New Five Nabataean Inscriptions from Northeast Jordan

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Abstract

During an epigraphical survey which started in 2001 until 2003 in northeastern Jordan, a large number of inscriptions were located, the majority of which were Greek, some were Latin, and a few were safaitic inscriptions. In addition, five new Nabataean inscriptions were located which are discussed in this paper. All these inscriptions were incised on the basalt stone of the southern Haurān region. Their importance lies in the fact that they provide new information for the study of the history and the language of the Arab tribes that inhabited the territory of the Jordanian and the Syrian deserts during the first century AD.

Introduction

The inscriptions, which are examined below, were found during a survey carried out in northeastern Jordan by the epigraphy department in the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology at Yarmouk University. It was conducted in the summer of 2000 and 2001. The region, from which these inscriptions came was the outlying district of the Nabataean kingdom. Nabataean culture and power grouped around three centres, represented by three cities, Bosra in the north, Petra in the middle, and Al-Higr in the south. The most important one of these was no doubt Petra. Bosra itself and the region to the south and to the east were always under the Nabataean kingdom power until the fall of their kingdom in 106 A.D. The basalt desert lies in the northeast of Jordan, stretching from about 20 kilometres east of Mafraq to a few kilometres west of Ruwaishid. The Northeast part of Jordan, or what we used to say the Jordanian part of Haurān had already provided a group of Nabataean inscriptions. As the result of the survey of Nabataean inscriptions from various sites in the southern Haurān as a part of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904 – 5 and 1909, Littmann published the first comprehensive Nabataean inscriptions collection from Haurān in 1914. This collection comprises 107 inscriptions found in the

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different Nabataean villages in the region, in particular at Umm al-Jimal. In
the late 1930s and early 40s Nelson Glueck made several visits to Umm el-
Jimal in search of evidence for his thesis that the city was a major link on the
Nabataean trade route from southern Jordan to Syria via Wadi Sirhan (Glueck
1939: 140-46; 1942: 3-8; 1944: 7-17; 1951: 1-34). From the absence of
Nabataean pottery at Umm el-Jimal and other Syrian sites, he concluded that
the Nabataean influence (attested by numerous inscriptions) there was in the
form of commercial and strategic interest rather than in the form of dense
settlement (Glueck 1951: 13, 17). In addition, Bert de Vries found additional
fragmentary Nabataean inscriptions in Umm al-Jimal region during his
excavations over the last two decades; these inscriptions are still waiting to
be published. Nabil Khairy has found a new Nabataean inscription from the
1996 survey in Umm el-Jimal area, published in the Archaeology of Jordan
and Beyond, Essays in Honour of James Sauer.

Inscriptions analysis

Inscription no 1, pl. 1, fig. 1.

A basalt triangular stone was found in a house courtyard in the centre of
the archaeological site of Umm al-Qu'tein (أم القتين) which is located about
twelve km. to the east of Sabha in Northeastern Jordan. The top left corner is
broken which affected the correct reading of the last letter of the first line.
Otherwise, the text is complete and clear. The inscription consists of three
lines that cover the stone face. The letters are of a big size and deeply incised.

Dimensions: Height 57 cm; Width 33 cm; Thickness 15 cm; Height of
letters 16 – 13 cm.

Transcription

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>... ḥl(y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>fw br</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>'lqw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translation

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>ḥal(i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>fū son of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>'Alqū</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ḥl(y)fw : The first name is ḥl(y)fw if the reading of the letter “y” is correct.
This name attested in the Nabataean inscriptions (Negev, 1971; Savignac,
1933 and 1934), Arabic خلف “ḥalaf”. This name is a masculine construct
singular, either derived from the name خلف means “what comes after”,
succeed, replace, and also “the pious offspring” or from Arabic خلف “halif”
“ally, sworn friend” (Harding, 1971). This name is to be identified with the
known Arabic names that currently used خلف (Ibn Duraid, 1979);
and for the name ḥalaf see (Cantineau, 1978; and for the names ḥalaf, ḥilaf,
and ḥulaif see Winnett and Harding (1978). This name is also found in other
Nabataean inscriptions (Euting, 1885; Jaussen and Savignac, 1909-1914;
Littmann, 1914; Al-Theeb, 1998 and 2002), in Safaitic as ḥalaf, ḥilaf, and...
hulaif (Harding, 1971; Winnett and Harding, 1978; Al-Theeb, 1991 and 1993), in Thamudic as ḥlf (King, 1990), in Palmyrian ḥlfw, ḥlfʾ and ḥlfy, successor. (Stark, 1971). This name also attested as a first element in a Thamudic compound name ḥflh (Harding, 1971). The Greek rendering Χαλλωσ was influenced by Greek names ending in –πας (Lidzbarski, 1889-1900). The letter ḥ is sometimes rendered by χ, and sometimes it is not expressed at all, if it is near a liquid consonant, e.g., Χαλλωφάνης, Χαλλωφάνος, Ἀλλωφάν and Ἀλλωφαίος (Lidzbarski, 1889-1900); for the discussion of the meaning of these names see (E. Littmann, 1914). This name may also be identified with the Greek Ὀλφος or Ἀλφος (Wuthnow, 1930; Cantineau, 1978).

