

# Arabian Epigraphic Notes

<http://www.arabianepigraphicnotes.org>

ISSN: 2451-8875

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A Publication of the Leiden Center for the Study of Ancient Arabia  
<http://www.hum.leiden.edu/leicensaa/>

# New Epigraphica from Jordan II: three Safaitic-Greek partial bilingual inscriptions

Ahmad Al-Jallad

Leiden University

Ali al-Manaser

Oxford University

Arabian Epigraphic Notes 2 (2016): 55–66.  
Published online: 15 June 2016

**Link to this article:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/40202>

# New Epigraphica from Jordan II: three Safaitic-Greek partial bilingual inscriptions\*

Ahmad Al-Jallad (Leiden University)  
Ali al-Manaser (Oxford University)

## Abstract

This paper publishes three new Safaitic-Greek bilingual inscriptions. One of them is the first to contain a translation of the Old Arabic prose into Greek. In addition to their decipherment and translation, the paper offers a few grammatical observations on the Arabic and Greek and remarks on the growing evidence for Arabic-Greek bilingualism in the Harrah.

**Keywords:** Safaitic; Greek inscriptions; Literacy; Bilingual inscriptions; Graeco-Arabica

## 1 Introduction

This paper deciphers and comments on three new Safaitic-Greek partial bilinguals. These inscriptions add to the small corpus of such texts<sup>1</sup> and stand as important witnesses to Greek-Old Arabic bilingualism in the Syro-Jordanian Desert. In addition to this, they add to our fragmentary knowledge of the phonology of Old Arabic, as the phonetic realizations of the vowels and consonants can be deduced from the Greek spellings. The inscriptions are carved on three stones. Stones 1 and 2 were discovered during a 2004 survey in Wadi al-Ḥašād (see Fig. 4) led by Ali al-Manaser and Sabri Abbadi to collect material for al-Manaser's PhD dissertation. The texts were not included in al-Manaser's dissertation, but were kindly made available to Ahmad Al-Jallad to study in 2016. The third stone was discovered by the OCIANA Badia Survey of 2015 at Tell al-ʿAbed in northeastern Jordan, and was kindly made available to be published in the present study by M.C.A. Macdonald.

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\*This study was made possible by the support of the AHRC-funded OCIANA project at Oxford University. We thank M.C.A. Macdonald and Chiara Della Puppa for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article, and Dr. Robert Daniel for his help with matters of Greek philology.

<sup>1</sup>See Al-Jallad (2015: 293–294) for a list of examples.

