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A selection of Safaitic inscriptions from Al-Mafraq, Jordan: II

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A selection of Safaitic inscriptions from Al-Mafraq, Jordan: II

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on twenty-one new Ancient North Arabian (Safaitic) inscriptions discovered in 2015 in Jordan, one of which mentions the Nabataean Damaṣī.

Keywords: Safaitic Nabataean inscriptions Damasi Ancient North Arabian

1 Introduction

The stones on which these inscriptions were found are located about 35 km from the town of al-Azraq in north-eastern Jordan. The precise location of the site where the inscriptions were found is called Wādī wa-Ġadīr Aṣḥīm (see figure 1), an area in which Byzantine and Islamic architecture can also be found. Specifically, there is an abundance of Ayyubid ceramics and a great number of other Islamic inscriptions, although these are admittedly short inscriptions consisting mostly of genealogies. There are also a number of Safaitic inscriptions in this area, most of which remain *in situ*. Some of the stones have been relocated to the Mafraq museum on account of their significance. These inscriptions were found in September 2015 by the author.

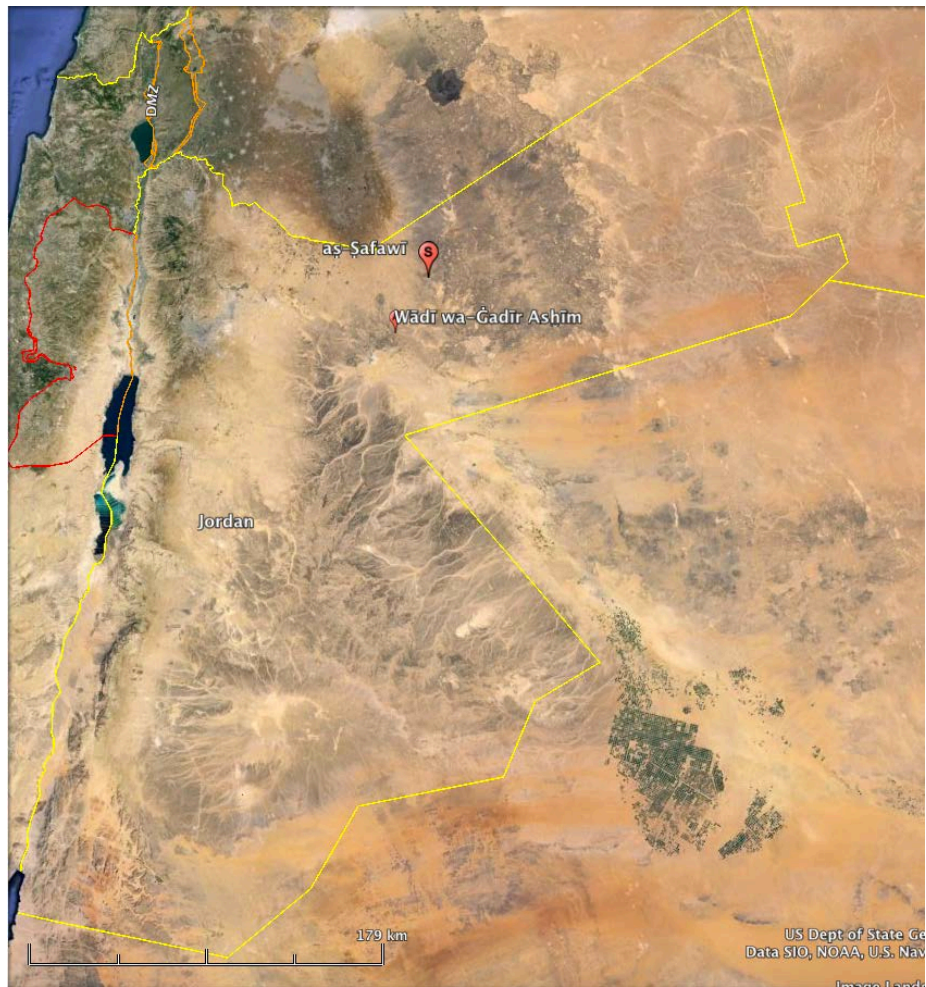


Figure 1: Map of Jordan showing the location of Wādī wa-Ġadīr Aṣḥīm (Source: Google Earth)

2 Inscriptions 1–20



Figure 2: Inscriptions no. 1–3

INS-NO-1:

l bḫt{n} bn 'd bn klb'l bn 's'd bn {g}{r} [] mrḡm w wgm 'l- ḥbb

'By {Bḫt{n}} son of 'd son of Klb'l son of 's'd son of {Ġr} son of Mrḡm and he grieved for a loved one'

A portion of stone and therefore inscription missing. The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.

