Nabataean inscriptions from south-west of Taymāʾ, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This group of inscriptions was found at several sites southwest of Taymāʾ, on the way to Al-ʿUlā. They were discovered by Dr Bader al-Faqayr, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, King Saud University during his geographical survey of the province, in the spring of 2008. The study of these fifteen inscriptions provides twenty-three personal names; four of them occur for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions. They provided us with thirteen lexical items, two of which are attested for the second time in Nabataean inscriptions: *gʾyʾ* 'the tailor' and *yhwdy* 'the Jew'.

1 Introduction

This group of inscriptions was found at several sites southwest of Taymāʾ, which is located in northwestern Saudi Arabia, mainly southwest of Taymāʾ, on the way to Al-ʿUlā. They were discovered by Dr Bader al-Faqayr, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, King Saud University

during his geographical survey of the province, in the spring of 2008. These fifteen inscriptions furnish us with the following information:

1. They include twenty-three personal names, which can be classified into the following categories: 13 one-word names, 3 compound names, 3 hypocoristic names, 2 Greek names, 1 Hebrew name, and 1 unexplained name.

2. Among the one-word names, the *faʿal* form is the most common, (inscriptions nos. 4, 6, 10, 12). There are two names of the *faʿil* form: *ḥryšw* (1:1) and *ʿmyrw* (3); two names of the *mfʿl* form: *mslmw* (15:1) and *mtrw* (7), as well as two names of the *faʿalān* form: *sysn* (8) and *ḥyrn* (14). There is one example of each of the following two forms: the *faʿilah* form: *wšykt* (9), and the *ʾafʿal* form: *ʾslmw* (3:1).

3. The compound names attest two theophoric elements: *ʾl* in *rbʾl* 'ʾl is great' (9) and *rbybʾl* 'slave of ʾl' (12) and *ʿl* in *ʿlyšw* '(ʿl) the supreme, distorted' (2:1–2).

4. The hypocoristic names are *tymw* 'servant' [+ the name of deity] (1:1, 2, 5) and *ʿbdʾ* 'servant/slave' [+ the name of deity] (14).

5. There are only two names that do not have a Semitic etymology: *tqys* (13) and *ʾkyrs* (5). These are either Greek or Latin names. In addition, *ywsf* derives from Hebrew.

6. Four of the names in this group of inscriptions are new and do not occur in the previously published Nabataean inscriptions, and these are: *ʾkyrs* (5), *ʿlyšw* (2:1–2), *mtrw* (7), *sysn* (8), *tẖʾ* (13) and *tqys* (11).

7. One of the writers of these commemorative inscriptions gave his profession, *gʾyʾ* 'the tailor' (1:1), while *tqys* referred to himself as a Jew (11).

8. There are several different ways in which the inscriptions begin:

   (a) with the passive participle *dkyr* 'be remembered' (9, 15:1);

   (b) with a personal name (3, 8, 11, 12);

   (c) with the singular noun *šlm* 'greetings' (1:1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14); and

(d) with the interjection *bly* 'yes, indeed' (4).

9. The longest inscriptions are numbers 1, 2, 3, and 15. The first one consists of three lines, while the other three consist of two lines. The remaining fifteen contain only one line.

10. This group of inscriptions provided us with thirteen lexical items and articles. Two of them are reported for the second time: *gʾyʾ* 'the tailor' (1:1) and *yhwdyʾ* 'the Jew' (11).

11. Some of these inscriptions were nicely and carefully carved (4, 6, 15), others were clearly written (1, 2, 8, 9, 13, 14). Some either suffered from weathering (12) or were carelessly written (3, 7, 11), making it difficult to give the correct reading. Thus, the condition of these inscriptions can be characterized as elegant (three inscriptions), good (six inscriptions), carelessly written (five inscriptions) or weathered (one inscription).

12. Some of these inscriptions were accompanied by a number of drawing of animals (camels) and birds (ostriches), some of which were carefully drawn such as the ostrich in inscription no. 5.

