Original article

UNVEILING THE CULTURAL LEGACY: EXPLORING NEW PRE-ISLAMIC GRAFFITI FROM THE BLACK BASALT DESERT

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Abstract:
The carvings presented here were discovered during the second (2017) field season of the Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES), in Wādī Swīʿad, which is located in al-Ḥarrah approximately 34 km to the southeast of aṣ-Ṣafawī (H5) and stretches for 13 km and is approximately 820 meters above sea level. This article presents some examples of Rock Art that appear next to the inscriptions and provide us with two new personal names (grmry and hnʾmt), as well as with new Safaitic verb (ḫwr "he became weak or feeble" and wyl "Woe to!") and the adverb dhr (dahran "forever").
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1. Introduction

The study of ancient North Arabic inscriptions has received remarkable attention during the past decade. Recently, what is known of these inscriptions has been collected in an online database "Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA)". The aims of OCIANA project, is to collect all the known pre-Islamic inscriptions from northern Arabia into a single digital database and to make them freely available online with readings, translations, commentaries, *apparatus criticus*, bibliography and location. In order to achieve OCIANA project deliverables, Macdonald and Al-Manaser started in 2015 the *Badia Epigraphic Survey* (BES), which records the GPS co-ordinates and digital photographs of the texts and drawings and their environments [1]. So far, five surveys have been carried out in the period between 2015 and 2020 [2] and these have led to the discovery of approximately 10,000 new Safaitic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Greek, Islamic, mediaeval, and Modern Arabic inscriptions [3]. The epigraphical materials under study were found in *Wādī Swīʿad*, 34 km southeast of aṣ-Ṣafawī town. *Wādī Swīʿad* is a valley whose length amounts to 13 km, and it ends at *Mrabb Swīʿad* area. According to a

local legend, the name of this site derives from the fact that a person named *Swīʿad* was killed in this area which later became known by his name. Clark had published some inscriptions from this area in his doctoral thesis, but he referred to the area as *Swīʿad* and replaced the letter "s" with the letter "ṣ" [4]. The *Wādī Swīʿad* area, fig. (1) is distinguished by the presence of many stones that contain many short Safaitic inscriptions that contain only the names of their authors. In fact, the discovery of these inscriptions came within the work of the second season of the BES (2017) when 2336 inscriptions were discovered during this survey. This survey aimed at approaching the relationship between the water gathering areas and the number of inscriptions founds on the rocks and the nature of these inscriptions. It was shown that the rocks located near the water-gathering areas, known as *Al-Galta,* contain dense and short inscriptions that mostly only contain the authors' names in addition to a large number of rock arts which mostly represent animals that were known to the local people at the time such as deer, ostriches, and camels.
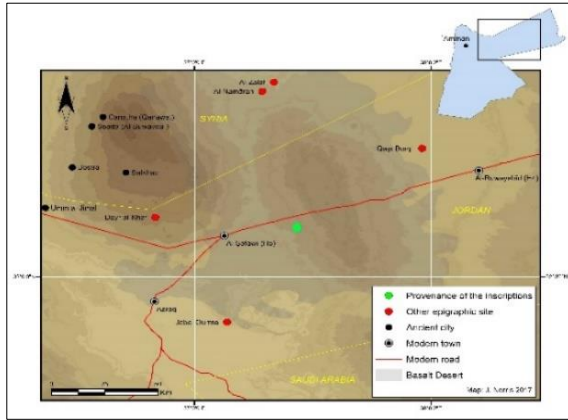
2. Methodology

One of the most important objectives of the Badia Epigraphic Surveys (BES) Project is to re-document the inscriptions that were found by various researchers and published in different languages. Most of these previous reports did not mention the exact location of the sites where these inscriptions were found, apart from a general reference to the town or a large place/area where the inscriptions were discovered. The BES project revealed the importance of determining the exact location of where the inscription was found in interpreting the inscription and attaining a clear and accurate meaning for the script. Therefore, the first criterion for choosing the place of the field survey is that the area has been previously studied, and the second criterion is to complete the areas that have not been fully surveyed to obtain a clear picture of the number of inscriptions and their distribution in those areas. In the field, the survey is carried out accurately, all rock drawings and inscriptions are photographed, the whole area or the valley is completely surveyed, and the survey is not limited only to rock cairns. In addition, all observations are taken in the field, and the survey team usually asks the local inhabitants to determine the exact names of the sites/valleys/areas.