Br: Although all scholars believe that the word br is just an Aramaic well-known noun, it is also common Semitic and an Arabic well-known noun (Beeston et al., 1982) and is a very common Nabataean masculine singular construct noun, “son of” (Cantineau, 1978). In Arabic it is attested as brw “child, son, offspring”, and the plural is ′brw (Jamme, 1962; Beeston et al., 1982). This term is also found in old and later Aramaic (Al-Theeb, 1993). It is also found in Phoenician (Tombback, 1974), in both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic as נ (Brown, et al., 1906), and in Syriac as ܕܢܢ, pl. ܕܢܢ (Costas, 1963).

′Alqw: The last line bears a new Nabataean personal name ′Alqw, Arabic علَق “to hang, be suspended, cleave, adhere”; also ′علق in Arabic means (دوة) “leech”. It occurs in Safaitic as ′lg (C I S. IV and V; Harding, 1971), and ′lqt (Caskel, 1966, ('alaqa); BDB), and in Syriac found as أ.و.الح, and in Targum found as פַּסֵרֵל which is perhaps an Aramaic loanword.

Inscription n° 2, pl. 1, fig. 2,

The inscription that was found in the northern side of the archaeological site of Sabha (ساحا) located about eleven km's. to the east of Umm al Jimal. It is inscribed in a basalt stone reused in the eastern side of an outer wall of a room courtyard construction; it was found situated in a widdithin way, so the stone head faced up to the north. The stone is broken from all sides except the lower part, which bears an inscription of three lines. Dimensions: Height 57 cm; Width 34 cm; Thickness 5 - 10cm; Height of letters 7cm.

**Transcription**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Amrt</th>
<th>'Amyrt</th>
<th>عمربت</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>br 'N</td>
<td>Son of 'An'a</td>
<td>أبن أعم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Translation**
‘Amyrt: This word is a personal name root of ʿOmar; it is identified with the Arabic name عمتر (Ibn Duraid, 1979) (ʿomairah). The form ‘Amyrt with the letter y attested only in Nabataean (Cantineau, 1978; Al-Khraysher, 1986; Negev, 1991). In Old North Arabic, it is attested as a tribal name عمتر (Harding, 1971; Al-Said, 1995). In Greek, the names ἂνθρα (Cantineau, II, 1978) and ἄθα (Wuthnow, 1930) were attested.

‘An’am: A Semitic personal name derived from the root n’m which means prosperous (Beeston et al. 1982). This name has already been attested in other Nabataean inscriptions in the region (Negev, 1991). It is also very well attested in the Safaitic inscriptions (Harding, 1971). In Palmyrene ‘nm means “tender” (Stark, 1971). In Greek the forms άναμ, άνωμ, άνωμ (Wuthnow, 1930) were also attested.

Inscription no. 3, pl. 1, fig. 3.

This inscription was found lying on the ground in a courtyard of a house in the northern part of the modern village of Sab’a (شَبْأ) in Northeastern Jordan. The inscription was found incised on a basalt stone of which the lower part is broken but the text seems to be complete.

Dimensions: Height 66 cm; Width 43; thickness 17 cm; Height of letters: 5 cm.

Transcription

L (') mt br
[y] dt

Translation

For ‘Amyrt son of عمتر ابن
[‘Ay] dat عيدت

1‘Amat: the letter l is a preposition “for”, and the name after is a one word noun masculine, yet the feminine ending – t in masculine names is quite frequent in Arabic, and may be compared with the feminine Arabic name عَمَّتِي (Ibn Manzir, 1956). The name is found as ‘mmt in other Nabataean inscriptions (Al-Theeb, 1993). Similar personal names are found in Phoenician as ‘m and ‘m (Tombakk, 1974), in Palmyrene as ‘mt (Stark, 1971) and in Old North Arabic inscriptions as ‘mt and ‘mmt (Harding, 1971).

[‘y]dt: It is a personal name masculine singular construct found in Thamudic (Harding, 1971; Al-Theeb, 2000), Safaitic (Winnett and Harding, 1978), and in Ma’înean inscriptions (Al-Said, 1995). It is also found as a compound noun ‘dihy (Al-Theeb, 2002).

Inscription no 4, Pl. 1, fig. 4,

This is found in a pavement of a courtyard in front of a modern house in the northwest part of a small village located at about three and a half km. to
the west of umm al Qur'ain in Northeastern Jordan called Khisaa Sleitan (خيساء سليتان). The lower part of the stone is missing and a part of the remaining stone which is the lower part is covered with cement.

