

## TWO NORTH- ARABIAN INSCRIPTION FROM JORDAN

by  
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I. The first inscription is on a yellowish sandstone slab, with a brownish surface, discovered in 1990 by Mr Neal Buckon from Cleveland, Ohio. It was found on the road between al-Mudawarra and Ma'ān, at about 80 km from Ma'ān. The author is grateful to Mr Buckon who kindly presented this inscription to the Department of Antiquities.

The text is inscribed in spiral, on one face of the slab ( Figs. 1 and 2 ).

Dimensions: length: 28 cm; width: 13.5 cm, thickness: 7 cm. H. of letters: nun: 5mm; qaf; 35 mm.

### Text

*Ihwd bn škr'l wnzr w tšwk w dkr It 'šy'n*

### Translation

By Hud s. of Šakhar'el, and he was on the outlook, and he longed for and may Lat

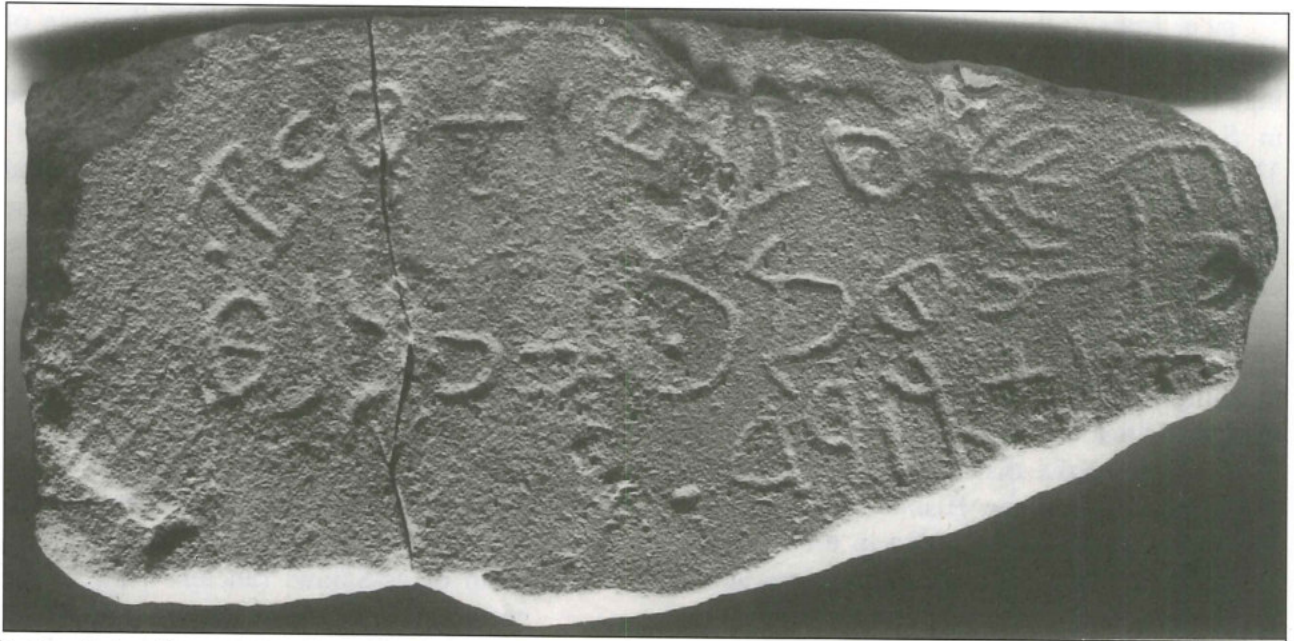
remember (my) fellow tribemen.

