as a relative chronology by epigraphists, archaeologists, and historians, even though her theory of the influence of the Greek alphabet has been almost universally rejected, and her absolute dating largely abandoned. This, I would suggest, misses the point since the very sequence itself is based on unverifiable criteria. As Christian Robin has written, after pointing out ‘de nombreuses erreurs’ in Pirenne’s ‘palaeographical’ dating,<sup>100</sup> ‘il faut donc retenir qu’une datation par la paléographie [of Pirenne’s kind] est frappée d’une forte incertitude’ (1991: 1113).

It is a great pity that so much of Pirenne’s work concentrated on establishing a chronological sequence, since her true palaeographical study – that is her minute analysis of the formal script used in public inscriptions – is extremely valuable and laid the foundations for all future studies of the Ancient South Arabian script.<sup>101</sup>

#### 5.4 Ḥegrā, a suitable case for palaeography?

Given that the proper conditions for creating a valid palaeographical sequence are a corpus of documents serving a similar purpose, in a well-defined area, with good non-palaeographical dating evidence, it might be thought that the public Nabataean inscriptions on and inside tombs at Ḥegrā/Madā’in Ṣāliḥ might afford such an opportunity. The vast majority of them are dated by regnal years of Nabataean kings, and almost half of them were carved by named members of a handful of families of monumental masons. On the other hand, there are only 38 of these texts, 31 of which are dated, and the time-span – BC/AD 1 to AD 74/75 – is very short. In theory, it might be hoped that palaeographical analysis would help one fit the seven undated inscriptions into the sequence. However, a glance at the script-tables which Healey abstracted from the dated texts (1993: 292-297) shows a remarkable uniformity in the letter forms from the earliest to the latest in the sequence – and particularly between the very earliest and very latest texts<sup>102</sup> – with variations in the shape of a particular letter often occurring *within a text* rather than between one text and another.<sup>103</sup>

The inscriptions on the façades and inside the tombs at Ḥegrā constitute a very small group of public texts carved by a limited number of masons in one particular centre over 75 years. We have no examples of informal versions of the Nabataean script used in the same place at the same time. We therefore cannot know whether the lack of change in the formal letter forms was the reflection of a similar situation in the informal script, or whether, for example,

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<sup>100</sup>Jacqueline Pirenne estime pouvoir atteindre une précision de l’ordre de 25 ans dans ses classements paléographiques. Ce chiffre paraît exagérément optimiste : dans la période des Ier – IVe s. è, chr., pour laquelle la découverte de documents datés a permis de contrôler les résultats de la paléographie, on relève de nombreuses erreurs de datation supérieures à un siècle et une qui excède deux siècles....’ (1991: 113).

<sup>101</sup>For an excellent summary see Ryckmans 1991: 26-32.

<sup>102</sup>Compare the forms shown on Healey 1993: 292, 297.

<sup>103</sup>See particularly, for instance, variations in the forms of *h* and *m*.

the masons of Ḥegrā had fossilised the formal script at a particular stage, after which it had become immune to influence from the informal version.

We do not know whether there was a standard form of the Nabataean formal/calligraphic script current *throughout* the Nabataean kingdom, comparable to the Imperial Aramaic informal script used throughout the Achaemenid empire. Moreover, if such a standard form existed, we do not know whether – or how well – the Ḥegrā inscriptions represent it. Yet, unless there were such a standard form, there would be no justification for treating all texts in (what *modern scholars* call) the Nabataean script as mutually comparable examples of a supposedly palaeographically consistent script, similar to the products of single, or closely related, monastic scriptoria over a given period. Yet inscriptions from Petra and Ḥegrā in formal Nabataean scripts, and texts from the Ḥawrān in Nabataean and Ḥawrān Aramaic, and even graffiti from Sinai, are regularly compared, dated by reference to each other, and treated as stages in a single palaeographical development.<sup>104</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Much to the disgust of archaeologists, who are always hoping that an inscription will date their levels, most inscriptions in Arabia depend on archaeology to provide them with a chronological context. For texts produced in settled areas there is hope from the increasing amount of archaeological work being undertaken in the Peninsula, while for graffiti of a non-literate society on desert rocks, new scientific dating techniques may perhaps one day provide reliable dating. But it is vital not to let the search for dates and the chronological development of letter forms distract us from the many other lines of enquiry which the inscriptions invite us to pursue.<sup>105</sup> It is surely far more profitable to ask the sort of questions for which the inscriptions *can* provide answers, than to pursue lost causes and risk imposing one's own answers on the texts.

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<sup>104</sup>See, for example, Roschinski 1981: 46-48 and fig.6; Naveh 1982: 153-158 and fig. 142; Healey 1990-1991: 47-52, Yardeni 2000: 223-226 where inscriptions and graffiti from all over the Nabataean world (and beyond) plus a coin-legend, and even texts in the Ḥawrān Aramaic script, are all treated as part of the same evolutionary process. I should emphasize that I am not condemning script tables as such, indeed I have used one in this article (fig. 1)! They have a useful purpose in showing varieties of the same or different scripts, or, in the rare circumstances in which the material allows, the development of a script used on similar surfaces by writers working in the same place over a period of time (as in Yardeni's Chart B, in 2000: 227). Thus, in the script table showing varieties of the Nabataean and Ḥawrān Aramaic scripts in Macdonald 2003: 52-53, fig. 38, I made it clear that 'this table is not intended to suggest a linear development of the script'. Similarly, in my script table of the Ancient North Arabian scripts (2009 III: 34; 2004: 496, I emphasized that there are 'no chronological implications in the order in which the scripts are arranged'.

<sup>105</sup>For instance, a study of the engraving techniques of both the public and the personal inscriptions would be extremely valuable, a field-study of the relative positioning of texts in places such as al-ʿUḏayb (in al-ʿUlā, Saudi Arabia) where inscriptions are crowded together, might well help determine the order in which they were carved. In the study of the public scripts at al-ʿUlā, it is time to integrate the large number of newly discovered texts for which there are photographs into the picture of the formal scripts obtained from Jaussen & Savignac's texts, and to see if there appear to be 'local' differences within the oasis and its surroundings, etc., etc.

## Appendix 1

### Summary of the terms used in this article

In this summary, terms which will be found elsewhere in this list are in *italics*. The terms which represent major distinctions are in ***bold italics***.

<i>calligraphic</i>	is used here of a (usually <i>informal</i> ) script which has been formalized and regularized for use in <i>public</i> inscriptions or manuscripts, for example the Nabataean script of public inscriptions.
<i>cursive</i>	except in quotations, this term is used only in its strict sense (in English), i.e. of writing in which most or all of the letters are joined to others.
<i>formal</i>	describes the <b><i>register</i></b> of script normally used in inscriptions and documents which are for public consumption. It is employed in public inscriptions and, usually in <i>graffiti</i> , as well as in manuscripts of religious or literary works.
<i>graffiti</i>	personal statements inscribed, painted or written in a public place. They can be divided into <i>graffiti of a literate society</i> and <i>graffiti of a non-literate society</i> .
<i>graffiti of a literate society</i>	are <i>graffiti</i> by members of a <i>literate society</i> and almost always use the <b><i>formal register</i></b> of a script. Although they represent individual self-expression, their <b><i>purpose</i></b> is <i>public</i> since they are by definition situated where they can be read by any passer-by.
<i>graffiti of a non-literate society</i>	are <i>graffiti</i> produced by members of a <i>non-literate society</i> who have learnt a script but do not employ it for practical uses, for instance those who carved the Safaitic inscriptions or the Tuareg who use the Tifinagh (see Macdonald 2009 I: 58–64, 84–93). In this case, there is only one <b><i>register</i></b> of script and, although they represent individual self-expression, their <b><i>purpose</i></b> is <i>public</i> because they are left in places (usually in the desert) where they can be read by anyone.
<i>informal</i>	describes the <b><i>register</i></b> of script normally used in practical or everyday documents written in ink, or incised on wax or wood, regardless of whether the <b><i>purpose</i></b> of the document is <i>public</i> (e.g. a government decree) or <i>personal</i> (e.g. a private letter).
<i>illiteracy</i>	is the inability to read in a <i>literate society</i> .
<i>ligature</i>	is used here for the line used to join two letters in a <i>cursive</i> script, and not in the printer's sense of linked letters such as 'æ' or 'œ'.

<i>literacy</i>	‘the ability to read and/or to write at a number of different levels’ (Macdonald 2009 I: 49).
<i>a literate society</i>	is one ‘in which reading and writing have become essential to its functioning, either throughout the society (as in the modern West) or in certain vital aspects, such as the bureaucracy, economic and commercial activities, or religious life’. <sup>106</sup>
<i>monumental</i>	a misleading term in the context of script, which I have avoided since it blurs the distinction between <i>purpose</i> and <i>register</i> .
<i>non-cursive</i>	Except in quotations, this term is used solely to mean scripts in which letters are not joined to each other.
<i>a non-literate society</i>	is one ‘in which literacy is not essential to any of its activities, and memory and oral communication perform the functions which reading and writing have within a literate society’. <sup>107</sup>
<i>personal</i>	describes a document the <i>purpose</i> of which is to record or communicate information that is of interest purely to one or more specific individuals rather than the public, thus personal or business letters, whether written by a scribe on behalf of an individual or in the author’s own hand, personal notes, aides-memoire, business accounts, private or business lists, exercises, etc.
<i>public</i>	describes the <i>purpose</i> of a document as one which records or communicates information which is not aimed solely at one or more specific individuals. It can be an inscription or a legal document, an official letter, etc., designed for public, official or otherwise non-personal purposes or containing material which is already in the public domain such as a text of religious significance or a literary work.
<i>purpose</i>	describes the readership at which an inscription or document is aimed, i.e. whether it is for <i>public</i> consumption or for <i>personal</i> use.

<sup>106</sup>Macdonald 2009 I: 49. I add, ‘Thus, in this sense, a society can be literate, because it uses the written word in some of its vital functions, even when the vast majority of its members cannot read or write, as was the case, for instance, in early mediaeval Europe or Mycenaean Greece, where literacy was more or less confined to a clerical or scribal class’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>107</sup>Macdonald 2009 I: 49. I add, ‘Prehistoric and – at least until very recently – most nomadic societies were of this sort. There are, of course, gradations between these two extremes and, just as it is possible to have large numbers of illiterates in a literate society, so, perhaps surprisingly, it is possible to have many people who can read and/or write in an oral society, without this changing its fundamentally oral nature’ (*ibid.*). I would now prefer the term ‘non-literate’ to ‘oral’ in this context.

*register*

describes the form of the script used in a document, either *formal* (or *calligraphic*) or *informal*. Different *registers* of script are appropriate to different documents in the same way that different registers of speech are appropriate to different circumstances.

## Appendix 2

### Notes on figs 1 and 2: the Safaitic ‘square script’<sup>108</sup>

It will be remembered that a number of writers have assumed that the ‘square’ forms of Safaitic letters must represent the oldest version of the Safaitic alphabet because they were thought to be closer to the ASA formal letter shapes.<sup>109</sup> Yet a glance at fig. 1 will show that, in all cases, this supposed similarity does not exist and that the ‘square’ letter form is much closer to its ‘normal’ Safaitic equivalent than it is to the ASA formal shape.

1) The various Safaitic letter forms can be divided as follows:

The Safaitic letters  $h z s^2 d^{110} t g l n$  do not take a ‘square’ form.

The Safaitic letters  $’ b t h d r s^1 m h$  are quite commonly given ‘square’ or ‘suarish’ forms, and  $t g d s z f q k w y$  far less often.

(a) Of these, the *normal* Safaitic shapes of  $t ’ w y$  are very close to the formal ASA shapes, and making them angular by squaring the circles makes them *less* similar to their ASA equivalents, see fig. 1.

<sup>108</sup>The ‘Northern Minaic’ formal inscriptions found at Dadan (in modern al-‘Ulā, north-west Arabia) are the examples of the Ancient South Arabian [ASA] formal letter forms which are geographically closest to the location of the Safaitic inscriptions. I have therefore chosen them as the most suitable comparison with the Safaitic ‘square script’. This does not mean, however, that I believe that the Safaitic letter forms developed from their Northern Minaic equivalents, as suggested by E.A. Knauf, see Macdonald 2009 II: 385 n. 487. Because the Minaic letter forms are taken from scans of the published photographs of Jaussen & Savignac’s squeezes of the inscriptions, they are not always very clear. I have therefore placed beside each one the equivalent letter in the JS facsimiles to help the reader identify the features. Since the letter *z* does not occur in JSMin 1 or 6, I have used a form from JSMin 24. I have used photographs of the letter forms (fig. 1) and complete inscriptions (fig. 2) apart from LSI 37, and KhNSJ 2 and 6 where I have had to use the facsimiles because I was unable to reproduce the published photographs sufficiently clearly. Safaitic did not have a set letter order (Macdonald 2009 I: 85-87), and I have therefore used the common Arabic letter order ( $’ b t t$ , etc.) simply because it has the right number of letters and is well known.

<sup>109</sup>See for instance Littmann 1904: 106, 142; 1940: 98; Winnett 1957: 12, 19, 95; Oxtoby 1968: 47; Clark 1979 [1983]: 68. Littmann commented on LSI 37 that ‘the letters  $’$  and  $m$  are given here in an older form than in almost any other Safaitic inscription; both are more closely related to the South-Arabian alphabet than the usual Safaitic forms of  $’$  and  $m$ ’ (1904: 142). Comparison of the  $’$  (and indeed the other letters) in this inscription with their equivalents in the ASA alphabet (see figs 1 and 2), will show this to be incorrect. Ironically, the  $m$  here has one of its ‘normal’ shapes, rather than a ‘square’ one, and so does look closer to the ASA  $m$  than a ‘square’  $m$  would be, see 1 (e) below. Jamme believed that ‘the dependence [of the Safaitic script] from South-Arabian is manifest’ but believed that his schemata ‘disprove considering the so-called square lettering as the oldest. It has to be a later development’ (1971: 53). Harding doubted the ‘square’ forms of letters had any chronological significance (*apud* Winnett 1957: 19) as did Rodinson (1959: 215), Beeston (1959-1960: 185), Van den Branden (1970: 261), and others, though no one has so far given a detailed justification for either view.

<sup>110</sup>Note that  $d$  has either the commonest form  $\#$  (as in WH 1673, SESP S.1) or the Hismaic form  $\textcircled{d}$  sometimes found in Safaitic (as in KhNSJ 2).

(b) Giving  $d$  (𐤃) and  $q$  (𐤄) squares instead of circles (𐤃) and (𐤄) (as in SIAM 36) does not make them more like the formal ASA letters since in ASA the protrusion on  $d$  is a wedge not a square 𐤃, and the stem of  $q$  does not pierce the circle 𐤄 as it does in both Safaitic forms. Similarly, giving  $s$  a 'square' 𐤅 rather than a rounded or wedge-shaped base 𐤅 brings it no closer to the ASA shape 𐤅 where the base is rounded and pieced by the stem.

(c) The 'square' form of Safaitic  $h$  𐤆 is closer to the ASA formal shape 𐤆 than are most of the 'normal' Safaitic forms, e.g. 𐤆, in that the stem is central in relation to the 'cup', but the angularity is foreign to the ASA shape, which has a rounded cup.

(d) 'Normal' Safaitic  $t$  𐤇, 𐤇, which can sometimes resemble its formal ASA equivalent 𐤇 though it is usually smaller in relation to the other letters, is, in its 'square' form, rendered quite different from the ASA letter, either by its stance 𐤇, or by the addition of short strokes at right angles to the ends of the lines giving it the form of a swastika 𐤇, or both 𐤇.

(e) One of the 'normal' forms of Safaitic  $m$ , 𐤈, is not dissimilar to its formal Northern Minaic equivalent), 𐤈.<sup>111</sup> However, the 'square' shape 𐤈 takes it further from the ASA not closer. Ironically, the first example in SIAM 11, 𐤈, looks relatively close to the ASA examples simply because it is *less* 'squared' (i.e. closer to the 'normal' form) than the other example 𐤈.

(f) It is true that some examples of the 'square' form of Safaitic  $b$  (e.g. 𐤉), bear a certain resemblance to a formal ASA  $b$ , 𐤉, turned at 90°. However, the 'arms' of the Safaitic letter are usually considerably shorter than the 'legs' of the ASA one. In fact, the variable length of the 'arms' in the 'square' form of Safaitic  $b$  mirrors the variation between shallow and deep curves in the 'normal' form, thus, for instance, (𐤉) 𐤉 𐤉 etc. If the 'square' form were directly related to the formal ASA shape one would expect its arms always to be long, matching the long 'legs' of the ASA letter.

(g) In Safaitic,  $s^l$  takes several related shapes 𐤊 𐤊 𐤊, which can have either a horizontal or vertical stance. The shape of this letter is one of the most stable in the Ancient North Arabian alphabets,<sup>112</sup> and its forms in Oasis North Arabian and in Thamudic B, C and D are all very similar to that in the ASA formal alphabet 𐤊. Indeed, only in Safaitic, Hismaic, and informal Dadanitic do variant, but clearly related, forms develop. It is noticeable that, when square letter forms are used in Safaitic,  $s^l$  can either take an angular version of the first 'normal' shape shown above 𐤊 (e.g. on Figs 1 and 2: LSI 37, C 88, SIAM 11 and 35, KhNSJ 2) or is treated as one of the letters which do not take a 'square' shape, as in SIJ 39, LP 325, KhNSJ 6 on Fig. 1, where I have placed it among the 'normal' forms since it is no different from the forms found in texts where no letters have been given 'square' shapes (e.g. SESP S.1, LP 262, etc.).

(h) The shapes of the remaining letters which can take 'square(ish)' forms (𐤋 𐤌 𐤍 𐤎 𐤏 𐤐 𐤑 𐤒 𐤓 𐤔) are quite different in Safaitic from their formal ASA equivalents, and the addition of angularity does not reduce the difference (see fig. 1).

(i) Thus, while 20 of the 28 Safaitic letters can have a 'square' or 'suarish'

<sup>111</sup>This form is taken from JSMin 1 line 4.

<sup>112</sup>See the script table in Macdonald 2009 III: 34, fig. 3.

form,<sup>113</sup> only 9 do so with any regularity<sup>114</sup> and there is no consistency in their use. To take just one example, in WH 1673 (fig. 2) all the examples of *b* are ‘normal’ (i.e. rounded), not ‘square’, and see also the discussion of KhNSJ 6, below.

(2) As stated above (§3.2) it is clear that there is no chronological significance in the use of ‘square’ letter forms in Safaitic, since both ‘square’ and ‘normal’ forms are quite commonly found in the same inscriptions. The mixtures vary (see fig. 2):

In some texts, like SIAM 36, every letter possible (except the first *ʿ*) is given a ‘square’ form.<sup>115</sup> Thus (using capital letters, or underline in case of *ʿ* and *ʿ*, to show square forms):

*l GRM Bn DMSY D ʿl ʿMRT W nDM ʿl ʿB-H W ʿl GRM Bn ʿQRB Bn ʿM*

In other texts some of the letters in the name, genealogy and lineage group are given ‘square’ shapes, but the statement appears in the ‘normal’ forms. Thus WH 1673 reads:

*l s<sup>2</sup>Mt bn RMyn bn ʿbH D ʿl df W wld b- bql h-mʿzy*

This is extended in LP 325 where the letters making up the genealogy, lineage, and the first words of the statement (*w dmy l-h ʿb-h w hrs*) are mostly given a ‘square’ form, while in the remainder of the text the letters have their ‘normal’ shapes. Thus,

*l MtR Bn ʿM Bn MtR Bn ʿnʿM Bn qdM D ʿl ʿwD w dMy l-H ʿB-H w hrs  
h-nw mʿ ʿh-h m-mabr f h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm w gnmt l-d dʿy h-s<sup>1</sup>fr w ʿwr w hrs<sup>1</sup> l-d  
yʿwr h-htt.<sup>116</sup>*

By contrast, in KhNSJ 6 the ‘square’ and ‘normal’ letter forms are mingled indiscriminately throughout the text. Thus the first *ʿ* has the ‘normal’ form, the next a ‘square’ form and the third the ‘normal’ form again. The letter *b* alternates between a shallow curve and the angular ‘square’ form; the first *m* is ‘normal’ (even though it is in the lineage name) and all the rest are ‘square’; the three examples of *d* in line 1 have short tails at the bottom of the stems, while that in the last line has no tail; etc. On fig. 1, I have separated the ‘square’ from the ‘normal’ and placed those letters which normally do not take a ‘square’ form in between the two rows. In transliteration, this would read:

*l ʿbh Bn Dl bn ʿs<sup>1</sup> bn Dl D ʿl ʿmrT W Mrd ʿl ʿl RM W qyZ ʿl fryT s<sup>1</sup>nT  
bRH qSR l-bSRy f h lT s<sup>1</sup>lM W ʿWR l-D ʿWR h-s<sup>1</sup>fR.<sup>117</sup>*

(3) The term ‘square script’ is thus a misnomer since it is not a script as such, nor even a coherent version of a script, like the *musnad* or *Estrangelā*. The letter forms which have been identified as belonging to this so-called ‘square

<sup>113</sup> *b t t g h d d r s<sup>1</sup> ʿ ʿ f q k m h w y.*

<sup>114</sup> *b t h d r s<sup>1</sup> m h.*

<sup>115</sup> Obviously, the letters *l* and *n*, being simple vertical lines, retain their normal forms.

<sup>116</sup> For this new reading of this text, and a commentary, see Macdonald, Al Muʿazzin, & Nehmé 1996: 467–472.

<sup>117</sup> There are, of course, a few cases where it is difficult to decide whether the form is ‘square’ or ‘normal’, e.g. the *bs* in the second and third examples of *bn*, or the *r* in *ʿmrt*.

script' are simply attempts by numerous different individuals to give some of the letters more angular forms, for reasons we can only guess at. The particular letters chosen, and the exact way in which this was done, varied from individual to individual and was only one of a number of ways in which perhaps they 'played' with, or decorated, their texts.<sup>118</sup>

The content of the Safaitic inscriptions in which 'square' forms of letters are employed is no different from those in the 'normal' forms, i.e. simple graffiti and very occasionally grave markers. Nor is there a greater proportion of texts with angular letter forms in settled contexts such as Umm al-Jimāl, Palmyra, Pompeii, etc.), indeed, with the exception of the Dayr al-Kahf cave tomb, Safaitic inscriptions with angular forms are extremely rare in these places (see Macdonald 2006: 293-294).<sup>119</sup>

(4) Another manifestation of this sort of playfulness, or aesthetic awareness, was identified by V.A. Clark who called it 'the 90° script' (1979 [1983]: 68, 70-71).<sup>120</sup> Once again, this is not a script, or even a version of a script, but simply refers to a practice in some Safaitic inscriptions of turning one or more of the letters *b* ∩, *h* ∩∩, *s*<sup>1</sup> ∩, *k* ∩∩, *m* ∩, at 90° to the direction of the text for decorative purposes. There is no consistency between texts as to which of these letters is turned, and often within a single inscription one example of a letter will be at 90° and another have its normal stance.