INS-NO-2:

l b{ṣ}ln bn glm

'By {Bṣln} son of Glm'

INS-NO-3:

l rhy bn 'mr'l

'By Rhy son of 'mr'l'



Figure 3: Inscription no. 4

INS-NO-4:

l ms²dt w ts¹wq ʿl- k{s¹}t

‘By Ms²dt and he longed for ‘ks¹t’

The letter *s¹* is not clear, but we can infer from other inscriptions that it is the name *k{s¹}t*. The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.



Figure 4: Inscription no. 5

INS-NO-5:

l tm bn zn'l bn 'bd bn ngm d- 'l kn w r'y h- 'gml f h lt s'lm

'By Tm son of Zn'l son of 'bd son of Ngm of the lineage of Kn and he pastured the camels and so O Lt [grant] security'

The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.



Figure 5: Inscription no. 6

INS-NO-6:

l s¹b^c bn wny bn š^cd bn s¹kr bn mfny bn n^cmn

‘By S¹b^c son of Wny son of Š^cd son of S¹kr son of Mfny son of N^cmn’

The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.



Figure 6: Inscription no. 7

INS-NO-7:

l mḥrn bn 'ts¹ bn s¹wr

'By Mḥrn son of 'ts¹ son of S¹wr'



Figure 7: Inscription no. 8

INS-NO-8:

l s¹wr bn qdm h-gml

‘By S¹wr son of Qdm is the camel’

The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.



Figure 8: Inscription no. 9

INS-NO-9:

l rm'l

'By Rm'l'



Figure 9: Inscription no. 10

INS-NO-10:

l mrt bn ys²kr w b^r m hrt

‘By Mrṭ son of Ys²kr and he went with camels from the Harrah’

The verb *b^r* has been found only four times in Safaitic inscriptions and there is not yet an agreed translation for this word. One possible translation of this inscription is that ‘he went through the desert with the camels’, another ‘he rode the camels from the desert’.



Figure 10: Inscription no. 11

INS-NO-11:

l 'bg{r} bn 's¹ bn hlf bn 's¹ d-l 'mrt

'By 'bgr son of 's¹ son of Hlf son of 's¹ of the tribe of 'mrt'

The author of this inscription made a mistake on the last letter of the first name 'bg{r} and wrote *m* instead of *r*, then corrected the error below.

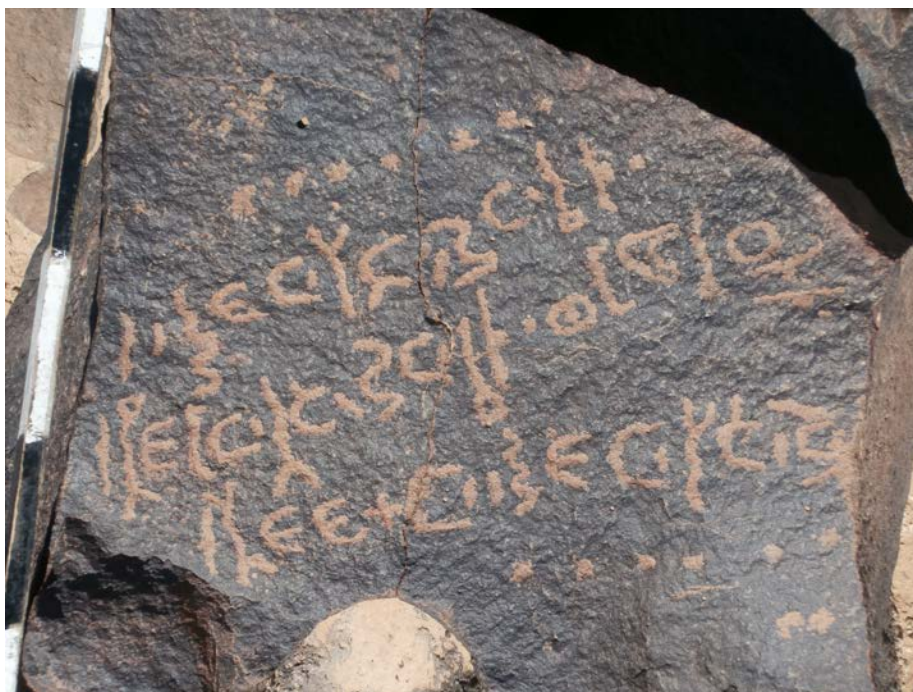


Figure 11: Inscriptions no. 12–14

INS-NO-12:

l ns²ḥ bn hknf bn yd'