### Commentary

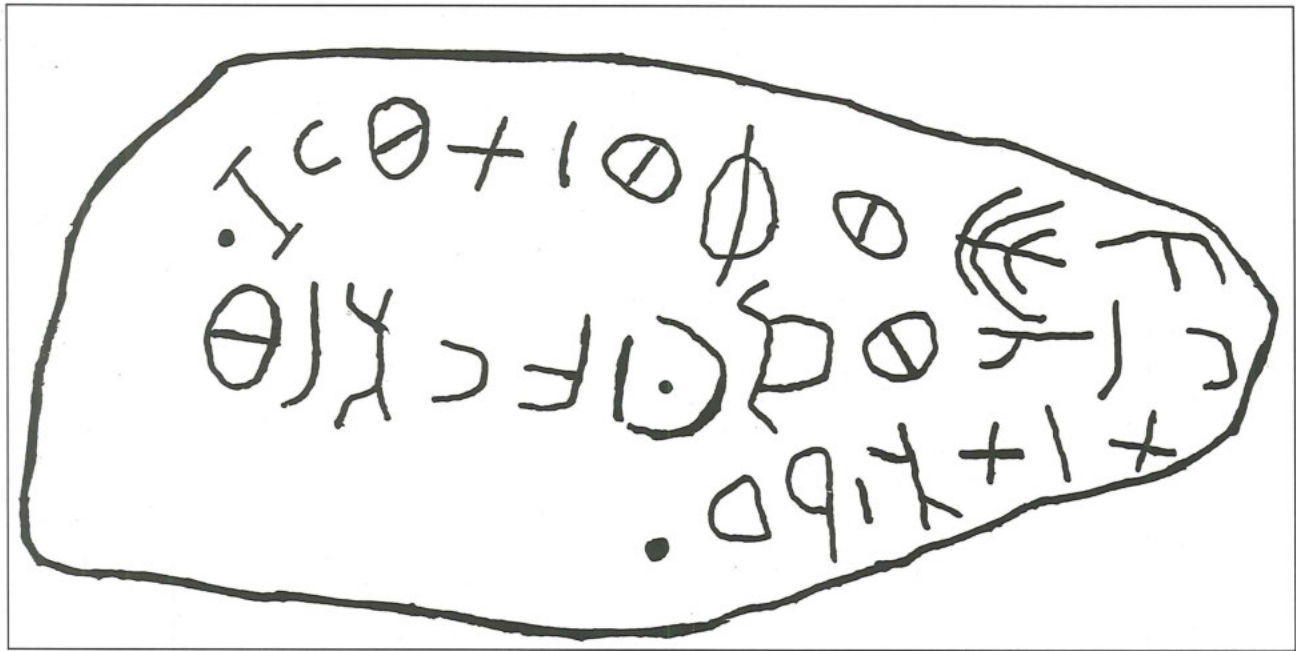
*hwd* (Hud): is a personal name, common in North Arabia, mainly in Safaitic ( Winnett 1957: N° 282: *Ihwd bn hlfn*; CIS, 34, 1920). In Arabic, *hawid* means "repentant", "contrite" ( Harding 1971: 628). In the holy Qur'an, surat 11: 53-60, prophet Hud warned the tribe of 'Ad against the worship of pagan gods.

*škr'l*: a theophoric proper name attested in South Arabia, (CIS, 967, 989), but also in Safaitic (Milik 1980:44). The name is also common in the Nabataean onomasticon (Negev 1991: 1132; Cantineau 1932: 150)

*wnzr*: in Arabic, *nzr* means "to look at, to observe, to be on the watch". Milik (1980: 43-44) translated this verb "*il est chargé de surveillance*". It can be assumed that Hwd was a watchman of the encampment during



1. Inscription discovered on the road between al-Mudawarra and Ma'ān.



2. Facsimile of the inscription.

the journey of the caravan and more precisely on night duty. This sentry function may explain the rest of the inscription: he longed for (his) tribe people and prayed the pan Arabian goddess Lat to remember them.

*Tšwq*: long for, is common in the Safaitic inscriptions (Harding 1953: 48; 1971: s.v. *šwq*). It is of interest to note that in general, most of the expressions and vocabulary are well attested in the so-called Safaitic graffiti.