2 Stone 1

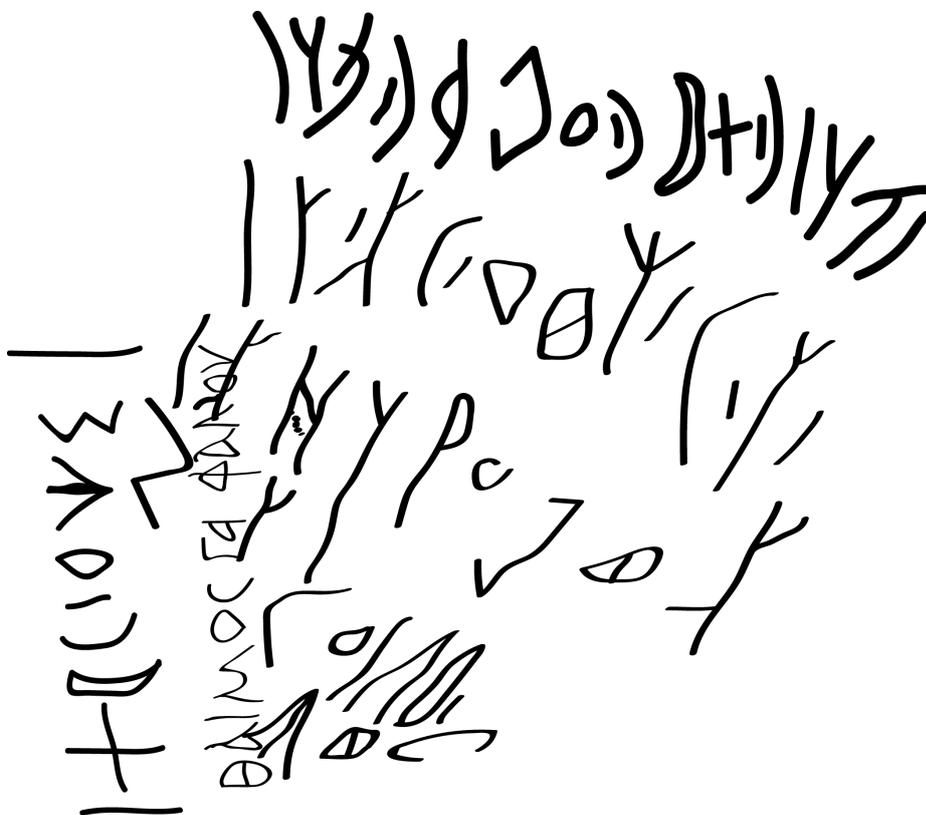


Figure 1: Stone 1, tracing by A. Al-Jallad

This stone bears three Safaitic texts and a Greek inscription. 1Saf.a and 1Grk comprise the bilingual text, while the other two Safaitic texts are independent compositions.

**1Saf.a:** *l tm bn ghfl*  
‘By Taym son of Gaḥfal’

**1Grk:** Θαιμος Γαφαλου  
‘Taimos son of Gafalos’

**Commentary** The name *tm bn ghfl* appears only in one other Safaitic inscription, as the father of the author:

**KWQ 83:** *l qd[[y]] bn tm bn ghfl w r’y hrt f h rdw s’lm*  
‘By [Qdy] son of Tm son of Ghfl and he pastured the Ḥarrah so, O Rḏw, may he be secure’

With only two names, it is impossible to know if the two Taym son of Gaḥ-fal's are one and the same. The inscription does not provide any new information about the phonology of Old Arabic. As expected, the word-internal diphthong [ai] continues to be unmarked in Safaitic orthography (Al-Jallad 2015: 37–38), while being clearly represented in the Greek spelling.<sup>2</sup>

The other two Safaitic texts on the stone read and translate as follows:

**1Saf.b:** *l khl bn tm bn 'rd bn khl*  
 'By Khl son of Tm son of 'rd son of Khl'

**1Saf.c:** *l hn' bn 'wdn bn hn' w r'y h-d'n {f} h b'ls'mn rwḥ*  
 'By Hn' son of 'wdn son of Hn' and he pastured the sheep {so},  
 O B'ls'mn, send the winds!'