'By Ns²ḥ son of Hknf son of Yd'

INS-NO-13:

l 'ḥḥt bn ns²ḥ bn hknf

'By 'ḥḥt son of Ns²ḥ son of Hknf'

INS-NO-14:

l ṣḥr bn hknf bn yd' w rmy gdd

'By Ṣḥr son of Hknf son of Yd' and he went to a level plain'



Figure 12: Inscriptions no. 15–16

INS-NO-15:

l s²rk bn q^ʿsn bn n^ʒr w qsf f h lt rwḥ

‘By S²rk son of Q^ʿsn son of N^ʒr and he was sad, so O Lt [grant] ease’

The inscription includes a drawing of a man and a camel. This depiction is rarely seen in Safaitic inscriptions; instead it is usual for inscription from northwest Saudi Arabia. The author put a point between the two *fs* to delineate the two different words.

INS-NO-16:

l ʿqrb bn m^ʿ{l} bn ġzlt bn s²rk

‘By ʿqrb son of {M^ʿl} son of Ġzlt son of S²rk’



Figure 13: Inscription no. 17

INS-NO-17:

l flt bn šbh h-bkrt

‘By Flt son of Šbh is the young she-camel’

The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.



Figure 14: Inscriptions no. 18–19

INS-NO-18:

*l {gz}k bn s^{2c} bn gmm bn qn'l bn yhm'l bn mr't bn gryt bn 'zn bn hr{n}tt bn tmn
bn 'dr bn h{}b bn z{m'}*

'By Gzk son of S^{2c} son of Gmm son of Qn'l son of Yhm'l son of Mr't son of Gryt son of 'zn son of Hrntt son of Tmn son of 'dr son of Hb son of Zm'

INS-NO-19:

l rs^{2h} bn wqf

'By Rs^{2h} son of Wqf'



Figure 15: Inscription no. 20

INS-NO-20:

l ʾs¹lm bn khl bn ws²kʿt

‘By ʾs¹lm son of Khl son of Ws²kʿt’

The stone is currently located in the Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.

3 An inscription mentioning Damašī



Figure 16: Inscription no. 21

INS-NO-21:

l ns²l bn m^cn bn m^ll ḡ- ʾl tm w nṣr ʾl- dmsy b- ḥms¹ m^t frs¹ s¹nt ḥrb ʿmm

‘By Ns²l son of M^cn son of M^ll of the lineage of Tm and he was on the lookout for Dmsy with five cavalry units in the year of the war of ʿmm’

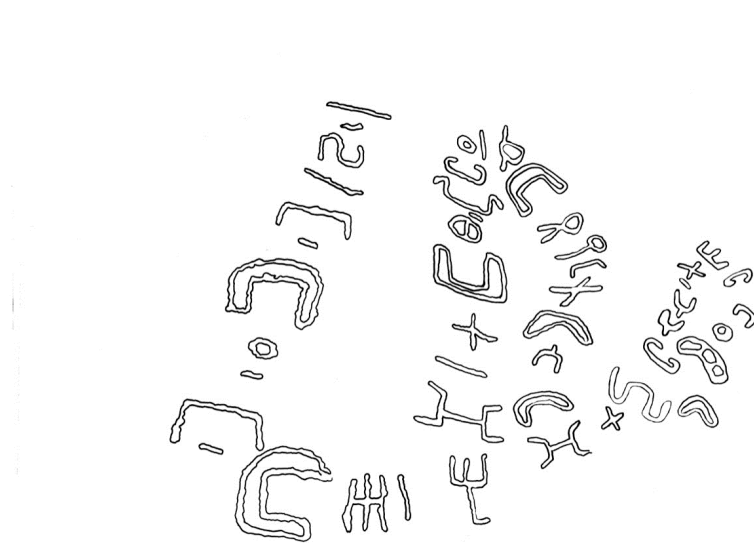


Figure 17: Tracing of INS-NO-21 (drawn by Abdul-Qader al-Housan)