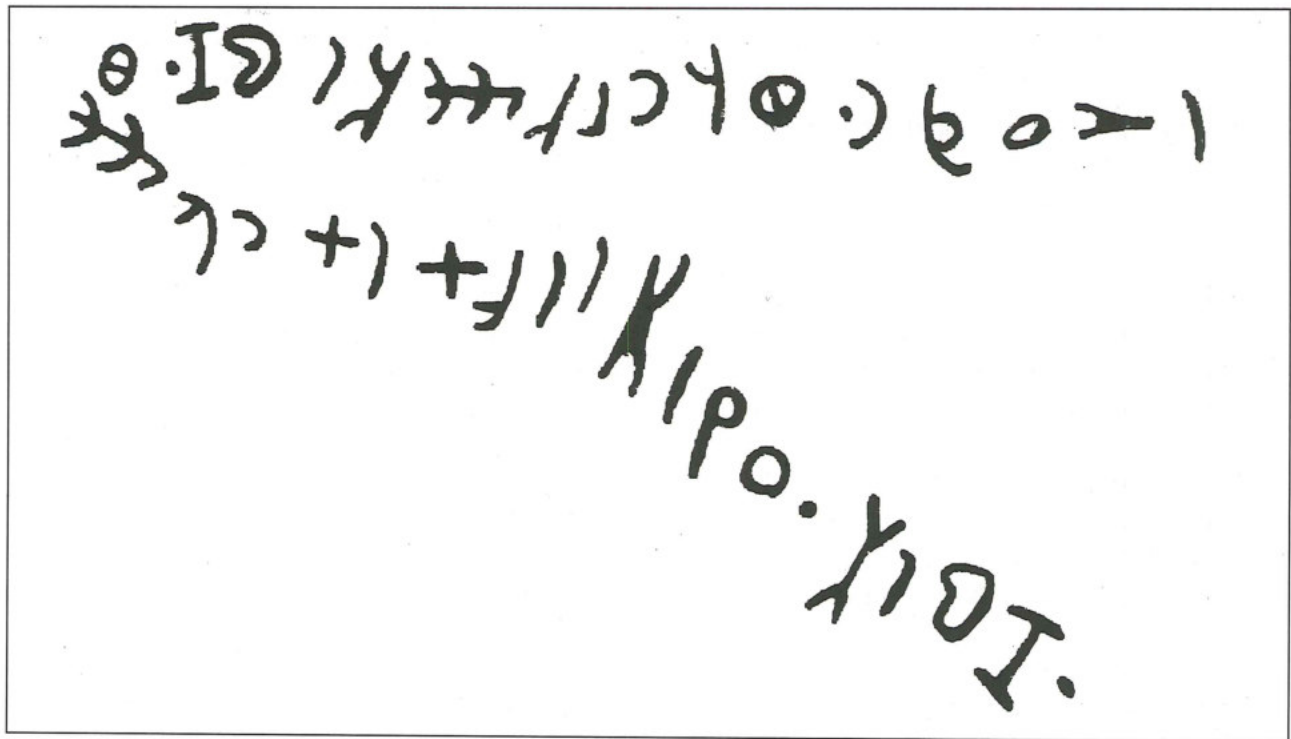
*šy'n*: from Arabic *šy'*: "to accompany, to bid farewell" (Al-Mu'jam al-Wasîṭ; Harding, 1971, s.v.). The substantive *šy'* occurs in Safaitic (Winnett 1957: Nos 310 and 312). It is also attested in Wādī Iram: "*Ls'd bn whblh d'l mzn w-dkrt lt kll 'šyn'n 'l mzn*", "By Ša'd, s. of Wahb-Allah, of the clan of Mazen, and may Lat remember all of the Mazen tribemen" (Farès Drapeau 1996: 280-82) (Fig. 3). In this inscription the meaning of *šy'n* is clearly the "tribe member" of Mazen.

It is noteworthy that both, the authors of the inscriptions in the Ḥisma of Southern Jordan and those of the Ḥarra in the Syrian Desert were using the same expressions and vocabulary, but in their peculiar script. From the bilingual graffiti in Wādī Iram, it appears