### 3 Stone 2

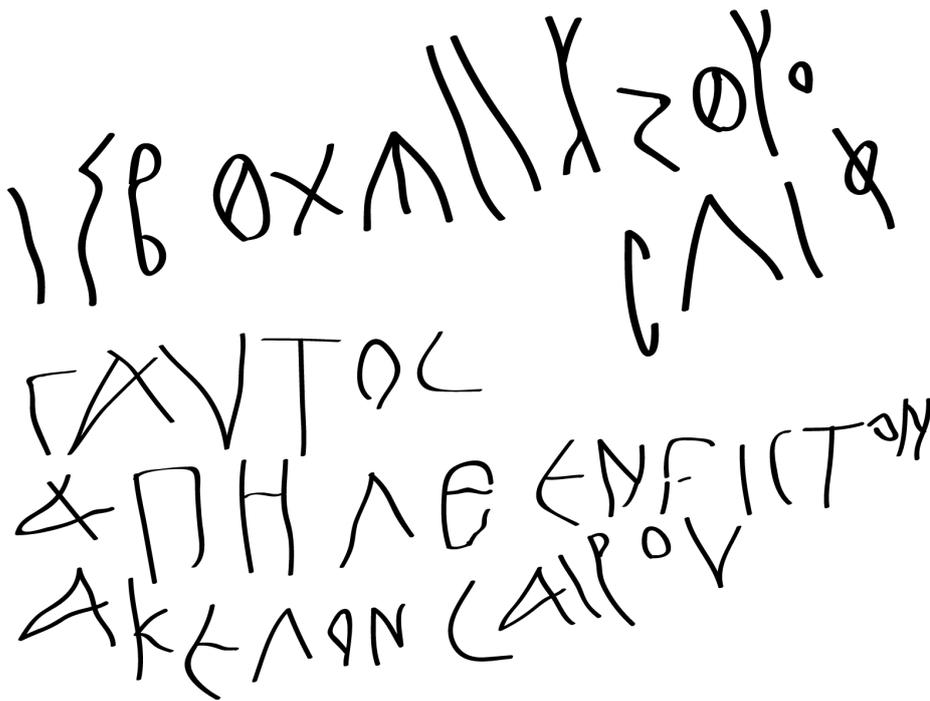


Figure 2: Stone 2, tracing by A. Al-Jallad

<sup>2</sup>While it has been assumed that the digraph αι had come to be pronounced as [e] in the Koiné, we cannot be sure that this was the case in the Greek of the Near East. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, the fact that this digraph is not used to represent the plain [e] vowel in transcriptions suggests that it was an attempt by scribes to approximate a diphthong in Old Arabic (see Al-Jallad forthcoming: §4.2.4). As we shall see below, the fact that the diphthong \*aw was represented consistently with αυ would further suggest that the diphthongs did not collapse.

The second stone bears an atypical, non-formulaic Safaitic inscription, accompanied by a unique Greek text. The exact meaning of the Safaitic is unclear, and the Greek, unlike all of the other known bilingual texts, is not simply a rendition of the names but rather an attempt to translate the Old Arabic into Greek language. The possible limitations of the writer's Greek, however, complicate this, and raise more questions about the meaning of both texts than provide answers. Let us begin with the Safaitic.

**2Saf:** *l ḡt w thll ʾfwh ʿql sʿr*  
 ‘By Ḡawṭ and he departed (this place) into the foremost part of the protected area of Sayr.’

The text opens in the typical manner with the *lam auctoris* and a common personal name, *ḡt*, the vocalization of which is /ḡawṭ/, based on the Greek portion. Every term in the narrative that follows is a *hapax legomenon*. The verb is *thll*, which would appear to be a t-stem (probably the tD or tG) of the common verb *hll*. The latter generally means “to camp” in the Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2015: 322).<sup>3</sup> The tD-stem in Classical Arabic, *taḥallala*, covers the semantic range of being broken down, e.g. “it passed away by becoming dissolved”; “it became reduced by analysis to it”. The meaning of going away or exiting is attested, however, in “it (a disease) went away by degrees” or “he became *ḥalāl*, meaning he finished his prayer” (Lane 621–622). The Gt is not attested in Classical Arabic. Looking at the Greek portion of this inscription, the corresponding verb is ἀπῆλθεν “he went away”, suggesting in fact that the Safaitic *thll* corresponds closest in meaning to the reduplicated stem of Classical Arabic, *taḥalḥala* ‘an *makānīhī* ‘he removed from his place’ ... ‘and went away’ (Lane 621a).

The crux of the entire text is the meaning of the word ʿql. If we take *thll* as leaving a place, then ʾfwh ʿql sʿr must be understood as some sort of toponym or description of a location. In this context, ʾfwh does carry the meaning of “the foremost part” of an area if we connect it to Classical Arabic ʾafwāh (Lane 2465c),<sup>4</sup> namely, the part that one enters into an area through vs. the ʾarḡul, which is the point of departure from an area. While Classical Arabic uses the preposition *fī* before this term, this preposition is rather rare in Safaitic; location and goal of travel are usually indicated by the accusative. Finally, if we take literally the equation of ʾfwh with the term εἰς “into” in the Greek section, then it may be the case that the former should be taken as a preposition, the plural of the rare *f* \*/pī/, Classical Arabic *fī* (Al-Jallad 2015: 150).<sup>5</sup> Plural bifurms of prepositions of nominal origin are attested, e.g. Levantine Arabic *bayn* and *baynāt* or Hebrew *bēn* and *bēnôt*, but these usually occur with plural pronominal suffixes (Waltke & O’Conner 1990: 199).