3.1 Commentary

The inscription is easily legible, with clear letters written in a ‘square’ script that is considered to be a stylistic feature in Safaitic inscriptions, occurring in only a minority of inscriptions. There are a number of oddities in the letter-forms however. The second letter could be read either as s^2 or as f , and it is difficult to decide which should be preferred since the resulting word, a personal name, could be either ns^2l or nfl , both of which are attested as personal names in Safaitic. We might prefer the reading with s^2 since there is a f at the end of the inscription which does not have the same unusual shape. The letter d in the formulaic expression $d-l$ is interestingly adorned with a flick at the extremity of the letter, as can be seen in figure 17. We consider this to be a form of decoration, which can perhaps support the hypothesis that the use of the square script is decorative as well. The letter d in the personal name $dmsy$ is also unusual, having a form that at first glance could be mistaken for the letter q . This appears to be on account of the uneven surface of the stone, which is not flat and in fact quite indented, especially in the area where the name occurs. Finally, the last word is mm in the phrase $hrb\ mm$, in which the penultimate letter (the first m) is unusually filled in with additional lines. While the resulting form bears no resemblance to any particular Safaitic letter, it could perhaps be misread as a w ; this is impossible however since there is one other occurrence of w in the text which is written normally. Furthermore, decoration of this type is not unprecedented in Safaitic inscriptions, with even whole inscriptions being written in this ‘stripy’ script style. It is impossible to

say why the author chose to adorn only this *m* in this way, and why he did not write the following *m* in the same way.

3.2 Genealogy

As is customary in Safaitic inscriptions, this text starts with the letter *l*, understood conventionally as a *lam auctoris* which introduces the author of the text. This *l* is always followed by a personal name, which usually takes the form of a genealogy containing anything from two to ten names, and in many cases more. Here the genealogy traces three generations, all the names of which are known already from the Safaitic corpus (although see the comment on the first name, *ns²l*, above). After the genealogy comes the tribal affiliation, introduced by the formula *q-l*. Here the tribe name is Tm, which is also a known tribe from the Safaitic corpus (e.g. HCH 130, WH 711, CSNS 633, etc.).

3.3 Narrative

The narrative content of the inscription opens with the verb phrase, *w nʒr ʔl-dmʂy*, ‘and he was on the lookout for Dmʂy’. The verb is interesting because it is a well attested verb but only occurs one other time in the known corpus with the preposition *ʔl*; the verb *nʒr* usually takes an object without a preposition (LP 1263; ISB 90). The verb is also interesting because it has several forms, also appearing frequently as *w tnʒr*, and also as *tʒr* which demonstrates assimilation of the *n* in the *t-stem* (see Al-Jallad 2015: 132). The other inscription containing *nʒr ʔl* is HaNSB 305. The name Dmʂy is known as a personal name from three other inscriptions (SIJ 287; SIJ 823; SIAM 36) and now in this inscription; in only one of the four inscriptions is there a genealogy, so it is impossible to prove that they do or do not refer to the same person.

The following two clauses are supplementary to the narrative. The first is *b-ḥms¹ mʔt frs¹*, ‘with five hundred horses’. It is interesting to note that we do not find the number five hundred elsewhere in Safaitic except in this inscription. There are, however, a number of inscriptions which exhibit parallels to this:

- In C 320¹ the author writes *w s¹rt m^c ʔb-h {b-}mʔt frs¹*, ‘and he served with his father in a cavalry unit’.
- C 2076² has *b-ʔf rgl w mʔt f [r]s¹*, ‘with one thousand foot soldiers and {a

¹C 320:

l whblh bn ʔhrb bn ykn q- ʔl kkb w bhʔ brkt w bnq{l} w hrbt sʔnt rʔy ʔl ʔwq nʔmʔl ʔbd w sʔrt m^c ʔb-h {b-} mʔt frs¹

‘By Whblh son of ʔhrb son of Ykn of the lineage of Kkb and he rejoiced at Brkt because there was fresh herbage, and returned from a place of water the year the lineage of ʔwq pastured the livestock of the lineage of ʔbd; and he served with his father in a cavalry unit’

²C 2076:

l lt fty gʔd bn ʔbt n w sʔrt ʔl-{h}dq ʔbgr b- ʔf rgl w mʔt f [r]s¹ w tnʒr h- sʔmy b- h- d{r} f h lt r{w}h w h bʔs¹{m}{n} —

‘By Lt slave boy of Gʔd son of ʔbt n and he served in a troop against the walled enclosure of ʔbgr with one thousand foot soldiers and {a cavalry unit}; and he waited for the rains near this place

cavalry unit}'.

