

## GL'D AND NGD: SOME NEW EPIGRAPHIC HERITAGE FROM THE BLACK DESERT IN NORTH-EASTERN JORDAN

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#### Abstract:

This study aims at presenting newly-found safaitic inscriptions discovered in the Black Desert, north-eastern Jordan by the Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES) during the second (2017) field season at Wādī ar-Ru'aylah and in Wādī Suway'id. Through this paper, we aim to explain the toponyms Gl'd and Ngd in the Safaitic inscriptions, shed light on their interpretation in Safaitic and give translation and some commentary. This paper provides a comparison of inscriptions that mention these two toponyms in order to determine whether those names belong to a toponym or an adjective of a toponym. All photo credits are of 'Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES) Project'.

### 1. Introduction

The Safaitic inscriptions are among the most widely discovered ancient north Arabian (ANA) inscriptions. During the past few decades, a large number of these inscriptions were discovered in Jordan and Syria. In 2015, the *Badia Epigraphic Survey* (BES) started to re-discover and document these inscriptions, which records the GPS coordinates and digital photographs of the texts and drawings and their environments. Recently, what is known of these inscriptions has been collected in an online database "*Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia* (OCIANA)" [1]. So far, five surveys have been carried out in the period between 2015 and 2020. Through epigraphic surveys conducted in recent years, we have a clearer image of the inhabitants of the Badia especially their religious life and written heritage culture. In addition, we have a clearer under-

standing of the areas where inscriptions are found and the relation to the water resources. The discovery of new numbers of inscriptions has helped to create a map showing the distribution of the tribes, deities, toponyms, and personal names. The continuation of the epigraphic survey will help to have more information and materials to build a clearer image of the nomadic societies inhabiting the area [2].

### 2. Methodology

The epigraphical materials under study were discovered at Wādī ar-Ru'aylah, 36 km south-east of aş-Şafawī town, and in Wādī Suway'id 34 km southeast of aş-Şafawī town, fig. (1). It was collected during the second survey season of the Badia Epigraphic Survey, at a small cairn abounding with inscriptions, mostly Safaitic but containing numerous mod-

ern and pre-modern Arabic-script texts as well. Many researchers published many inscriptions from the two areas, which contributed to increasing knowledge about the area and the spread of epigraphical materials and rock art in the area [3]. The study of these inscriptions is based on a comparison with the previously published Safaitic and the ANA in general in order to analyze the words and verbs in these two inscriptions.

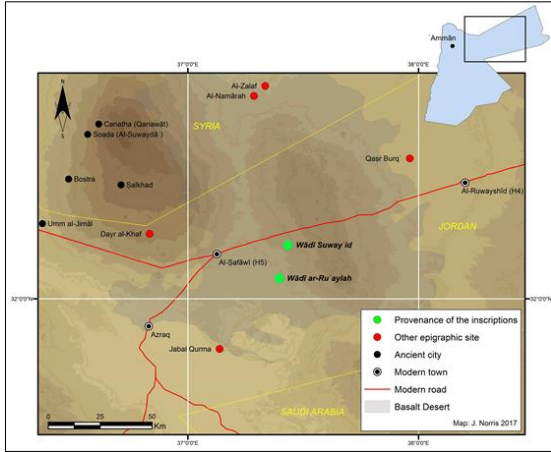


Figure (1) Shows a regional map showing the distribution of the inscriptions under study.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Inscription No. 1, fig. (2)



Figure (2) Shows stone 1/inscription no., 1 and 2 (© Al-Manaser).

#### ▪ Transliteration

*l bnt bn 'd bn tm bn 'd bn grm 'l bn qhs<sup>2</sup> bn  
 ḥdg w dt' b- 'bl fh lt s'lm w [w]r l- dy  
 'wr*

#### ▪ Translation

*By Bnt son of 'd son of Tm son of 'd son of  
 Grm 'l son of Qhs<sup>2</sup> son of Ḥdg and he spent*

*the season of the later rains with the  
 camels, O Lt [grant] security and blind  
 whoever scratches out [the inscription]*