<sup>118</sup>See Macdonald 2009 I: 93-95, and the way letters are placed within each other like Russian dolls in KhNSJ 2 on fig. 2 here, even when this crosses word-boundaries, as in *w q y (zm') (rd) w t for w qyž m' rdwt for n (zrf) h l t for ngr f h lt*.

<sup>119</sup>Thus, only occasional letters in the inscriptions from Umm al-Jimāl published in Littmann 1943: nos LP 1269-1279 are given angular shapes, e.g. some of the letters (though not the ' or the *m*) in LP 1269, the first *b* in 1270 (the other letters though neatly written do not have special angular shapes), the *h* in LP 1271, etc.

<sup>120</sup>See, for example, LP 199 and 202, SIJ 724, WH 1214, and the texts identified by Clark in his collection (1979 [1983]: 68), etc. Littmann (1943: 46-47) identified the letters in LP 199 and 202 as 'archaic'.

## Appendix 3

### Notes on figs 4 and 5

#### Fig. 4.

This shows an example of how easy it is to postulate almost any sequence of development simply by treating letter forms in a vacuum. At the beginning of the twentieth century, M. Lidzbarski (1902: 122)<sup>121</sup> and F. Praetorius (1904: 717-718), using the same materials, proposed precisely opposite sequences for how each thought the Safaitic and South Arabian forms of *alif* had developed from '(alt)kanaanäisch' which was considered to represent the origin of both the North West Semitic and the South Semitic alphabetic traditions. The letter forms used on fig. 4 are taken directly from their articles.

In an article entitled 'Der Ursprung der nord- und südsemitischen Schrift' (1902), Lidzbarski argued that the 'nordsemitische Alphabet' was not only older than the South Semitic, but its direct ancestor.<sup>122</sup> He believed that the North Semitic alphabet had been taken directly to South Arabia (1908: 25, 27), probably by South Arabian merchants who came across it in the trading towns of Phoenicia-Palestine (1902: 128), and that its development into the distinctive ASA script had taken place in South Arabia. However, he also believed that at a very early period before the letter forms known to us from the ASA inscriptions had fully developed, the new proto-ASA alphabet had been carried north again and had provided the basis for the Ancient North Arabian scripts (1908: 25, 27). He gave the chronological order of development of the South Semitic scripts as 'minäo-sabäisch – lihjanisch – thamudisch – safatenisch' (1908: 26), though in this later article he stated that he did not believe that one had developed *directly* out of the other.

He believed that in both the South Arabian and the Greek alphabets there was a tendency towards changing the irregular forms of the North Semitic letters into symmetrical shapes (1902: 117-118; 1908: 25). He argued that a trend towards architectonic shapes had strongly influenced the form and stance of the letters in the South Arabian script (1902: 122, and see also 118 and 120).<sup>123</sup> Thus, in the case of *alep*, he thought that the 'kanaanäische' shape (no. 1 on fig. 4) had first been turned at 90° clockwise (no. 2 on fig. 4), as in Greek *alpha*, and that in the South Semitic script the 'legs' had then been made vertical (3). While admitting that in the ASA script (5b) the upper part did not achieve a symmetrical form he points out that it did so in the Dadanitic (5a), and suggested that it was from this shape that the Safaitic form (6) developed (1902: 122).

Praetorius strongly rejected this theory. While agreeing that the original alphabet had travelled from Canaan to South Arabia, he did not accept the idea put forward by Lidzbarski and others that it had then come back northwards at a later date to give birth to the Ancient North Arabian scripts. He believed that although the extant letter forms in the Safaitic and Lihyanite (i.e. Dadanitic)

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<sup>121</sup>In 1908, he published another article entitled 'Altnordarabisches', in which he repeated and built on the arguments in his 1902 work.

<sup>122</sup>'nicht nur ältere Formen hat das nordsemitische Alphabet, sondern ich glaube ... dass das südsemitische direkt von ihm abstammt' (1902: 113).

<sup>123</sup>'Diese Tendenz nach architektonischen Formen hat die Form und Stellung der Zeichen stark beeinflusst' (1902: 122).

inscriptions could not themselves be considered as the intermediary stages between the *alkanaanäisch* and the ASA scripts, yet they must have preserved some letter shapes, or reminiscences of letter shapes, from the original intermediary (so far unknown to us) between the North Semitic alphabet and that of South Arabia (1904: 715-716).

Praetorius started from the belief that the shape of Safaitic *alif* was very similar to what he regarded as the 'Urform', as found in the 'Mesha Stela' (no. 1 on fig. 4).<sup>124</sup> He suggested that from a shape such as that in no. 2, which can be found in some early Phoenician inscriptions, developed a series of Safaitic forms (3a-e), the 'last' of which (3e) led to the 'protoarabische' form (actually one form of Thamudic B *alif*, = 4) and from this developed in one direction the Dadanitic shape (5a), by abandoning the short stem between the base and the cap, and the ASA form (5b) in which the short stem and the cap became a flourish. Curiously in view of the fact that it is a formal letter shape, he explained this latter process as a 'cursive simplification' (1904: 717). There is, of course, no evidence that any of the Safaitic forms he illustrates is older than any other, nor that there was *any* progressive development of the forms, let alone the sequence he suggests. Moreover, Praetorius' theory leaves us with a possible gap of up to 1000 years between the Phoenician and the Safaitic forms, and the idea that the *alkanaanäische* form left a trace in North Arabia on its way south, a trace which lay hidden for a millennium before appearing in its precise original form in Safaitic, cannot be taken seriously.

I cite these two examples not only to show how a letter in one script can develop a form very similar to that of its equivalent in a quite different (and in this case, earlier) script (see also fig. 5), but also to highlight the dangers of plucking these forms out of context and using their apparent similarity to build theories on the relationship and development of scripts using 'comparative palaeography'.

### Fig. 5.

This shows an example of how a letter in one script can develop a form identical to that of its equivalent in a quite different script, by entirely independent processes. To the right of the examples and the inscriptions from which they are taken, I have shown in [ ] the common Dadanitic formal shape of *s*<sup>1</sup> and the Old Aramaic and Old Phoenician forms of *šīn/šīn* as a reminder of the different ancestry of the Dadanitic and North West Semitic letters. The form of Phoenician and Aramaic *šīn/šīn* derives ultimately from the shape of the letter *ś* in the proto-alphabet (as does Dadanitic *s*<sup>2</sup>), whereas the form of Dadanitic *s*<sup>1</sup> derives from the proto-alphabetic shape of the letter *š*. This underlines the fact that the identity of shape here is entirely coincidental, as it well could be in other cases where we have much less evidence, and it suggests that to draw conclusions about relationships simply on similarity of form is extremely risky.

<sup>124</sup>The similarity between the forms of the Safaitic and the Phoenician ' was something which he had noted twenty years earlier (1883-1884: 29), though at that time he had declined to draw a conclusion, and which Halévy had remarked on even earlier (1877: 310).

Figures

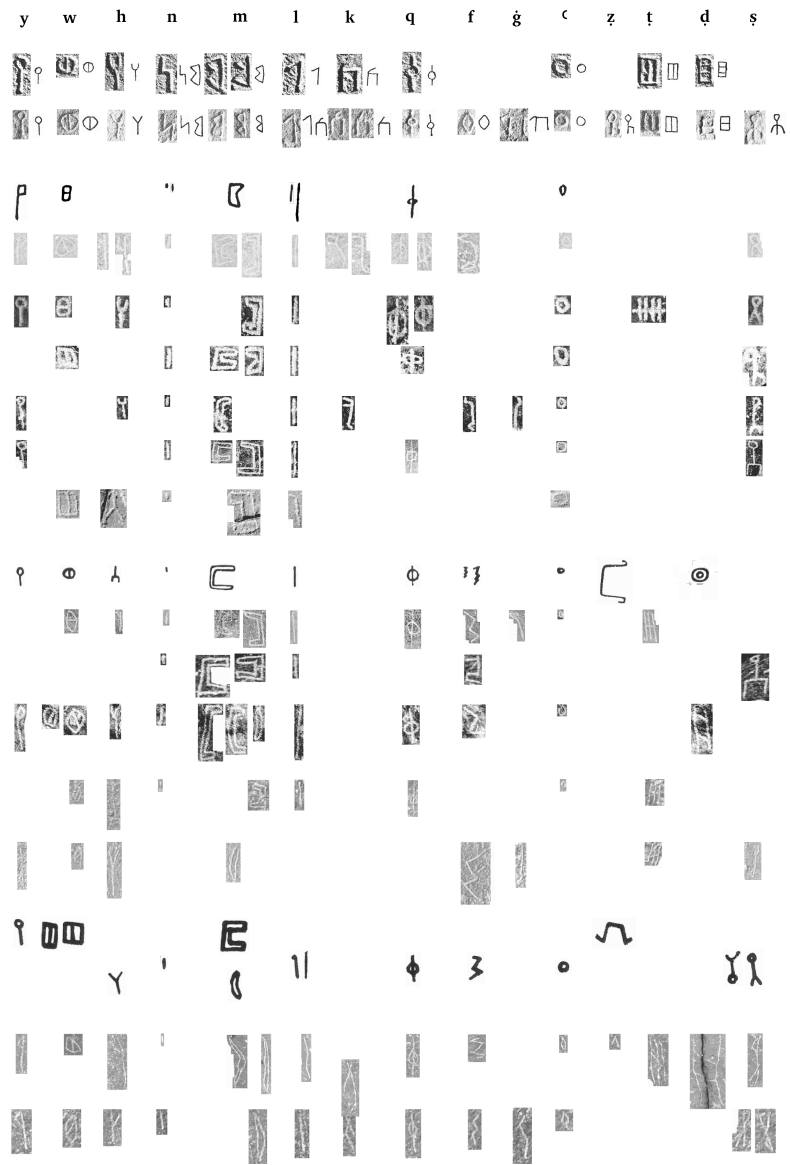


Figure 1: A comparison of 'square' Safaitic letter-forms with the formal Ancient South Arabian (Northern Minaic from Dadan) shapes and with their equivalent 'normal' Safaitic letter forms.

s <sup>2</sup>	s <sup>1</sup>	z	r	d	d	h	h	g	t	t	b	ʔ	
	JSMIn 24												NORTHERN MINAIG
													JSMIn 1
													JSMIn 6
													SAFAITIC 'SQUARE SCRIPT'
													LSI 37
													C 88
													SIAM 10
													SIAM 11
													SIAM 35
													SIAM 36
													SIAM 41
													KHNSJ 2
													SIJ 39
													SIJ 748-749
													WHI 1673
													LP 325
													'Square' letter forms
													'Normal' letter forms
													KHNSJ 6
													'Square' letter forms
													'Normal' letter forms
													'NORMAL' SAFAITIC
													SESP S.1
													LP 262

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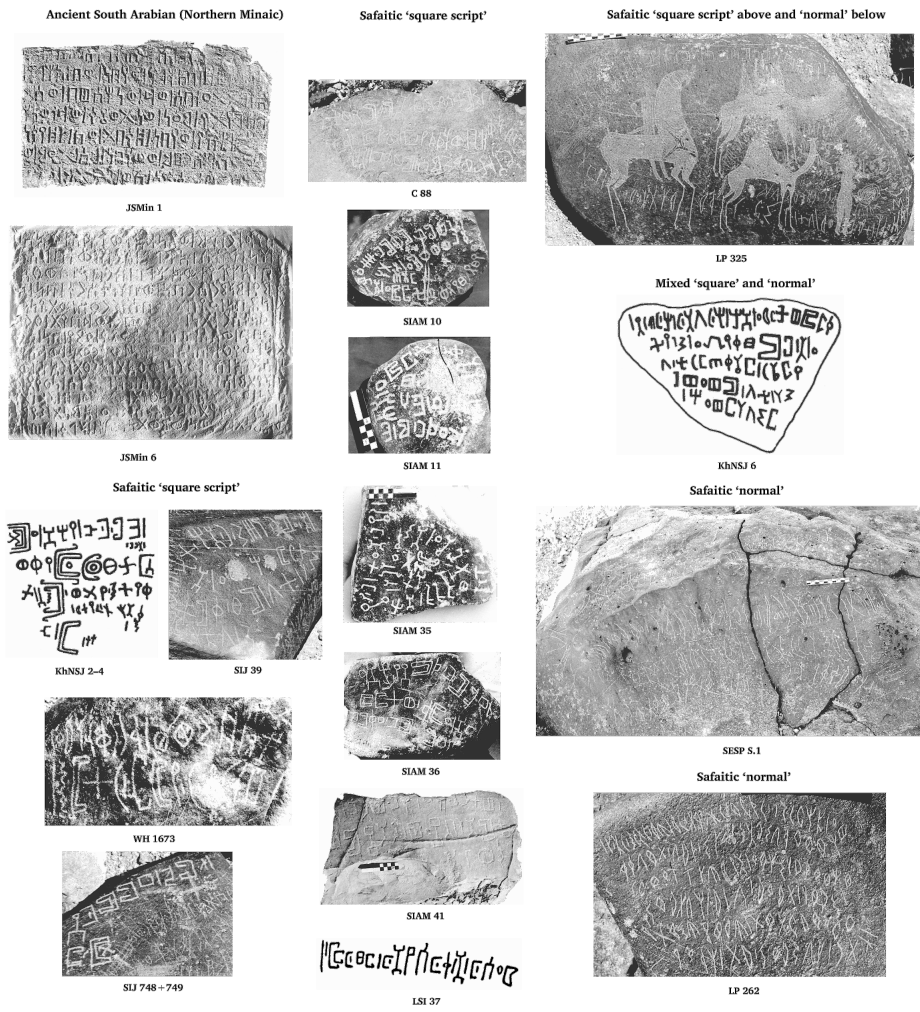


Figure 2: The inscriptions from which the letter forms in fig. 1 were taken.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	s <sup>3</sup>	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧	𐩧
l	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	f	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨	𐩨
h	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	ʾ	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩	𐩩
m	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	ˁ	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪
q	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	d	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫	𐩫
w	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	g	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬	𐩬
s <sup>2</sup>	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	d	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭	𐩭
r	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	ġ	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮	𐩮
b	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	t	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯	𐩯
t	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	z	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰	𐩰
s <sup>1</sup>	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	d	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱	𐩱
k	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	y	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲	𐩲
n	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	t	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳	𐩳
h	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	z	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴	𐩴
ʕ	𐩵	𐩵	𐩵	𐩵	𐩵	𐩵	𐩵								

Figure 3: The Ancient South Arabian *musnad* and *zabūr* scripts adapted from Stein 2005b: 132, Abb 1 with kind permission of the author. The letter order is the *hlhm*, the order used in ancient South Arabia. (1) Transliteration; (2) Early Sabaic *musnad*; (3) Early Sabaic *zabūr*; (4) Middle Sabaic *musnad*; (5) Middle Sabaic *zabūr*; (6) Late Sabaic *musnad*; (7) Late Sabaic *zabūr*.

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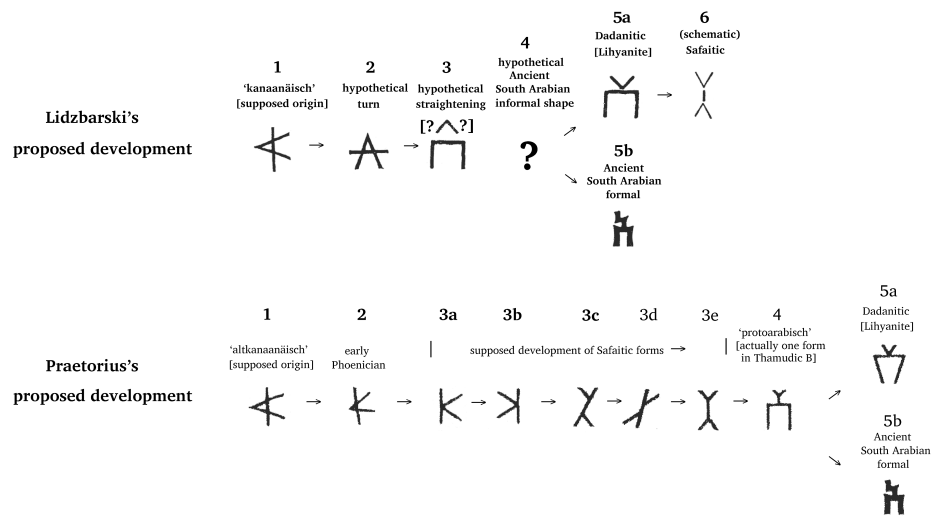


Figure 4: Diagram of Lidzbarski's and Praetorius' theories of the development of Safaitic *alif*.

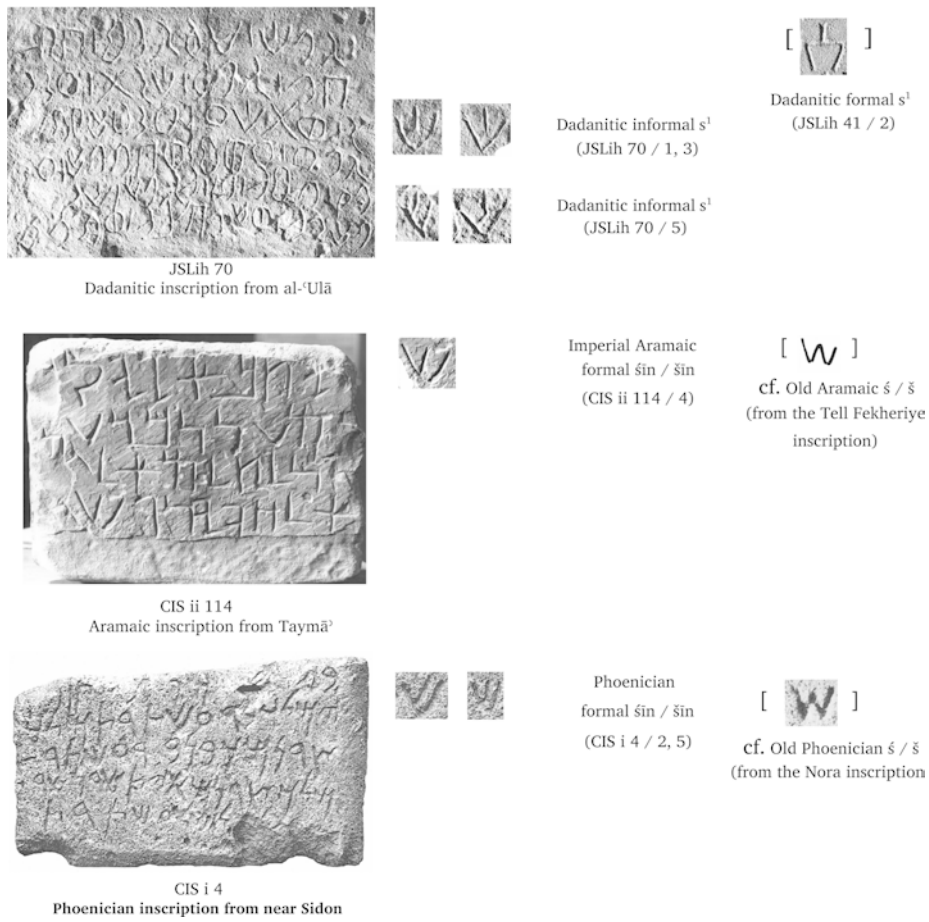


Figure 5: Unconnected similarity of shape between a Dadanitic  $s^1$  and Imperial Aramaic and Phoenician forms of  $\text{š}in/\text{š}tn$ .

## Sigla

C	Safaitic inscriptions in <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars V. Inscriptiones Saracenicis continens</i> Tomus 1. <i>Inscriptiones Safaiticae</i> . Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1950-1951.
CIH	Ancient South Arabian Inscriptions in <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars IV. Inscriptiones Himyariticas et Sabaeas continens</i> . Paris: Reipublicae Typographeo, 1889-1932.
CIS i	Phoenician inscriptions in <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars I. Inscriptiones Phoenicias continens</i> . Paris: Reipublicae Typographeo, 1881-1962.
HCH	Safaitic inscriptions in Harding 1953.
JSLih	Dadanitic inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909-1922.
JSMIn	Minaic inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909-1922.
JSNab	Nabataean inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909-1922.
JSTham	Taymanitic, Hismaic and 'Thamudic' inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909-1922.
KhNSJ	Saifaitic inscriptions in Al-Khrayshesh 1995.
LP	Safaitic inscriptions in Littmann 1943.
LPNab	Nabataean inscriptions in Littmann 1914.
LSI	Safaitic inscriptions in Littmann 1904.
LSINab	Nabataean inscriptions in Littmann 1904.
LSISyr	Syriac inscriptions in Littmann 1904.
RES	Inscriptions in <i>Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique</i> . Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1900-1968.
RIL	Chabot 1940-1941.
SESP S.1	Safaitic inscriptions from Site D in Macdonald et al. 1996: 453-458.
SIAM	nos 1-35, Safaitic inscriptions in Macdonald 1979. nos 36-44, Safaitic inscriptions in Macdonald 1980.
SIJ	Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett 1957.
WH	Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett & Harding 1978.