The term ʿql has not yet appeared in the inscriptions with a clear toponymic signification. The word is attested, as far as I know, only twice, and on both occasions there are difficulties in connecting the term with the present attestation. The first is in JaS 52, where the author states *hyt l- ʿqlt* ‘he journeyed

<sup>3</sup>Also with the same meaning in Sabaic (Beeston et al. 1982: 67). Note that the author has carved the *t* as an *X* rather than a cross, which is its typical shape in Safaitic.

<sup>4</sup>*daḥalū fī ʾafwāhī l-baladi wa ḥaraḡū min ʾarḡulihī* (Lane 2465c)

<sup>5</sup>ʾafwāh is of course one of the plurals of the word “mouth”, *fam*, which itself is the source of the preposition *fī*.

quickly to ‘qlt’. The second, Is.H 744, states: *l ʾwsʿd bn ytʿ h- ʿql{l}*. If ‘ql is correctly read, then the syntax would indicate that it is an area or an installation (Al-Jallad 2015: 201–202). Thus, both contexts prefer the interpretation of ‘ql(t) as a toponym, although its exact meaning cannot be determined through the texts themselves. In search of toponyms in the Classical Arabic lexica, one finds the term *maʿqilun* “a place to which one betakes himself for refuge, protection, preservation, covert, or lodging”; also *maʿāqilu l-ʾarḍi* “fortresses of the land” (Lane 2116a–b) or *ʿaqūl/ʿaqūl* (Lane 2115c–2116a) “a place of bending”, and to “a land in which one will not find the right way, because of its many winding places”. The root gives rise to some suitable terms in Gəʿəz as well, e.g. *ʿaql* ‘lake, pool’; *məʿqāl* ‘pool, pond, cistern, reservoir’ (Leslau 1987: 67b).

Nevertheless, the Safaitic term ‘ql – vocalized as /ʿāqel/ or /ʿaqel/ based on the Greek portion – does not match perfectly any of the relevant etyma in Classical Arabic or Gəʿəz. Therefore, there is no *a priori* reason that the term carries an identical meaning to the aforementioned terms. The basic sense of the root ‘ql refers to “binding”, which gives rise to meanings having to do with protection or fortification. It is possible that /ʿāqel/ is an equivalent of *ḥmy* \*/ḥemay/, “a protected area of pasturage” (Al-Jallad 2015: 322) or some other area that is placed under tribal protection. I would therefore suggest the loose translation of ‘ql as “protected area”, either of pasturage or to a place of water such as a lake or pool. The fact that this was such a culturally specific term may have prevented the author from finding a suitable translation in Greek, and so he resorted to simply transcribing the word.<sup>6</sup> Like ‘ql, the term *sʿr* is simply transliterated in the Greek, and so it is likely a proper name, referring to the group who owned or managed this protected area. Curiously, the *r* is carved facing the beginning of the boustrophedon line. While this is common in Thamudic B, it is rare in Safaitic. According to this sequence of interpretation, we may suggest the following translation: ‘By Ġawṭ and he departed (this place) into the foremost part of the protected area of Sayr.’

**2Grk:** Γαυτος ἀπῆλθεν [ε]ῖς τὸν Ἀκελον Σαιρου  
‘Gawtos departed into the Akel of Sayr’

Let us begin with the personal name. Greek Γαυτος corresponds to the Safaitic *ḡt*, confirming two important issues in the phonetics behind transcriptions and Safaitic orthography. First, it is clear – beyond any doubt – that Safaitic preserved the diphthongs in pronunciation word internally but did not indicate them in writing. While the diphthong \*ay has appeared in other bilingual texts, always represented with αι, one could always doubt the realization of this sequence in the Greek of this period, and suggest that it in fact stood for /ē/ in transcription. However, Greek αυ, as I have argued before, never came to represent /ō/, and so its usage here can only signify that the diphthong \*aw obtained and was realized as [au]. Safaitic orthography therefore treated diphthongs as long vowels [ai] and [au] rather than a sequence of a short vowel and a consonantal glide [ay] and [aw], as other Semitic scripts seem to have.