#### ▪ Commentary

Two inscriptions were inscribed on a black basalt stone. All letters of the inscriptions are clear. All the names and vocabulary mentioned in this inscription are known in the previous Safaitic inscriptions. The Genealogy of the author of the inscription is known from other Safaitic inscriptions. The author of the inscription indicates that he spent the spring period in the area, which is characterized as semi-plain. Not far from the cairn, there is a water collection area known as a pastoral reservoir for rainwater, and it seems that the area was a station for the gathering of different animals, as rock art is widely spread in the area. These rock arts were part of the culture of the area's inhabitants, who expressed their daily memoirs through inscriptions and rock art. After the author of the inscription request the deity *Lt* for peace, he also request her to hurt anyone who damages or scratches out the inscription, and "damage" here means any form of harm. It is assumed that the Safaitic verb, 'wr, is correlated to the Arabic verb, 'awar, which means, "to lose an eye, be or become one-eyed" [4]. However, upon close analysis and inspection, in this case, it is more probable that the verb, 'wr, actually translates to "to harm" [5].

#### 3.2. Inscription No. 2, fig. (3)



Figure (3) Shows stone 2/inscription no. 3 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ Transliteration

*l 'dm ' bn khl bn s'r w syr m- mdr f h lt w ds<sup>2</sup>r s<sup>1</sup>lm m- b 's' gl'd*

▪ Translation

*By 'dm ' son of Khl son of S'r and he returned to a watering-place from the desert so, O Lt and Ds<sup>2</sup>r, let there be security from misfortune [from] Gl'd*

▪ Commentary

The author of the inscription indicates that he usually goes to the water area of the desert and asks the deities *Lt* and *Daushara* for security from the horribleness of *Gl'd*. *Gl'd* appears three times in the Safaitic inscriptions, one of which its reading is unconfirmed, and, as noted, the name was preceded by the preposition "m" in all the cases in which it appeared, tab. (1).

Table (1) List of Safaitic inscriptions with *Gl'd*

C 2473	'hmd 'bl f rld' m- gl' d	he stayed at Abila as he returned from Gilead'
KRS 15	w mty m- gl' d l- tdmr	and he travelled quickly from Gl'd to Tdmr
ASWS 168	[w syr] gl' d	[and he returned to] Gl' d [6]

*Gl'd* is the name of a place located in central Jordan near the current city of As-Salt [7-9]. It is believed that the name "*Gl'd*" is originally Canaanite and that the 'ayn was transferred to the word through the influence of the Semitic languages on the Safaitic [10]. The inscription C 1665, which carries the same genealogical chain of the author of the inscription, indicates that he went to Tdmr (Palmyra), which is the same event in the inscription KRS 15, tab. (2) & fig (4). The inscription can be interpreted that its author is requesting safety from the disease coming from the Gilead area which could have been a water epidemic or disease that spread in the Gilead region. The author can refer through this disease to the Jewish ruler Judas Maccabaeus in 162 BC who fought many battles against the local population in the region for the Jews who were living there and asked him for safety, which is a weak probability given the history of the war of the Jewish ruler<sup>(a)</sup> [7].

Table (2) List of Safaitic inscriptions with TDMR

Transliteration	Translation	Sigla
w mty tdmr	and he was travelling quickly to Palmyra	C 663
w 's'fr tdmr	and journeyed to Palmyra	C 1649
w 's'yr tdmr	and he travelled to Palmyra	C 1664
w 's'yr l- tdmr	and he returned to a watering place at Palmyra	C 1665
w 'ty m- tdmr	and he came from Palmyra	LP 717 [11]
w 'shb tdmr	and he had made a sudden attack on Palmyra?	WH 2833 [12]
w mty m- gl' d l- tdmr	and he travelled quickly from Gl'd to Palmyra	KRS 15
s'nt qtl' l' tdmr	in the year which the Palmyrenes <i>Sym</i> fought	Al-Namārah.H 61
w hrs' l' tdmr	and was on the look-out for Palmyrenes	Is.Mu 290
{b}[r]s' l' tdmr	{and was on the look-out for} Palmyrenes	Is.Mu 290.1
b- s'b tdmr	a company of men from Tadmur	AWS 393 [13]
q- l' tdmr	the people of Tdmr	Damascus Museum 32750.2
m' l' tdmr	with the people of Tdmr [Palmyra]	Salameen et. al, (2019) [14]