13. This collection of inscriptions adds fifteen new texts to the already recorded 234 inscriptions from the nineteen sites in the province (Alhaiti 2016; al-Theeb 2014), and they are geographically distributed as follows:

no	site	texts
1	Gabalt al-šarqiyyah	4
2	Ǧunūb ġarb Taymāʾ	17
3	al-Qaṭyiʿyah	7
4	Haswat ʾbamaġyar	2
5	Saramadāʾ	88
6	al-Habw al-ġarbī	2
6	Gabū hūlah	1
7	Qablat Saramadāʾ	2

no	site	texts
8	Šamāl Barad	2
9	Gabū Saramadāʾ	57
10	Mašāšharb	2
11	Gabū al-hūiyrah	44
12	al-Ṣnāʿyah	1
13	al-Būayb al- ṣanāʿi	1
14	ʿaradh	4
15	Gabū Qliyb Harān	1
16	Gabū hūlah	1
17	South of Taymāʾ	81
18	Al-Maqāyyal	5
19	ʾbraq bin Saramadāʾ al-ġarbī	3

2   The inscriptions

2.1   Inscription no. 1

Transliteration

šlm
tymw gʾyʾ br ḥryšw
b-ṭb mn qdm dwšrʾ

Translation

'Greetings of *tymw* the tailor son of *ḥryšw*, before (the deity) *dwšr*"

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Commentary

This inscription consists of three lines. Its importance is twofold: the engraver gave his occupation, *gʾyʾ* 'the tailor', and it contains a religious invocation to the deity Dushara. For one reason or another, the writer, despite his good knowledge of Nabataean writing, divided the letters of the second personal name between the second and third lines, putting the two letters *š* and *w* in the third line. He also wrote the last word, which is the name of the god *dwšrʾ*, Dushara, in the first line.

šlm: Noun, singular, masculine, construct, found in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions. For further comparisons see al-Theeb (2014: 379–381).

tymw: A hypocoristic name, 'servant + (name of a deity)', or a simple personal name 'servant'. It has been found in Nabataean (Negev 1991: 68; al-Theeb 2011: no. 5, 18:1), International (Imperial) Aramaic (al-Theeb 2007: 4b:1–2), and Palmyrene (Stark 1971: 115). It occurs as *tym* in Minaic (al-Said 1995: 76–77), Sabaic (e.g. Res463:2), and Thamudic inscriptions (Shatnawi 2002: 662), and in Safaitic as *tm* (al-Khrayshah 2002: no. 297), and is well known in Classical Arabic; for further discussion and parallels, see al-Theeb (2010: 124–125).

gʾyʾ: A noun, masculine, singular, emphatic, 'the tailor'. It appears for the second time in Nabataean (al-Theeb 1993: no. 15 = al-Theeb 2010: no. 851); the word is previously attested in a text found in the Tabūk region. One can compare it with the Arabic root *gʾy* 'he sewed it up and repaired it' (Ibn Manẓūr 1955–1956: vol. 14, 127). Therefore, we suggest the meaning 'the tailor'.

ḥryšw: A hypocoristic name or a one-word name in the *faʿīl* pattern, found several times in Nabataean (Cantineau 1978: 99), Hatran (Abbadi 1983: 113), and Palmyrene inscriptions (Stark 1971: 23). For more parallels see al-Theeb (2010: 908–909); Huffmon (1965: 205); Benz (1972: 318).

b-ṭb: A noun (*ṭb*) in the masculine singular absolute preceded by the preposition *b-*, meaning 'for good, well'. It is a common component of graffiti formulae (see al-Theeb 2014: 173).

qdm: A compound preposition with *mn* (al-Theeb 2014: 244–246), attested in Nabataean (al-Theeb 2010: 340–341) and in other Semitic languages, cf. Ugaritic (Gordon 1965: 476) and Phoenician (Tomback 1978: 284–285). For more discussion and parallels, see al-Theeb (2014: 341). The word is

followed by the Nabataean deity *dwšr'*, who is associated with the Sharah mountains in southern Jordan (Healey 1993: 36).

2.2 Inscription no. 2

Transliteration

šlm tymw br 'l
yšw b-ṭb

Translation

'Greetings to *Tymw* son of *'lyšw* for good'

Commentary

The reading of this memorial inscription is almost certain, with the exception of the word *br* 'son', and the second personal name, the first two letters of which were written on the first line, while the other three letters were written in the second line, dividing the word into two parts. This practice is rare in the Nabataean inscriptions.

'lyšw: This name is attested, as far as we know, for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions. It is most likely a simple personal name of the *fa'īl* pattern, related to the word *'alūš*, which means 'wolf' in Classical Arabic.

2.3 Inscription no. 3

Transliteration

'šlmw br 'myrw
šlm

Translation

'Greetings to *'šlmw* son of *'myrw*'

Commentary

The reading is almost certain, but the first name could also be taken as *ʾšlfw*, cf. *slfw*, already attested in Nabataean (Negev 1991: 65), and *slf* in Safaitic (Winnett & Harding 1978: nos. 2737, 2994), and *slfm* attested in Sabaic (Harding 1971: 325).