Dimensions of the visible part: Height 40 cm; Width 54 cm; Thickness 15 cm; Height of letters 2.5 cm.

**Translation**

Μγγιο br ...... Μγγιο son of ...... مغيث بن

**Muγγιο:** Arabic gauς “help”, with a prefix m “helper” attested for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions, derived from noun γους and γως, which was found in Nabataean inscriptions and other Semitic inscriptions. In addition, it appeared as a compound noun in Nabataean inscriptions in the form of γως ἱθυ (Cantineau, 1932) “God help”. The simple noun was also found in other Semitic languages: in Old North Arabian inscriptions (Harding, 1971) and in Palmyrene as gwsn (Stark, 1971) and gwς (Cooke, 1903). The name gυς, corresponds to the Arabic personal name مغث (Beeston, 1982) and مغث (Ibn Manzür, 1956), and related to the Arabic verb فغث, “call for help, appeal”, the name مغث, “assistance, help” (Ibn Manzür, 1956). The Biblical Hebrew verb כחט “aid” (BDB; Jastrow, 1926) is equivalent of the classical Arabic, فغث. Also the name ygςw is attested to another Nabataean inscriptions which might be associated with the Old South Arabic deity ygςw which was worshipped in Yaman (Ibn Al-Kalbi, 1924) which is also mentioned in the Qur’ān (The Holy Qur’ān, 71: 22.) The names Gauς and Gaiς are found in Greek as Αυθεοςος, Αυτηςος (Wuthnow, 1930).

**Inscription n° 5, Pl. 1, fig: 5**

This inscription inscribed at a semi rectangular clime stone was found in the archaeological site of Sab'a village (سبب) to the north of the main road towards Dāfyānā. The stone was reused in the construction of an arch in a room facing north; it is on the right side of the room. The inscription is of two lines, and seems not complete and converted; the letters are clear.

Dimensions: Height: 30 cm; Width: 50 cm; Thickness 10 cm; Height of letters 5 cm.

**Translation**

'mr b it rained in أمّر في

šnt 14 year 14 سنة
Amār: A past verb “rained”, the simple form is ym.r “it rains”, and it could be the plural form of m.r “amār”. In Old South Arabic the noun, m.r (م mystery) means a rain watered field" (Beeston, 1982)

b šnt: The letter b here is a proposition “in, with”, common in Semitic. The second word šnt is a feminine singular construct noun “year”, which appears in other Aramaic inscriptions (Segal, 1986; Avigad, 1967). The name šnt followed by is number 14 in Nabataean signs; thus, the sentence is translated as “It rained in year 14”.

Conclusion

These inscriptions, which were thoroughly analyzed, show seven personal names. One of them appears for the first time; it is Ḥilū. Also a new verb is attested as Am.r (منظر), a past verb of the present form ym.r (مير). The execution of these inscriptions characters shows a general lack of inscribers’ care. The letters differ in shape, though they are of correct spelling, giving an indication that ordinary citizens incised these inscriptions. Based on the shape of the characters, they are chronologically assigned to various historical periods (see Table 2). Thus, inscriptions 1 and 2 can be roughly dated to the second half of the second century A.D., while inscriptions 3, 4 and 5 can be dated to the third century A.D.

خمسة نقوش نبطية جديدة من شمال شرق الأردن

kowski: نجل عطلان، قسم النقوش، كلية الآثار والآثاروبولوگيا، جامعة اليرموك،

إربد، الأردن.

الملخص

من خلال المسح عن النقوش الذي بدأ العمل به في العام 2001 حتى العام 2003 في

المنطقة الشمالية الشرقية من الأردن تم العثور على مجموعة من النقوش، معظمها كان نقوشاً

يونانية وبعضها لاتينية. وعدد من النقوش الصفوية، بالإضافة للخمسة نقوش نبطية جديدة

والتي تبحث عنها في هذه الورقة. وجدت هذه النقوش محذورة على الحجارة البازلتية في منطقة

جنوب حوران. وتأتي أهمية هذه النقوش من خلال تزويدنا بعلومات جديدة حول دراسة

التاريخ واللغة للقبائل العربية التي سكنت المنطقة الصحراوية من الأردن وسوريا.
Plate 1.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4
Fig. 5
Table 1: Alphabetic chart of the inscriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No 1</th>
<th>No 2</th>
<th>No 3</th>
<th>No 4</th>
<th>No 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>א</td>
<td>ב</td>
<td>ג</td>
<td>ד</td>
<td>ה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>ז</td>
<td>ח</td>
<td>ט</td>
<td>י</td>
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<td>ק</td>
<td>ר</td>
<td>ש</td>
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<td>║</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ת</td>
<td>ד</td>
<td>פ</td>
<td>║</td>
<td>║</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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