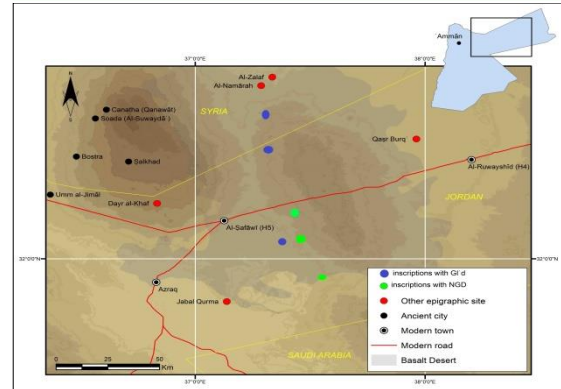


Figure (4) Shows a regional map showing the places where the Safaitic inscriptions with "toponym" *Gl'd* and *Ngd* have been discovered

3.3. Inscription No. 3, fig. (5)



Figure (5) Shows stone 3/inscription no. 4 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ Transliteration

*l km bn 'mr bn km bn 'qlds' bn dyn w 's'rq ' - ngd f h lt w ds<sup>2</sup>r s<sup>1</sup>lm*

▪ Translation

*By Km son of 'mr son of Km son of 'qlds' son of Dyn and he migrated to the Ngd and so O Lt and Ds<sup>2</sup>r [grant] security*

▪ Commentary

The author of the inscription indicates that he came to the 'Ngd. He used the letter "' as a definite article, and the name "*Ngd*" appeared three times in the Safaitic inscriptions

[15]. This word has been interpreted as an adjective meaning high ground, and it is not possible to know the extent to which it is linked to the Najd region in Saudi Arabia. Comparing the names of the places that appear in the Safaitic inscriptions, and that still bear the same names, such as Al-Ruḥbah, Hawrān, or Tdmr, does not provide sufficient evidence to confirm that the name Ngd is a name of a place [16-18]. This name is probably an adjective describing a high place, as in that place, which is one of the highest areas in *Harrah*, are located the four high areas Wadi Al-Qattafi, Wadi As-Suway'īd, and to their east the extension of Tulūl al-'Abd and Al-Ashqf that the author of the inscription may have visited or come from, tab. (3).

Table (3) List of Safaitic inscriptions with NGD

Sigla	Transliteration	Translation
KWQ 1	<i>w nqr h-ngd</i>	and he watched the high ground
HaNSB 303	<i>w mty m-ngd</i>	and he travelled quickly from Ngd [or high ground]
CSNS 381	<i>w syd 'r mn-ngd</i>	and he was pursuing a hybrid from Ngd

### 3.4. Inscription No. 4, fig. (6)



Figure (5) Shows a stone with safaitic inscription and drawing of the lion (© OCIANA).

#### ▪ Transliteration

*l fš 'l bn 's<sup>2</sup>hl bn s<sup>2</sup>qr bn gḥr bn nd' bn  
's<sup>2</sup>ym w ḥwr m- wrd lṯ*

#### ▪ Translation

*By Fš 'l son of 's<sup>2</sup>hl son of S<sup>2</sup>qr son of Gḥr  
son of Nd' son of 's<sup>2</sup>ym and he became  
weak because of a group of lions*

#### ▪ Commentary

The inscription contains the verb *ḥwr*, which appears for the first time in the Safaitic inscriptions, and this verb can be compared

with the Arabic verb *ḥawara* which means 'to be weak, feeble' [4]. The letter *m* is a preposition that means "from" or "because of". The word *wrd* here is more likely used as an adjective, which means "coming to the water", and the word *lṯ* means "a lion". It is noteworthy to mention that the word *laith* in Arabic is one of the names of the lion. Besides, the lion is sometimes referred to by the noun *ward* in Arabic. However, as a verb the word *warad<sup>a</sup>* in Arabic means "to come to water" [4]. In the Safaitic inscription, the lion is referred to by three different words: *lṯ*, *asd*, and *mdn*, tab. (4). The name of the lion in the Safaitic is often accompanied by a rock art of a lion, fig. (6). The "drawing" of the lion is one of the arts of the ancient Near East, which indicates the bravery of the knight in hunting and killing predators and highlights the social status of the hunter [19].

Table (3) List of Safaitic inscriptions with lion names

Transliteration	Translation	Sigla
<i>l gn bn 'lhm h- 's'd</i>	By Gn son of 'lhm is [the drawing of] the lion	C 1621
<i>l d' fš' bn bg'yd w l-h h- lṯ</i>	By {D'y} son of {Bgyd} and the lion is by him	WH 1229
<i>l 'dm bn bkr h- 's'd</i>	By 'dm son of Bkr is [the drawing of] the lion	CEDS 237
<i>l 's'l bn md mdn</i>	By 's'l son of Md [is the drawing of] a lion	KRS 1583

### 3.5. Inscription No. 5, fig. (7)



Figure (6) Stone 4/inscription No. 5 (© Al-Manaser).