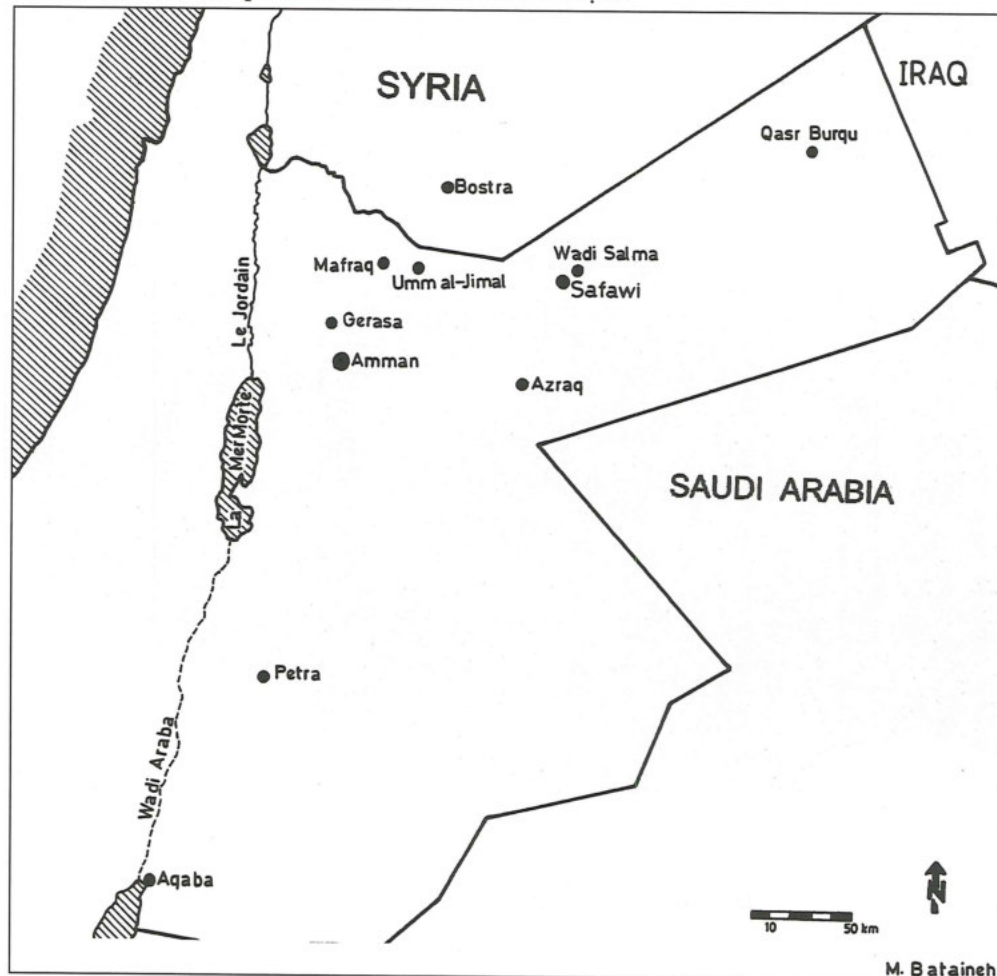
that the Nabataeans used the so-called Thamudic E script, [or more correctly "the Ḥismaic" script], before Aramaic-Nabataean became the official writing of their transactions, religious dedications and funeral epitaphs. There was no apparent conflict between the Nabataeans and the tribes of southern Jordan. They took over the trade of aromatics from the Minaeans and remodeled the sanctuary of Lāt in Wādī Iram, which was originally founded by the tribesman of 'Ad (Zayadine and Farès-Drapeau 1998: 255-58). But several inscriptions of the Ḥarra mention the "war of the Nabataeans" (Abbadi 1996: 239-253). It can be surmised that the Nabataeans were in conflict with the so-called Safaitic tribes to safeguard the roads of their caravans to the north. Nevertheless, a Safaitic inscription of Wādī Salma, in the northeastern desert of Jordan is dated to "the year Rabel became king" (see below).

II. The second inscription was recently discovered in Wādī Salma, at about 30 km north of aṣ-Ṣafāwī (ancient H5), in the northeastern desert of Jordan (Fig. 4), at a mound called Marabb al-Ḥuṣayniyyāt.





3. Facsimile of inscriptions of Wādī Rumm-Umm Saḥm.



4. The location of Wādī Salma in the north-eastern desert.

The inscription is incised on a basalt boulder (40x21x15 cm), on two faces.

- A- On the narrow base of the basalt block one line is incised: "l'dy bn mty bn mkbl" "by 'Aḍy s. of Mty, s. of Mkbl" (Figs. 5 and 6).

*Commentary*

The two first proper names from Arabic 'd' and mty' have the meaning of "to walk rapidly" (see Mu'jam 1972 and Harding 1971).

Mkbl: from Arabic kbl, "to bind", to "fetter"; the passive participle mukabbal corresponds to "prisoner", "captive"; this name is a contradiction with the two first names.

- B- The second inscription is incised on the main face of the boulder in a spiral form.

Text: "l'mty bn 'dy bn mty bn mkbl wbnny 'l gyr'l h rjm bn swdn"

"By Mty s. of 'Aḍy Mty s. of Mukabbal and he built upon Gyr'l s. of Swdn the cairn".