- KRS 1468³ reads *w qšš b-m't frs¹*, 'and he tracked with a cavalry unit'.

It could be that the author was on the lookout for Dmšy accompanied by five hundred riders, or five cavalry units. Of course, the syntax is not lucid and it might equally be possible that it is Dmšy who is coming with the horses.

The inscription employs a well-known Safaitic dating formula, namely, the pattern *s¹nt* followed by the occurrence, which took place in that year (C 2577; LP 360; SIJ 705; WH 2113). In this case it is *s¹nt ḥrb 'mm* 'the year of the war of 'mm'. Given that this stone was discovered in the vicinity of inscription which reads *l ḥrb bn 'mm*, 'By Ḥrb son of 'mm', it seems plausible to understand this as a personal name (see figure 18)⁴.



Figure 18: The Safaitic inscription with the personal name 'mm

3.4 The historical figure of Dmšy

As discussed above, the name *dmšy* appears in four Safaitic inscriptions, but unfortunately without enough evidence to shed much light on the identity of

so, O Lt, let there be relief, and O {B¹ls¹mn}...

³KRS 1468:

l mlk bn bls¹ bn ys¹m¹l bn š^cd bn 's¹ w qšš b- m't frs¹ b^cd 'l ḏf f h gḏdf s¹lm 'ḏ

'By Mlk son of Bls¹ son of Ys¹m¹ son of Š^cd son of 's¹ and he tracked with a hundred horsemen after the 'l ḏf and so O Gḏdf may he be secure "

⁴Present location: Al-Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum.

the person, or persons, referred to. There is also one occurrence of a *dmš* (WH 908) and one *dmšn* (WH 1964) in the known corpus; the name is clearly very rare in Safaitic and not in any way well known. Since only one inscription furnishes Dmsy with a genealogy, there is no way to securely identify all these instances as references to the same person. On account of the relatively small number of references to him in the Safaitic inscriptions, it is impossible to say even whether he was an important character; naturally this is an argument *ex silentio*. Two, however, do make reference to a revolt (*mrd*) by a Dmšy who must be the same person. The first (SIJ 287) was found in Jawa (Jordan), and reads as follows:

SIJ 287:

*l ḥr bn ʿs¹ bn ḥr d-ʿl ms¹kt w wld b-h-dr s¹nt mrd mḥrb w s¹nt mrd dmšy w ḥrṣ
h-s²n¹ f h lt s¹lm w mwgd*

‘By Ḥr son of ʿs¹ son of Ḥr of the tribe of Ms¹kt. He was born in this place [Jawa] the year of the rebellion of Mḥrb and the year of the rebellion of Dmšy. He is on the watch for the enemy, so, o Lt and Ds²r, [grant] security and [continued] existence.’

The second inscription to refer to the revolt of Dmšy is from Tell al-ʿabd in Jordan and reads as follows:



Figure 19: SIJ 823⁵

⁵I would like to thank the OCIANA project for permission to use this image.

SIJ 823:

*l mgd bn zd bn qdm bn mr' d- 'l df w q(š) b'd d(f) s'nt mrd dmsy lhtm(—) 's'lm
f {}(—)*

‘By Mgd son of Zd son of Qdm son of Mr’ of the tribe of Df and he followed
after Df the year of the revolt of Dmsy...’



Figure 20: The Safaitic inscription bearing the name *Dmsy*, presently situated in the Irbid museum⁶

⁶I would like to thank the OCIANA project for permission to use this image.