<sup>6</sup>It is certainly tempting to see here a connection with Proto-Semitic \**ḥaqlu*, Arabic and Aramaic *ḥaq(e)l*, ‘a field’. The word is transcribed in the Acts 1:18–19 as Akel, in the place name Ἀκελδαμάχ in the Greek New Testament. However, even if we consider the term a loan, it is difficult to explain the rendering of Aramaic *ḥ* with Safaitic ʿ. I thank Benjamin Suchard for bringing this verse to my attention.

Second, it has been hypothesized in the past that the use of Tau to represent etymological \*ṭ was an indication that the latter had merged with the stop [t] (Sartre 1985: 192–193). The Safaitic spelling, however, indicates that the interdental obtained, suggesting that Tau was used to approximate ṭ [θ], probably on the basis that both were not aspirated.

The verb following is ἀπῆλθεν, the 3rd singular aorist indicative, meaning “he went away, departed from”. This, as I have suggested above, must correspond to Safaitic *ṭhl*. The rest of the inscription reveals an awareness of Greek grammar beyond the usual Hellenization of personal names. On the photograph available to me, the last part of the second line reads most easily as γιστον. This would not seem to render anything meaningful. The final τόν is probably the definite article, and so that leaves us with γις. It is possible, although not immediately recognizable on the photograph, that γις actually renders εἰς “into”, which would correspond very nicely with *ʿfwh*, “the point of entry into a place”. Given the equivalence between the two, it would seem, if the resemblance between the Epsilon and Gamma is not the result of a flaw on the photograph, that the author simply erred. The following two nouns are Hellenized transcriptions of the Old Arabic: τόν ἀκελον, the accusative Hellenized form of *ʿql*, and Σαιρου, the genitive of Safaitic *sʿr*. This indicates that *ʿql* and *sʿr* in the Safaitic form a genitive construction, and the spelling out of both in Greek supports the idea that they are either proper nouns or too culturally specific to translate.

#### 4 Stone 3

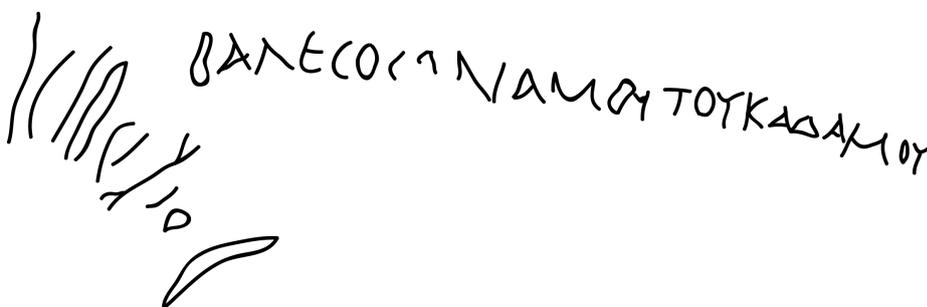


Figure 3: Stone 3, tracing by A. Al-Jallad

This one consists of only names, but unlike the other known bilingual texts, the Greek portion is longer than the Safaitic.

**3Saf:** *l bls<sup>1</sup> bn ʿnʿm*  
‘By Bls<sup>1</sup> son of ʿnʿm.’

**3Grk:** Βαλεσος Αναμου του Καδαμου  
‘Balesos son of Anamos of Kadamos.’

The extra component in the Greek seems to refer to the author's grandfather, as in the bilingual inscription WH 1860 + Greek 2:

*l whblh bn zn'l bn whblh*  
 Ουαβαλλας Ταννηλου του [] Ουαβαλλου

If this interpretation is correct, then the same man composed two other inscriptions, WH 27 and SIJ 159, where in both he gives the name of his grandfather as *qdm*.

## 5 Concluding remarks

All of the newly discovered bilinguals further confirm the phonological reconstruction of Safaitic as described in (Al-Jallad 2015: 39–47). The Greek of 2Grk suggests that bilingual authors had various commands of the language. This writer's Greek is not as developed as the author of A2 (Al-Jallad & al Manaser 2015), but appears to be more capable than the author of A1 (*ibid.*), if the interpretation that the prose component of that inscription was composed in Arabic because the author had exhausted his knowledge of Greek is correct. It may be significant that Grk1 and Grk2 are incised in a much thinner manner than their Safaitic counterparts, suggesting perhaps that their authors were used to writing Greek with a pen. This, combined with the fact that all three inscriptions are composed in the book hand, may suggest that these authors acquired Greek through a more deliberate form of education, rather than casually picking it up from examples of Greek epigraphy that abound in the vicinity of the settled areas.