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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

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\*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) 'Aws son of 'ūd (?)
2) Βανασου Χαζιμ	2) son of Bannā' son of Kazim
3) μου αλ-Ιδαμι αθα	3) the 'idāmite came
4) οα μι- Σεια ζαθαοε ω	4) from Sī' to spend the winter
5) α Βαναα α-δαυρα	5) with Bannā' in this region
6) αουα ειραυ βακλα	6) and they pastured on fresh herbage
7) βι-Χανου[v]	7) during Kānūn

Transliteration: 'Aws (bin) 'ūd (?) (bin) Bannā' (bin) Kazim 'al-'idāmiyy 'atawa mis-si'ā' šatāw wa Bannā'a 'ad-dawra wa yir'aw baqla bi-kānūn

Reading 2	Translation
1) Αυσος Ουδου	1) 'Aws son of 'ūd (?)
2) Βαννου Χαζιμ	2) son of Bannā' son of Kazim
3) μου αλ-Ιδαμι αθα	3) the 'idāmite came
4) οα μι-σειαζ αθαοευ	4) because of scarcity; he came
5) α Βαννα α-δαυρα	5) to Bannā' in this region
6) αουα ειραυ βακλα	6) and they pastured on fresh herbage
7) βι-Χανου[v]	7) during Kānūn

Transliteration: 'Aws (bin) 'ūd (?) (bin) Bannā' (bin) Kazim 'al-'idāmiyy 'atawa miš-šihās; 'atawa Bannā'a 'ad-dawra wa yir'aw 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 = 'Aws: This name is common in the Safaitic inscriptions, spelled nearly always as 's<sup>1</sup>, with the expected non-representation of the diphthong [au]. There are several attestations of a name 'ws<sup>1</sup> (Harding 1971: 84), which could reflect a plene spelling of the diphthong or, perhaps more likely, a diminutive form, \*/oways/.

Ουδου: There are several equal possibilities in the interpretation of this name. The first consonant can be any laryngeal or pharyngeal fricative, thus *h*, *ħ*, ' , ʕ, or even *ḥ* 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 choose from in the Safaitic onomasticon: 'd (e.g. C 114); ḥd (e.g. C 165); ḥd (e.g. C 622); 'd (e.g. C 111); etc.

Βαννου: This name can be none other than Safaitic *bn'* (e.g. C 213). Harding (1971: 122) connects this word with CAr *bannā'* 'builder', but for this to be the case, the sound change of *āy* to *ā'* – 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:<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>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  $\alpha$ . If the writing of two  $\mu$ '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).

$\alpha\lambda\text{-}\iota\delta\alpha\mu\iota$ : 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,  $\alpha\lambda\text{-}\iota\delta\alpha\mu\iota$  /*al-ʿidāmiyy*/. This would seem to be related to Safaitic *ʿl ʿdm* ‘the lineage of *ʿdm*’, 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). *ʿdm* 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:  $\alpha\theta\alpha\alpha\alpha\ \mu\iota\text{-}\Sigma\epsilon\iota\alpha\ \zeta\alpha\ \theta\alpha\ \omicron\ \epsilon\ \omega/\upsilon\ \alpha\ \beta\alpha\nu\alpha\alpha\ \alpha\text{-}\delta\alpha\nu\alpha$

$\alpha\theta\alpha\alpha\alpha$ : This word is clearly the suffix conjugation of the root  $\sqrt{\text{tw}}$ , ‘to come’, with the preservation of the triphthong in final position, cf. Ancient South Arabian *ʿtw*, Gəʿəz *ʿatawa*, 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: *ʿty* and *ʿtw* (Al-Jallad 2015b: 121–122).

$\mu\iota\sigma\epsilon\iota\alpha\zeta\alpha\theta\alpha\omicron\epsilon\omega/\upsilon$ : 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 Βανναα α-δαυρα

a) ‘He came with Bannā’ from Si<sup>c</sup> during the winter to this region’  
or

b) ‘He came with Bannā’ from Si<sup>c</sup> to spend the winter in this region’

αθαοα μι- Σεια ζαθαοε: The phrase <sup>ʾ</sup>ty/w m- is attested in Safaitic:

**LP 171:**       <sup>ʾ</sup>ty m- tdmr  
                  ‘he came from Palmyra’

**KRS 262:**     <sup>ʾ</sup>ty m- mabr  
                  ‘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 Si<sup>c</sup> 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<sup>1cc</sup> (e.g. CSNS 424) coupled with the present Greek transcription suggests the vocalization /si<sup>c</sup>ā<sup>c</sup>/.

This interpretation leaves us with the following sequence of letters to explain: ζαθαοεω//α. It is tempting to parse this into two words, ζαθαοε and ωα. This first could be connected with Safaitic s<sup>2</sup>ty/s<sup>2</sup>tw ‘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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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: ωα Βανναα αδαυρα. The personal name Bannā’ 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-mā’īyyah (Fischer 2001: §328b). The next term αδαυρα is the common Safaitic expression h- dr, but here probably with the assimilated <sup>ʾ</sup>al-article, thus \*/ad-dawra/, with perhaps again the non-representation of gemination. Opinions

<sup>2</sup>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  $\alpha$  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 αθαοενα Βαναα α-δαυρα  
 'he came because of scarcity; he came to Bannā' 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  $s^2h\varsigma$  'want', 'scarcity' (Al-Jallad 2015b: 345). The transcription of  $\varsigma$  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  $h$  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 *'atawa*, 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  $\alpha\omicron$  is not a digraph, the author may have then chosen to use the diphthong  $\epsilon\upsilon$ , 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 r'y 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  $\alpha$  before it could be an attempt to mark deliberately the consonantal value of the sequence  $\omicron\upsilon$  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  $\sqrt{r'y}$ . 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[v]: The phrase *bi-kānūn* is attested in ASWS 217, *wld h- mʿzy 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 /síhāš/, then it would appear that a voiced realization of \*š was possible in this variety, suggesting further that this consonant was pharyngealized and realized as [zʰ].<sup>3</sup> The second interpretation requires an explanation of the transcription of *s*<sup>2</sup> in \*šatāw with Zeta. In Safaitic, it seems clear that the value of *s*<sup>2</sup> remained [ʃ], 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

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion on the realization of the \*š 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 'a(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 εἶραυ above, no definitive conclusions can be drawn from the prefix conjugation. One remark on agreement, however, is possible. The antecedent of εἶραυ seems to be the author and Bannā'. If the latter is a single person, then the verb would seem to have lost dual agreement. However, it is possible to identify Bannā' 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 'al here does exhibit assimilation to the following coronal, or at least, /d/. The Safaitic inscriptions attest several examples of an 'al-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 'al-article and an 'al-article which precedes all classes of consonants are attested, and so it is impossible to identify in most cases which variety lies behind the 'al- + noun.

## 2.4 On the lineage group 'idām

It is tempting to connect the gentilic adjective 'idāmiyy 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 'ēdôm; Assyrian *Udumi*; Greek Ἰδομᾶία; 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 *ʿl 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<sup>5</sup> 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 Ḥalaf

<sup>4</sup>For a concise summary of the state of the art, see Beyer 2012.

<sup>5</sup>We thank Robert Daniel for reading this word.

### 3.1 The narrative

Αβγαρος is transparently Arabic *ʿabgar*, frequently attested in the Safaitic inscriptions as *ʿbgr*, and common elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> 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  $\sqrt{mṭy}$  ‘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 αὐτόν 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 Σαιιδηνῶν

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 ἐνῶν, 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 παρεμβολή 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 *sʿrt* as meaning ‘to serve’ in such a troop (Macdonald 2014: 156).

**RWQ 347:** *l sʿkrnn bn grmʿl d ʿl sʿwʿ sʿnt sʿrt ʿl dʿf l- ʿwḏ*  
 ‘By Sʿkrnn son of Grmʿl of the lineage of Sʿwʿ, the year the lineage of Dʿf served in a troop for the ʿwḏ (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 = (ἐνῶν) ἄρχῃ may render Old Arabic *sʿrt* ʿ- ‘to serve in a troop under (the command)’:

<sup>6</sup>For example, Αβγαρ IGLS XXI-2, 118a.

**KRS 1024:** ...w s<sup>1</sup>rt ʔ- hr hdy s<sup>1</sup>nt qttl hrdʂ f h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm w ǧnmt l- d dʕy...  
 ‘...and he served in a troop under the command of Hr, the commander, the year Hrdʂ 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 *d ʔ l* ‘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 κυκλευη. The next verb τηρήσει seems to be a 3rd singular future indicative, which is sometimes confused with the subjunctive, τηρήση. 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 may have correctly intended the subjunctive in both cases.

The Safaitic inscriptions attested both ‘surrounding’ *ʕd*, *ʕd* and ‘protecting’, ‘keeping guard’ *nʒr*, *hrʂ* of livestock.

**KRS 1706:** w ʕd h- d<sup>ʕ</sup>n b- hrn  
 ‘and he put the sheep in an enclosure in/near the Ḥawrān’

**SIT 52:** nʒr b<sup>ʕ</sup>d- m<sup>ʕ</sup>zy -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:** s<sup>1</sup>nt r<sup>ʕ</sup>y ʔ l ʕd n<sup>ʕ</sup>m ʔ l ʕbd w s<sup>1</sup>rt m<sup>ʕ</sup> ʔ b -h b- m<sup>ʔ</sup>t frs<sup>1</sup>  
 ‘the year the lineage of ʕd pastured the livestock of the lineage of ʕbd; 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 *ʒr* ‘hired man’ is attested a few times in the Safaitic inscriptions. In KRS 1563, for example, the author keeps watch (*hrʂ*) for the lineage of Df as a hired man (*ʒr*) 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<sup>1</sup>d bn ḥn'l w 'hl{k h- d'nt}----*  
 'By S<sup>1</sup>d son of Ḥn'l and {he slaughtered the ewe or a number of sheep}'

While the verb *'hlk* does not require a ritualistic context, other examples such as *dbh l- rdy* 'he made a sacrifice for Rdy (divine name)' are clearly religious. More often than not, the verb *dbh* 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 *'qrb*, and Αλαφου to either Safaitic *ḥlf* 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 *'bgr bn mty* nor *'qrb bn ḥlf/ḥlf* 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 Mu'azzin, & Nehmé 1996: 484)<sup>7</sup> seems to have later been read by another person who wrote in response to it: I2: *wgd mly s<sup>2</sup>r* 'he found the words of S<sup>2</sup>r'.<sup>8</sup> 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 Σαιδιηνῶν 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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<sup>7</sup>The inscription states: Σααρος Χεσεμανου Σαιφινης φυλής Χαυνηνων 'S<sup>2</sup>a'ar son of Kehsemān, the Šayfite, of the lineage of Kawn'.

<sup>8</sup>The edition read and interpreted the text as *l 'tm bn rb w gd mly s<sup>2</sup>r* 'By 'tm son of Rb and the words of S<sup>2</sup>a'ar 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

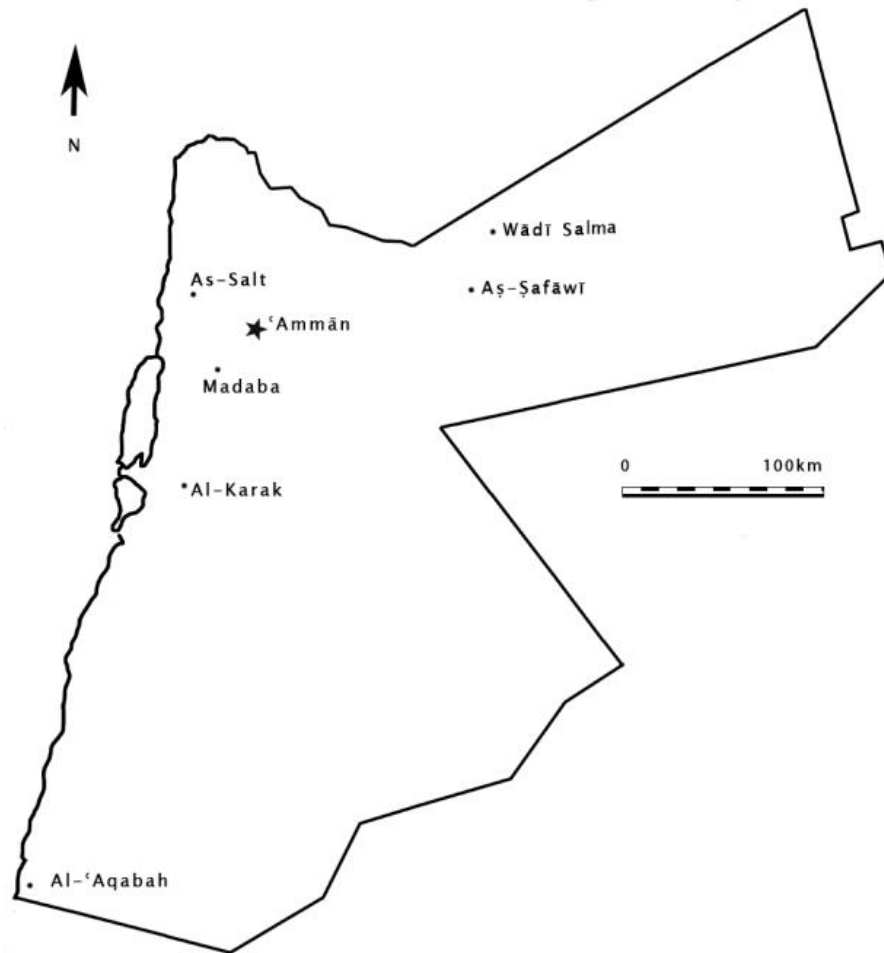


Figure 1: Map of Jordan

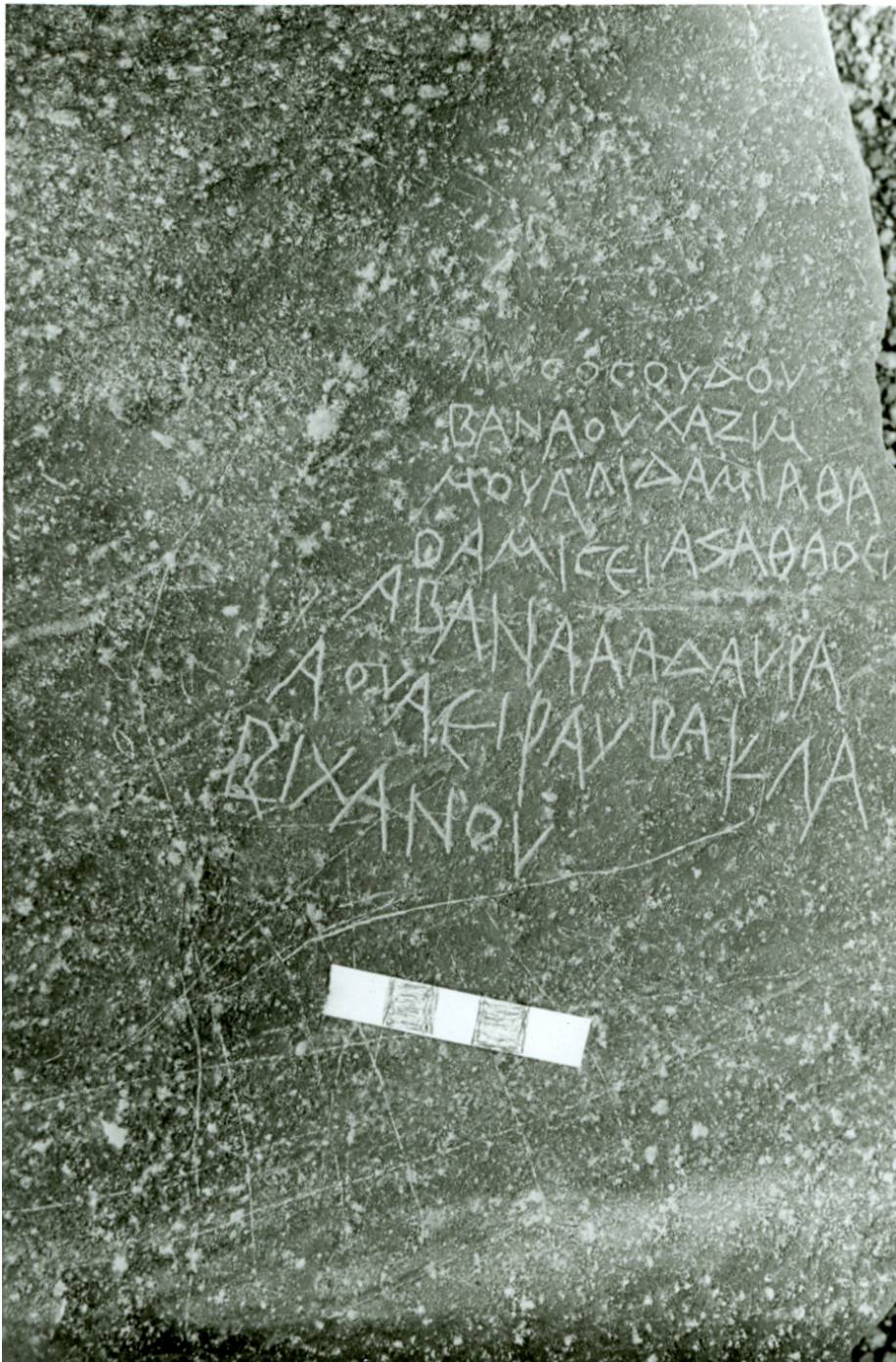


Figure 2: A1 (courtesy Sabri Abbadi)

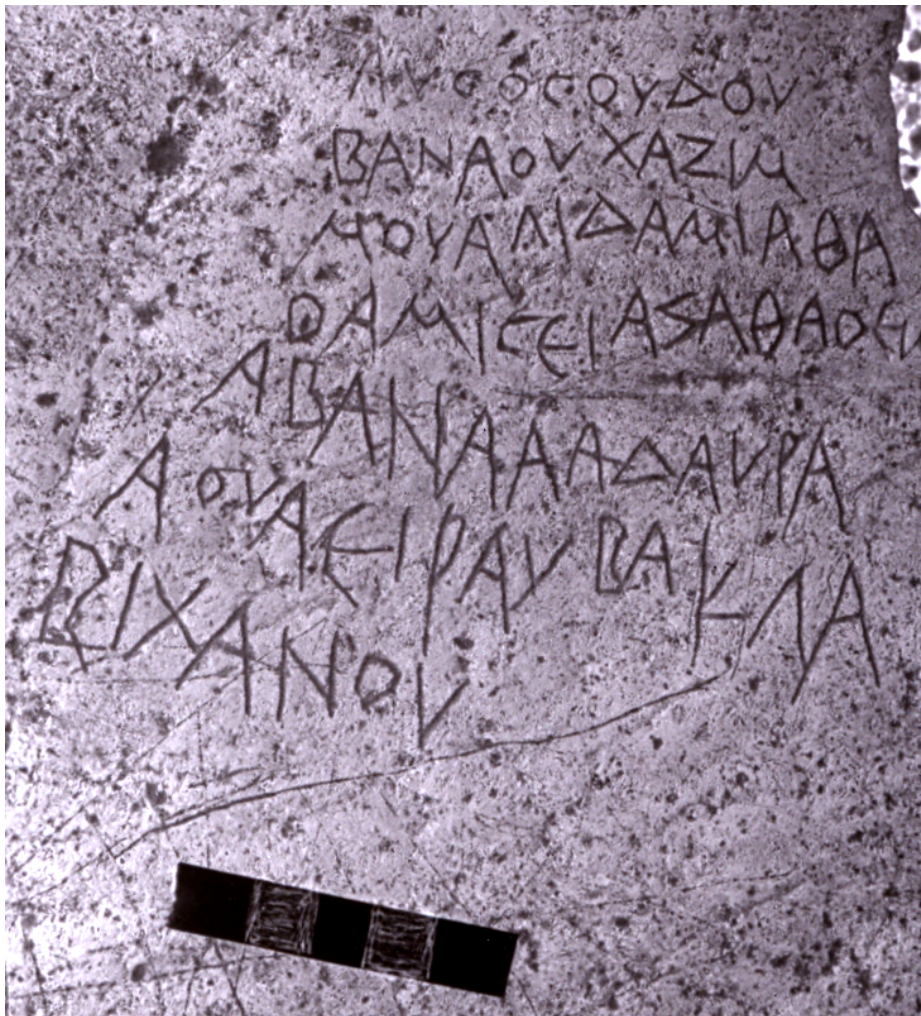


Figure 3: Digitally enhanced A1

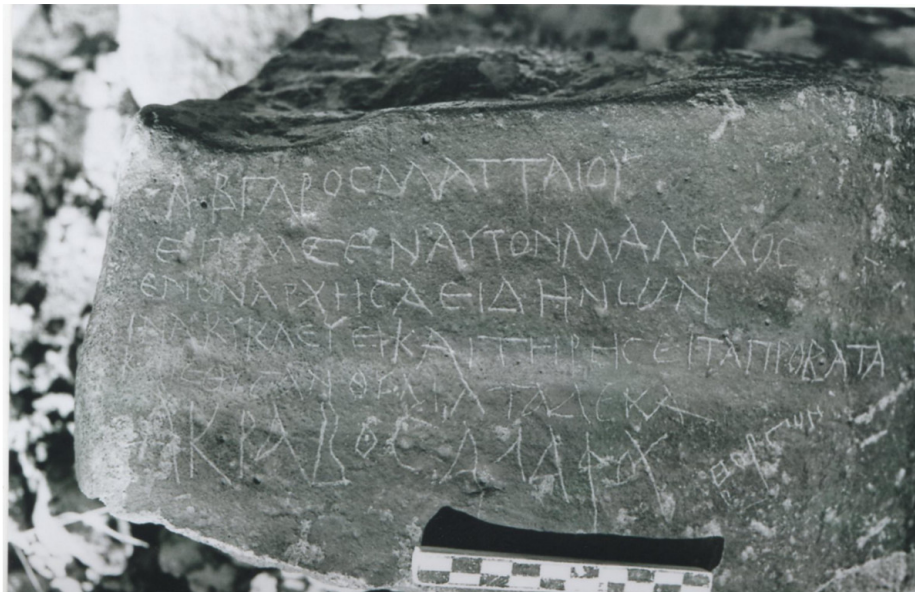


Figure 4: A2 (courtesy Sabri Abbadi)

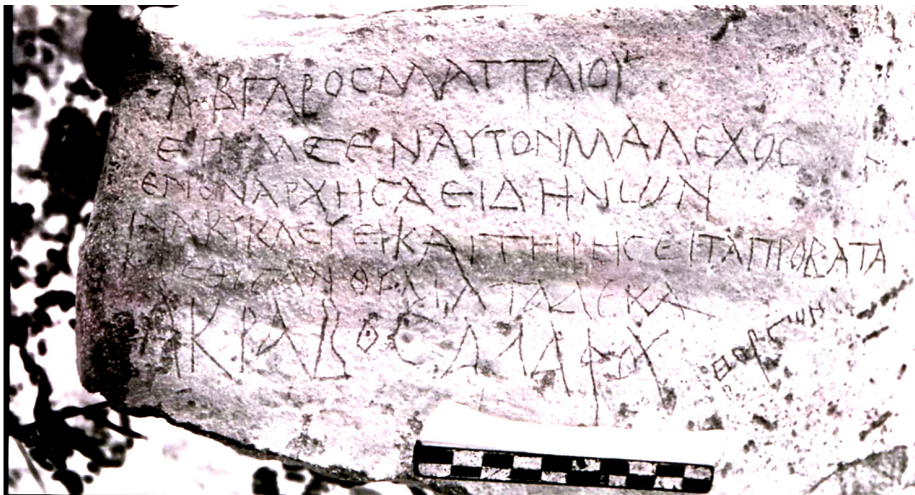


Figure 5: Digitally enhanced A2

## 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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# New evidence of a conflict between the Nabataeans and the *Ḥwlt* in a Safaitic inscription from Wadi Ram

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## Abstract

This article reads and interprets a Safaitic inscription discovered in Wadi Ram that mentions a conflict between the *Ḥwlt*, a North Arabian tribe, and the Nabataeans.

