

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

NEW ANCIENT NORTH ARABIAN INSCRIPTION WITH REFERENCES TO NABATAEA II

Nada Al-Rawabdeh

School of Archaeology and Tourism, the University of Jordan, 11942, Amman, Jordan

Ali Al-Manaser

Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities

Abstract

The primary aim of this following paper is to bring to light a recently discovered North Arabian inscription which researchers believe, contains a reference to the Nabataean. Throughout this following paper, I aim to explain the meaning and significance of the word 'nbṯ' which is cited through the Safaitic inscriptions.

KEYWORDS: Nabataean, Jordan, Ancient North Arabian, Safaitic inscriptions

1. INTRODUCTION

The original stone that bears these inscriptions was originally discovered in *Wadi Salma*, an area located around 45km north-east of the village of as-Safawi formerly known as H5 (see fig. 1). Whilst there have been a number of stone Cairns discovered in the wadi, it must be noted that the volume and distribution of Cairns is especially low when compared with their prevalence elsewhere in the area. In terms of topographic data, the wadi is fairly flat and spans over a considerably large area. Interestingly, this area also boasts a large number of Ancient Arabian inscriptions, which have since been discovered by various research teams. It is also common to find a variety of accompanying rock art in this area, indicating that the area in ancient times was populated to a large extent. The *Safaitic* inscriptions from this area are generally easily characterised by their long length and by the thin engraving technique that was adopted to carve out letters and symbols (see Macdonald, M. and Al-Manaser 2019).

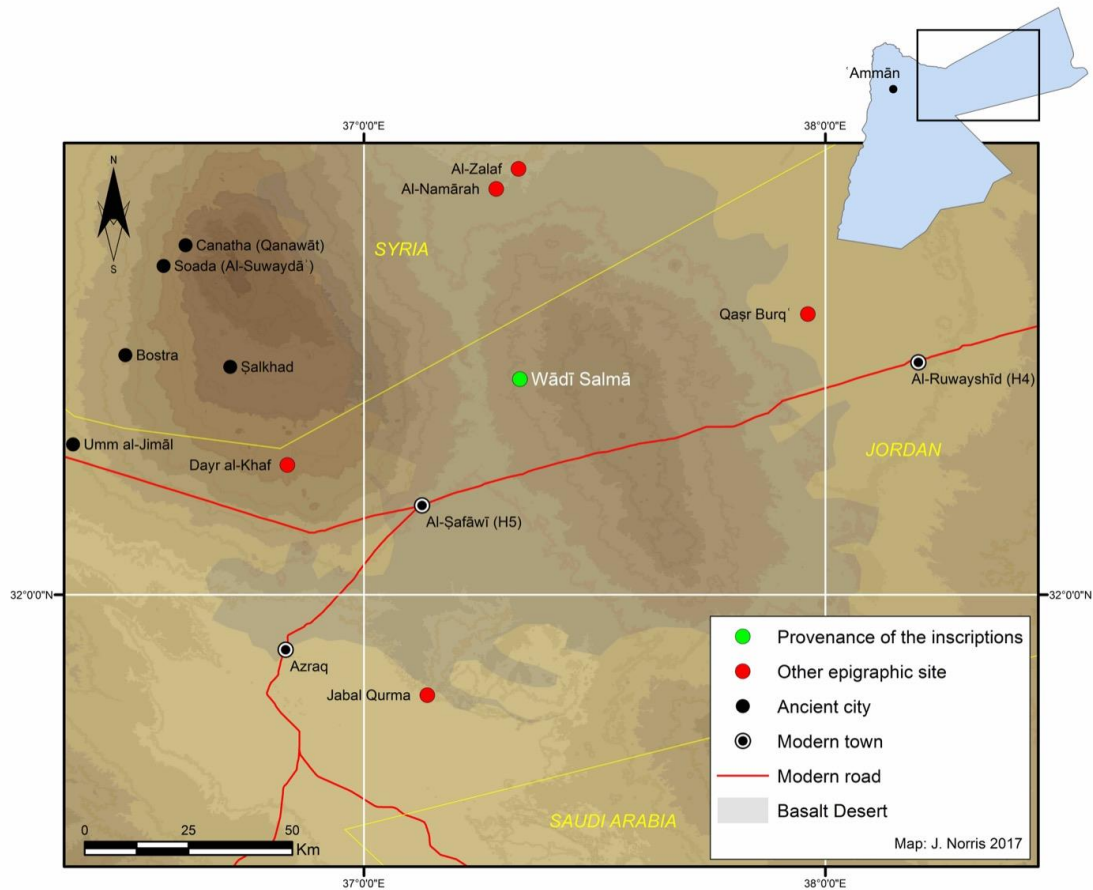


Figure 1. A map showing the sites on which the inscriptions were recorded (Map: J. Norris).

2. THE INSCRIPTIONS

Four inscriptions are chiselled and engraved onto slabs of basalt stone using notably thin strokes and mark making. At points, the colour of the stone used for these inscriptions is often so dark that these marks show up in a yellowish colour too.



Figure 2. Photos of the inscriptions



Figure 3. Tracing of the inscriptions

2.1. Inscription 1

Transliteration

*l bny bn wrd bn s²hyt bn 's¹ bn ḥg w ḥll h- dr w ḥrṣ w h lt s¹lm m nbṭ w l'n
m 'wr h- s¹fr*

Translation

By Bny son of Wrd son of S²hyt son of 's¹ son of Ḥg and he camped here and was on the look out for [the Nabataeans] and {O} Lt may he be secure

from Nabataeans and {curse} whoever {scratches out} the inscription

3. COMMENTARY

This particular inscription starts as the vast majority of Safaitic inscriptions tend to with the author beginning with the letter 'l' (Al-Manaser 2008). Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that all of the names mentioned in this genealogy are well known from the *Safaitic* corpus, even though this exact combination had not been seen before this discovery. Overall, the inscription in question contains a significant narrative, a genealogy and a prayer as well.