ʾšlmw is a one-word name, common in Nabataean (Cantineau 1978: 150; Negev 1991: 15) and other Semitic inscriptions. For more parallels see al-Theeb (2010: 258–259).

ʿmyrw: a simple personal name in the *faʿīl* pattern, found in this form only twice in Nabataean (Negev 1991: 52; al-Theeb 2010: no. 658).

2.4 Inscription no. 4

Transliteration

bly šlm rfdw qynʾ

Translation

'Yea, greetings to *rfdw* the blacksmith (the slave)'

Commentary

This inscription is clearly and beautifully written. The letters of the first two words are joined, reflecting regular practice in cursive Nabataean writing.

bly: An interjection previously attested in Nabataean (al-Theeb 2014: 76), as well as in Hatran (Vattioni 1981: 99).

rfdw: A one-word name meaning 'gift', attested several times in Nabataean (Negev 1991: 61) and other Semitic inscriptions including Thamudic (King 1990: 504; al-Theeb 1999: no. 36; Shatnawi 2002: 697), Dadanitic (Lihyanite; Caskel 1954) and Safaitic (Ababneh 2005: no. 83). The name is cognate with *rfdm*, attested in Sabaic (Harding 1971: 284). For more discussion and parallels, see al-Theeb (1999: 53).

qynʾ: Noun, singular, masculine, emphatic, reported in Nabataean (al-Theeb 2010: nos. 543:3, 866). It is known in Thamudic (Van den Branden

1956: Ph160k, p. 53), Lihyanite and Syriac (Costaz 1963: 318). For more discussion and parallels, see al-Theeb (2014: 345).

2.5   Inscription no. 5

Transliteration

šlm ᾿kyrs br tym(w)

Translation

'Greeting of *᾿kyrs* son of *tymw*'

Commentary

The text was incised on a rocky surface near Lihyanite graffiti as well as images of animals (camels, birds, ostriches), some of which were nicely drawn. The name *᾿kyrys*, which might correspond to a Greek or Latin name, indicates the strong relationship between the Nabataean tribes and the Romans and Greeks.

    ᾿kyrs: Appears for the first time, a shorter *kyrys* is known in Nabataean inscriptions (Negev 1991: 35). *᾿krs* is found in Thamudic (Harding 1971: 61) and appears as *krs* in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 498) and Sabaic (Res4650:3).

2.6   Inscription no. 6

Transliteration

šlm š῾dw

Translation

'Greeting of *š῾dw*'

Commentary

This short inscription consisting of two words is elegantly carved with shapes that are easily made out. Thus, the proposed reading shown above is certain.

s'dw is a simple personal name with the meaning 'lucky, happy'. It could also be a hypocoristic name, 'luck, happiness [+ name of deity]'. The name is a common in Semitic inscriptions, and is attested in Nabataean (Cantineau 1978: 152; Negev 1991: 66; al-Theeb 2010: 1132), Palmyrene (Stark 1971: 115) and Hatran inscriptions (Abbadi 1983: 172). *s'd* appears in other Semitic inscriptions. For more discussion and parallels, see al-Theeb (2010: 126); al-Said (1995: 119); King (1990: 509–510).

2.7   Inscription no. 7 (Alhaiti 2016: no. 90)

Transliteration

šlm mtrw l-'lm

Translation

'Greeting of *mtrw*, for ever'

Commentary

Written above inscriptions nos. 8 and 9. The writer (*mtrw*) rewrote the singular, masculine, construct noun *šlm*, because of cracks in the rock, which hindered the completion of his inscription. So he changed his place and rewrote his inscription.

mtrw: A simple personal name in the *mf'l* pattern, and derived from *ṯr'*, which means 'to be wealthy'. It is a prayer to make him rich. Although it registered here for the first time in Nabataean, it appears as *mṯr* in Thamudic and Safaitic inscriptions (Harding 1971: 527).

l'lm: A compound word of the preposition *l*, and the masculine, singular, absolute noun *'lm*, which appears frequently in Nabataean inscriptions, as well as a number of other Semitic languages. For more information, see al-Theeb (2014: 301–303).

