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A new Safaitic square-script inscription with a unique expression of ‘longing’

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A new Safaitic square-script inscription with a unique expression of ‘longing’*

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Abstract

This paper aims to study a new Safaitic inscription documented from the eastern Jordanian Badiyah. The inscription is written in the square script by a member of the lineage of *‘mrt* and includes a rare expression of longing.

Keywords: Ancient North Arabian Safaitic Safaitic square script Paleography Graffiti

This inscription was documented in the year 2000 through my epigraphic survey in Wādī Ru‘eila in the eastern Jordanian Badiyah.¹ It is written in what is known as square script² (i.e. the general features of most letters are angular). The square script inscriptions are a minority in the Safaitic corpus, and were produced primarily by members of the lineage *‘mrt*.³ This paper studies a new inscription in the square script, adding to this small corpus, and examines its rather atypical formulation.

All the characters of the inscription are clearly engraved in three lines in a boustrophedon direction, and the reading of the text is certain. This inscription is introduced by the *l* (*lam-auctoris*), the author’s name, and his genealogy including his lineage group. The narrative contains a unique expression of longing. In most inscriptions of this category, the object of longing is a person, but here the verb *ts²wq* takes the relative pronoun *d* as its object, and is followed by two lexemes: *‘qb* and *s¹lm*, both of which require further discussion.

*I am grateful to Dr. S. Al-Jarrah for reading the draft version of this paper, as well as to Mr. M.C.A. Macdonald for his suggestions and comments.

¹A collection of the documented inscriptions from this region was used in my dissertation and published in 2005, and another collection of Safaitic inscriptions will be published in OCLANA.

²It is known that the script of Safaitic inscriptions is divided in two forms: the normal and the square script. For the discussions on the palaeography, see Al-Jallad (2015: 27). The study by Macdonald (2015: 30, Appendix 2) gives a detailed description of the square script and disproves any connection with the Ancient South Arabian alphabet.

³There are some inscriptions which were written in square script by persons of the lineage *‘bs²t* (CSNS 424), *ngbr* (Alolow 1999, 396), *hly* (Al-Housan 2015, 58), *mhrb* (Oxtoby 1968, 57), as well as some letters in square script appearing in the inscriptions Alolow 1999, 388, 389, 390 and 391 that were written by members of the lineage *š’d*.



Figure 1: Photograph of the inscription by M.I. Ababneh

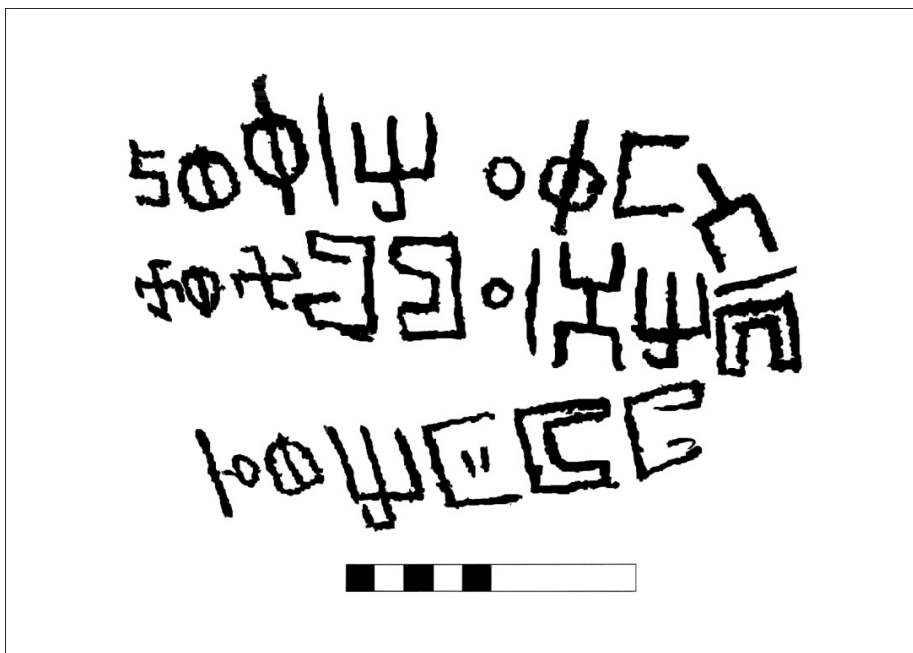


Figure 2: Tracing of the inscription by M.I. Ababneh

Transliteration

l ʿwḏ bn nmr ḏ ʾl ʿmrt w ts²wq l-ḏ ʿqb s¹lm

Translation

‘By ʿwḏ son of Nmr of the lineage of ʿmrt and he longed for him who had gone away. Peace!’

Palaeographic notes

This inscription consists of 29 letters, 13 without repetition. Of these, 8 are written in square script. According to Macdonald’s classification, the letters *l* and *n* appear in normal script form and the letters ʿ, *q* and *w* seem to be closer to the normal Safaitic form. The eight letters ʾ, *b*, *t*,⁴ *ḏ*, *r*, *s*¹, *s*²,⁵ and *m* are written in a square or square-like form.