**Keywords:** Safaitic; Chronology; Nabataeans

## 1 The Text

The text under consideration, discovered in Wadi Ram in 2004, was incised with a wide instrument on an oblong slab of sandstone. The inscription consists of 56 characters, written in a boustrophedon manner.

Transliteration: *l zyd bn m'z bn grm w r'cy s'nt 'ys<sup>1</sup> f h lt s'lm w gnyt w h ds<sup>2</sup>r hb s'<sup>1</sup>d l- nbṭ l- ḥwlt*

'By Zyd son of M'z son of Grm and he pastured in the year of 'ys<sup>1</sup>, so, O Lt, [grant] security and abundance, and, O Ds<sup>2</sup>r, give aid to the Nabataeans against the *Ḥwlt*.'

## 2 Commentary

### 2.1 Writing Materials

Unlike most Safaitic inscriptions, this text was incised in sandstone rather than basalt. The greatest concentration sandstone texts is found in northern Saudi Arabia (see, for example, Al-Theeb 2003). It is also possible to find inscriptions carved on limestone as well, although these are less numerous than the sandstone ones. The letter shapes of this text are unremarkable and fall within the typical range of variation for the Safaitic script.

### 2.2 The inscription

As in the vast majority of Safaitic inscriptions, this text begins with the *lam auctoris*, which has conventionally been translated as a sign of authorship, 'by'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion on the various possibilities, see Al-Jallad (2015: 4-6) and Macdonald (2006: 294-295).

### 2.3 Genealogy

All three names attested in the genealogy are common, although no other inscriptions by this author are known.

### 2.4 Narrative

The narrative component consists of a single verb, *rʿy* ‘he pastured’, followed by a dating formula introduced by *s<sup>1</sup>nt* ‘year’. Since the inhabitants of the Harrah did not have a fixed calendar (Al-Jallad 2014), authors usually dated their inscriptions by notable events. The year of *ʿys<sup>1</sup>*, however, has not yet been encountered in other inscriptions. Interpretations of *ʿys<sup>1</sup>* can range from a personal name, perhaps *ʿiyās*, to a noun, ‘despair’. The following prayer may suggest that the latter interpretation is correct, and that despair was connected to the absence of rain or herbage, a common complaint in the inscriptions (e.g. KRS 169; RWQ 326).

### 2.5 Prayer

Following the dating formula, the author appeals to the goddess *lt*, probably *Lāt*, for security and abundance, very typical requests in the inscriptions. However, the author continues, and appeals to *Ds<sup>2</sup>r*, the Nabataean national deity, to aid the Nabataeans against the Ḥwlt, an enemy social group known from a number of other Safaitic inscriptions. From a grammatical perspective, this formulation is unremarkable: *hb* is the imperative of the common verb *whb* ‘to give’, with its indirect object introduced by *l-*. The preposition *ʿl* meaning ‘against’ is also well attested (Al-Jallad 2015: 149).

## 3 Nbṭ – Ḥwlt engagements

While there are many inscriptions that testify to conflicts between the inhabitants of the Harrah and the Ḥwlt tribe, who appear to come from elsewhere, there is little information about the latter group. A few Safaitic inscriptions were composed by men who called themselves Ḥwl-ites, *ḥwly*, and a Hismaic inscription from North Arabia, south of Tabūk, composed by a man who gave his lineage as *d ʿl ḥwlt* ‘of the lineage of Ḥwlt’ is known (Macdonald 2009b: 160, fig. 10). The Ḥwlt are probably to be connected with the Avalitae, whom Pliny associates with the North Arabian oases of Dūmah and Ḥegrā (Macdonald 2009 III: 42).

The engagement between the Nabataeans and Ḥwlt is mentioned again in Stehle 16, which states: *w bʿ[ʿ]s<sup>1</sup>mn ḡrt w s<sup>1</sup>d h- nbṭ ʿl- ḥwlt* ‘O Bʿs<sup>1</sup>mn, help the Nabataeans against the Ḥwlt’. The authors in both cases are sympathetic to the Nabataeans. Indeed, there are no inscriptions to my knowledge in which authors support the Ḥwlt. Finally, a war of the Ḥwlt – *ḥrb ḥwlt* – is mentioned in ISB 365.1, but it is unclear if this event refers to the conflict mentioned in the present inscription, and possibly Stehle 16, or if it concerns another encounter between the Ḥwlt and other inhabitants of this region.

## 4 Conclusion

This text sheds a small ray of light on the relationship between the Nabataeans and the nomadic tribes of North Arabia, and the attitudes of the nomads of the Ḥarrah regarding these contests. While the Nabataeans are viewed both positively and negatively in the Safaitic inscriptions, the Ḥwlt are always regarded with enmity. The prayers to aid the Nabataeans against the Ḥwlt reflect this general trend.

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## Figures



Figure 1: Photograph of image (by the author)



Figure 2: Tracing of image (by the author)

## Sigla

ISB	Safaitic inscription in Oxtoby 1968.
KRS	Safaitic inscriptions in King unpublished.
RWQ	Al-Rousan 2005.
Stehle	Inscriptions in Stehle 1960.

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# A selection of Safaitic inscriptions from the Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum

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## Abstract

This paper provides the photographs, readings, and interpretations of sixty-one Safaitic inscriptions from the Mafraq Museum's collection.

**Keywords:** Ancient North Arabian; Safaitic; Old Arabic

## 1 Introduction

The inscriptions under investigation are part of the collection of the Mafraq Museum, located in the town of Mafraq in northern Jordan, about 45km southeast of Irbid. Since 1991, Abdul Qader al-Housan has been gathering inscriptions from various sites across northern Jordan, including Wadi Salma, Wadi Rajil, Al-Muhaddath, Al-Ajb, Zaatari, Al-Qattafiyat, Al-Ashaqif, and storing them in the depository of the Mafraq Museum. This effort has been mainly to preserve the texts against development, theft, and vandalism. Unfortunately, the provenance of these stones is not known and no GPS information is available.

The texts edited herein are considered a representative sample of the kinds of Safaitic inscriptions held by the Museum. It is hoped that by publishing these texts, we will stimulate the interest of researchers to visit the Museum on-site and to work on the various collections of texts held in its depository. The reading and translation of these texts was made in collaboration with Dr. A. Al-Jallad and Dr. A. Al-Manaser, and the tracings are by Dr. A. Al-Manaser.

## 2 Vocabulary items of interest

The inscriptions of this corpus have yielded several unique or rarely attested words. These are listed below in the order of their occurrence.

Word	Translation	Occurrences	Comments
<i>tll</i>	‘writing’, ‘words’	#1	See Al-Jallad (2015: 348)
<i>šdt</i>	‘side of a valley’	#10	CAr <i>šuddun</i> ‘the side of a valley’ (Lane, 1659a)
<i>mtʿ</i>	‘the day became advanced, the sun being held high’	#13	CAr <i>mataʿa n-nahāru</i> ‘the day became advanced’ (Lane, 3016c)
<i>s<sup>2</sup>yʿ</i>	‘to experience want’	#26	See Al-Jallad (2015: 345)
<i>ʿnzt</i>	‘goat’	#31	<i>well known</i>
<i>gʿlt</i>	‘short palm-trees’	#31	CAr <i>ḡaʿlun</i> ‘short palm-tree’ (Lane, 431b), perhaps here an individuating plural */gaʿlāt/.
<i>ḥrf</i>	‘the side of a rivulet’	#42	CAr <i>ḥarfūn</i> ‘the extremity, verge, boarder, margin, brink, brow, side, or edge of anything...for example the side of a rivulet’ (Lane, 550a).
<i>rđt</i>	‘meadow’	#44	See Al-Jallad (2015: 339)
<i>tʿmr</i>	‘to be widespread’	#45	See Al-Jallad (2015: 300)
<i>ḥgg</i>	‘to make a pilgrimage’	#58	<i>well known</i>
<i>ḥfrt</i>	‘guidance’	#60	See Al-Jallad (2015: 318)

## 3 The inscriptions



Figure 1: Inscription No. 1

**No. 1:** *l mfny bn qdm bn mfny h- tll*  
 ‘By Mfny son of Qdm son of Mfny is this writing.’



Figure 2: Inscription No. 2

**No. 2:** *l 'by bn grmt bn d'ḇ bn 's<sup>2</sup>mn bn 'mr w wgm ḷ- bz w ḷ- 'kt*  
 'By 'by son of Grmt son of D'ḇ son of 's<sup>2</sup>mn son of 'mr and he  
 grieved for Bz and for 'kt.'

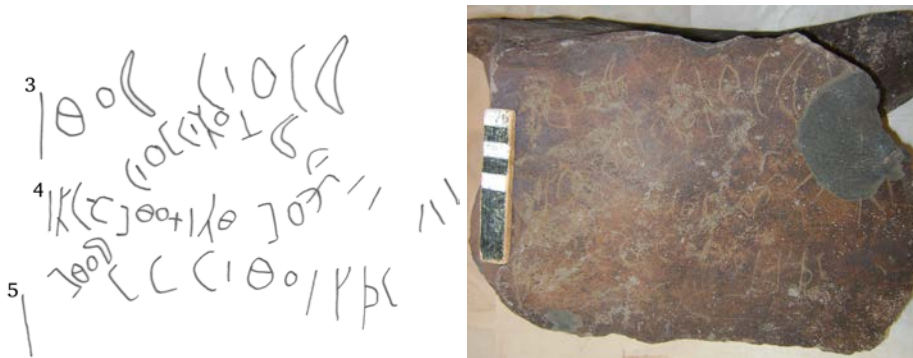


Figure 3: Inscriptions No. 3-5

**No. 3:** *l wḷ bn grm*  
 'By Wḷ son of Grm.'

**No. 4:** *l 'bs<sup>1</sup> bn gr bn 'zm bn d'r w h lt 'wr m 'wr*  
 'By 'bs<sup>1</sup> son of Gr son of 'zm son of D'r, so, O Lt, blind whoso-  
 ever would efface (this inscription).'

**No. 5:** *l rb bn wḷ h-dr*  
 'By Rb son of Wḷ, in this region.'



Figure 4: Inscription No. 6

- No. 6:** *l s<sup>1</sup>mm bn 's<sup>1</sup>lm bn šm bn ġt h- frs<sup>1</sup>*  
 'By S<sup>1</sup>mm son of 's<sup>1</sup>lm son of Šm son of Ġt is the horse.'



Figure 5: Inscriptions No. 7-8

- No. 7:** *l qtl bn grm bn d<sup>1</sup>l bn bwk bn šbh*  
 'By Qtl son of Grm son of D<sup>1</sup>l son of Bwk son of Šbh.'

- No. 8:** *l 'dr bn b<sup>c</sup>mh bn s<sup>1</sup>wd w h 'lt s<sup>1</sup>lm w nq<sup>2</sup>t l- d 'wr h- s<sup>1</sup>fr*  
 'By 'dr son of B<sup>c</sup>mh son of S<sup>1</sup>wd and so, O Lt, [grant] security but may he who would efface this writing be thrown out of the grave.'



Figure 6: Inscription No. 9

**No. 9:** *l b'l bn ḥṭft h- ḥyt*  
'By B'l son of Ḥṭft are the animals.'



Figure 7: Inscription No. 10

**No. 10:** *l ns<sup>1</sup>r bn nhmn bn 'd bn kmn f h rzy ḡrmt*  
'By Ns<sup>1</sup>r son of Nhm<sup>n</sup> son of 'd son of Kmn, so, O Rzy, [grant] spoil.'



Figure 8: Inscription No. 11

- No. 11:** *l s<sup>1</sup>k<sup>1</sup>rn bn ḥṭs<sup>1</sup>t bn s<sup>1</sup>k<sup>1</sup>rn h- ṣdt w ʿs<sup>2</sup>rq f h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm*  
 ‘S<sup>1</sup>k<sup>1</sup>rn son of Ḥṭs<sup>1</sup>t son of S<sup>1</sup>k<sup>1</sup>rn, at this side of the valley, and he migrated to the inner desert so, O Lt, [grant] security.’



Figure 9: Inscription No. 12

- No. 12:** *l ḡhm bn zky bn ḥṭs<sup>1</sup>t bn s<sup>1</sup>k<sup>1</sup>rn w wgd s<sup>1</sup>fr ʿb -h w l ...*  
 ‘By Ḡhm son of Zky son of Ḥṭs<sup>1</sup>t son of S<sup>1</sup>k<sup>1</sup>rn and he found the writing of his father ...’



Figure 10: Inscriptions No. 13-19

- No. 13:** *l ʾnʿm bn ʿdrʾl bn bdr w mtʿ f h ʾlt sʾlm*  
 ‘By ʾnʿm son of ʿdrʾl son of Bdr and the day became advanced  
 (the sun’s heat was intense) so, O ʾlt ,[grant] security.’
- No. 14:** *l mlk bn bdn bn ʿwḏ w rʿy*  
 ‘By Mlk son of Bdn son of ʿwḏ and he pastured.’
- No. 15:** *l zʿn bn gfft*  
 ‘By Zʿn son of Gfft.’
- No. 16:** *l ḥr bn ʿm*  
 ‘Ḥr son of ʿm.’
- No. 17:** *l sʾd bn ḡyrʾl bn sʾkṛn bn zkr bn znʾl*  
 ‘By Sʾd son of Ḡyrʾl son of Sʾkṛn son of Zkr son of Znʾl.’
- No. 18:** *l ḥsʾk b[n] ḥrsʾ w rʿy*  
 ‘By Ḥsʾk son of Ḥrsʾ and he pastured.’
- No. 19:** *l qsʾ bn ḥlf bn frg w rʿy*  
 ‘By Qsʾ son of Ḥlf son of Frg and he pastured.’



Figure 11: Inscriptions No. 20-23

- No. 20:** *l 'qrbn bn s<sup>2</sup>rk<sup>l</sup> bn ḥrs<sup>2</sup>n*  
 'By 'qrbn son of S<sup>2</sup>rk<sup>l</sup> son of Ḥrs<sup>2</sup>n.'
- No. 21:** *l s<sup>2</sup>ḥtr bn nṣr bn 'ḥlm bn zhrn*  
 'By S<sup>2</sup>ḥtr son of Nṣr son of 'ḥlm son of Zhrn.'
- No. 22:** *l s<sup>2</sup>kr<sup>l</sup> bn s<sup>2</sup>kr<sup>l</sup> bn ḥrs<sup>2</sup>n h- dmyt*  
 'By S<sup>2</sup>kr<sup>l</sup> son of S<sup>2</sup>kr<sup>l</sup> son of Ḥrs<sup>2</sup>n is the drawing.'
- No. 23:** *l khl bn s<sup>2</sup>kr<sup>l</sup> bn ḥrs<sup>2</sup>n*  
 'By Khl son of S<sup>2</sup>kr<sup>l</sup> son of Ḥrs<sup>2</sup>n.'



Figure 12: Inscription No. 24

- No. 24:** *l s<sup>1</sup>d bn ḥny bn ʿbd bn š<sup>c</sup>d bn ʿbd bn ʿd bn s<sup>2</sup>rb bn ḡlmt w wgd s<sup>1</sup>fr  
 ʾs<sup>2</sup>y<sup>c</sup> -h f ng<sup>c</sup> w r<sup>c</sup>y h- d<sup>n</sup> f h lt ḡnyt l- d r<sup>c</sup>y w mḥlt l- d y<sup>c</sup>wr h- s<sup>1</sup>fr*  
 ‘By S<sup>1</sup>d son of Ḥny son of ʿbd son of ʿd son of S<sup>2</sup>rb son of Ḡlmt  
 and he found the inscription of his companions so he grieved  
 in pain; and he pastured the sheep, so, O Lt, may he who has  
 pastured have abundance but may he who would efface this  
 writing experience a dearth of pasture.’



Figure 13: Inscription No. 25

- No. 25:** *l s<sup>2</sup>mt bn zkr bn ḡyr<sup>l</sup> w r<sup>c</sup>y h- d<sup>n</sup> f h lt ḡnyt*  
 ‘By S<sup>2</sup>mt son of Zkr son of Ḡyr<sup>l</sup> and he pastured the sheep and  
 so, O Lt, [grant] abundance.’



Figure 14: Inscriptions No. 26-28

**No. 26:** *l s<sup>2</sup>ddt bn s<sup>2</sup>bm w r'y h- nhl w s<sup>2</sup>y' f h rdy gny[t] l- d r'y*  
 'By S<sup>2</sup>ddt son of S<sup>2</sup>bm and he pastured in the valley but experienced want so, O Rdy, may he who has pastured have abundance.'

**No. 27:** *l m'qn bn 's<sup>1</sup>n*  
 'By M'qn son of 's<sup>1</sup>n.'

**No. 28:** *l 'bd*  
 'By 'bd.'



Figure 15: Inscription No. 29

**No. 29:** *l s<sup>c</sup>d bn qdm bn rmzn*  
 'By S<sup>c</sup>d son of Qdm son of Rmzn.'



Figure 16: Inscriptions No. 30-36

- No. 30:** *l dr'l bn 'hlm bn mty bn rgd bn hqr w hrš h- s'nt f h lt s'lm w rwh  
h b'ls'mn w nq't l- d y'wr h- s'fr*  
'By Dr'l son of 'hlm son of Mty son of Rgd son of Hqr and he kept watch this year and so, O Lt, [grant] security and send, O B'ls'mn, the winds; and may he who would efface this writing be thrown out of the grave.'
- No. 31:** *l hd bn mhrk bn mty w hrš {n}{z}t -h g'lt f h lt s'lm d s'r*  
'By Hd son of Mhrk son of Mty and he watched his goats at the small palm-tress, so, O Lt, keep him who would leave (this inscription) untouched safe.'
- No. 32:** *l tm bn gmr bn tm*  
'By Tm son of Gmr son of Tm.'
- No. 33:** *l š'd bn znn bn š'd bn l'tmn bn rgd*  
'By Š'd son of Znn son of Š'd son of L'tmn son of Rgd.'
- No. 34:** *l 'lf bn znn bn š'd bn l'tmn bn rgd*  
'By 'lf son of Znn son of Š'd son of L'tmn son of Rgd.'
- No. 35:** *l znn bn š'd bn l'tmn w wgm l- hdk*  
'By Znn son of Š'd son of L'tmn and he grieved for Hdk.'
- No. 36:** *l s'hr bn s'cd bn s'rz w hrš*  
'By S'hr son of S'cd son of S'rz and he kept watch'



Figure 17: Inscription No. 37

**No. 37:** *l mlk bn y'mr h- ḥṭṭ*  
 'By Mlk son of Y'mr are these carvings.'



Figure 18: Inscription No. 38

**No. 38:** *l bny bn 'sr bn bny h- frs<sup>1</sup> f h lt 'wr l- ḏ y'wr h- ḥṭṭ*  
 'By Bny son of 'sr son of Bny is the horse, so, O Lt, may whoso-  
 ever would efface these carvings go blind.'



Figure 19: Inscription No. 39

- No. 39:** *l zhr bn hṭṭ bn zhr bn t'm ḡ- ṽl gr w syr s'nt ws'q ṽl 'bd w 's'ml f h  
lt s'lm*  
 'By Zhr son Hṭṭ son of Zhr son of T'm of the lineage of Gr and  
 he returned to a place of water the year of the struggle of the  
 lineage of 'bd and 's'ml and so Lt [grant] security.'



Figure 20: Inscription No. 40

- No. 40:** *l s'ny bn s'wd bn hy bn ṭrd bn ms'ḡ*  
 'By S'ny son of S'wd son of Hy son of Ṭrd son of Ms'ḡ.'



Figure 21: Inscription No. 41

**No. 41:** *l 'tm bn hn' bn 'tm w wgm l- bs<sup>1</sup> w l- hn'*  
 'By 'tm son of Hn' son of 'tm he grieved for Bs<sup>1</sup> and for Hn.'



Figure 22: Inscriptions No. 42-43

**No. 42:** *l gfft bn wqm bn ḥs<sup>2</sup> bn ws<sup>1</sup>m w r'y h- ḥ{r}f*  
 'By Gfft son of Wqm son of Ḥs<sup>2</sup> son of Ws<sup>1</sup>m and he pastured  
 the side of a rivulet.'

**No. 43:** *l s<sup>2</sup>l bn 'n'm bn znmy*  
 'By S<sup>2</sup>l son of 'n'm son of Znmy.'



Figure 23: Inscription No. 44

- No. 44:** *l kṣṭ bn nṣr'l bn zbdy bn s<sup>2</sup>kr'l bn ryḏ w r'y h- ḏ'n h- rḏt bql f h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm*  
 'By Kṣṭ son of Nṣr'l son of Zbdy son of S<sup>2</sup>kr'l son of Ryḏ and he pastured the sheep in the meadow on fresh herbage so, O Lt, [grant] security.'



Figure 24: Inscriptions No. 45-46

- No. 45:** *l kḥs<sup>1</sup>mn bn gn'l bn s<sup>2</sup>r bn gn'l ḏ-<sup>1</sup> kn w t'mr h- s<sup>2</sup>n' s<sup>1</sup>nt qsr w h- mḏy f h lt w gddf s<sup>1</sup>lm w 'wr l- ḏ- 'wr h- s<sup>1</sup>fr*  
 'By Kḥs<sup>1</sup>mn son of Gn'l son of S<sup>2</sup>r son of Gn'l of the lineage of Kn and adversity was widespread the year of Caesar and the Persians so, O Lt and Gddf, may he be secure; and may he who would efface this writing go blind.'
- No. 46:** *l gn'l bn kḥs<sup>1</sup>mn bn gn'l*  
 'By Gn'l son of Kḥs<sup>1</sup>mn son of Gn'l.'