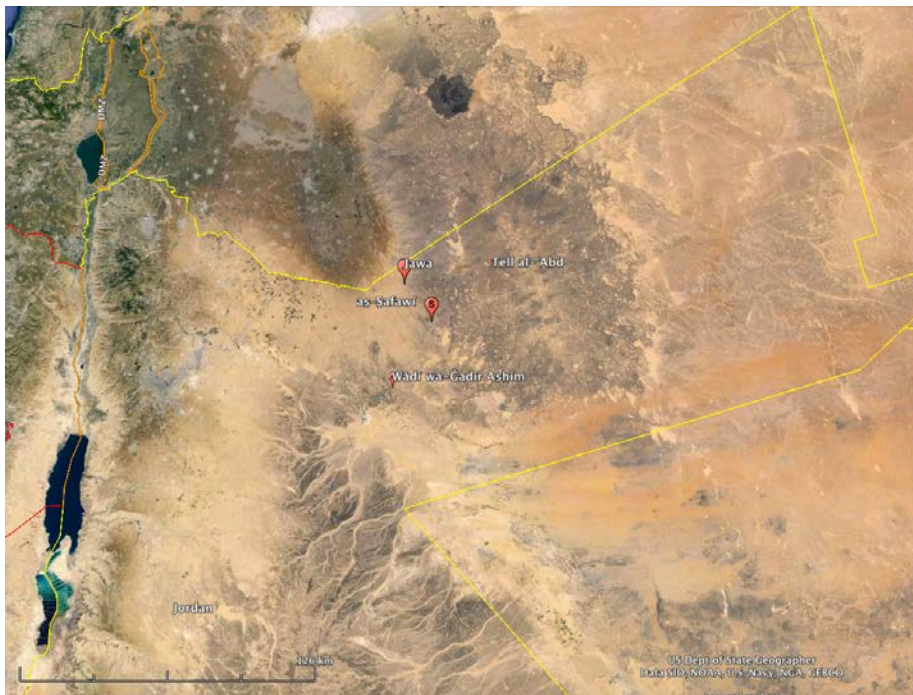


Figure 21: Map of Jordan, showing the location where the other two inscriptions were found

We may compare the localities where these inscriptions mentioning Dmsy have been found: Jawa, Tell al-‘abd and now Wādī wa-Ġadīr Aṣḥīm (unfortunately the provenance of the fourth example is unknown, since the rock has been moved to the Irbid Museum). It can be seen that these three places are all located in the Jordanian Badia, in relatively close proximity to each other.

There is a known Nabataean inscription mentioning a character called *dmsy* who has long been associated with this Dmsy of the Safaitic inscriptions (see, for example, Winnett 1973). This inscription (C II no. 287; JS I: 224 no. 84) is from Ḥegrā (Medāin-Šāleḥ) and consists of only one line. It reads:

C II 287:

dkyr dmsy br rbyb'l 'srtg' btb

‘In memory of Dmsy, son of Rbyb’l, the *strategos*, for good.’

It will be immediately noticed that the Nabataean inscriptions uses the letter *s* (*samekh* / *semkath*) where the Safaitic has *ṣ*, but this is possible to reconcile since, as Winnett writes, “the name DMSY is of Greek origin and Greek *sigma* might well be reproduced by *ṣ* in Safaitic and by *s* in Nabataean” (1973: 55). The name Winnett is referring to is the Greek Damasippos (hypocoristic of *dmsps*, Greek Δαμάσιππος), of which the Nabataean form Dmsy is an apparent hypocoristic. Hackl et al. (2003: 342) suggest that the Dmsy of the Nabataean inscription is “wahrscheinlich identisch mit Damaṣi”, an assertion which is

perhaps more indicative of the uncertainty than it is of the identification itself.

The Nabataean Dmsy was, as the above inscriptions shows, the son of a *strategos* from Ḥegrā. His grandfather was the aforementioned Damasippos, whose sons were Ganimu and Rabīb'el, the latter being the father of Damasi and a certain Maliku (see Winnett 1973: 55; Graf 1997: 199). Winnett's hypothesis is that Dmsy revolted on account of his father overlooking him as a successor, in spite of his seniority, and promoting his younger brother Maliku as governor of Hegra in his place. This contention is based on the fact that JS 34nab refers to Maliku as *strategos* but, as is clearly evident, the term is absent from the above memorial inscription to Dmsy.