In some inscriptions, the square letters appear next to the normal letters, attesting to a stylistic choice in the use of these shapes rather than the existence of a truly independent script. In addition to the examples mentioned by Macdonald (2015: 32), see also the following examples of the mixed Square-Normal script (using capital letters and ʾ, ʿ to show square forms):

- The edited inscription in this paper: *l ʿwḏ Bn nMR ḏ ʾl ʿMRT wT S²wq lḏ ʿqB S¹lM*;
- Ma’ani & Sadaqah 2002, 7: *l ʾbgr bn wTr ḏ ʾl frt*;
- Ma’ani & Sadaqah 2002, 8: *l wTr bn ʾbgr bn wTr ḏ ʾl frt*;
- Harahsheh 2007, 25: *l zyd Bn MʿyR ḏ ʾl ʿMRT*;
- Harahsheh 2007, 26: *l ʾnʿM Bn ʿqRB ḏ ʾl ʿMRT S¹lM*;
- Harahsheh 2007, 27: *l ʿqRB Bn S¹ḏl S¹lM*;
- Bani Awad 1999, 187: *l ks¹t bn whb ʾl bn wrl wwld bhdr wwgm ʿl ʾhh hl* (only ʾ appears in square script);
- Bani Awad 1999, 188: *l S²kr ʾl bn ʿQrb bn Hn ʾ bn rgl wwld bHDr*;

⁴Here, it occurs in the form of a swastika, see Macdonald (2015: 31). It occurs also in the inscriptions WH 1725a and CSNS 388 which are written in normal Safaitic script, as well as in Alolow 1999, 276 and 389, which are written in both forms (i.e. not all letters in square form).

⁵The form of *s*² here is clearly square or squarish, contrary to the classification of Macdonald (2015: 30), where it does not take a square form. Cf. e.g. the shape of *S*² in *dS²R* (CIS V 2947), in *DS²R* (Abbadi & Zayadine 1996: 157) and in *DS²r* (Al-Housan 2015, 58). Furthermore, in the inscription Bani Awad 1999, 188 in which some of the letters take the square form, *S*² appears clearly in a completely square form in the word *S²kr ʾl*.

- Al-Rousan 2005, 45, 47: *l s²cR Bn kḥs¹Mn Bn kḥs¹Mn Bn Ḍnn Bn s²cR Bn gn¹l Ḍ¹l kn ws¹RT s¹nT ngy ‘MD Bn¹ s¹ HDy ws¹nT dRg HṣMkRn HMD fhgddf s¹lM wgnMT Ḍ¹ d’y hs¹fR wng¹T Ḍ¹ Mḥy hs¹fR;*
- Al-Housan 2015, 58: *l ‘bDT bn ‘Qrb bn lb¹n Ḍ¹l Ḥly WHgg s¹nT MyT Mn‘T Bn RḌWT Wḥrṣ Ḷ ḥlh FhlT WDS²r s¹lM WQbll l s¹{R}.*

Commentary

The two personal names ‘*wḏ*’ and *nmr* are previously attested in the Safaitic corpus (e.g. HIn 448, 599). It should be noted that this person, ‘*wḏ bn nmr*’ of the lineage ‘*mrt*’, is not previously attested.

ḏ Ḷ: This phrase is the common way of expression affiliation with a lineage group; see Macdonald (1993: 352–354); Al-Jallad (2015: 57, 84).

‘mrt: This lineage name is well attested in the Safaitic inscriptions (Harding 1969: 14, 21; Al-Rousan 1992: 336). It should be noted that the majority of the inscriptions of this lineage includes a short genealogy, few exceeding three generations. The lineage is also attested in a Safaito-Hismaic inscription (Al-Salameen 2011: 216, figs 2, 3), as well as occurring in a bilingual Nabataean-Greek⁶ inscription from Madaba (Milik 1958: 244); see also Graf (1989: 360) and Macdonald (1993: 359).

As stated earlier, the unique feature of this inscription is the structure of the longing formula, which consists of two parts. The first begins with the verb *ts²wq⁷* and the preposition *l*.⁸ This phrase is common and it means ‘he longed for’, which is the usual form to express longing in Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015: 220).

The nomadic lifestyle, like seasonal migration to pasture in the inner desert, is reflected in the contents of the inscriptions, which record escorting herds and long stays away from family and relatives. Thus, longing is a natural theme. In the Safaitic corpus this verb occurs to state the longing of the author in general⁹ or to express his longing for his family,¹⁰ relatives (father, brother, sister, maternal uncle, maternal aunt, etc.),¹¹ companions, beloved,¹² a named person¹³ and gods.¹⁴ Furthermore, the author longed for someone e.g. after

⁶The name ‘*mrt*’ occurs only in the Nabataean text.

⁷It is also attested in the 3SG.F *ts²wqt* as in Abu Assaf 1975, 1: *l ‘z bnt ms¹k wts²wqt Ḷ¹ Ḷb¹ w¹ ḥb¹t bn ms¹k bn ys¹lm*. For the discussion of this formula, see Al-Jallad (2015: 103).