Figure 25: Inscriptions No. 47-48

**No. 47:** *l s<sup>2</sup>sr bn qtl bn s<sup>1</sup>hly bn mr bn 'ft*  
 'By S<sup>2</sup>sr son of Qtl son of S<sup>1</sup>hly son of Mr son of 'ft'

**No. 48:** *l mty bn s<sup>2</sup>sr*  
 'By Mty son of S<sup>2</sup>sr.'



Figure 26: Inscriptions No. 49-50

**No. 49:** *l ys<sup>1</sup>lm bn glt bn rbn w r<sup>cy</sup> h- nhl tbb f h rđw flt -h [m-] b's<sup>1</sup>*  
 'By Ys<sup>1</sup>lm son of Ġlt son of Rbn and he pastured in the valley as an old man so, O Rđw, deliver him [from] misfortune.'

**No. 50:** *l hđz bn w<sup>l</sup> w r<sup>cy</sup> h- nhl wny*  
 'By Hđz son of W<sup>l</sup> and he pastured in the valley feebly.'

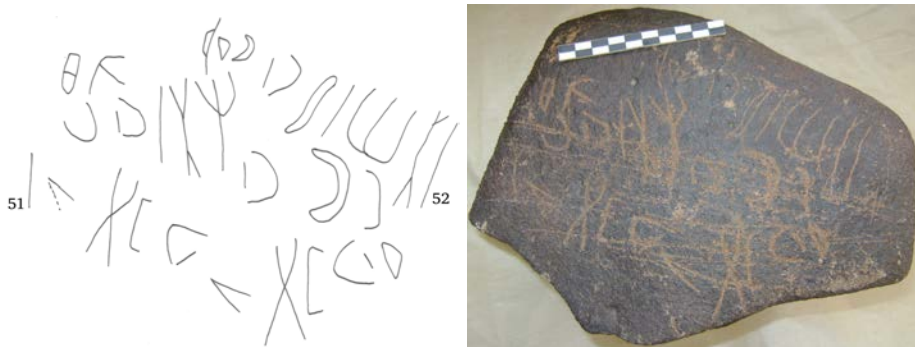


Figure 27: Inscriptions No. 51-52

**No. 51:** *l s<sup>1</sup>hr bn s<sup>1</sup>hr bn grm bn d<sup>1</sup> bn bwḥ*  
 ‘By S<sup>1</sup>hr son of S<sup>1</sup>hr son of Grm son of D<sup>1</sup> son of Bwḥ.’

**No. 52:** *l ḥlm bn m<sup>c</sup>d*  
 ‘By ḥlm son of M<sup>c</sup>d.’



Figure 28: Inscriptions No. 53-54

**No. 53:** *l s<sup>1</sup>krm bn ḥts<sup>1</sup>t bn s<sup>1</sup>krm*  
 ‘By S<sup>1</sup>krm son of Ḥts<sup>1</sup>t son of S<sup>1</sup>krm.’

**No. 54:** *l s<sup>1</sup>hr bn ṯs<sup>1</sup> bn ṯs<sup>1</sup>hr w ḥrṣ f h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm w ṯwr l- d ṯwr w ḡnmt l- d  
 d’y w tnzr mṯr*  
 ‘By ṯs<sup>1</sup>hr son of ṯs<sup>1</sup> son of ṯs<sup>1</sup>hr and he was on the look out  
 and so O Lt [grant] security; and may he who would efface  
 (this inscription) go blind but may he who would read (this  
 inscription) aloud have spoil; and he awaited rain.’



Figure 29: Inscription No. 55

- No. 55:** *l tm bn s<sup>1</sup>lm bn nml ḏ- ʿl grs<sup>2</sup>t w wld h- m<sup>ʿ</sup>zy f h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm w ḏkr yt<sup>ʿ</sup>  
bn s<sup>2</sup>ddt hl -h*  
‘By Tm son of S<sup>1</sup>lm son of Nml of the lineage of Grs<sup>2</sup>t and he helped the goats to give birth, so, O Lt, [grant] security; and may Yt<sup>ʿ</sup> son of S<sup>2</sup>ddt, his maternal uncle, be remembered.’



Figure 30: Inscription No. 56

- No. 56:** *l trml bn y<sup>ʿ</sup>ly bn ḏhdt bn s<sup>1</sup>dy*  
‘By Trml son of Y<sup>ʿ</sup>ly son of ḏhdt son of S<sup>1</sup>dy.’



Figure 31: Inscription No. 57

**No. 57:** *l znm bn gmz bn s<sup>1</sup>b w wgm*  
 'By Znm son of Gmz son of S<sup>1</sup>b and he grieved.'

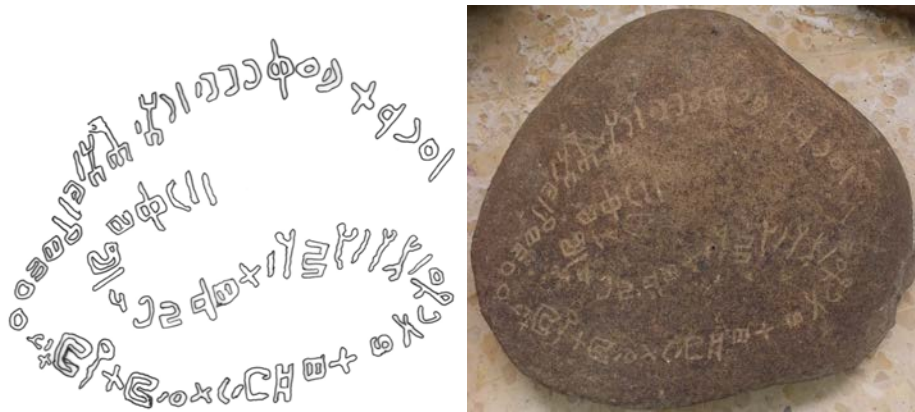


Figure 32: Inscription No. 58

**No. 58:** *l 'bdt bn 'qrb bn lb'n d- 'l hly w hgg s<sup>1</sup>nt myt mn't bn rđwt w hrš*  
*l- 'hl -h f h lt w ds<sup>2</sup>r s<sup>1</sup>lm w qbll*  
 'By 'bdt son of 'qrb son of Lb'n of the lineage of Hly and he made a pilgrimage the year Mn't son of Rđwt died and kept watch for his family so, O Lt and Ds<sup>2</sup>r, [grant] security and reunion.'



Figure 33: Inscription No. 59

**No. 59:** *l mn<sup>c</sup> bn h<sup>s</sup>l... n s<sup>l</sup>k<sup>rn</sup> h- gml*  
 'By Mn<sup>c</sup> son of H<sup>s</sup>l n S<sup>l</sup>k<sup>rn</sup> is the male camel.'



Figure 34: Inscription No. 60

**No. 60:** *l s<sup>c</sup>d bn glmt bn mtn bn hny bn ms<sup>l</sup>k bn s<sup>2</sup>rk bn 'bd bn glmt w h<sup>r</sup>s*  
*h- mlkt f h lt w gd<sup>w</sup>d w s<sup>2</sup>hqm w ds<sup>2</sup>r b- h<sup>r</sup>ft -k 'wd -k w nq<sup>t</sup> b-*  
*wd[d] d hbl h- s<sup>l</sup>fr w gnmt l- d d'y h- s<sup>l</sup>fr w w*  
 'By S<sup>c</sup>d son of Glmt son of Mtn son of Hny son of Ms<sup>l</sup>k son of S<sup>2</sup>rk son of 'bd son of Glmt and he kept watch for Hmlkt so, O Lt and Gd<sup>w</sup>d and S<sup>2</sup>hqm and DS<sup>2</sup>r, through your guidance comes your protection; and may he who would obscure this writing be thrown out of the grave by a loved one but may he who would read this writing aloud have spoil and...'



Figure 35: Inscription No. 61

**No. 61:** *l ...l bn ʿnʿm bn nṣr bn nṣr bn hms<sup>1</sup>k bn ḥg bn rb bn hmlk bn nhḍ  
bn ḥmyn bn ḡḍḍt bn ʿnḍt bn ws<sup>2</sup>kt bn ḍf bn gnʿl*  
'By ...l son of ʿnʿm son of Nṣr son of Nṣr son of Hms<sup>1</sup>k son of  
Ḥg son of Rb son of Hmlk son of Nhḍ son of Ḥmyn son of Ḡḍḍt  
son of ʿnḍt son of Ws<sup>2</sup>kt son of Ḍf son of Gnʿl'

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## **Sigla**

*Lane* Lane (1863-1893)

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# *Strategoi* in the Nabataean Kingdom: a Reflection of Central Places?

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## Abstract

This contribution examines the function and characteristics of the official known as *'srtg'* (*strategos*) in the Nabataean inscriptions and ancient literary sources. It provides an updated list of the texts which mention a *strategos* as well as a list of the *strategoi* mentioned in them, as well as a general commentary on their role, distribution, career, prestige, etc. It appears that the *strategoi* are very much related to the Nabataean provincial system, the places where a *strategos* is known to have had an authority being central places in the Nabataean kingdom.

**Keywords:** Nabatean inscriptions, military titles, administration, province of Arabia

## 1 Introduction

This contribution was initially presented at a conference organised in 2009 by the Excellence cluster Topoi in Berlin, the title of which was Central places in Arabia during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The oral contribution dealt with a few general topics such as the role of the oases as central places in the desert, the central character of the ancient city of Hegra in northwest Arabia during the Nabataean period, the existence of possible other central places in this region and finally some glimpses on the relationship between the title of *strategos* and central places. It is on this particular aspect that I decided to concentrate for the written contribution, the presence of a *strategos* in a particular place being considered as a possible indication that this place was central, whatever the meaning of this adjective. New Nabataean inscriptions or rereadings of previously published inscriptions which mention *strategoi* have indeed convinced me of the interest to present an up to date commented list of the known Nabataean *strategoi*.

The Nabataean inscriptions have provided a relatively large number of words referring to military and/or administrative titles, the etymology of which is either Semitic, Greek or Latin. Several publications have dealt with them, mainly by D. Graf (1994) and J. Bowsher (1989). One of these titles, *strategos*, best translated as 'governor', is assumed to have been borne by men who had both a military and administrative function.<sup>1</sup> The Greek word is always

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<sup>1</sup>Graf (1994: 278): 'the Nabataean stratêgoi were charged with both the civil and military administration of their districts'; Teixidor (1995: 115): 'À côté du roi existait le stratège, une fonction administrative nabatéenne très attestée qui fut plus civile que militaire, éponyme et cer-

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rendered, in Nabataean, as *ʿsrtgʿ*, dual/plural *ʿsrtgyʿ*, except in JSNab 61 where it is spelt *ʿsrtygʿ* (see n. 7). This title is particularly interesting because it is attested not only in the Nabataean inscriptions but also in Josephus, in various episodes related to the history of the relationship between the Nabataean and Jewish kingships during the Herodian period. It will be examined here in view of the following question: may the places where *strategoi* are mentioned be called *central* places?

The list of Nabataean *strategoi* has been usefully established by D. Graf in 1994, with some complements by L. Nehmé more recently,<sup>2</sup> but corrections and comments should be made to this list, which is given in the table below (see map in fig. 7), as a basis for a general discussion on this function in the Nabataean realm. At the end of the table, only the inscriptions which are not very well known, or those which were previously unpublished, are presented in more detail.

No.	Site	Type of inscriptions	Date
1	Şaydā – Sidon (despite the doubts expressed by E. Renan (1869: 538), the stone comes probably from ancient Sidon)	On a very small marble slab (14 x 15 cm), dedication of a <i>rbʿt</i> , a ‘bench’ (?) by a <i>strategos</i> whose name is lost.	5/4 BC? <sup>3</sup>
CIS ii 160 (RÉS 482.1, 2092.1); Nehmé 2003: 4–6, with references to previous editions n. 11 <sup>4</sup>			
2	Ḍmayr	Dedication of a <i>msgdʿ</i> , an ‘altar’ by a person one son of whom, ʿAdramū, is a <i>strategos</i> and the other son of whom may have been adopted by another <i>strategos</i> , ʿAbdmankū.	AD 94/95
CIS ii 161; Sachau 1884; Cantineau 1932: 19–20; Clermont-Ganneau 1888 and 1897: pl. XLII; Healey 1989: 334–336			
3	Qanawāt – Canatha	Dedication of a <i>nefesh</i> , probably by the <i>strategos</i> , whose name is lost, to his wife.	—
CIS ii 169; de Vogüé 1868-1877: no. 8, p. 97			
4	Umm ar-Raṣāṣ	Dedication of the <i>nefesh</i> of ʿAbdmankū, the <i>strategos</i> , by his brother Yaʿmarū, also <i>strategos</i> .	AD 40/41
CIS ii 195; de Vogüé 1868-1877: no. 15, p. 160–161			

tainement héréditaire’. On the *strategos*, see also Savignac & Starcky (1957: 201–203) and Healey (1993: 108). Note that the title is also used in Palmyrene Aramaic (Hillers & Cussini 1996: 341, *ʿsrtg*, ‘general’), in Jewish Aramaic (Jastrow 1903, *ʿisartēgōs*, ‘general, prefect, city commander, chief of body guards’), and in the Greek New Testament (Bauer 2000: ‘chief magistrate of a city, commander responsible for the temple in Jerusalem’).

<sup>2</sup>Graf (1994: 276), and Nehmé (2005-2006: 187–188).

<sup>3</sup>The text is dated to year 5 of a king named Aretas, probably Aretas IV, but an earlier date is also possible.

<sup>4</sup>Only the main references are given in this table, the list is not comprehensive.

No.	Site	Type of inscriptions	Date
5	Mādabā	Epitaph of a tomb and two <i>nefesh</i> made by 'Abd'ubdat the <i>strategos</i> for his father 'Aytibel, also <i>strategos</i> , as well as for his son 'Aytibel the camp commandant.	AD 37/38
CIS ii 196 (RÉS 674); Cantineau 1932: 44–45; Healey 1993: 47–48, with reference to previous editions; Kühn 2005: 221–222			
6	Southwest of Taymā'	signature of a <i>strategos</i> named Gadūdīlū.	—
Al-Theeb 2005: no. 57 (see below figs 1-2).			
7	Southwest of Taymā'	Dedication of the <i>nefesh</i> of a <i>strategos</i> named probably Wuraylū	—
Al-Theeb 2005: no. 59 (see below and fig. 3)			
8	Southwest of Taymā', Sar-madā'	Signature of two <i>strategoī</i> signing together, one named Šullay and one named probably Wuraylū.	—
Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30 (see below and fig. 4)			
9	Southwest of Taymā', Sar-madā'	Signature of a <i>strategos</i> named 'Abdrab'el (' <i>bdrb'l</i> ).	—
Al-Theeb 2014: no. 80 (see below and fig. 5)			
10	al-'Arniyyāt (Ar 104) <sup>5</sup>	Signature of a <i>strategos</i> named 'Abdmankū.	—
Previously unpublished (see below and fig. 6)			
11	Hegra, Qaṣr al-Bint	Legal text on tomb façade IGN 20. The <i>strategos</i> Šullay son of 'Aydū is the owner of the tomb.	AD 40/41–70? <sup>6</sup>
JSNab 6 (RÉS 1104); Healey 1993: no. 6.			
12	Hegra, Jabal al-Aḥmar	Legal text on tomb façade IGN 127. The <i>strategos</i> Taymū is the father of one of the owners of the tomb, a woman, the other owner being a man, probably her husband.	AD 36/37
CIS ii 213; JSNab 24; Winnett & Reed 1970: no. 82; Healey 1993: no. 24.			
13	Hegra, Jabal al-Khraymāt	Legal text on tomb façade IGN 66. The <i>strategos</i> Maṭiyū is the owner of the tomb.	AD 39/40
CIS ii 214; JSNab 32			

<sup>5</sup>This text was photographed in 2004 during the Darb al-Bakra survey, a project directed by A. al-Ghabban. It is due to be published by the author along with the 800 Nabataean texts recorded during this survey (in Nehmé forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup>On the very uncertain date of this text, see Nehmé 2015: vol. 2: 46.

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No.	Site	Type of inscriptions	Date
14	Hegra, Jabal al-Khramāt	Legal text on tomb façade IGN 87. The two <i>strategoī</i> mentioned in the text, Malkū and Rabīb'el, are father and son and their names are given in order to specify the family relationship between them and the owners of the tomb (on this, Nehmé 2015: vol. 2: 97–98).	AD 71/72
<i>CIS</i> ii 224 (1156, 1293,7); <i>JSNab</i> 34; Healey 1993: no. 34.			
15	Hegra, Jabal al-Khramāt	Legal text on tomb façade IGN 100. The <i>strategos</i> , whose name is not given, represents one of the authorities to which a fine should be paid by anyone who does contrary to what is written in the text.	AD 63/64
<i>JSNab</i> 38 (RÉS 1108, 1293,1); Healey 1993: no. 38.			
16	Hegra, Jabal Ithlib	Claiming of ownership over a <i>mškb</i> , a 'resting place' by the <i>strategos</i> 'Animū.	—
<i>CIS</i> ii 234; <i>JSNab</i> 40; Winnett & Reed 1970: no. 57; Nehmé 2005-2006: no. 17, p. 205–206, fig. 143, with references to previous editions.			
17	Hegra, Qaṣr al-Bint	Claiming of ownership over an 'tr', a 'place' in order to build a tomb, by the <i>strategos</i> Rabīb'el (Nehmé 2015: vol. 2: 97–98).	—
<i>CIS</i> ii 270 (RÉS 1174); <i>JSNab</i> 43; Nehmé 2005-2006: no. 19, p. 208–210, fig. 146, with references to previous editions.			
18	Hegra, Jabal Ithlib	Signature commemorating several persons who were the servants of two <i>strategoī</i> , Ba'qat and Malkū, who were responsible for the restoration of a 'place' for the 'Lord of the temple'.	—
<i>CIS</i> ii 235 (RÉS 1160, 1291,1); <i>JSNab</i> 57; Nehmé 2005-2006: no. 17, p. 194–200, fig. 138, with references to previous editions.			
19	Hegra, Jabal Ithlib	Signature possibly written 'in the time of the <i>strategos</i> Hani'at'. <sup>7</sup>	—
<i>CIS</i> ii 238 (RÉS 1162); <i>JSNab</i> 61; Nehmé 2005-2006: no. 10, p. 186–188, fig. 129, with references to previous editions.			
20	Hegra, Jabal Ithlib	Signature commemorating a man named Damasī who is the son of Rabīb'el the <i>strategos</i> .	—
<i>CIS</i> ii 287 (RÉS 1182); <i>JSNab</i> 84			

<sup>7</sup>This text has been reread in Nehmé 2005-2006 as *šlm* 'bd'l'z' m zmn hn't 'sryg' w tymw br 'šlm,

No.	Site	Type of inscriptions	Date
21	al-‘Ulā	Signature of a man named Rabib’el whose name is possibly preceded by the letter ’, interpreted by Jaussen and Savignac as being an abbreviation of ’srtg’ (reading and interpretation denied in Winnett and Reed).	—
JSNab 216; Winnett & Reed 1970: no. 45.			
22	near Philadelphia – ‘Am-mān	A <i>strategos</i> named Elthemos (ʿlṯmw in Nabataean?) is a troupe commander during the military conflict between Malichos I and Herod.	32 BC
Josephus <i>JW</i> I. 381			
23	?	Nakebos ( <i>nqybw</i> in Nabataean?) is called both a hegomenos and a <i>strategos</i> during the episode of the punitive expedition launched by Herod against Raēpta, the base from where rebels from Trachonitis were fighting him.	ca. 9 BC
Josephus <i>JA</i> XVI. 282–285			
24	Machaerus – Jabal al-Mashnaqa	A <i>strategos</i> who was stationed at Machaerus arranged the journey of Aretas IV’s daughter, who wanted to run away from her husband, from there to Arabia, being passed from one <i>strategos</i> to the other. <sup>8</sup>	ca. AD 27 or a little after
Josephus, <i>JA</i> XVIII. 112			
25	Gamala, north of the Yarmūk	Herod Antipas and Aretas IV dispatched their respective <i>strategoī</i> when engaging a battle in the territory of Gamala. <sup>9</sup>	ca. AD 34
Josephus, <i>JA</i> XVIII. 113			

## 2 Supplementary notes

Note that two texts listed by D. Graf as containing perhaps the title ’srtg’ do not, in fact mention it. The first one is *CIS* ii 319a (RÉS 1194), from Mabrak an-

<sup>7</sup>May be safe ‘Abd’al‘uzzā, in the time of the *strategos* Hani’at, and Taymū son of ‘Ašlam’.

<sup>8</sup>Loeb edition: ‘when she arrived [at Machaerus] all preparations for her journey had been made by the governor. She was thus able to start for Arabia as soon as she arrived, being passed from one governor to the next as they provided transport’. Note however that since Machaerus was under Herodian rule, one has to assume either that there was a Nabataean official there, acting in the name of the Nabataean king, or that the *strategos* was a Herodian one.

<sup>9</sup>On the location and date of this battle, see Bowersock 1983: 65–67.

Nāqa, name given to a pass ca. 12 km north of Madâ'in Sâlih. This text is equal to JSNab 187, an equivalence which was not given by Jaussen and Savignac. The correct reading of this inscription, already given by them, is *yṭbw brt tymw bgy*. *bgy* may be here the toponym *gy*, Gaia, ancient Wādī Mūsà near Petra, preceded by the preposition *b-*.

The second text is *CIS ii 293* (RÉS 1185), which is equal to JSNab 65, from the Dīwān area in Hegra. It has been recently reexamined by the author and it reads *dkyr lwqys ' ---- 'drw bṭb*. There is no particular reason to restore *'srtg* after *lwqys*.<sup>10</sup>

Previously unpublished or not very well known texts listed in the table are the following:

### 2.1 Text no. 6 of the table: Al-Theeb 2005: no. 57 (figs 1–2).



Figure 1: Inscription Al-Theeb 2005: no. 57. Photograph Taymā' archaeological Project.

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<sup>10</sup>See the photograph in Nehmé (2010: fig. 8).



Figure 2: Facsimile of Al-Theeb 2005: no. 57.

This text was also photographed in the desert southwest of Taymā<sup>3</sup> during the 2005 excavation season at this site by the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut*.<sup>11</sup> It is 85 cm long and the *d* is 10 cm high. It is written in beautifully incised characters, to the left of a rectangular betyl, ca. 30 x 72 cm, carved in relief in a shapeless niche.