3. Results
3.1. *Stone 1*, fig. (2)

Figure (2) stone 1 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l hnʾmt bn gḫfl h- frs¹

▪ **Translation**

By Hnʾmt son of Gḫfl is [the drawing of] the horse

▪ **Commentary**

This inscription was carved on a black basalt stone in approximately medium-sized letters. It is accompanied by a drawing of a knight riding a horse and hunting a deer. The inscription is located beneath the drawing. Like most Safaitic inscriptions, the inscription begins with the letter *l* "*lām auctoris*" [5], followed by the ancestral chain of the author, then the definitive article *h*, distraction, and after that comes the Substantive *frs¹*. All the names and vocabulary mentioned in this inscription are known in the previous Safaitic inscriptions. However, there is a difference among the researchers in the field regarding the interpretation of the Substantive *frs¹*. Some interpreted it as the meaning of the knight, and thus, the meaning of the inscription is: [This inscription was carved by/to] congratulated Hnʾmt son of Gḫfl the horseman! [6]. Whereas, others interpreted it as the meaning of the *frs¹* (horse) [7], and consequently, the meaning of the inscription is: the drawing of the (horse) is by Hnʾmt son of Gḫfl. Although the interpretation of the word *frs¹* in such drawings as the meaning of the knight is the common interpretation, the authors of this study believe that the most suitable interpretation of this inscription is that the depicted horse in the hunting scene is of Hnʾmt son of Gḫfl. Under the inscription, there is a horizontal line with vertical lines beneath it as a sort of decoration. Actually, this kind of decoration was repeatedly found in many Safaitic inscriptions, and some researchers interpreted it as a sort of magic to protect the inscription. The associated depiction of the deer hunting scene was performed in a simple and slack way as compared to many drawings that represent the same scenes. In such drawings, the front legs were usually depicted in a curved way forward so as to give the suggestion of movement and running. In fact, the artist always depicts the prey in the Safaitic deer hunting scenes by placing the deer in front of the horse in the process of running and the deer's head in a position looking back as if asking for mercy from the attacker or trying to dodge the spear while running away. In addition, the drawing of the lines on the body of the horse is believed to suggest force and that the provision of some size to the head of the horse is to suggest majesty and prestige. Besides, the artist is believed to try to give the type of movement and running by suggesting the legs to portray the hunting process of the prey while the knight runs behind it. On the other hand, the drawing of the hunting process of predators such as lions and hyenas is different in many aspects from that of the deer hunting process. These differences include the followings: the depicted movement of the legs and the shape of the predator indicate that the animal is in a state of attack and in the process of confronting the knight and the horse; and the movement of the front legs of the horse, which is in a state of reversal, gives the impression of the state of being pushed and giving a perception of the power of the attacking predator. In addition, the artist distinguishes between the lion and the hyena in the Safaitic drawings through the size of the head. Besides, the artist differentiates between the hunting spear and the fighting spear in the rock drawings through the length of the spear, where the hunting one is depicted longer. In some drawings of spears, things that look like weights were drawn at the end of the spear and are believed to fulfill the purpose

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of maintaining the balance of the spear when thrown at the target [8].

3.2. *Stone 2*, fig. (3)

Figure (3) stone 2 (© Al-Manaser).