⁸On the use of the prepositions *Ḷ*- and *l*- after the verb *ts²wq*, see Al-Jallad (2015: 43, 144).

⁹E.g. CIS V 5377: *l ḥlf b[n] w¹ b[n] tm wts²wq*.

¹⁰KRS 214: *wts²wq Ḷ ḥlh fhlt s¹lm wqbl*; KRS 1257: *wts²wq Ḷ ḥlh fhs²ḥqm qbll s¹lm*.

¹¹HCH 44: *wts²wq Ḷ Ḷbh w¹ Ḷḥth*; WH 1698: *wts²wq Ḷ ḡyr¹ Ḷḥth*; HCH 127: *wts²wq Ḷ Ḷbh w¹ Ḷlh w¹ Ḷlth*.

¹²KRS 2782: *wts²wq Ḷ ḥbbth*; Bani Awad 1999, 229: *wts²wq Ḷ ḥbbh*; Alolow 1999, 48: *wts²wq Ḷ ḥḥb[h]*.

¹³KRS 1225: *l tm bn ‘ts¹ bn ḡ‘n bn whb¹l wts²wq Ḷ ḡ‘n fhlt s¹lm m s²n¹*.

¹⁴Abu Assaf 1975, 2.3: *wts²wq Ḷ b¹ls¹m[n]?*; Harahsheh 2010, 123: *wts²wq Ḷ s²qm w¹ ds²r w*; CIS V 88: *wts²[wq] Ḷ b¹ls¹my w l-bny ddh wl kll qyḥ*. M.C.A. Macdonald (personal communication) suggests that the divine names may likely be personal names in this context.

finding a trace or a writing of his paternal uncle,¹⁵ maternal uncle¹⁶ or a person identified by name.¹⁷

The second part, i.e. the object of the verb *ts²wq*, appears here in a sentence which includes the relative pronoun *d̄*, the verb *‘qb* and the substantive *s¹lm*.

d̄: This relative masculine singular pronoun, ‘who, him who’, is well known in Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2015: 16, 86–88).

‘qb: The word *‘qb* is previously attested in the Safaitic in the inscription CIS V 4404,¹⁸ where it occurs in the invocation of several deities to exact a punishment. The root *‘qb* is common in Semitic language and has different meanings. In Arabic there are many meanings of the root *‘qb*; some of these are not suitable for the context of this text. It could be interpreted here as cognate to Arabic *‘aqaba* ‘to come after’ or *‘aqqaba* ‘to return back’ (Lisān √*‘qb*). It is clear that the author is longing for someone who has left him or someone who came to him.

s¹lm: This common term occurs in a rather unusual context here, where it directly follows the verb *‘qb*; this syntax seems to be characteristic of inscriptions by members of the lineage *‘mrt*.¹⁹ It could be translated as ‘greeting, peace, salute’. It is helpful to illustrate the use of *s¹lm* in this case to compare it with the use of *šlm* in the short Nabataean inscriptions.²⁰

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¹⁵CIS V 95: *wwgd s¹fr ddh fts²wq*.

¹⁶See Alolow 1999, 28: *wwgd s¹fr h̄lh fts²wq*.

¹⁷WH 1105: *wwgd ṛṛ ‘qrb fts²wq*; KRS 2321: *wwgd ṛṛ ḏnt fts²wq fhlt qbll s¹lm*.

¹⁸CIS V 4404: ... *f h s²ms¹ (w) h gd’wq w h lt ‘qb b- -h rm d̄ ṛs¹lf w ‘wr d̄ ----* ‘... and so O S²ms¹ and O Gd’wq and O Lt punish for it Rm who did it in revenge and blind whoever ----’. The reading and the translation are by the editors of OCIANA. *‘qb* also occurs as a personal name (HIn 426). The word *‘qbt* occurs in the inscription BS 92: *wmṛṛt hs¹my b’qbt ‘gzt* ‘and the sky rained after a long time of no rain’ (translation from OCIANA).

¹⁹It occurs in the following inscriptions, all written in square script: Harahsheh 2007, 26: *l ṛn‘m bn ‘qrb d̄l ‘mrt s¹lm*; 27: *l ‘qrb bn s¹dl s¹lm*; 24: *l nhs¹ṭb bn ḏlb d̄l ‘mrt [] {d̄} [] ṛdrm s¹lm whlt wds²r s¹lm*; Al-Manaser 2008, 133 = BS 2000: *l ṛs¹ bn rwh d̄l ‘mrt s¹lm*.

²⁰*Passim*, e.g. see Nehmé (2015: 111–112).

Sigla

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|--------|--|
| CIS V | Ryckmans (1950–1951) |
| CSNS | Clark (1979) |
| BS | Inscriptions recorded by the Badia Survey in north-eastern Jordan in 2015 and published online in OCIANA |
| HCH | Harding (1953) |
| HIn | Harding (1971) |
| KRS | Inscriptions recorded by Geraldine King on the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey in north-eastern Jordan in 1989, published online in OCIANA |
| Lisān | Ibn Manẓūr (1955–1966) |
| OCIANA | Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia, http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd#ociana |
| WH | Winnett & Harding (1978) |

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