*gdwdylw 'srtg'*  
 'Gadūdīlū the strategos'

The reading *gdwdylw* is suggested here instead of *grwrylw* because the shape of the *r* and that of the *d* seem to be distinguished in this text: the upper horizontal stroke of the *r* in *'srtg'* is straight whereas it is curved in both *d*. S. al-Theeb reads this name *gdwdyly* but the last letter is very similar to the first *w* and it is very unlikely that it should be read as a final *y*. The name does not occur elsewhere in Nabataean and, as pointed out by S. al-Theeb, it is probably of foreign origin. It is interesting to note that there is no patronym after the name, which is quite rare in the Nabataean inscriptions. This is also the case for several *strategoī* mentioned in the texts, such as *b'qt* and *mlkw* in JSNab 57, *hn't* in JSNab 61, *'bdmknw* in Ar 104, etc., as if, due to the importance of their function, the authors of these inscriptions felt that it was not necessary to give their father's name to be recognized. This text was probably written by Gadūdīlū or commissioned by him.

<sup>11</sup>We are very grateful to R. Eichmann for letting us use the photograph.

2.2 Text no. 7 of the table: Al-Theeb 2005: no. 59 (fig. 3)

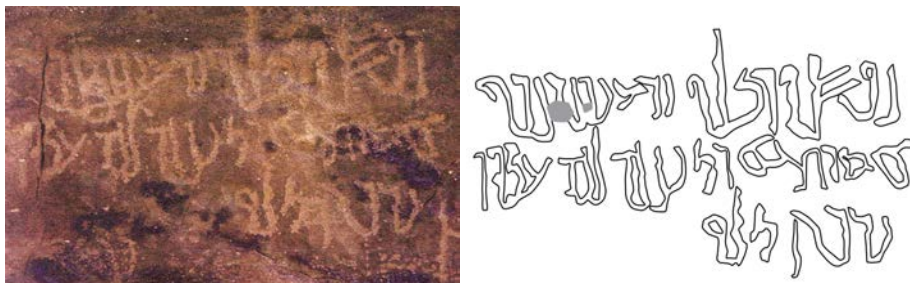


Figure 3: Inscription Al-Theeb 2005: no. 59. Photograph from Al-Theeb 2005.

This text is written in a much cruder way than the previous one.

*npš wrylw br 'bdmknw*  
*'srtg' dy bnh lh 'ydw*  
*br khylw*  
 'Nefesh of Wuraylū son of 'Abdmankū the *strategos* which 'Aydū son of Kuhaylū built for him.'

Here and elsewhere, it is assumed that the title *strategos* applies to the first person mentioned, here Wuraylū, not to his father.<sup>12</sup> This text is the dedication of a *nefesh*, a commemorative funerary monument which was probably erected near the place where the text was carved. The form of the *nefesh* (small monument or obelisk shape stele) is not known. The author of the text is of course the person who erected the *nefesh*, not the *strategos* himself.

2.3 Text no. 8 of the table: Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30 (fig. 4)<sup>13</sup>



Figure 4: Inscription Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30. Photograph Taymā' Hinterland Survey Project, M.C.A. Macdonald.

<sup>12</sup>Except in JSNab 84, where we have *dkyr dmsy br rhyb'l 'srtg'*. Rabīb'el being a very well known *strategos*, the title applies probably to him, unless his son Damasi was also a *strategos*.

<sup>13</sup>I am very grateful to M.C.A. Macdonald for providing me with photographs of this inscription and the following.

This text is written in very large and elegant characters in the upper part of a large panel of rock which bears many Nabataean inscriptions. It occupies therefore an outstanding position on the panel.

*šly w [w]rylw 'srtgy' šlm*  
 'Šullay and [W]uraylū the strategoi, may they be safe'

Despite the quality of the script, it is likely that the author forgot to carve a *w* after *šly w*. Indeed, considering that a strategos named *wrylw* is mentioned in the same area (Al-Theeb 2005: no. 59, see above), it is likely that both texts were written by the same author named Wuraylū.

#### 2.4 Text no. 9 of the table: Al-Theeb 2014: no. 80 (fig. 5)



Handwritten transcription of the Nabataean inscription in Figure 5, showing two lines of text in a cursive script.

Figure 5: Inscription Al-Theeb 2014: no. 80. Photograph Taymā' Hinterland Survey Project, M.C.A. Macdonald.

This text is written in relatively crude characters in the bottom part of a panel bearing many other Nabataean inscriptions.

*dkyr 'bdrb'l*  
*'srtg' kd/ry / 'srtg' 'kd/ry*

The original editor notes that the text can be read in two different ways according to whether the ' is attached to 'srtg or to the following word. However, since the ' is very close – although not touching – the end of the g, it is more likely that it belongs to 'srtg and that the following three letters form a separate word, or even a separate text. The interpretation of 'kd/ry as a toponym is possible but the formula, 'srtg' of a particular place, is not attested elsewhere in the Nabataean inscriptions.

#### 2.5 Text no. 10 of the table: Ar 104 (fig. 6)

Previously unpublished text, south of Tabūk.



Figure 6: Inscription Ar 104. Photograph Darb al-Bakra project.

ʾ{h}wr ʿlym  
 <ʿbd> ʿbdmknw  
 ʾsrtgʾ šlm  
 ʿAḥwar the servant of ʿAbdmankū the *strategos*, peace.ʾ

This text is a simple signature.

### 3 The provenance and date of the inscriptions

Thirteen out of the twenty-five occurrences of the word *strategos* in the texts are dated, from the interval between 32 BC and AD 95, none of them being later than AD 106. *Strategoi* are mentioned in eleven different places which are all, except for Sidon and Ḍmayr, in areas formerly under the control of the Nabataean kingdom (fig. 7). There is a strong predominance of both Transjordan, around Mādabā, and northwest Saudi Arabia. It is interesting to note that not a single *strategos* is mentioned either in Petra or Bosra, the two major cities of the Nabataean kingdom. In Petra, the only military title which is attested is *rb pršyʾ*, ‘chief of cavalrymen’.<sup>14</sup> In Bosra, the only attested military title is *hprkʾ*, hipparch or eparch, ‘cavalry general or prefect’.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Two inscriptions mention a *rb pršyʾ* in Petra. One, found in az-Zantūr, was published by J. Starcky in 1971 (MP 664) and mentions a certain *dydws rb pršyʾ*. The other, carved within an incised cartouche in the rock-cut chamber Brünnow & von Domaszewski (1904-1909: no. 41) in al-Madras, is MP 58 (= CIS ii 442), lines 2 and 3 of which were read by J.T. Milik as ---- [b]r [ʿb]dḥrtt rb [prš]y[ʿ dy] m[n] wqytʿ ----. The inscription was severely damaged by erosion and only the last two letters of lines 2 and 3 are still visible (see MP 58): <sup>2</sup>---- rb <sup>3</sup>----tʿ, while <sup>2</sup>---- rb <sup>3</sup> [prš/mšr]y[ʿ/ʿ] ---- can be restored with the help of the available copies and squeezes. Finally, it is uncertain whether MP 85 (in Nehmé 2012: 177), written with charcoal inside the *triclinium* Dalman (1908: no. 117), contains the word *pršʿ*, read by J.T. Milik’s at the beginning of the text. The latter was photographed by the author in 2002 but it is not legible anymore. On the unpublished photographs taken by J. Starcky in 1969, the word *pršʿ* is not visible.

<sup>15</sup>CIS ii 173: ʿbdʿlgʿ hprkʿ. On *hprkʿ*, see Healey (1993: 108–109).



Figure 7: Map showing the distribution of the *strategoī*.

#### 4 The categories of inscriptions:

There are twenty-one Nabataean inscriptions and two literary texts which mention *strategoī*. The inscriptions belong to different types which can be divided as follows:

**Simple signatures of *strategoī*:** no. 6 = Al-Theeb 2005: no. 57 (Taymā' area), no. 8–9 = Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30 and 80, no. 10 = Ar 104 (al-'Arniyyāt) and possibly no. 19 = JSNab 216 (Hegra).

**Strategoi who own monumental tombs at Hegra:** no. 11 = JSNab 6 and no. 13 = JSNab 32.

**Claiming of ownership over an object by a *strategos*:**

- of a resting place (*mškbʿ*): no. 16 = JSNab 40, (Hegra);
- of a place (*ʿtrʿ*) in order to make a tomb: no. 17 = JSNab 43 (Hegra).

**Dedications of objects by a *strategos*:**

- a bench (of a *triclinium*?) for Dūšarā: no. 1 = CIS ii 160 (Sidon);
- a *nefesh* for his wife: no. 3 = CIS ii 169 (Canatha);
- a *nefesh* for his brother, who is also a *strategos*: no. 4 = CIS ii 195 (Umm ar-Rašās);
- a tomb and two *nefesh* for his father, who is also a *strategos*, and his brother, who is a camp commandant: no. 5 = CIS ii 196 (Mādabā).

**Dedications of objects for a *strategos* by other persons:** *nefesh* made by a person for him: no. 7 = Al-Theeb 2005: no. 59 (Taymāʿ area).

***Strategoi* mentioned as family members of persons who are the authors of a signature or are responsible for a dedication or a legal text:**

- no. 20 = JSNab 84, in Hegra, is the signature of the son of a *strategos*;
- In no. 2 = CIS ii 161, from Dmayr, two *strategoi* are mentioned: the first is one of the sons of the person who dedicated the altar which bears the inscription while the second may have adopted the other son of this person;
- In no. 12 = JSNab 24, from Hegra, the *strategos* is the father of one of the owners of the tomb;
- In no. 14 = JSNab 34, from Hegra, two *strategoi*, father and son, are named only in order to relate to them the family of the owners of the tomb.

***Strategoi* mentioned as being the persons who made the restoration of a sanctuary and who had servants:** no. 18 = JSNab 57 (Hegra).

***Strategoi* who represent the local authority:** no. 5 = CIS ii 196 (Mādabā), no. 15 = JSNab 38 and possibly no. 19 = JSNab 61, both at Hegra; Josephus, though it is possible that he uses *strategos* not as a specific title but as a general word for ‘military leader’.

All in all, there are few instances in which it is clear that the *strategos* who is mentioned in the available sources had a military and administrative authority over a particular place.

- The most important of them is Josephus, who says that the daughter of Aretas IV was ‘being passed from one governor to the next as they provided transport’. There were therefore, in various places from Machaerus to Petra, persons who bore the title *strategos* and who were responsible for transportation and presumably security along the roads. These places are probably to be equated with the *byt šlṭwn*, the ‘house of authority’<sup>16</sup> where ʾAytibel the *strategos* and ʾAytibel his grandson were said to be stationed in the Mādabā inscription, *CIS* ii 196. It is probable that each *strategos* had a *byt šlṭwn*, which was the centre of his jurisdiction and from where he exercised his authority over a region.
- Another important text is JSNab 38, which shows that the *strategos* who was stationed at Hegra represented the administrative authority to whom the fine due by the persons who sold a tomb or gave it in pledge had to be paid. There are other mentions of fines in the tomb inscriptions<sup>17</sup> but JSNab 38 is the only one in which it is said that the fine had to be paid to the *strategos*. Considering that a fine of the same amount was also due to the king, it is clear that the *strategos* represented the *local* authority (it is specified in the text that he is ‘in Hegra’, *dy hwʾ bhgrʾ*) while the king represented the great central power.
- We then have JSNab 61 which, according to the rereading we proposed (see no. 7) dates the inscription to the ‘time’ (*zmn*) of one particular *strategos*. This suggests that the function he exercised lasted for a limited span of time – sometimes twice this span, see the Mādabā inscription, *CIS* ii 196 – which was probably known to the local people. The same word, *zmn*, is used in the Mādabā inscription to designate the period during which the *strategos* and his grandson, the camp commandant, exercised their authority over Luḥitū and ʾAbartā (*šlṭw zmnyn tryn*). This may suggest the eponymous character of the title.
- We may consider that the trouble taken by the owners of tomb IGN 87, in JSNab 34, to relate their family to the name of the *strategos* Malkū, is an indication that the latter was considered locally as the warrantor of the ownership over the tomb.
- The fact that the *strategos* Rabībʾel claims ownership over the place where the largest tomb of Hegra (IGN 46) would have been carved if it had been finished shows that Rabībʾel had considerable financial means. It should also be noted that tombs IGN 20 and IGN 66, which are also said to belong to *strategoī*, are either the largest or the almost largest tombs of the necropolese in which they are carved, the Qaṣr al-Bint and the Jabal al-Khramāt respectively. The other instance of claiming of ownership, that of a ‘bench’ in the Jabal Ithlib area (JSNab 40), is not particularly significant.
- The military importance of the *strategoī* is given by Josephus, who mentions several of them in contexts which are clearly related to battles.

<sup>16</sup>Healey 1993: 247: ‘territory of their rule’. However, the word *byt* refers more to a specific place than to a ‘territory’.

<sup>17</sup>On the fines, see Nehmé 2015: vol. 1: 131 (table 17).

- Finally, the possible hereditary character of the title may also be an indication of its importance. This character can be inferred from inscriptions *CIS* ii 196 (Mādabā), *CIS* ii 161 (Ḍmayr) and *JSNab* 34 (*CIS* ii 224, Hegra) where both father and son are *strategoi*.<sup>18</sup> In *CIS* ii 195 (Umm ar-Raṣāṣ), two brothers are *strategoi*.

All the other occurrences of the function of *strategos* do not particularly point to the fact that the persons mentioned in them exercised their authority in the place where the inscriptions were carved.

In conclusion, one may say that the places which can be interpreted as *central* on the basis of the presence in them of a *strategos* invested of a recognized authority are Machaerus, undetermined places between there and Petra, Hegra, as well as some place in the region of Mādabā.<sup>19</sup> As for the five *strategoi* who appear southwest of Taymāʿ, it is possible that they signed their names while they were on their way from there to Hegra or coming from Hegra. It is possible that the *strategoi* were stationed only in the provincial districts, which may explain why there was no need to have any in Petra, where the power would have been exercised by the king and his ministers directly. The absence of a *strategos* in Bosra is more difficult to explain but it may be due to the lacunae of our documentation. All the places in which a *strategos* is known to have had an authority is a central place in the Nabataean kingdom. These *strategoi* are characterized by a territorial based activity and had both civil and military responsibilities.

## 5 The career of the *strategoi*

There is no way of knowing how and by whom the *strategoi* were appointed. They may, in some cases, have been appointed two by two, as shown on the one hand by inscription *JSNab* 57, which mentions the servants of two *strategoi*, by inscriptions Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30, which mentions two *strategoi* together, and on the other hand, possibly, by *CIS* ii 195, in which a man who was a *strategos* made a *nefesh* for his brother, also *strategos*. Neither of these inscriptions, however, specifies that the *strategoi* held the function at the same time and together. In *CIS* ii 195, they may have had this function successively, even if each one of them is called *strategos* in the text (this because of the prestige attached to the title), or at the same time but in different places.

We know that some of them started their career as junior officers before becoming *strategoi*:

- ‘Animū son of Damasippos was *rb mšryt*’ in Dūmat in AD 44 before becoming *strategos* in Hegra;
- it is probable that Rabibʿel, the brother of ‘Animū, was *strategos* in Hegra. Indeed, despite the fact that none of the Hegra inscriptions in which he is mentioned proves that he was the *strategos* of the city, we can assume that

<sup>18</sup>On the hereditary character of the function, see Graf 1994: 277.

<sup>19</sup>The text is not clear as to whether both the *strategos* ʿAytibel and his grandson the camp commandant, who bears the same name, were in Luhitū and ʿAbartā. Indeed, the last part of the expression *lʿytybl ʿsrtg* [...] *w lʿytybl rb mšryt dy blhytw w ʿbrt* may refer either to both names or only to the last name mentioned, i.e. the grandson.

he would not have claimed the ownership of a place to build his tomb, in JSNab 43, giving his title, if he had not been *strategos* of the district at the time when the inscription was written, i.e. at a date between ca. AD 40 and 72. Whether he was also the *strategos* of the other places where he left his signature is not certain, especially since he gives his title in neither of them. We know that it is the same Rabib'el only because he gives his father's name, Damasippos, and because this name is so rare that it is very unlikely that there were two persons bearing the same name and patronym.<sup>20</sup> On this basis, we may assume that Rabib'el's brother, 'Animū, was *strategos* during the same time span of thirty years.<sup>21</sup>

## Appendix: List of Nabataean *strategoi*, by name, in alphabetical order

Nabatean name	Name	Site
Elthemos ( <sup>?</sup> <i>lṯmw</i> ?)		Near Philadelphia – 'Am-mān
Josephus, JW I. 381		
Nakebos ( <i>nqybw</i> ?)		?
Josephus, JA XVI. 282–285		
?	?	Qanawāt – Canatha
CIS ii 169		
?	?	Hegra
JSNab 38		
?	? son of Zū----	Ṣaydā – Sidon
CIS ii 160		
<sup>?</sup> <i>drmw</i> [ <i>br bgrt</i> ]	<sup>?</sup> Adramū [son of Bagrat] (feminine name)	Ḍmayr
CIS ii 161		
<sup>?</sup> <i>tybl</i> [ <sup>?</sup> <i>b 'bd'bd</i> ]	<sup>?</sup> Aytibel [father of 'Abd-'ubdat]	Mādabā
CIS ii 196		
<i>b'qt</i>	Ba'qat	Hegra
JSNab 57		

<sup>20</sup>The list of mentions of Rabib'el son of Damasippos has been established by D. Graf (1994: 280): Dūmat al-Jandal (Winnett & Reed 1970: no. 3): *rbyb'l br dmsps šlm*; Jabal Mansūr in the Ḥismā, east of Wādī Ramm (Graf 1994: 280, no. 3): *rbyb'l br dmsps šlm*; Jabal Ṣarbūt Thu-laytha, southwest of Tabūk (Al-Theeb 1993: no. 69, the reading of which was corrected by Graf 1994: 280, no. 4): *dkyr rbyb'l br dmsps bṯb*. To these should be added, from Umm Jadhāyidh, Al-Theeb 2002: no. 152: *šlm rbyb'l br dmsps*.

<sup>21</sup>On the family of Rabib'el son of Damasippos, see J.T. Milik and J. Starcky in Winnett & Reed 1970: 142; Graf 1988: 199–200; Healey 1993: 222–223. The last two each provide a genealogical tree of the family of Damasippos, part of which is based on hypotheses which cannot be proved.

STRATEGOI IN THE NABATEAN KINGDOM

Nabatean name	Name	Site
<i>gdwdylw</i> Al-Theeb 2005: no. 57 (no. 6, see above and figs 1–2)	Gadūdilū	Taymā' area
<i>hn't</i> JSNab 61	Hani'at	Hegra
<i>wrylw br 'bdmknw</i> Al-Theeb 2005: no. 59 (no. 8, see above and fig. 3)	Wuraylū son of 'Abdman- kū	Taymā' area
<i>[w]rylw</i> Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30 (no. 8, see above and fig. 4)	Wuraylū	Sarmadā' (southwest of Taymā')
<i>y'mrw [br 'byšw]</i> CIS ii 195	Ya'marū [son of 'Ubayšū]	Umm ar-Raṣāṣ
<i>mṭyw br 'wprns</i> JSNab 32	Maṭiyū son of Euphronios	Hegra
<i>mlkw</i> JSNab 57	Malkū	Hegra
<i>mlkw br rbyb'l</i> JSNab 34	Malkū son of Rabīb'el	Hegra
<i>'bdmknw</i> Ar 104	'Abdmankū	Al-'Arniyyāt
<i>'bdmknw ['b nqydw]</i> CIS ii 161	'Abdmankū [father of Na- qīdū]	Ḍmayr
<i>'bdmknw br 'byšw</i> CIS ii 195	'Abdmankū son of 'Ubay- šū	Umm ar-Raṣāṣ
<i>'bd'bdt br 'ytybl</i> CIS ii 196	'Abd'ubdat son of 'Aytibel	Mādabā
<i>'bdrb'l</i> Al-Theeb 2014: no. 80 (no. 9, see above and fig. 5)	'Abdrab'el	Sarmadā' (southwest of Taymā')
<i>'nmw br dmsps</i> JSNab 40	'Animū son of Damasip- pos	Hegra
<i>rbyb'l?</i> JSNab 216	Rabīb'el?	al-'Ulā
<i>rbyb'l</i> JSNab 43	Rabīb'el	Hegra

Nabatean name	Name	Site
* <i>rbybʿl br dmsps</i>	Rabībʿel son of Damasip- pos	Dūmat al-Jandal; east of Wādī Ram; southwest of Tabūk; Umm Jadhāyidh
Winnett & Reed 1970: no. 3; Graf 1994: 280, no. 3; Al-Theeb 1993: no. 69 (= Graf 1994: 280, no. 4; Al-Theeb 2002: no. 152)		
<i>rbybʿl [ʿb dmsy]</i>	Rabībʿel [father of Dama- sī]	Hegra
JSNab 84		
<i>rbybʿl [ʿb mlkw]</i>	Rabībʿel [father of Malkū]	Hegra
JSNab 34		
<i>šly</i>	Šullay	Sarmadāʿ (southwest of Taymāʿ)
Al-Theeb 2014: no. 30 (no. 8, see above and fig. 4)		
<i>šly br ʿydw</i>	Šullay son of ʿAydū	Hegra
JSNab 6		
<i>tymw [ʿb ʿrsksh]</i>	Taymū [father of ʿArsak- sah] (feminine name)	Hegra
JSNab 24		

\* before a name indicates that the person is not mentioned specifically as a *strategos* in the inscriptions but that we know from other inscriptions that he was one.

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## Sigla

CIS ii	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars II. Inscriptiones Aramaicas Continens.</i> Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889–.
JSNab	Nabataean inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac 1909-1922.
MP	Unpublished corpus of the inscriptions from petra, established by J.T. Milik. They appear partly in Nehmé 2012
RÉS	<i>Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique.</i> Paris 1900–196.

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# Prepositional Phrases in the Dadanitic Inscriptions

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## Abstract

This article is concerned with the use and meaning of ten different prepositions attested in the corpus of Dadanitic inscriptions. Compared with previous overviews of the prepositional system, the article provides a more complete picture of the various semantic functions exhibited by these prepositions. It also discusses the impact of formulaic language on the semantic scope of individual preposition as well as instances where different prepositions have the same semantic function. It also compares the use of these prepositions with cognates in other ancient North-Arabian corpora. In addition to this, it contains some new interpretations and translations.