2.8 Inscription no. 8 (Alhaiti 2016: no. 91)

Transliteration

sysn šlm

Translation

'Greeting of *sysn*'

Commentary

This short graffito consists of two words, *šlm* (see inscription no. 1) and the simple personal name, *sysn*, in the *faʿalān* form of the Arabic word *sws* (Ibn Manẓūr 1955–1956: s.v.), which means 'leader'. It appears in Nabataean here for the first time.

2.9 Inscription no. 9 (Alhaiti 2016: no. 92)

Transliteration

dkyr rb᾿l br wšykt

Translation

'Remembrance of *rb᾿l* son of *wšykt*'

Commentary

This inscription was carved below the previous inscription, no. 7, to the left of inscription no. 8. Its reading is clear.

dkyr: Noun, singular, masculine, construct, meaning 'remembrance of'. It is widely reported in the Nabataean inscriptions and a number of other Semitic inscriptions. For more information and parallels, see al-Theeb (2014: 119–123).

rb᾿l: A compound name meaning '᾿l is great' or 'the Lord is ᾿l'. It is known not only in Nabataean (Negev 1991: 59; al-Theeb 2010: 1127), but in other Semitic inscriptions. For more parallels see al-Theeb (2010: 101–102).

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wšykt: a simple personal name in the *faʿilat* form, known in other Nabataean inscriptions (Cantineau 1978: 90; Negev 1991: 25).

2.10   Inscription no. 10 (Alhaiti 2016: no. 93)

Transliteration

šlm rynw br nšrw

Translation

'Greeting of *rynw* son of *nšrw*'

Commentary

On this rock we find three Nabataean inscriptions and one Thamudic text.

rynw: This is a simple personal name recorded in Nabataean (al-Theeb 2010: no. 413); for more discussion and parallels, see al-Theeb (2010: 474–475). The name could also be read as *dynw* 'judge', which is also known in Nabataean (Cantineau 1978: 82; Negev 1991: 20). Similar derivations such as *dynʾ* and *dyny* are found in Palmyrene and Syriac (Stark 1971: 83; al-Jadir 1983: 369).

nšrw: a simple personal name in the *faʿl* form, meaning 'eagle', known in other Semitic inscriptions such as Ugaritic (Gordon 1965: 448), Biblical sources (Brown et al. 1906: 676; Holladay 1988: 249), Syriac (Costaz 1963: 215) and Classical Ethiopic (Leslau 1987: 303). The name is attested in Nabataean (al-Theeb 2010: no. 836). Names derived from the same root are found in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 586–587), Thamudic (King 1990: 554; Shatnawi 2002: 745), Lihyanite (Jaussen & Savignac 1909–1922: no. Lih 168), Palmyrene (Stark 1971: 100), and Hatran inscriptions (Abbadi 1983: 130). For more parallels see al-Theeb (2010: 978–979).

2.11   Inscription no. 11 (Alhaiti 2016: no. 94)

Transliteration

tqys br ywsf yhwdyʾ

Translation

'*tqys* son of *ywsf* the Jew'

Commentary

The text was engraved between inscriptions no. 10 and 12. Although it was carelessly carved, the reading shown above is certain. The content of this small inscription is interesting as the engraver refers to himself as *yhwdy'* 'the Jew', which is recorded for the second time in Nabataean (al-Theeb 2014: 183–184). Again due to the state of the rock *tqys* was forced to write the last two letters of *yhwdy'*, *y* and *'*, above the inscription.[1]

tqys: A Greek or Latin name. It appears here for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions.

ywsf: A simple personal name in the *yaf'il* pattern, derived from the Hebrew root *ysp*. For more parallels see al-Theeb (2014: 192–193). The name in this form is attested in Nabataean (Cantineau 1978: 104; Negev 1991: 33; al-Theeb 2010: no. 556:1), Biblical sources (Brown et al. 1906: 415), Syriac (Costaz 1963: 409), Phoenician (Benz 1972: 323), Sabaic (Harding 1971: 670) and Safaitic (Oxtoby 1968: 330).

yhwdy': A noun, masculine, singular, emphatic, appears once in Nabataean (Healey 1993: no. 4 = al-Theeb 2010: no. 193:2), and also in the Palestinian Aramaic dialect (Fitzmyer & Harrington 1978: 2:104, 40:7). The spread of Judaism in the Arabian Peninsula goes back to Nabonidus' time in the 6th century BC when he invaded the area. The Jews were part of his army (Gadd 1958: 57). However, some believe that the Jewish presence in the region dates back to the period of Nebuchadnezzar (al-Theeb 2010: 327).