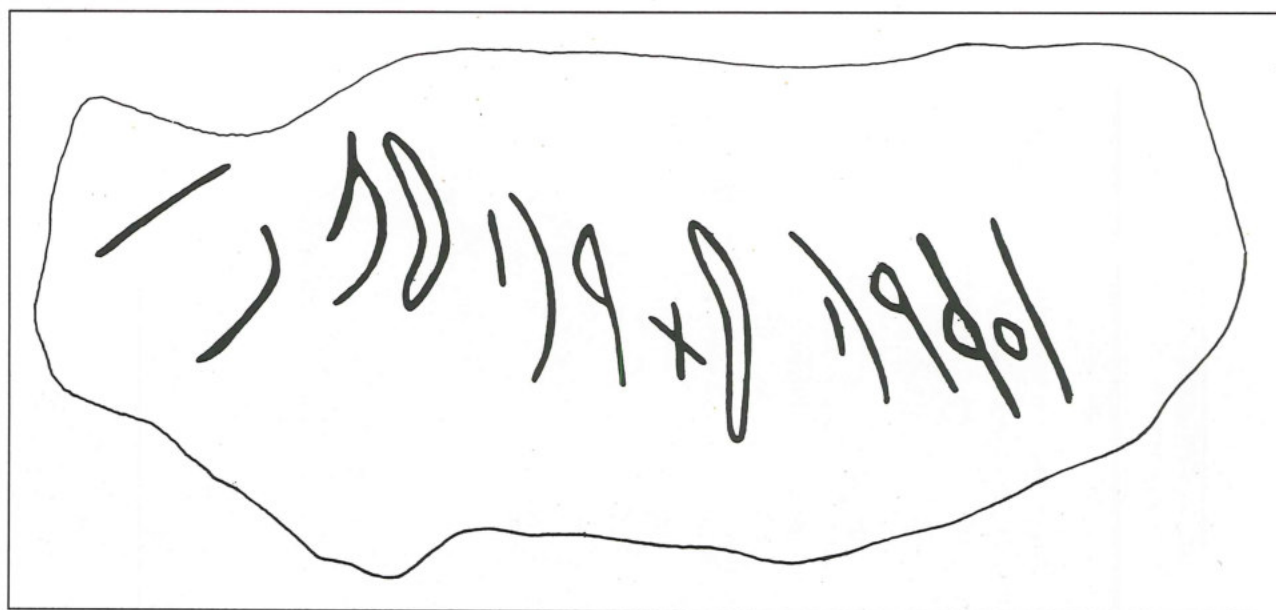
It is evident from the genealogy that he is

the son of the precedent in inscription A. However, the relation of the son and father to the deceased Gyr'l is not specified. He does not belong to the same family, since his father's name is not attested in the first inscription. Both names are common in the North Arabian onomasticon (Harding 1971: s.v.). The expression "bny 'l gyr'l hrjm", "he built upon Gyr'l the cairn" is of special interest for the significance of the *rujum* or heap of stones piled upon the tombs. In the Cairn of Hani', the expression "bny hrjm" appears twice (Harding 1953: Nos 26 and 36). This new inscription brings back to the attention of specialists the discussion on the meaning of the cairns. Commenting on a short inscription of the Jordan Archaeological Museum, J. 13157: "l'qrb bn hn't d'l tm wndm 'l 'mh trht wbnny 'lh", "by 'Aqrab son of Hani'at, of the tribe of Taym, and he grieved for his mother, she died and he built upon her". The present author has already discussed the significance of the cairn which he interpreted as a pile of stones upon tombs (Zayadine 1980: 107-109). A. Jamme who,



5. Inscription A from Wādi Salma, Marabb al-Ḥuṣayniyāt.





6. Facsimile of inscription (A).

after his soundings at the country of 'Ar'ar in Saudi Arabia, criticized the tomb interpretation of the cairns. According to him, the cairns are landmarks or rally signs (Jamme 1971: 43). He refers to modern usage to justify his interpretation: "The Bedouins of today do the very same. According to where they happen to stop, they use a cairn, a boulder or the side of a mountain" (Jamme 1971: 43). However, modern Transjordanian traditions clearly show that the cairns are memorials for the dead: "there is a rujum in Wādī al-Mūjib (the Arnon) to indicate the battlefield between the Šukhūr and beni Hamida" and "the bedouins used to build piles of stones for heroes who fell in battle, which they call rujum" (Salman 1929: 197). There should be no doubt that the famous Cairn of Hani' was a funeral memorial. It is noteworthy that the author of the second inscription recorded the father's name of Gyr'l at the end of the inscription to draw the attention of the readers on the "rujum" which was built upon the deceased. Such a practice is also known from other Safaitic inscriptions (Macdonald 1983: 572).