**Keywords:** Ancient North Arabian; Dadanitic; Prepositions

## 1 Introduction

This article concerns the prepositional system exhibited in the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions from the ancient oasis Dadan (modern-day 'al-'Ulā' in north-western Saudi Arabia). The term Dadanitic refers to inscriptions made in the local script of the oasis. These inscriptions were previously categorised as either Dedanite or Lihyanite. These terms could refer to successive dynasties in the oasis. However, the term Lihyanite is consistently used as an ethnonym. Dadanite, on the other hand, is also used with reference to the place. It is, therefore, possible that the terms have the same referent (Scagliarini 1995). Macdonald has argued in favour of the term Dadanitic because the texts in both groups belong to the same palaeographic and linguistic continuum and because of Sima's arguments in favour of the spelling Dadan instead of Dedan.<sup>1</sup> For these same reasons the term Dadanitic will be used in this paper.

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<sup>1</sup>Macdonald 2004: 490–492; for further discussions about the palaeographic development see Macdonald 2000: 33; for arguments in favour of the spelling Dadan see Sima 2000: 42–46, and Macdonald 2000: n. 1. The vocalisation primarily rests on the spelling in two cuneiform texts from the neo-babylonian period related to Nabonid (<sup>URU</sup>da-da-nu and <sup>URU</sup>da-da-na; cf. Beaulieu 1989: 150–151, 167) and the spelling Δαδαν in the Septuagint (cf. Gen 10:7).

The Dadanitic corpus can be subdivided into several different categories based on content/formula or on the method of carving. As for the latter it is noteworthy that some inscriptions are written in relief with a formal hand, most of which have a commemorative function. The use of a stone mason makes these inscriptions unique within the ANA corpora. But it is also noteworthy that not all commemorative inscriptions were written in relief.

The main part of the article contains a survey of ten different prepositions and the appendix contains a glossary of words with a new interpretation.

### 1.1 Aim and purpose

The main aim of this article is to map the prepositional system as it is used in the corpus of the Dadanitic inscriptions. The following questions will be considered:

1. What prepositions are used in the Dadanitic corpus?
  - (a) Do these inscriptions contain the same prepositions as other neighbouring ANA corpora (e.g. Safaitic)?
2. What was the semantic scope of these prepositions and what functions did they have?
  - (a) How does the formulaic language affect their semantic scope?
  - (b) Do these prepositions cover different and distinct semantic fields or are there overlaps so that some can be used interchangeably?
3. How many prepositional objects can a preposition govern?

### 1.2 Prepositions within a uniform corpus: the scope and limitations of this study

Before the main part of this study some remarks about the content of these inscriptions are in order. First, many inscriptions are irrelevant because they do not contain any prepositions. Secondly, many clauses lack prepositional phrases because they do not contain peripheral arguments. Thirdly, even those inscriptions that contain prepositions exhibit little variation of topics and syntactic constructions. Fourthly, many prepositions are primarily found in formulaic expressions (e.g. in *zll*-inscriptions). It is reasonable to assume that the formulaic character of these inscriptions has influenced the semantic scope exhibited by different prepositions. The use of *ʿly* and *bʿd* in *zll*-inscriptions nicely illustrates this point. The latter is more often used to mark benefactive phrases. But *ʿly* is also used in similar clauses pointing to a semantic overlap. If *zll*-inscriptions had not been so numerous, the standardised use of *bʿd* could easily have obscured this polysemy. These observations are very important and serve as a reminder of the incompleteness of the material at hand. With this in mind we turn to the inscriptional evidence.

## 2 Dadanitic prepositions

Both Macdonald and Farès-Drappeau have written brief surveys of the prepositions used in Dadanitic.<sup>2</sup> But their treatments are limited in that they only give a few examples, list English and French counterparts, and occasionally provide etymologies. The present article attempts to fill this gap.

### 2.1 ʿly/ʿl

This preposition is written either as ʿly or ʿl. The longer form occurs in most examples, making it difficult to determine if there is a distributional pattern. The shorter form ʿl is primarily found with clitics (e.g. ex. [5]) but it is also used once in the construction ʿl *ḏ-kn* (ex. [2]). It is therefore possible that ʿl and ʿly represent two distinct forms, the shorter being used with clitic pronouns and the long in most other constructions. However, more evidence would be needed to prove this. Moreover, the use of ʿly in similar phrases (e.g. ʿly *ḏ-kn* in AH 069 and 075) could indicate that ʿl *ḏ-kn* was a scribal error. If so, the different forms are probably due to orthographic conventions. y, whether it represented a diphthong or a long vowel, is never written word-internally in Dadanitic orthography.

In terms of function ʿly was used as a marker of locative and benefactive phrases, with the meanings ‘on’ and ‘for the sake of’. The locative function is attested three times:

- [1]: *l-ntnbʿl bn wny hn qbr ḏh ḥm ʿly ymn w ʿly šm mn trq(h)* (JSLih 081)  
 ‘This tomb belongs to Ntnbʿl son of Wny. It is protected on the north and on the south against thieves.’<sup>3</sup>

Two observations are noteworthy about the phrases in ex. [1]. To begin with, the preposition is repeated before both *ymn* and *šm*. Secondly, ʿly could be interpreted as an adversative if the two phrases were not followed by *mn trq(h)*. However, together with the adversative phrase, a locative interpretation of ʿly seems more plausible. The two phrases emphasise that the tomb is thoroughly protected.

Farès-Drappeau has suggested that ʿly primarily functioned as a locative preposition.<sup>4</sup> The locative meaning is certainly closer to that of the root ʿly but the size of the sample makes it impossible to determine whether ʿly had any primary function in the local dialect. Moreover, the preposition is used as

<sup>2</sup>Macdonald 2004: 519–520; Farès-Drappeau 2005: 72–74.

<sup>3</sup>Winnett & Reed 1970: 124, follow Jaussen & Savignac 1909-1922: 450–451, Pl. LXXXV, and reconstruct *šm[ʿl]* at the end of line five, i.e. one of the words meaning ‘left’ in CAr (*Lane*, 1601). For the present argument it is not necessary to determine whether the text was broken or not. But some comments about the state of the inscription are still in order. It is possible that the text is broken at the end of line five because some of the previous lines are longer. But the last word on the previous line (*ymn*) ends at the same point as the *m* in *šm[ʿl]*. Moreover, the photograph does not contain a trace of more letters to the left of the *m* in *šm*. Lastly, it might not be necessary to reconstruct *[ʿl]* at the end of line five since CAr also contains the term *šm*, meaning either ‘left’ or ‘south’ (*Lane*, 1490). In comparison with other Central Semitic languages Hebrew and Aramaic has *šmʿl* (DNWSI, 1159–60) while *šm* is attested in Sabaic (SbD, 130) and Qatabanic (MuB 659, 9).

<sup>4</sup>Farès-Drappeau: 74: “La premier sens de la préposition ʿly est «sur, au-dessus»”

much as a benefactive within the present corpus because of its occurrence in the formula of *zll*-inscriptions. This function suggests that there was a semantic overlap between *ʿly* and *bʿd*.<sup>5</sup>

[2]: *llt ʿzll h-zll l-dġbt ʿl d-kn l-hm b-bdr f-rd-h* (U 073)  
 ‘Llt performed the *zll*-ceremony for Dġbt on behalf of that which belongs to them at Bdr and so favour him!’

[3]: *mqh sʿlh d-(ġ)bt ʿzll b-khl ʿly m kn l-h b-dtʿl mn dtʿ w-ħrf f-rd-h w-ʿtb-h*  
 (U 059)  
 ‘Mqh the priest of Dġbt performed (the *zll*-ceremony) at Khl on account of that which belongs to him in Dtʿl from the spring harvest and autumn harvest, and so favour him and reward him.’

It is noteworthy that *ʿly* governs the same kind of objects as *bʿd* and that both are used together with the same kind of locative phrases. It is possible that a diachronic explanation could account for the use of *ʿly* and *bʿd* but the absence of dating formulae in many inscriptions and the lack of a fixed chronology makes it impossible to substantiate such a theory. Leaving this question to the side, we turn to syntactic matters:

As for prepositional objects, *ʿly* governs both individual nouns and headless relative clauses. It mostly takes one object but there is one instance where it governs two coordinated objects:

[4]: ---- ʿzy ---- d ---- h-zll ʿly dtʿ-h w nhl-h f rd-h w ʿ{h}rt-h (AH 107)  
 ‘----ʿzy ---- d ---- the *zll*-ceremony for his spring harvest and his palm garden and so favour him and his descendants.’

In addition to the benefactive use of *ʿly*, there is one example with a semantic function that is neither benefactive nor malefactive but somewhere in-between the two:

[5]: *whblh bn zdqny w lmy bn nfyh wdyw nfs<sup>1</sup> mr bn ħwt m{h} ʿħd ʿl-hmy ħrg*  
 (JSLih 077, 1–3)<sup>6</sup>  
 ‘Whblh son of Zdqny and Lmy son of Nfyh dedicated<sup>7</sup> the funeral chamber of Mr son of Ĥwt because of an obligation he had brought upon them.’

Lastly, the corpus does not contain any examples where *ʿly* means ‘against’ rather than ‘on’ or ‘on behalf of’.<sup>7</sup> Neither does the corpus contain verbs of

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Sima 1999: 101; Other examples of this type occur in U 050, U 071, U 059, U 087, U 125, U 126, AH 069, AH 071, AH 075, AH 079, AH 089, AH 107, AH 010.

<sup>6</sup>The verb *ħrg* usually means ‘to go’ or ‘to issue’ in CAR and there is also a noun from the same root with the meaning ‘disbursement’ or ‘expenditure’ (Lane, 718–19). The root is also attested twice in Central Middle Sabaic with the meaning to ‘sue’ or ‘bring a lawsuit against s.o’: *w-ʿsʿd-hw ʿsʿd ħrg-hw b-ʿbr mrʿ-hm* ‘and his men are the men who sued him before their lord’ (CIH 398, 7); *w-twsʿd-ħrg-hw b-ʿbr mrʿ-hw* ‘and to take his due of the one who sued him before his lord.’ (Ja 646, 6–7). In the present context the combination of this verb with *ʿħd* and *ʿly* probably means something along the lines of ‘to bring a claim/obligation upon s.o.’

<sup>7</sup>Cf. the Safaitic use of *ʿly* in curse formulae (Al-Jallad 2015: 149).

grief which normally have *ʔ* with their objects in Safaitic and Hismaic.<sup>8</sup> However, the absence of these functions should not be taken as an indication that Dadanitic used other preposition for these functions. In light of the current evidence it is just as likely that the lack of comparable phrases and expressions accounts for the absence of examples.

## 2.2 bʿd

The preposition *bʿd* is used frequently in *zll*-inscriptions, governing both nouns or headless relative clauses. In these constructions it has a benefactive function, like *ʔy*, indicating that it is a compound preposition consisting of *bi-* and *ʿad*.<sup>9</sup> As was noted in the section above, it is unclear why both *bʿd* and *ʔy* were used but their relative frequency indicates that *bʿd* was part of the standard formula:

[6]: *ḥmyh bnt nʒrh ʔft h-zll ḏh l-dḡbt b-khl bʿd m-l-h f-rḏ-h w-sʿd-h* (U 005)  
 ‘Ḥmyh daughter of Nʒrh accomplished this *zll*-ceremony for Dḡbt at Khl for the sake of that which was hers and so favour her and help her.’

[7]: *ʿbdʿs<sup>1</sup> bn ʿgry ʔzll h-zll b-khl l-dḡb(t) bʿd nḥl-h b-bdr f-rḏ-h w-ʔhrt-h* (U 011)  
 ‘ʿbdʿs<sup>1</sup> son of ʿgry performed the *zll*-ceremony at Khl for Dḡbt for the sake of his palm garden in Bdr and so favour him and his descendants.’

As for the number of objects governed, *bʿd* is often followed by one noun phrase but in a number of inscriptions it also governs two phrases coordinated by *w*:

[8]: *ʿf bn ʿydh ʔzll h-zll ndr bʿd dtʿ-h w-nfs<sup>1</sup>-h f-rḏ-h w-ʔtb-h w-sʿd-h w-ʔtb-h* (U 021)<sup>10</sup>  
 ‘f son of ʿydh performed the *zll*-ceremony as a vow for the sake of his spring harvest and for himself and so favour him and reward him and help him and reward him.’

[9]: *ʿbdʿs<sup>1</sup> bn ws<sup>1</sup>ṯ ʔzll l-dḡbt b-khl bʿd nḥl-h w-dtʿ-h b-bdr f-rḏ-h w-ʔhrt-h* (U 009; cf. U 058, U079bis, AH100)  
 ‘bdʿs<sup>1</sup> son of Ws<sup>1</sup>ṯ performed (the *zll*-ceremony) for Dḡbt at Khl for the sake of his palm garden and his spring harvest at Bdr and so favour him and his descendants.’

<sup>8</sup>Al-Jallad 2015: 148; King 1990: 48 (C.5); According to Kootstra forthcoming.b *ʔy* is not attested in Taymanitic inscriptions.

<sup>9</sup>Macdonald 2004: 519–520; Cf. Al-Jallad 2015: 147; Farès-Drappeau 2005: 74, rightly notes that a temporal *bʿd* meaning ‘after’ does not occur in Dadanitic (cf. CAr *baʿda*). A temporal *bʿd* is attested in Safaitic, Aramaic, and Sabaic. It is possible that *ḥlf* (‘after’), which is not attested in these languages, was used in the local dialect of Dadan instead of *bʿd*. But this cannot be deduced from the evidence seeing that *ḥlf* is only attested twice in Dadanitic (see 2.6 below).

<sup>10</sup>Note that the verb *ʔtb* is used twice in the prayer creating a parallelism, an uncommon feature in other prayers.

Example [8] is especially noteworthy because *b'd* is used to govern two different kinds of objects, i.e. both 'his spring harvest' (*dt'-h*)<sup>11</sup> and 'himself' (*nfs<sup>1</sup>-h*).<sup>12</sup> By way of contrast some inscriptions contain chains of objects, all of which are preceded by *b'd*:

[10]: *{y}d bn hr 'zll h-zll l-dgbt b-khl b'd-h w b'd '--- b-bdr frd -h w 'hrt-h* (U 102bis)

'{y}d son of Hr performed the zll-ceremony for Dgbt at Khl for the sake of him and for the sake of '--- at Bdr and so favour him and {his} descendants.'

[11]: *y'd bn hr b-khl 'zll h-zlln b'd-h w-b'd 'b-h w-b'd nhl-h <l> -dgbt f-rd-h w-'hrt-h w-s<sup>1</sup>d-h* (U 034)

'y'd son of Hr performed two zll-ceremonies at Khl for his own sake and for the sake of his father and for the sake of his palm garden to Dgbt and so favour him and his descendants and help him.'

The repetition of the preposition could indicate that it was optional in constructions with two objects but mandatory with more than two. The sample is too small, however, to determine whether the use of multiple prepositions is coincidental or if the choice was regulated by syntactic rules.

As for the order of clause constituents it is relevant to note that *b'd*-phrases normally occur at the end of a clause (after *b-khl* or *l-dgbt*). The formulaic nature of these clauses explains the consistent placement at the end of the clause while ex. [11], could suggest that there was some flexibility.

### 2.3 1

The preposition *l* is used frequently in Dadanitic. Semantically it covers the same areas as counterparts in other Central Semitic languages, indirect object (to), benefactive (for), possession (of), and possibly temporal duration (for/during). When it marks indirect objects, it is mostly used in connection with *dgbt* but it also occurs with other nouns outside of *zll*-inscriptions:<sup>13</sup>

[12]: *'mtyt'n bnt dd nd[r]t b'd bnt-h qn bnt ht l-s<sup>1</sup>lmn hm-d ndr l-h 'm-h f rd-h w s<sup>1</sup>d -h* JSLih 073

'mtyt'n daughter of Dd vowed on behalf of her daughter Qn daughter of Ht to S<sup>1</sup>lmn according to that which her mother vowed on her behalf, and so favour her and help her.'

<sup>11</sup>The noun *dt'* typically refers to the period of the later rains in Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015: 311; ?macdonald1992). In Sabaic *dt'* can refer to both spring (Ja 2848 ad) and spring harvest (CIH 2). In these instances, *dt'* often occurs together with *hrf* meaning either autumn or autumn harvest. In Akkadian the noun *dišu* refers to both spring and spring pasture (CAD D, 164). A noun *dš'* is also attested in Ammonite meaning 'grass' or 'hay' (DNWSI, 262).

<sup>12</sup>The use of *b'd* with pronominal clitics and nouns like *nfs<sup>1</sup>* suggests that the preposition is benefactive rather than directional. Example [8] and [11], especially, make the interpretation "in the direction of" unlikely (contra Sima 1999: 99–105).

<sup>13</sup>An extension of this function occurs in existential clauses: *d-kn l-h b-bdr* 'that which belongs to him in Bdr.' (AH 077, 3–4). Note that Farès-Drappeau 2005: 73, refers to this as possession.

Farès-Drappeau argues that *l*- can be used to express time:<sup>14</sup>

[13]: *s<sup>1</sup>nt ttn l-tlmy* (JSLih 045)  
 ‘the third year of Tlmy’

[14]: *f-hbr h-l-gbl d l-tlt s<sup>1</sup>nn* (JSLih 071)  
 ‘... for three years’

As for ex. [13], it is difficult to argue that *l* expresses duration.<sup>15</sup> The phrase as a whole refers to a period of time but this is not caused by the semantics of *l*. The phrase in JSLih 071, on the other hand, could be classified as temporal if the above reading is correct. But there are some interpretive difficulties. First, the reading is somewhat uncertain. The last lines of the inscription are considerably shorter than the preceding ones and it is not clear (from the photograph) whether this was the result of damage on the rock before or after the carving of the inscription. If something is missing between *tlt* and *s<sup>1</sup>nn*, it is far from certain that *l* has a temporal function. Secondly, Beeston has argued that the language of this inscription is closer to classical Arabic than Dadanitic.<sup>16</sup> If valid, his conclusion would be sufficient to exclude JSLih 071 from the present corpus even if *l* is temporal. Another feature of this inscription is the use of mixed letter forms, i.e. the carver used monumental script as well as less formal letter shapes.<sup>17</sup> Because of these reasons it is difficult to argue with confidence that there is evidence for a temporal *emphl* in Dadanitic inscriptions.

Lastly, it should be noted that the Dadanitic corpus only includes a few examples of a *lam actoris*.<sup>18</sup> This differentiates Dadanitic from Safaitic, Taymanitic, and Hismaic where *l/lm* is used frequently to mark authorship or possession.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.4 b

The preposition *b* has three functions in Dadanitic: to mark locative phrases (spatial and temporal), instrumental phrases, and authors.<sup>20</sup> When *b* is used as a spatial locative it primarily occurs in *ʔll*-inscriptions. As a locative, *b* often means ‘at’ but in some cases it could also mean ‘in’ (e.g. *b-h-mʂd*). One thing that differentiates the Dadanitic inscriptions from the Safaitic ones is the ab-

<sup>14</sup>Farès-Drappeau 2005: 73; Cf. Al-Jallad 2015: 145, for this function in Safaitic.

<sup>15</sup>Macdonald 2004: 520 has a similar example of *l* in a dating formula: *s<sup>1</sup>nt hms<sup>1</sup> l-hn<sup>1</sup>s<sup>1</sup> bn tlmy mlk lhyn* ‘year five of Hn<sup>1</sup>s<sup>1</sup> son of Tlmy king of Lhyn’

<sup>16</sup>Beeston et al. 2005: 107; Beeston also argued that *l-tlt s<sup>1</sup>nn* in early Arabic means ‘in the third year’ rather than ‘for three years’.

<sup>17</sup>Beeston et al. 2005: 108; Macdonald 2000: 52, classifies this inscription as Dadano-Arabic.

<sup>18</sup>*l-gwr s<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1</sup>* ‘by gwr son of s<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1</sup> (AH 265; cf. AH 295); Winnett and Reed, 1970, 123, 228–29 contains two possible examples: *z l-dln l-rm*, ‘This is for Dln by rm’ (nr. 3); and *l-šnh* ‘by Šnh’ (nr. 4). The first inscription might not be Dadanitic because *z* is not used as a demonstrative in Dadanitic. The reading of the second one does not match the tracing or the photograph so it is uncertain.

<sup>19</sup>Al-Jallad 2015: 145; Macdonald 2004: 518–519; Kootstra forthcoming.b: 46.

<sup>20</sup>Farès-Drappeau 2005: 72–73, mentions three functions: (1) instrument or means; (2) place; (3) in dating formulas. The third corresponds to the temporal locatives.

sence of unmarked locative nouns as well as the prepositions ‘*nd* and *f*’.<sup>21</sup> Given the formulaic nature of the inscriptions the absence could be circumstantial, especially since very few examples require the pragmatic meanings expressed by ‘*nd* and *f*’.<sup>22</sup>

Most prepositional objects fall into one of two categories. The first consists of phrases containing the two nouns *khl* (e.g. U 56) and *mšd* (‘sanctuary’ e.g. AH 224, 244).<sup>23</sup> For the interpretation of *khl* it is worth noting that these nouns never appear together and that they fill the same slot in the standard formula:<sup>24</sup>

[15]: *w ʔzlw b-h-mšd ʔll h-[nq] l-dġbt* (AH 197:6–7)  
 ‘And they did the ʔll of the mountain for dġbt in the sanctuary.’

[16]: *nsʔl bn whblh ʔzll h-ʔll b-khl l-dġbt bʔd d-kn l-h b-bdr f-rd-h* (AH 130)  
 ‘Nsʔl son of Whblh performed the ʔll-ceremony at Khl for Dġbt for the sake of that which belongs to him at Bdr, and so favour him.’