Scholars have attempted to produce evidence connecting the apparent rebellion of Dmsy as recorded in the Safaitic examples with what can be reconstructed of the narrative of Dmsy from the Nabataean sources. Al-Otaibi remarks that "Damasi's revolt was serious enough to be taken as a basis for dating in Nabataea (*snt mrd dmsy*)", (2011: 91) although this reasoning is less convincing when one considers that the same dating formula in Safaitic usually references far more banal (although, in all likelihood, just as serious to the writers) occurrences, such as the arrival of rains or hyenas. Bowersock (1983: 156) cites a title, given to the last Nabataean king Rabīb'el II (70–106 CE, a contemporary of Dmsy), of *dy ḥyy wšyzb ḥmh*, 'he who brought life and deliverance to his people'; he suggests that this description is an open reference to the "crisis of his accession" (1983: 156), characterized by the rebellion of nomadic leaders such as Dmsy. Al-Otaibi takes this even further, suggesting that it is a specific reference to the success of the former in putting down the revolt of Dmsy (2011: 91). As outlined by Graf (1997: 363), the Safaitic inscriptions give evidence of Dmsy being supported by nomadic tribes, the names of which are known from Safaitic inscriptions generally: Ḍf, Ms¹kt, Mḥrb. The evidence is not wholly compelling, however; if Dmsy was truly an important figure interacting on a large scale with the nomadic tribes, some of whom apparently carved Safaitic inscriptions, when why should there be so few references to him in the corpus?

The scene has therefore been reconstructed of Dmsy, as an influential Nabataean, involving the nomadic tribes in the vicinity of southern Nabataea in the political affairs of the kingdom and even using them in a revolt which he started against the northern part of the kingdom. The implication is that the Nabataeans before Dmsy had also formed alliances with the desert nomads and that Dmsy incited them to join his rebellion; the Nabataean approach is summarized by Bowersock as "a reasonable, if occasionally risky policy of using nomadic groups as allies of the government of the sedentary nation at the edge of the desert" (1983: 156).

3.5 Conclusion

This importance of this inscription lies in its being the fourth attestation of the name Dmsy in Safaitic, and therefore sheds light on the so-called revolt

of Dmsy as known from the other three instances. It could be the case that Dmsy came to the area, as this inscription suggests, with an entourage of five hundred riders; alternatively, it could merely be Dmsy with five hundred horses or, as we discussed, the horses could already have been at this location. The inscription cannot prove the theories already circulating in scholarly literature about the connection between Safaitic Dmsy and the Nabataean kingdom; it should, however, inform all future consideration of this topic as new evidence is eagerly awaited.

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ʾbgr	11	ʿts ¹	7
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ʿmrt	11
Tm	21

Index of divine names

Lt 5

Index of vocabulary

<i>ʿgml</i>	5	‘camels’
<i>bʿr</i>	10	‘he rode’ (3MS suffix conjugation verb)
<i>bkrt</i>	17	‘young she-camel’
<i>ts¹wq</i>	4	‘he longed (for)’ (3MS suffix conjugation verb)
<i>gml</i>	8	‘camel’
<i>hbb</i>	1	‘a loved one’
<i>hrt</i>	10	‘the Harrah’ (place name)
<i>hrb</i>	21	‘war’
<i>hms¹ m’t</i>	21	‘five hundred’
<i>r’y</i>	5	‘he pastured’ (3MS suffix conjugation verb)
<i>rmy</i>	14	(3MS suffix conjugation verb)
<i>rwh</i>	15	‘relief’
<i>s¹lm</i>	5	‘security’
<i>s¹nt</i>	21	‘year’
<i>frs¹</i>	21	‘horse’
<i>qs¹f</i>	15	‘he was sad’ (3MS suffix conjugation verb)
<i>nzr</i>	21	‘he was on the lookout’ (3MS suffix conjugation verb)
<i>wgm</i>	1	‘he grieved’ (3MS suffix conjugation verb)

Sigla

C	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars V. Inscriptiones Saracenicae Continens, Tomus 1. Inscriptiones Safaiticae</i> , edited by G. Ryckmans, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1950–1951
CSNS	Clark (1979)
HaNSB	Ḥarāḥšah (2010)
HCH	Harding (1953)
ISB	Oxtoby (1968)
JS	Jaussen & Savignac (1909–1922)
KRS	Safaitic inscriptions recorded by G.M.H. King on the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey (now published in OCIANA)
LP	Littmann (1943)
OCIANA	The Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia project at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford (http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/index.php)

SIJ	Winnett (1957)
WH	Winnett & Harding (1978)
SIAM	The Safaitic inscription in the Irbid museum

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