C. The third inscription is incised in the middle of the block and was the latest in date

because the author did not find space for his text:

Text: "lš'd bn bnt bn š d d'l mskt wr'y h'bl snt mlk rb'l" ( Figs. 7 and 8).

"By Ša'd, s. of Bnt, S. of Ša'd, from the tribe of Mskt, and he pastured the camels the year Rabel become king".

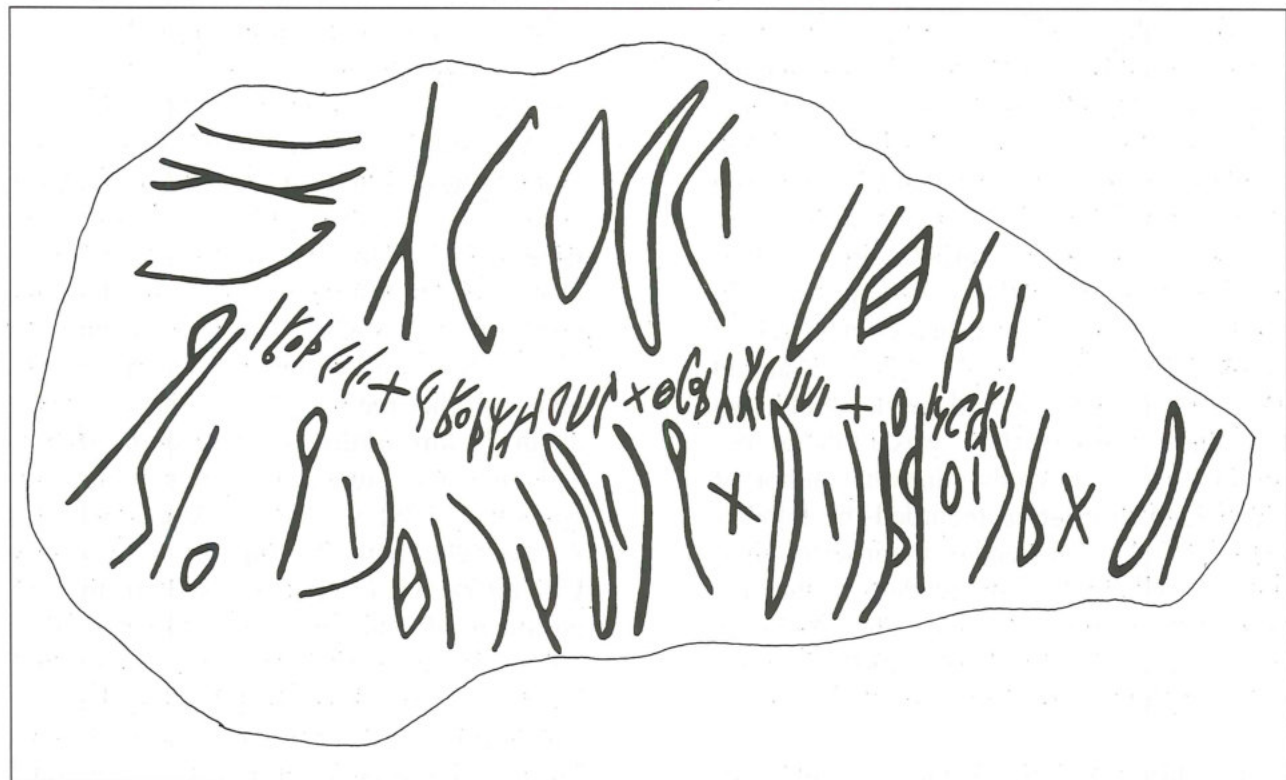
H. of letters: *alef*: 24mm; *'ain*: 4mm.