#### ▪ Transliteration

*l 'šrm bn wdm 'l w dt' f gnm ḥrt*

#### ▪ Translation

*By Šrm son of Wdm 'l and he spent the  
season of later rains [here] and then  
gained booty from the Harrah*

#### ▪ Commentary

Here, the inscription was carved onto a of basalt stone which is characteristic to this

region. Fortunately, all of the originally carved letters are intact and clear to read, making its reading and translation completely certain. The inscription includes a genealogy, a narrative section and ends with a toponym. All personal names and terms referenced in the text are already known in Safaitic.

#### 4. Discussion

The author of the inscription indicates that he spent the late winter and obtained booty from *Ḥarrah*. It is not possible to determine the exact place from which he obtained the booty in the *Ḥarrah* area, as the name is given to the whole black desert. Nevertheless, the Badia survey project team noticed that the local inhabitants in the black desert use the word *Ḥarrah* to refer to the areas with dense black stones of medium and large size, while refer to plain areas with small stones "the size of an orange fruit or slightly larger" with the name "Al-Ḥashad". Therefore, it is likely that the author of the inscription obtained the booty from a close area with dense black stones of medium and large size, which is well-known to the local inhabitants at that time. As the inscription is discovered in Wādī Suwayʿid and it is known that Suwayʿid region has a part of it with dense black stones of medium and large size, it is likely that the author of the inscription obtained the booty from this part Suwayʿid region. It is noteworthy to mention that each of the main regions in black desert such as Salma, Al-Khodari, Suwayʿid and Al-Shuwaiti have a *ḥarrah*, a *ḥashad*, a *qaʿ* (bottom), and a *marrb*. The plain areas without stones are referred to according to size in the following order from largest to smallest: *souh*, and *marab*. Valleys are also referred to in the following order from largest to smallest: *shuʿaib*, *farʿ*, and *wādī* [20].

#### 5. Conclusion

*The inscriptions discovered in the Jordanian Badia showed that the inhabitants of the region*

*were in contact with the neighboring regions in the first centuries AD, especially with cities such as Damascus and Ḥawrān. These inscriptions revealed a lot about the lives of these inhabitants. The mention of the names of different regions in the Safaitic inscriptions is a frequent phenomenon. It is important for the interpretation of the Safaitic inscriptions to know where the inscription was found and the geography of the place in order to understand the semantic implications of the contents of the inscription. For example, the inscription that contains the word Ngd (Inscription No. 3) was found in an area located to the west of the high area helped in that the meaning of the word Najd here is the high plateau and not the name of a place. High plateau is not a place name. Also, understanding the inscription while finding it in the field helps in determining the directions, especially with the verb ʿsʿrq (moved eastward), through which it is possible to know the intended area and periods of summer and winter travels for the inhabitants of the area. The same is true with regard to identifying the names of the geographical areas referred to in the inscriptions, such as the case when using the phrase rʿy h- nhl (grazed [in] this valley), or the phrase hll h- dr (settled [in] this "place of residence"). In the Safaitic inscriptions, when the author mentions or refers to the name of a geographical place, he likely wishes to convey a message to the potential readers of the inscription who live in the area where the script is written-that he visited or settled or grazed in this distinguished place. In addition, knowing and determining where the inscription was discovered contributes to determining the movement of the author, for example, the verb nʿr (to watch) is usually mentioned in inscriptions found in high-altitude areas or in elevated cairns. So far, twelve Safaitic inscriptions bearing the name Tdmr (Palmyra) have been found, some of which used it to refer to a place name which is definitely the city of Palmyra, while others used it to refer to the name of a tribe (Tdmr tribe). This is further supported by the similarity of the matter with the Safaitic inscriptions that sometimes mention the word Salkhad as a place name referring to the city of Salkhad, while in some other contexts use it to refer to the name of a tribe (Salkhad tribe). Revealing more names of places and the actions related to them can contribute to creating a clearer map of the relationship of the inhabitant of the Jordanian Badia with other cultures and civilizations.*

## Editorial conventions

- { } enclose doubtful letters and words
- [ ] enclose letters which are restored
- indicates a damaged area in which an unknown number of letters have been lost
- \* marks unattested or reconstructed forms
- \* / enclose proposed vocalisations

## Endnotes

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