- **Transliteration**

  l r{m} bn qdm bn s¹krn w ḥl h- dr

- **Translation**

  By R{M} son of Qdm son of S¹krn and he camped [at] this place

- **Commentary**

The inscription was carved on a black basalt Stone that is approximately rectangular in shape. The inscription includes a drawing of a dual match or a fight between two knights riding horses in addition to a drawing of four human figures of men. Actually, it appears that the artist tried to portray four men while watching the fight between the two knights, and appears that the artist discriminated between the sizes of the knights on horses in spite of the simplicity of the lines in which the scene was demonstrated. In addition, the human figures in this inscription are similar to the human figures in the other Safaitic inscriptions, where they are executed by simple lines. All the letters of this inscription are clear, except the third letter which is carved in a different way from what is ordinary in the Safaitic inscriptions, nevertheless the letter can be read as M due to its close similarity with the letter *M* in the Safaitic inscriptions. All the names mentioned in this inscription are known in the Safaitic inscriptions. Regarding the sentence, *w ḥl h- dr*, it is a well-known form in the Safaitic inscriptions [9], and it is sometimes written with a double *l*, *w ḥll h- dr*. Both forms have been interpreted with the same meaning, which is al-makan or mahal (i.e. staying in the place). This formula has been interpreted in the sense of him who camped here or was here. Actually, the word "dur" was mentioned in one of the Arabic inscriptions carved in Greek inscription with the formula *ad-dawra* "the role" meaning the place [10]. In the far upper right side of the stone there are two letters for *K* and it seems that the writer started the engraving and did not complete it.

3.3. *Stone 3*, fig. (4)

Figure (4) stone 3 (© Al-Manaser).

The third stone shows a hunting scene above the Safaitic inscription, which can be read as follows:

- **Transliteration**

  l n ʿmn bn ṣ ʿd bn ys¹m ʿl h- ḫṭṭ

- **Translation**

  By N ʿmn son of Ṣ ʿd son of Ys¹m ʿl is the carving

Commentary

It was apparently carved after the horse drawing was executed due to the limited space in which the inscription was carved. All the vocabulary and names mentioned in this inscription are known in the Safaitic inscriptions. As for the word *ḫṭṭ*, this was interpreted as drawing in the Safaitic inscriptions [11] and it is a word that is frequently found in this form in the Safaitic inscriptions. The name of the owner of the inscription appears in three previously published Safaitic inscriptions [12].

3.4. *Stone 4*, fig. (5)

Figure (5) stone 4 (© Al-Manaser).

- **Transliteration**

  l ṣ ʿb bn ḍhd bn ḏ ʾb bn n ʿmn

- **Translation**

  By Ṣ ʿb son of Ḍhd son of Ḏ ʾb son of N ʿmn

- **Commentary**

stone bears a drawing of a person sitting on the back of a camel. The artist tried to decorate the camel by placing the hanging lines in a zigzag way to give the impression that the person sits on what is known as a "*kharj*" that is placed on the back of the camel and where the rider places his tools on the camel. The drawing also shows that the rider on the camel holds a rope in his hand in order to control the camel and behind the rider there is something that looks like a shield and a stick. It is also noted that the artist decorated the head of the camel with different lines. All the names mentioned in this inscription are known in the Safaitic inscriptions.

3.5. *Stone 5*, fig. (6)

Figure (6) stone 5 (© Al-Manaser).

- **Transliteration**

l f{ḏ}g bn gryt h- ʾs²lly

- **Translation**

By {Fḏg} son of Gryt the ʾs²llite

- **Commentary**

This inscription is carved from left to right in relatively broad font, and it is noted that the last three letters have been deformed. The inscription is accompanied by a drawing of three circles carrying the seven signs. These signs are considered by many researchers as sacred signs or a sort of magic to guard the inscription. The last name in the inscription ʾs²lly was preceded by the letter *H* which is the defining tool in the Safaitic inscriptions and followed by the letter E, which is a well-known '*nisbah*' in the Safaitic inscriptions. In addition, the name ʾs²lly is a name for a well-known Safaitic tribe. The inscription [13] also, beared the same name with the presence of a tool to identify the tribes in the Safaitic inscriptions.

3.6. Stone 6, fig. (7)

Figure (7) stone 6 (© Al-Manaser).

- **Transliteration**

l hnʾmnt bn gḫfl bn mlk bn klbt bn hgn bn ywny bn ks²{d}{y} bn hgn w ḫll f h ʾlt s¹lm w ʿwr ḏ- yʿwr h- s¹fr

- **Translation**

By Hnʾmnt son of Gḫfl son of Mlk son of Klbt son of Hgn son of Ywny son of {Ks²dy} son of Hgn and he camped [here] and so O Lt [grant security] and blind whoever scratches out this inscription

- **Commentary**

All the names in this inscription are known in the Safaitic inscriptions. The last two letters of *ks²dy* have been distorted by the addition of extra lines. The loop of the *d* can be seen under the two diagonal lines carved across it, and a third diagonal line has been carved near the top of the stem. The top of the loop of the *y* is obscured by damage and other lines have been added to the side of the stem. The *f* after *ḫll* is a little difficult to see on the photograph but is clearly there.