2.12   Inscription no. 12 (Alhaiti 2016: no. 95)

Transliteration

ḫlfw br rbyb'l šlm

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[1]Alhaiti considered these two words a personal name, reading *yrsf twr* (2016: no. 95), which is not an acceptable reading.

Translation

'Greeting of *ḫlfw* son of *rbybʾl*'

Commentary

This inscription is badly written and weathered.

ḫlfw: A simple personal name in the *faʿal* pattern, recorded in other Nabataean (Negev 1991: 29; al-Theeb 2010: no. 87), Safaitic (Abbadi 2006: 130), and Thamudic inscriptions (al-Theeb 1999: nos. 5, 12). For more parallels see al-Theeb (2003: 60; 2010: 125).

rbybʾl: a compound name of two elements, *rbyb* "gifted, owned", and *ʾl*, meaning 'gifted to *ʾl*, owned by *ʾl*'. It is found only in Nabataean inscriptions (Cantineau 1978: 83; al-Theeb 2010: 1127).

2.13   Inscription no. 13

Although the letters of this small inscription were elegantly carved, the reading of the second word is uncertain. It is engraved inside an oval frame, a practice that is rare in Nabataean, but found twice in the study area (al-Theeb 2010: nos. 669, 670). This name may read as: *tgyʾ*, *thʾ*, etc. All of these names are attested in Nabataean for the first time. *thy*, a similar name, is found in a Minaic inscription (al-Said 1995: 76). Thus it may read as 'greeting of [Personal Name]'.

2.14   Inscription no. 14

Transliteration

šlm ʿbdʾ br ḥyrn

Translation

'Greeting of *ʿbdʾ* son of *ḥyrn*'

Commentary

The second name could be read as *ḥywn*, which appears in Minaic (al-Said 1995: 97) and Qatabanic inscriptions (Hayajneh 1998: 127).

ḥyrn is a simple personal name in the *faʿalān* pattern; it could also be read as *ḥyrw* (for more parallels see al-Theeb 2010: 610) or *ḥyrn* which is known in other Nabataean inscriptions as *ḥyrw* (Negev 1991: 26). The name could be compared with the Palmyrene and Safaitic *ḥyrʾ* and *ḥyr,* respectively (Stark 1971: 20; Harding 1971: 210).

ʿbdʾ: A hypocoristic meaning 'servant' [+ the name of deity], attested in Nabataean inscriptions (al-Theeb 2010: nos. 227:1, 272, 588:1), and in Palmyrene (Stark 1971: 102), Aramaic (Maraqten 1988: 191), Biblical sources (Brown et al. 1906: 715), Safaitic (Harding 1971: 397; Clark 1979: 732; al-Khrayshah 2002: no. 322). It could also reflect a simple personal name in the *faʿal* pattern in the emphatic state, meaning 'the servant'.

2.15 Inscription no. 15

Transliteration

dkyr mšlmw
br k . . y? šlm

Translation

'Remembrance (and) greeting of *Mšlm* son of *K..y*'

Commentary

This inscription, which consists of two brief lines, was clearly and beautifully written. Its letters are easily read with the exception of the second word. It is carved in a style rarely used in Nabataean, monogram. This style is employed in Ancient South Arabian script.

mšlmw: a simple personal name in the pattern *mfʿl*, appears in Nabataean (Cantineau 1978: 118, 150; Negev 1991: 42; al-Theeb 2010: 1116), Palmyrene (Stark 1971: 97–98), Biblical sources (Brown et al. 1906: 1024), Minaic

(al-Said 1995: 161), Thamudic (Shatnawi 2002: 741), and Safaitic (al-Theeb 2003: no. 54). For more information see (al-Theeb 2010: 221–222).