Finally, 3Saf-3Grk encourages caution when it comes to using the inscriptional evidence at face value for deducing things like the extent of cultural contact between the settle peoples and nomads.<sup>7</sup> Were it not for its chance discovery, there would be nothing in the two other texts composed by the same man to suggest that he knew some Greek or that he would have had contact with the settled world. If the composition of Safaitic inscriptions belonged to a tradition of rock art, which also included visual carvings as well, then the rarity of Greek epigraphy in the desert would not necessarily reflect an absence of knowledge of the language or script, but rather the fact that Greek did have a position in the rock art tradition of the nomads. Of course, this is not to say that every man in the desert knew Greek, but that the example of 3Saf-3Grk simply shows that one cannot say for sure who did based on the kinds of texts they produced.

Address for Correspondence: a.m.al-jallad@hum.leidenuniv.nl

<sup>7</sup>For an excellent treatment of the evidence for contact between the nomads and neighboring settled peoples, see Macdonald 2009 II; 2014.

## Figures



Figure 4: Location of Wadi al-Hashad and Tell al-ʿAbed, map by Ali al-Manaser, source: Google Earth



Figure 5: Stone 1, photo by Ali al-Manaser



Figure 6: Stone 1, photo by Ali al-Manaser

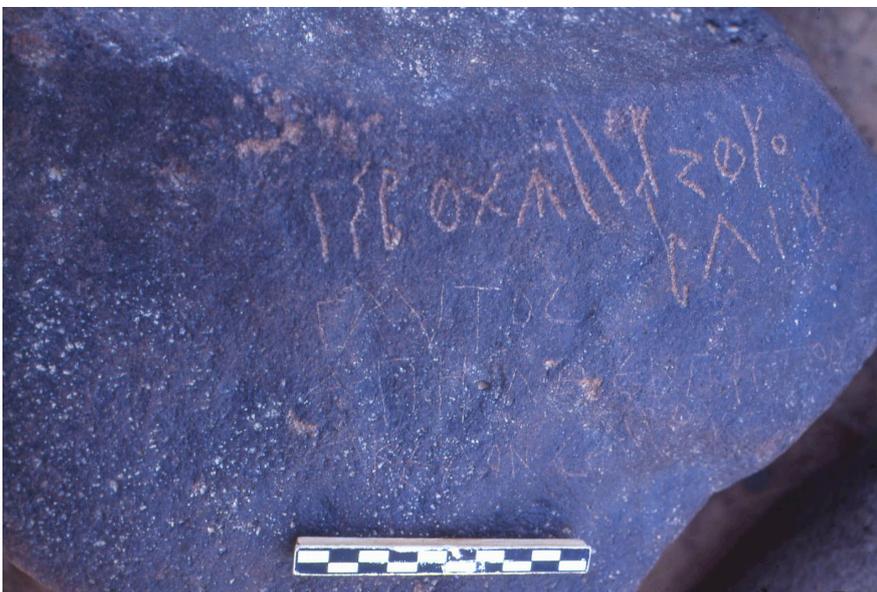


Figure 7: Stone 2, photo by Ali al-Manaser



Figure 8: Stone 3, photo by Michael Macdonald



Figure 9: Stone 3, photo by Michael Macdonald

## Sigla

Is.H	Unpublished inscriptions recorded by the SESP 1995 survey at Site no. 40, the hill south of the well at al-ʿĪsāwī. (to appear on OCIANA).
JaS	Unpublished inscriptions recorded by the SESP 1995 at Jabal Says (to appear on OCIANA).
KWQ	Unpublished Safaitic inscriptions from Wadi Qattafi recorded by G.M.H. King.
SIJ	Safaitic Inscriptions in Winnett 1957.
WH	Safaitic Inscriptions in Winnett & Harding 1978.

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