3.7. Stone 7, fig. (8)

Figure (8) stone 7 (© Al-Manaser).

- **Transliteration**

l ʾs¹ bn ys¹lm bn zhrn w rʿy ḥry {f} wny {m}{n}{ʿ}[] ʾḫ -h ḍbʾ f h lt ġnyt w qbll l- ḏ ts²wq w s¹lm w ʿwr lḏ yʿwr h- ḫṭṭ

- **Translation**

By ʾs¹ son of Ys¹lm son of Zhrn and he pastured as best he could {and so} he became feeble [] his brother Ḍbʿ and so O Lt [grant] prosperity and a reunion of loved ones to him who is longing and security and [inflict] blindness on whoever scratches out this carving.

- **Commentary**

Tentatively, the authors of this article suggest a connection with Arabic ḥariyyun "adapted, suitable" [14] in the sense that owner of the inscription was adapting his pasturing to particular circumstances.

3.8. Stone 8, fig. (9)

Figure (9) stone 8 (© Al-Manaser).

- **Transliteration**

l ḍbʾ bn frʾ

- **Translation**

By Ḍbʾ son of Frʾ

- **Transliteration**

l mnʾl bn grmry h- rm----

- **Translation**

By Mnʾl son of Grmry the rm----

- **Commentary**

The name *grmry* has not been found before. The end of the inscription is covered by a patch of lichen but it is clear from the corner of the cartouche that this affects only one letter. One might expect a *y*, producing the nisbah *h-rmy* [7]. However, what can be seen after *h-rm* is a part of a fork at the base and possibly a diagonal line at the top, suggesting that the letter is a ʾ or a ḫ. The latter would not produce a known root (RMḪ) but it is also difficult to find a suitable meaning for *rmʾ*.

- **Transliteration**

l bnʿry bn ktb

- **Translation**

By Bnʿry son of Ktb

3.9. Stone 9, fig. (10)

Figure (10) stone 9 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l fṣ ̉l bn ̉s²hl bn s²qr bn ġhr bn nd ̉ bn ̉s²ym w ḫwr m- wrd lṯ

▪ **Translation**

By Fṣ ̉l son of ̉s²¹hl son of S²qr son of Ġhr son of Nd ̉ son of ̉s²ym and he became weak because of a group of lions

▪ **Commentary**

It is not quite clear what the narrative ḫwr m-wrd lṯ means and the translation here is purely a suggestion. For ḫwr compare Arabic ḫawira and ḫawwara "he became weak or feeble" [14]. For wrd cf. Arabic wird "a herd of camels", "a flock of birds", "a company of men", etc. [15].

3.10. Stone 10, fig. (11)

Figure (11) stone 10 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l ̔ḏr bn ḥrt h- nql{t} [ff] h ̉lt flṭ -h m ṭrd ̔m f ̔m

▪ **Translation**

By ̔ḏr son of Ḥrt the stranger O ̉lt save him from being driven away year after year

▪ **Commentary**

For nql compare Arabic naqīl "nomad, stranger" [15]. For ṭrd cf. Arabic ṭarada-hu "he drove him away", of which the maṣdar is ṭard [14].

▪ **Transliteration**

l ḏkr bn ḫgr ̉

▪ **Translation**

By Ḏkr son of Ḫgr ̉

3.11. Stone 11, fig. (12)

Figure (12) stone 11 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l ̔bs¹ bn g ̔ṯm bn ḥmyn bn ġḍḍt bn ̉n{ḍt} bn ws²yt bn ḍf bn gn ̉l bn bll h- bkrt w w{y}{l} mlkt dhr

▪ **Translation**

By ̔bs¹ son of G ̔ṯm son of Ḥmyn son of Ġḍḍt son of { ̔ndt} son of Ws²yt son of Ḍf son of Gn ̉l son of Bll is [the drawing of] the young she-camel and woe to Mlkt for ever

▪ **Commentary**

The part of the genealogy from ḥmyn to ḍf is well known [16] and so it is possible to restore the fifth name as ̉nḍt.