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Indexes

Personal names

Divine names

dwšrʾ		1:1

Lexicon

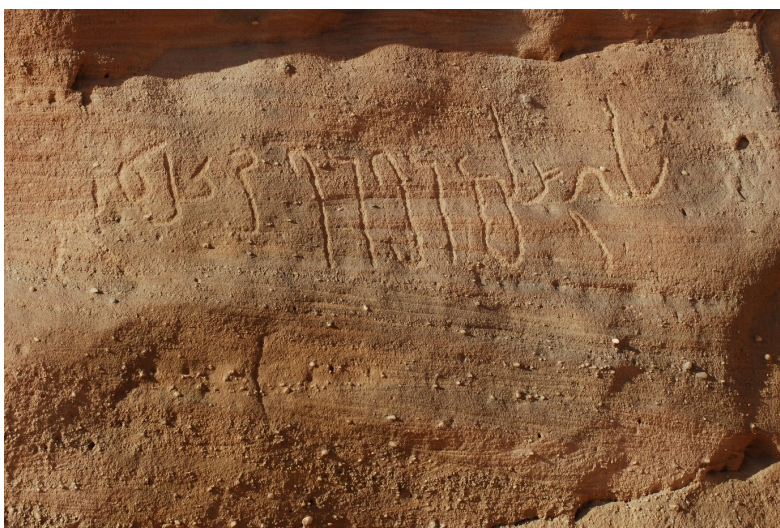|		
b	'in'	1:1, 2:2
bly	'yea'	4
br	'son of'	1:1, 3:1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15:2
gʾyʾ	'the tailor'	1:1
ḏkyr	'remembrance of'	9, 15:1
yhwdyʾ	'the Jew'	11
ṭb	'good'	1:1, 2:2
ʿlm	'forever'	7
l	'for'	7
mn	'from'	1:1
qdm	'front'	1:1
qynʾ	'the slave', 'the blacksmith'	4
šlm	'greeting of'	1:1, 2:1, 3:2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15:2

Figure 1: Inscription no. 1.

Figure 2: Inscription no. 2.

Figure 3: Inscription no. 3.
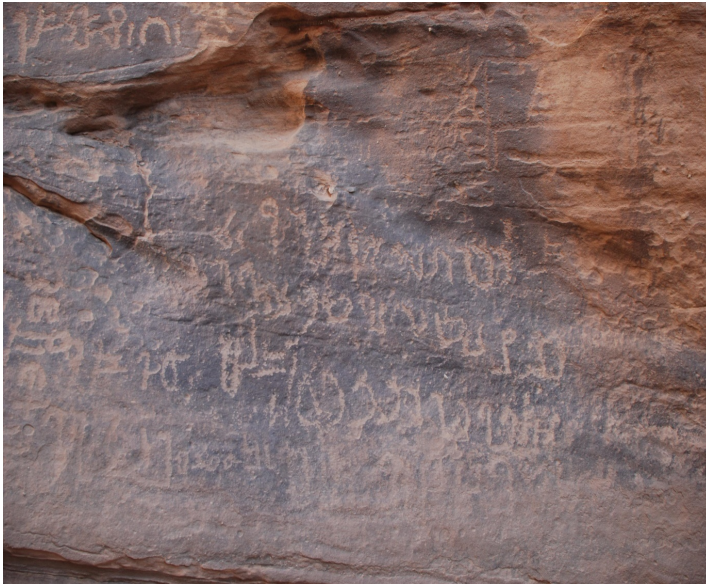

Figure 4: Inscription no. 4.

Figure 5: Inscription no. 5.
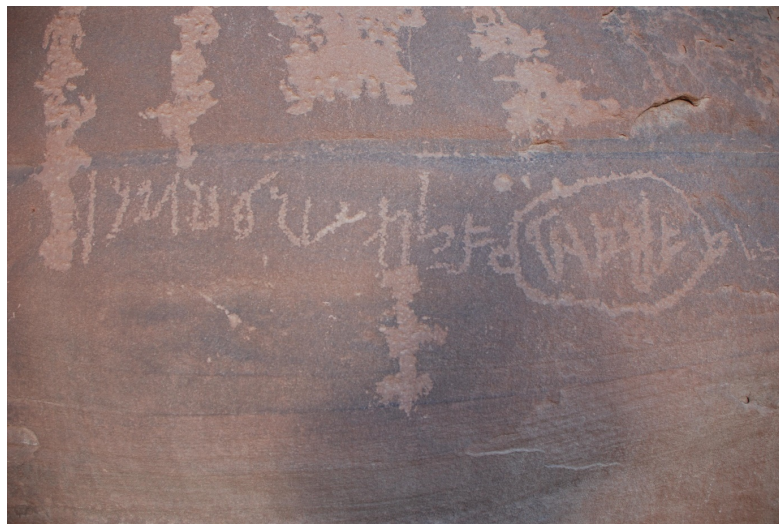

Figure 6: Inscription no. 6.

Figure 7: Inscription nos. 7, 8, 9.

Figure 8: Inscription nos. 10, 11, 12.

Figure 9: Inscription nos. 13, 14.

Figure 10: Inscription no. 15.

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