The distribution of *khl* and the lack of a preceding article indicates that it is a proper name, probably referring to a similar entity as *mšd*. It is even possible that *khl* was the name of a sanctuary in Dadan where ʔll-ceremonies were performed.<sup>25</sup>

The second category of objects consist of the following terms: *thfy*, *bnʔl*, *tr*, *btr*, *bdr*, *dʔmn*, *dʔm*, *blh*, *dtʔl*, *msʔhl*, *hmqhb*, *dʔdn*. All these words occur in phrases governed by *bʔd* and *ʔy* and they have so far been interpreted as place names. The absence of the article *h-* between *b* and these terms suggests that they referred to geographical locations. Another possibility is that they are calendrical terms. But the consistent placement directly after the noun/phrase governed by *bʔd* indicates that these locative phrases are part of the benefactive phrase, making a calendrical reading less likely. More importantly there are other calendrical terms found in dating formulae:

[17]: *sʔnt hmsʔl b-rʔy ʔbdn hnʔsʔl* (JSLih 072, 8–9)  
 ‘year five, at the rʔy of ʔbdn, Hnʔsʔl’

The exact meaning of the phrase *b-rʔy* is at the present unknown and the meanings of most words that follow are uncertain (*sʔlhn*, JSLih 068; *dʔbsʔmwy*, Nasif, 1988, 96; *dʔsʔln*, AH 244; *hmm*, AH 219; *ʔbdn*, JSLih 072; *[m]nʔy*, JSLih 082; *gltqsʔl*, JSLih 083; *hmt*, JSLih 085; *hrʔ*, as-Saʔid 1420/2000, 3–14, no.1). The lack of an article before *rʔy* suggests that the noun is in the construct followed by a proper noun. It has been suggested that the following words are

<sup>21</sup>Note, however, that the use of *f* to mark static location in Safaitic is rare and ‘*nd*’ is used only twice in the corpus of Safaitic texts included in *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions* (Al-Jallad 2015: 150, 152–153).

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Al-Jallad 2015: 70–71, 245–26. The Safaitic corpus also uses the accusative to indicate the goal of travel. The Dadanitic texts neither mention travel nor journeys so it is impossible to determine whether the accusative, if it was still morphologically marked in Dadanitic, was used with this function.

<sup>23</sup>The Dadanitic noun *mšd* could be a cognate of Arm *mšd/mšdʔ* meaning ‘fortress’ or ‘stronghold’ (DTTML, 823).

<sup>24</sup>The reading *b-mšd* in AH 207 could be interpreted as *b-[h]-mšd* or as elision of the article.

<sup>25</sup>Note, however, that Robin 2003: 778, suggests that *Khl* was the ancient name of Al-ʔUdhayb.

personal names. But this seems unlikely since most of them are not attested as names in the ANA and ASA corpora. Moreover, even if words such as *ʿbdn*, *hrm* and *s<sup>1</sup>lḥn* are attested personal names, it is still unlikely that *ḏ<sup>2</sup>bs<sup>1</sup>mw* is a personal name. A more likely alternative is that they are calendrical terms referring to months, festivals, or astronomical phenomena.<sup>26</sup> In either case, the use of *b-r<sup>2</sup>y* X after *s<sup>1</sup>nt* indicates that the preposition has a temporal function.<sup>27</sup>

The second function of *b* is to mark instrumental phrases:<sup>28</sup>

[18]: *b-yd wt* JSLih 106  
 ‘By the hand of Wt.’

Related to this function is the use of *b* to indicate the author of an inscription comparable to *lam auctoris*:

[19]: *b-dkrh wdd ḏ{h}k* (AH 311)<sup>29</sup>  
 ‘By Dkrh son of Wdd son of D{h}k’

To summarise, the use of *b* in Dadanitic covers the same semantic spheres as other Central Semitic cognates even though the formulaic language of the Dadanitic material makes it difficult to determine the full semantic scope.

## 2.5 qbl

The preposition *qbl* occurs three times in the Dadanitic corpus. Two attestations occur in dating formulae before the object *r<sup>2</sup>y* and one is followed by *ʿns<sup>1</sup>* in a broken context:

[20]: *{s<sup>1</sup>}nt {s<sup>2</sup>rn {w} tmn tlt ʿym qbl r<sup>2</sup>y s<sup>1</sup>lḥn* (JSLih 068; cf. AH 244)  
 ‘Year twenty-eight three days before the *r<sup>2</sup>y* of *s<sup>1</sup>lḥn*.’

[21]: *w<sup>1</sup> ʿbd s<sup>1</sup>rmr<sup>2</sup> h<sup>2</sup> nšb ---- h [l-]ʿtrḡth qbl ʿns<sup>1</sup> ----* (AH 288)  
 ‘W<sup>1</sup> the servant of S<sup>1</sup>rmr<sup>2</sup>, he set up a standing stone [to] ʿtrḡth in presence of ʿns<sup>1</sup>’

Contextual factors determine the meaning of the preposition. In the dating formula it is reasonable to assume that it has a temporal function because the formula has a similar structure as *b-r<sup>2</sup>y* X, it is preceded by a temporal expression (*{s<sup>1</sup>}nt {s<sup>2</sup>rn {w} tmn* ‘year twenty-eight’), and it modifies the temporal phrase *tlt ʿym* (‘three days’).

The second example is more difficult to interpret because of the break at the end of the line. Two interpretations of *ʿns<sup>1</sup>* are possible. It could either

<sup>26</sup>This interpretation was suggested by Kootstra and a more detailed discussion of this and other dating formulae will appear in her forthcoming article about Dadanitic dating formulae.

<sup>27</sup>Moreover, *r<sup>2</sup>y* is also preceded by *qbl* which is more narrow semantically.

<sup>28</sup>Another possible example occurs in JSLih 70 (cf. n 29 below).

<sup>29</sup>It is possible that *bdkrh* is a personal name in which case the inscription would mean ‘Bdkrh loves D{h}k’. But it is not uncommon that *bn* is left out in Dadanitic genealogies (cf. AH 157, U 038, U 078).

mean ‘people’ or it could refer to someone called  $\text{ʾns}^1$ .<sup>30</sup> In both instances the preposition would be spatial rather than temporal. However, it is also possible that the missing word(s) at the end of the line would lead to another interpretation.

## 2.6 $\text{ḥlf}$

The preposition  $\text{ḥlf}$  only occurs twice in dating formulae, both times with a temporal function:

- [22]:  $s^1nt \text{ } ^s2r \text{ } w \text{ } \underline{\text{ḥlf}} \text{ } ymn \text{ } \underline{\text{ḥlf}} \text{ } \text{ṭ}^n \text{ } \underline{\text{ḍ}} \text{ } \text{---} \text{ } l\{\text{ } \} \{b\} / [t]lmy / bn / [l]\underline{\text{ḍ}}\{n\} / ml\{k\} / \{l\}\{h\}yn$  (AH 197)  
 ‘Year thirteen, two days after the  $\text{ṭ}^n$  of  $\underline{\text{ḍ}}$  ---  $l\{\text{ } \} \{b\}$  [T]lmy son of [L] $\underline{\text{ḍ}}\{n\}$  king of  $\{L\}\{h\}yn$ ’

The damage on the second line of this year formula slightly obscures the meaning of the sentence. The term  $\text{ṭ}^n$  could be the opposite of  $r^y$ .<sup>31</sup> If so, then this formula would be similar to  $qbl \text{ } r^y$  and the missing word would be a calendrical term.

## 2.7 $m^c$

The preposition  $m^c$  (Ar.  $ma^c/ma^c$ ), which has a comitative function, is attested four times in Dadanitic:

- [23]:  $\underline{\text{ḍbn}} \text{ } ^mr \text{ } bn \text{ } mr\{d\} \text{ } ^gw \text{ } h\text{-}zll \text{ } \underline{\text{ḍh}} \text{ } l\text{-}\underline{\text{ḍgbt}} \text{ } \text{ḳ} \text{ } \text{---} \text{ } m^c \text{ } hn\text{-}^yfklt \text{ } b\text{-}bn^l \text{ } f \text{ } rd\text{-}h \text{ } w \text{ } ^yhr[t]\text{-}h \text{ } w \text{ } ^yb\text{-}h \text{ } hn^y \text{ } bn \text{ } ^mr$  (U 038)  
 ‘Ḍbn  $^mr$  son of Mrd organised this  $zll$ -ceremony for  $\underline{\text{ḍgbt}}$  on behalf of --- together with<sup>?</sup> the priestess in  $Bn^l$  and so favour him and his descen[dants] and reward him.  $Hn^y$  son of  $^mr$ ’

- [24]:  $wny \text{ } bn \text{ } fs^1y \text{ } tq\text{ṭ} \text{ } m^c \text{ } \underline{\text{ḍ}} \text{ } m^c\text{ly} \text{ } f \text{ } rd\text{y}\text{-}h \text{ } w \text{ } s^1\text{ḍ}\text{-}h \text{ } w \text{ } ^yhr\text{-}h$  (WR 16)  
 ‘Wny son of  $Fs^1y$  wrote together with the one of the family of  $M^c\text{ly}$  and so may (the deity) favour him and help him and his descendants’

The reading of  $m^c$  in the first example is slightly uncertain because of the gap in the text. As a comitative phrase, it would indicate some kind of involvement of a priestess. The  $\text{ḳ}$  immediately before the break could introduce

<sup>30</sup>According to Harding 1971: 79, the name  $\text{ʾns}^1$  is attested in Dadanitic, Safaitic, and Taymanitic. It should be noted that the  $\text{ʾ}$  of  $\text{ʾns}^1$  has an unusual shape, perhaps because of the length of the word divider in the line above.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Kootstra (forthcoming.a) for a more detailed discussion of this and similar formulae; The term  $\text{ṭ}^n$  also occurs in JSLih 077 with  $b: b\text{-}\{t\}^n \text{ } \underline{\text{ḍ}} \text{ } \text{---}$ . It has previously been interpreted as ‘at the departure of  $\underline{\text{ḍ}}$ ’. But in light of Kootstra’s work it seems more likely that it means: ‘at the  $\text{ṭ}^n$  of the turning of  $\underline{\text{ḍ}}$ ...’ The broken word at the end could be a divine epithet. The term  $\underline{\text{ḍ}}$  could mean ‘turning’ or ‘return’ (Lane, 1658). An alternative meaning could be ‘sign’ if it is a cognate of Akk  $\text{ṣ}ad\text{du}$  ( $\text{ṣ}ādu$ ) which is sometimes used together with planets, e.g. Jupiter. (CAD S: 56). The second example with  $\text{ḥlf}$  occurs in JSLih 070:  $\text{ḥls}^1 \text{ } zd\text{ḥrg} \text{ } bn \text{ } bl \text{ } \underline{\text{ḥld}} \text{ } s^1nt \text{ } ^s2m \text{ } wts^1c \text{ } ^s2r\text{ } ym \text{ } \underline{\text{ḥlf}} \text{ } fdg \text{ } wbm\text{m}^y \text{ } ^ly \text{ } mgh \text{ } mn \text{ } ḥḥls^1 \text{ } s^1h \text{ } m^l\text{h} \text{ } w \text{ } \dots$ . The meaning of the last term  $\text{fdg}$  is unclear but it could be a ‘month’ name (cf. Kootstra forthcoming.a).

a benefactive construction indicating that the priestess at Bn<sup>l</sup> (*hn-ʿfkl t b-bn<sup>l</sup>*) was a beneficiary of the *zll* ceremony. If so, it would be a variant of the standard formula with several benefactive phrases introduced by *ʿl* and coordinated with *m<sup>c</sup>*. Alternatively, the comitative phrase could indicate that the priestess was involved in the performance of the ritual. The departure from the standard formula could be a way of emphasising that the ceremony had followed the proper procedures. But it could also be a way of highlighting that the ceremony was performed by a priestess rather than a priest.

In ex. [24] the comitative function indicates that the inscription was a collaboration between Wny and someone of a family called M<sup>ʿ</sup>ly.

## 2.8 mn

The Dadanitic preposition *mn* occurs ca. 15 times. The form is always *mn*, perhaps suggesting that the *n* was followed by a vowel (*mina*), and it usually has the meaning ‘from’, indicating origin or source:

[25]: *mqh s<sup>l</sup>lh d{g}bt ʿzll b-khl ʿly m-kn l-h b-dt<sup>c</sup>l mn dt<sup>ʿ</sup> w hrf f rd-h w ʿtb-h*  
(U 059)  
‘Mqh priest of D{g}bt performed [the *zll*-ceremony] at Khl on behalf of that which belongs to him in Dt<sup>c</sup>l from the spring harvest and the autumn harvest, and so favour him and reward him.’

[26]: *llt bn ʿbny ʿzll h-zll b<sup>d</sup> d-kn l-h b-bdr mn nhl{-h} f rd-h l-dgbt* AH 077  
‘Llt son of ʿbny performed the *zll*-ceremony for the sake of that which belongs to him in Bdr from (his) the palm garden – and so favour him – to Dgbt.’

It is probably that *mn*, in these examples, precedes products that were used to perform a *zll*. The first example could then indicate that produce from both the spring and the autumn harvest was used in the ceremony. This means that Mqh either performed two separate ceremonies but only made one commemorative inscription or that he offered the fruits of both harvests at one time. The second inscription has a similar pattern but contains another object (*nhl*; palm garden). The use of these, therefore, objects suggests that various kinds of harvests could be used to perform a *zll*.<sup>32</sup>

In one instance it is possible that *mn* expresses manner meaning ‘according to’:

[27]: *tmlk bnt hd{l} ʿzlt l-dg[b]t b-khl s<sup>l</sup>tt ʿs<sup>2</sup>r mn s<sup>1</sup>nt mt ʿl-h f rd-h w ʿhrt-h*  
*ʿdb s<sup>1</sup>nt ʿs<sup>2</sup>rn tlmy [mlk l]hyn* AH 064  
‘Tmlk daughter of Hd performed [the *zll*-ceremony] for Dg[b]t at Khl sixteen (times) according to the custom of reverence on her behalf, and so favour her and her descendants forever. Year twenty of Tlmy [king of L]hyn.’

<sup>32</sup>It is also possible that the preposition has a partitive meaning here. If so, the inscription emphasises that the ritual was only performed on behalf a specific harvest or palm garden belonging to the person who performed the ritual.

This formula is only attested in this inscription. An interesting feature is the phrase *s<sup>1</sup>tt s<sup>2</sup>r* (sixteen). It is possible that Tmlk performed the ritual 16 times before she commissioned the commemorative inscription, indicating that the inscription was made as a complement to the ceremony. The interpretation of *mn* rests on the meaning of *s<sup>1</sup>nt* which could mean either ‘year’ or ‘custom’. If ‘year’, it would be desirable to connect *mn s<sup>1</sup>nt* with ‘*db s<sup>1</sup>nt*. The word ‘*db* could perhaps be a compound preposition consisting of ‘*d* and *b* meaning ‘until’. The main problem with this interpretation is the placement of the prayer between the two prepositional phrases. If the second phrase was not added as an afterthought it is simpler to view ‘*db* as a part of the prayer. If *s<sup>1</sup>nt* means ‘custom’, then *mt* could be understood as a term for a ritual/bond where one person seeks favour on someone else’s behalf.<sup>33</sup>

Lastly two additional functions should be highlighted, the use of *mn* in reason clauses and in adversative expressions, both of which are also attested in Safaitic.<sup>34</sup>

[28]: *b<sup>1</sup>ls<sup>1</sup>mn ḥrm h-qrt mn mh trq-h mr<sup>2</sup>t ḥl-bhny hn-ḥklt d----* (JSLih 064)<sup>35</sup>  
 ‘B<sup>1</sup>ls<sup>1</sup>mn protected the village because the woman of the palm tree, the priestess of ... cast a spell on it.’

[29]: *l-ntnb<sup>1</sup> bn wny hn qbr dh ḥm ḥly ymn ḥly šm mn trq(h)* (JSLih 081)  
 ‘This tomb belongs to Ntnb<sup>1</sup> son of Wny. It is protected on the north and on the south against thieves.’

Regarding ex. [28] it is possible that *mn* has an adversative function: ‘B<sup>1</sup>ls<sup>1</sup>mn protected the village against the woman...’. The exact function depends on the interpretation of *trq*. If casting a spell/charm is something positive, then *mn* is probably used to express the reason for B<sup>1</sup>ls<sup>1</sup>mn’s protection. On the other hand, if it is something negative, it is more likely that B<sup>1</sup>ls<sup>1</sup>mn is protecting the village against the sorceress, in which case *mn* has an adversative function.

To summarise, *mn*, has a similar semantic range as its cognate in other Central Semitic languages. In addition to these examples *mn* also occurs in a spatial phrase together with the preposition ‘*dky* (‘until’), discussed in the following section.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Lane, 2688, for similar meanings of *mt*.

<sup>34</sup>Ex. [28] and [29] are discussed in Farès-Drappeau 2005: 73, but she does not place them in a separate category. Both of these occur in Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015: 150–151)

<sup>35</sup>This interpretation of JSLih 064 is the product of discussions during an ANA seminar in Leiden during the spring semester 2015 with Ahmad Al-Jallad, Fokelien Kootstra, and Hekmat Dirbas. The term *qrt* is taken as a cognate of Arm *qrt* (city/town; DNWSI, 1037). For *bhn* meaning palm tree see KAZ, vol 1, 174.

## 2.9 ‘dky

The Dadanitic corpus contains one attestation of the preposition ‘*dky* (to, until):

[30]: ʾbʾlf b[n] ʿhyw kbr h-dʿt s<sup>2</sup>cʿt hns w rb-hm ʿhrmnḥr bn wḥyn kbry s<sup>2</sup>cʿt hns  
 ʿḥdḥw h-mkn w h-mqʿd dh kll-h mn mʿn h-gbl hnʿly ʿdky mʿd h-gbl hnʿs<sup>1</sup>{f}l  
 f rd-hm s<sup>1</sup>nt ḥms<sup>1</sup> b-rʿy ʿbdn hnʿs<sup>1</sup> (JSLih 072)

‘bʾlf son of Ḥyw the kabir of the adviser of the party of Hns and their lord Ḥrmnḥr son of Wḥyn the two kabirs of the party of Hns took possession of the place and also of this sitting-place, its entirety from the assembly place of the upper border until the sanctuary of the lower border and so favour them. Year five at the rʿy of ʿbdn, Hnʿs<sup>1</sup>.’

The preposition is found in the second part of a phrase that specifies the boundaries of *h-mkn w h-mqʿd* which ʾbʾlf and Ḥrmnḥr took as their possession. Semantically it has a terminative function meaning ‘until, as far as’.<sup>36</sup> The area subdued ranged from the assembly place of the northern border ‘until’ the sanctuary of the southern border.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.10 ldy

The preposition *ldy* (cf. Ar *laday-*, *ladā*) has only been identified in JSLih 077:<sup>38</sup>

[31]: whblh bn zdqny w lmy bn nfyh wdyw nfs<sup>1</sup> mr bn ḥwt m{h} ʿḥd l-hmy ḥrg  
 w h-dḥ ldy dḥ ḥmm b-dʿf w l-dḡbt ---- (JSLih 077, 1–4)

‘Whblh son of Zdqny and Lmy son of Nfyh dedicated<sup>?</sup> the funeral chamber of Mr son of Ḥwt because of an obligation he had brought upon them and (they dedicated) the spring harvest on account of a harvest he had offered at dʿf. And for dḡbt ...’

The translation of this inscription is somewhat uncertain. If it contains the preposition *ldy* it could mean ‘on account of’. Formally *ldy* could also be a G infinitive of *wdy* where the initial radical has been assimilated. More attestation of *ldy* or a similar formula are needed to determine the validity of the above interpretation.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Macdonald 2004: 519.

<sup>37</sup>Farès-Drappeau 2005: 73, gives the following translation: “depuis mʿn en haut de la montagne, jusqu’à mʿd en bas de la montagne”. There are two problems with this interpretation. First, the definite article before *gbl* indicates that it is not in the construct state, suggesting that the word that follows is an attributive adjective. Secondly, it is more likely that *gbl* means border than mountain. That leaves *mʿn* and *mʿd*. The first could be a cognate of Hb. *mʿwn* which occurs in the Dead Sea Scrolls with the meaning ‘abode’ or as a reference to the temple or a dwelling place (TWQ II, 728–30). There is also an Akkadian noun *māʿunnu* with the meaning ‘dwelling’ which, according to von Soden, is derived from Canaanite *māʿōn* (AHW II, 637). Moreover, there is also an example of *mʿwn* meaning ‘temple’ in Punic (DNWSI, 668) and Arm has the word *mʿwn* (CAL). The noun *mʿd* could be a cognate of the Hb. *mwʿd* meaning “meeting place” (HALOT, 557–58) from the root *yʿd* which is *waʿada* in Arabic (cf. also *mawʿid* and *miʿād* in Lane, 2953). Another, less likely interpretation occurs in Zwettler 2000: 227–239, where he cautiously suggests that *mʿn* could refer to Mineans and *mʿd* to the Arabic tribe Maʿaad.

<sup>38</sup>Macdonald 2004: 520.

### 3 Conclusion

This survey shows that prepositions in the Dadanitic inscriptions have similar functions as their counterparts in other Central Semitic languages. But the difference in formulae also makes it difficult to make comparisons with texts in other ANA scripts. The main difficulty concerns static location and goal of travel. Safaitic can use the accusative with the meaning ‘in’ or to indicate the goal of travel. Dadanitic locative phrases are preceded by *b* but in examples like *b-h-mšd* it could mean either ‘at’ or ‘in’. In addition, there are no clauses in the Dadanitic corpus referring to the goal of travel.

### Appendix: Glossary of terms with a new interpretation

For further discussion of these terms see the discussions in the footnotes notes in parentheses.

<i>ʿhd:</i>	claim or obligation (n. 6)
<i>bhny:</i>	a kind of palm tree (n. 35)
<i>hrg:</i>	to sue, bring a lawsuit against s.o (n. 6)
<i>mʿd:</i>	meeting place, assembly point (n. 37)
<i>mʿn:</i>	sanctuary, temple, dwelling place (n. 37)
<i>mšd:</i>	sanctuary (n. 23)
<i>mt:</i>	custom (n. 33)
<i>qrt:</i>	village (n. 35)
<i>rqy:</i>	to cast a spell ( <i>trq</i> G prefix conjugation 3fs in n. 35)

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## Sigla

### Dictionaries

CAD	Gelb & Civil (1956-)
CAL	<i>Comprehensive Aramic Lexicon</i> . <a href="http://cal1.cn.huc.edu">http://cal1.cn.huc.edu</a>
DNWSI	Hoftijzer & Jongeling (1995)
DTTML	Jastrow (1886-1990)
HALOT	Koehler et al. (1995-2000)
KAZ	Kazimirski (1860)
Lane	Lane (1863-1893)
SbD	Beeston et al. (1982)
TWQ II	Fabry et al. (2013)

### Inscriptions

AH	Dadanitic inscriptions in Abū L-Ḥasan (1997; 2002)
JSLih	Dadanitic inscriptions in Jaussen & Savignac (1909-1922)
U	Dadanitic inscriptions in Sima (1999)

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