This appears to be the first time the exclamation *wyl* "Woe to!" has been found in Safaitic, though it is used as a noun in C 76 [7]. It is also the first time that *dhr* used as an adverb has occurred in Safaitic. For the meaning, the word *dhr* compares with the Arabic *dahran* "forever" [14].

3.12. Stone 12, fig. (13)

Figure (13) stone 12 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l s¹lg bn bhh w ws¹q -h h- s¹l ̉ ġl f h rḍy wqyt h- s¹nt

▪ **Translation**

By S¹lg son of Bhh and the flash-flood drove him away destroying [him] suddenly and so O Rḍy [grant him] preservation this year

▪ **Commentary**

The expression *w ws¹q-h h-s¹l* is found several times [6, 17], and means "the flash-flood drove him away". It is noted that flash-floods are a constant danger in the desert wadis when there has been rain far way at their sources. However, the interpretation of ̉ġl is offered very tentatively. In Arabic, the verb ġālā (Ġ-W-L) means "he or it took [him] away unexpectedly". In Arabic, this verb does not have IV form, but we suggest that in Safaitic it did have one and that ̉ġl here represents its maṣdar * ̉iġāl, which would here be an adverbial accusative * ̉iġālan, meaning "destroying suddenly".

3.13. Stone 13, fig. (14)

Figure (14) stone 13 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l bny bn wrd bn s²hyt bn ̉s¹ w rġm ̔l- bn ̉m -h mny f h lt nqmt m ḏ ̉s¹lf w ḏ y ̔wr h- s¹fr ̉ty -hm ̉ḫy -h

▪ **Translation**

By B{n}]y son of Wrd] son of S²hyt] son of ̉s¹ and Fate struck down the son of his mother and so O Lt [grant] revenge on whoever committed the act [requiring vengence] and whoever scratches out the inscription may his [the victim's?] two brothers destroy them.

▪ **Commentary**

The statement *rġm ̔l- N mny* has not been found before in Safaitic inscriptions. The implication of bn ̉m-h is not clear,

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it could perhaps refer to the author's mother's son from a previous or subsequent marriage, or may be just a periphrasis for "his brother", as is implied at the end of the text? The prayer is somewhat convoluted and it is not clear whether ʾḫy refers to the victim's or the offender's brothers. Very tentatively, we have taken ʾty in the sense of Arabic atā "he destroyed" (though in Arabic this takes ʿalā) [14] and ʾḫy as the dual of ʾḫ, though elswhere this is found as ḫw (see the examples in Al-Jallad) [18]. None of this is very satisfactory and it is hoped that others will have greater success in interpreting this interesting text.

3.14. *Stone 14*, fig. (15)

Figure (15) stone 14 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l ys¹mʿl bn ġyr bn ḫl bn ḍhdt bn kṯbt bn ḥmyn bn ġ{ḍ}ḍ[t] bn {ʾ}nḍt bn ws²yt bn ḏf bn gnʾl w ḫll h- dr w dṯ ʾ f h lt s¹lm w nqʾt l- ḏ yʿwr h- s¹fr w ngʿ ʾl- frs¹ -h f h lt w s²ʿhqm w ds²r ḫlf m- ṯl -h

▪ **Translation**

By Ys¹mʿl son of Ġyr son of Ḫl son of Ḍhdr son of Kṯbt son of Ḥmyn son of {Ġḍḍt} son of {ʾnḍt} son of Ws²yt son of Ḏf son of Gnʾl and he camped here and he spent the season of the later rains and so O Lt [grant] security and [inflict] ejection from the grave on whoever scratches out the inscription and he grieved in pain over his horse and so O Lt and S²ʿhqm and Ds²r [grant that he receives] compensation from his company of men.

▪ **Commentary**

The phrase *w ngʿ ʾl frs¹-h* is unusual and it is possible that *frs¹* is a plural (cf. Arabic *furūs*) and that the author was grieving over the loss of several horses. In Arabic *ṯūl* means "a swarm of bees" but can be used of "a company of men" [14], but it is uncertain whether this is the case here. If it is, then it would seem that his "company of men" (either in a military sense or another grouping such as a raiding party) was in some way responsible for the loss of the author's horse(s).