Commentary Ša'd, from Arabic to ascend, to raise, to elevate ( Harding 1971: s.v)

*Bnt*: Arabic *bny* to built; this proper name is well attested in the Cairn of Hani' and in several Safaitic inscriptions of Jordan. The tribe of *mskt*, Masikat? is attested at Rujum Hani', seven kilometers east of al-Azraq, north of the Baghdad highway. Harding (1953: No 116) comments: "I have seen texts by other members of this tribe at Jawa, about 20 km northwest of (Rujum) Hani'". This area was subject to a systematic prospection in 1981 by M.C.A. Macdonald and A. Searight, with the support of Yarmouk University and in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities (Macdonald 1982; 1983). To my knowledge, only preliminary reports are available. The remark of Harding was accurate, for a few years later, Winnett recorded the tribe's name *mskt* seven times at Jawa and four times at Tall al-'Abd,



7. Inscriptions (B) and (C).



8. Facsimile of inscriptions (B) and (C).



which is a huge heap of basalt blocks, near the Syrian frontier (Winnett 1957: 145).

However, the major interest of this short graffito is the dating formula: "*snt mlk rb'l*", the year Rabel became king. The author of inscription C does not seem to have any relation to the authors of A and B. He might have been the shepherd of the tribe, since he pastured the camels. In any case, he was the last to incise his inscription, since he found no room for it except in the middle of graffito B. It can be assumed that the king is most probably Rabel II who ascended the throne in AD 76, following the regency of his mother Shaqilat II (AD 70-76). This event was certainly relevant to the inhabitants of the Ḥarra, because his accession to the throne of the Nabataean kingdom was an era of relative prosperity with no major political problems. Other dated inscriptions in the Ḥarra were recorded by Macdonald (1995). Although this dating formula is not rare, it helps reconsider the relation between the bedouin tribes of the Ḥarra and the Nabataean kingdom. In his stimulating article "Nomads and the Ḥawrān in the Late Hellenistic and Roman Periods", 1993, M.C.A. Macdonald strongly opposed the view of D. Graf who considered the Safaitic tribes "as another component of the diverse population that existed under Nabataeans rule" (Graf 1989:359). He also did not accept Milik's hypothesis that some Safaitic tribes were semi-nomadic, or "quasi complètement sédentarisées" (Milik 1980:46). Milik had in mind the *beni 'Amrat* of *Mādabā* or the tribes of *'Awidh* and the *Dafaites*.

It is not in the author's intention to take part in this complex issue. But it is hard to imagine that the bedouins of the Ḥarra had no close contact with the sedentary population of Damascus and other cities of the Ḥawrān. Macdonald admits: "I have never claimed that the nomads had no commercial relations in the great cities. It is highly likely that they did, although the evidence is sparse and fragmentary" (private communication of

3.8.99). If the bedouins were not included in the administration of the Nabataean kingdom, it is highly probable that they exchanged their sheep and goats for food stock and clothes in the cities and that they were "clients" of the Nabataean kings. It is significant in this context that a man by the name of "*Drb s. of Qn*" who wrote in the Safaitic script identified himself as "*hnbty*, the Nabataean" (Clarck 1979: No. 661). This evidence is of little relevance to prove the control of the Safaitic population by the Nabataeans. However, Macdonald (1993: 346-52) reviewed the "Nomads, Sedentaries and the Epigraphic Evidence" and recorded several examples of bilingual Nabataean-Safaitic inscriptions, one of which is in a tomb cut in the rock by one "*HLF*" and inscribed in both Nabataeans and Safaitic at Dayr al-Kahf (Macdonald 1993: 348). He also cites bilingual Greek and Safaitic inscription and the inscriptions of a man who calls himself "*ḏ'l šlhḏ*", maybe in reference to the city of *Ṣalkhad* in the Ḥawrān.

To conclude this section, it is difficult to demonstrate the direct control of the Nabataeans on the bedouin tribes of the desert. But close contacts should be admitted as evidenced by bilingual inscriptions and dating formulae. If the Nabataeans were in need of the safe passage of their caravans toward the north, or to the Arabian-Persian Gulf, they no doubt had to establish a treaty of friendship with the bedouin tribes. Such tribal peaceful agreement did not survive, but we know from pre-Islamic Arabia that the tribe of *Quraysh* passed an agreement with other tribes for the safety of their caravans for the winter and summer journeys (*Ilaf Quraysh*, surat 106). There is no reason why the Nabataeans could not establish such treaties with the bedouin tribes.

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