3.15. *Stone 15*, fig. (16)

Figure (16) stone 15 (© Al-Manaser).

▪ **Transliteration**

l tm bn s¹krn bn qdm bn mfny bn nʿmn w bʾs¹ ʿzy ʾl- ʾs²yʿ -h ḥrb -hm w s¹by ʾl ḥwlt f {h} lt rwḥ l- ḏ ġl{b}

▪ **Translation**

By Tm son of S¹krn son of Qdm son of Mfny son of Nʿmn and he was miserable enduring it patiently for his companions whom the lineage group of Ḥwlt had plundered and taken prisoner and so {O} Lt grant relief to those who {have been overpowered}

▪ **Commentary**

ʿzy has been interpreted on the basis of Arabic *ʿazin* "patient, enduring" [14]. In this case, it would be used as an adverb. If the final word is *ġlb*, we would take it as the 3rd person plural passive of the suffix conjugation "they were overpowered". The *{h}* in the invocation looks like a *ḫ*, but either the author's tool slipped or there is a small split in the surface at this point.

4. Discussion

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 [19]. These inscriptions revealed a lot about the lives of these inhabitants. It can be said that our knowledge about the life of the tribes that inhabited the al-Ḥarrah has become better through the discovery of more inscriptions that contain many information about the different aspects of their lives. Understanding and translating the inscriptions at the site or where they were discovered gives a better interpretation of the true meaning of the actions or words contained in the inscriptions [20]. Many of the translations of inscriptions are being reconsidered because more inscriptions have been discovered and translated based on their general meaning and not based on their Literal meaning. These inscriptions were one of the means by which the inhabitants of the area tried to convey some of the events they were living to each other. Some of these rock inscriptions and drawings were a kind of distinction for their authors. Although some inscriptions from this region have been published previously by some researchers, the discovery of these new inscriptions confirms that the process of documenting inscriptions and rock drawings needs to be permanently re-evaluated and a new mechanism for the documentation process is found in order not to lose much of the written heritage which might be important cultural treasures that hold valuable information about the region's history, especially from the pre-Islamic period.

5. Conclusion

The second (2017) field season of the Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES), took place between the 15th and 27th of April 2017 across al-Ḥarrah area situated in northeastern Jordan. This survey allowed the team to retest previously recorded GPS data and record photographic evidence as well, both aspects integral to the success of the research. The BES was established in 2015 to make systematic surveys of inscriptions and rock art of all periods in the basalt desert of northeastern Jordan. The study showed a relationship

between the locations in which Safaitic inscriptions are found and the interpretation of the inscriptions themselves. The inscriptions presented here represent a portion of the more than 3,000 discovered during the second season. To date, the BES has conducted six seasons of fieldwork in different areas of al-Ḥarrah. The main goal of this project was to record the inscriptions and use modern methods to create a clear picture of how the inscriptions were spread throughout the region. This would help preserve the largest amount of written heritage found in al-Ḥarrah. In addition to documenting the inscriptions, the BES also recorded numerous rock drawings. The results of the BES showed that there is a pressing need for more extensive documentation work, which will take many years to complete. The findings from the surveys underscored the crucial work done by previous researchers, particularly Winnett, F. V., & Harding, G. L., and Michael Mac-Donald, in preserving the region's written heritage. Their efforts had a significant impact in attracting many researchers to the area, enabling the discovery of numerous important inscriptions. Michael MacDonald played a pivotal role in establishing a comprehensive database of northern Arabic inscriptions, which has become an invaluable resource for researchers worldwide to access the inscriptions revealed so far in Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and many other regions. OCIANA offers abundant information about all aspects of the inscriptions. The ultimate goal is to collect and document all ANA inscriptions along with their accurate geographical details. This enables researchers to create maps showing the spread of tribes, deities, people's names, rock drawings, and more. The discovery and sharing of more inscriptions contribute to building a robust database. This, in turn, provides researchers with extensive information to accurately interpret the historical narrative of the region. It also helps create a more realistic picture of the lives of the people in the region in the pre-Islamic period, helping improve the information we have about the region and its connections with the nearby areas.

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