4. GENEALOGY

It has since been discovered through other supporting evidence and research that the original author and owner of this inscription is related to other carvers as similar genealogies occur on three separate occasions in the *Safaitic corpus* (see KRS 1491; 291; 1486; 291; C 2549; LP 664; BS 168).

5. NARRATIVE

In terms of the inscription's narrative, the piece contains four identifiable verbs which include: *hll*, *hrs*, *l'n* and *'wr*. Firstly, *hll* directly translated to "he camped" (KRS 40; LP 29; RSIS 329). On the subject of this aspect of the inscription's narrative, Al-Jallad believes "It is unclear if the doubled forms are archaisms reflecting an original */*halala*/, innovations based on analogy with strong roots" (2015).

Secondly, the verb *hrs* occurs frequently in *Safaitic* and can be directly translated to "to keep watch for" or "to look after" (LP 354; C 1591; HCH 102; WH 577; ISB 115). Al-Jallad further explains and highlights (2015: 319) that this specific verb is usually employed in conjunction with various intangible words and phrases. Therefore, this means that there must have been a semantically related meaning and significance to 'to anticipate' in order for the narrative to make literal sense in these inscriptions. Additionally, *l'n* directly translates to the phrases "to curse/be cursed" (BS 36; LP 360). Lastly, *'wr* is also known to directly translated to the term "scratches out" (HCH 85; Al-Manaser 2008: 109) Nonetheless, it remains unclear to researchers whether *s¹lm* should be strictly understood as a verb or as a substantive. Regardless, the meaning of the term in the context of prayer or religious rhetoric should remain the same. If one understands that the word is a verb then it could well be the case that it exists as a precative imperative. This is because, in Arabic culture, deities should strictly not be directly ordered by believers rather should be referred to with a future wish.

6. PRAYER

As aforementioned, the original author followed the above narrative with a section of prayer, which is actually customary for the majority of Safaitic inscriptions and writings. Throughout this prayer, the author prays directly to the deity it, who remains a well-known god in the context of Safaitic inscriptions and cultures. Nonetheless, this deity is very well known and understood to have been a popular god for the tribes and communities that

settled in northern Arabia during this period. Interestingly, there are also various spellings of this god's name throughout the inscriptions found which mention them. For example, in addition to the common of it there is also the well attested and quite widely executed form of *y'lt* as well. Furthermore, it is also widely believed by experts in the field that through future research into these areas and inscriptions that there could well be other variants and spellings of the name too (see Krone 1992: 103; Al-Manaser 2008: 45-46).

Inscription 2

Transliteration

l ḥrṣ bn s²qq bn s²hyt bn 's' bn ḥg bn s²bḥr bn grm'l w ḥll h- dr

Translation

By Ḥrṣ son of S²qq son of S²hyt son of 's' son of Ḥg son of S²bḥr son of Grm'l and he camped here

Inscription 3

Transliteration

l 'n 'm bn q'ṣn bn s'ḥr bn s²rk

Translation

By 'n 'm son of Q'ṣn son of S¹ḥr son of S²rk

Inscription 4

Transliteration

l grm'l bn 'nf bn grm'l w ḥrṣ s²n' f h lt s'lm

Translation

By Grm'l son of 'nf son of Grm'l and he kept watch for an enemy and so O Lt [grant] security.

7. HISTORICAL DISCUSSION

The so far reported Safaitic inscriptions contain 65 inscriptions indicating what might be a reference to the Nabataean (*nbṭ*). It can be deduced from these inscriptions that the authors considered the Nabataean as foreign people. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand the relationship between the authors of these inscriptions and the Nabataean despite some of the shared personal names and names of some deities.

In an important inscription discovered by the *Badia Epigraphic Survey* (BES)¹ team in 2017. The author refers to the deity *Dushara* as the goddess of the Nabataean. The authors of the Safaitic inscriptions occasionally dated their inscriptions to certain events related to the Nabataean. They also sometimes mention the names of the Nabataean kings or other important historical Nabataean figures. Based on the Safaitic inscriptions known to date, the inscriptions containing a reference to the Nabataean can be categorized into the following groups:

Category 1 safaitic inscriptions that reference the Nabataean king.

¹ „The BES records the GPS co-ordinates and digital photographs of the texts and drawings and their environments. These are then entered into the OCIANA database (Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (<http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana>) which is freely available online“.

Category 2 contains those inscriptions which reference known Nabataean persons.

Category 3 comprises the six known Safaitic inscriptions, which contain *h-nbty*, which is the *nisba* form of *nbṭ*.

Category 4 is the group of inscriptions that lists *nbṭ* in a list among other nations, such as the Jews and the Romans.

Category 5 contains those inscriptions which reference *nbṭ* in relation to events such as war, or when the author prays about the Nabataeans, either to help them or to cause them to flee. There are also inscriptions in which the author attacks the Nabataeans

| <i>Text</i> | Category | <i>Reference</i> | Notes |
|--|-----------------|------------------|-------|
| <p><i>l ḥnn bn ḍr' l ḍ- 'l 'mrt w g{l}s' mn</i> <i>'dmt s'nt mt mlk nbṭ</i> By Ḥnn son of ḍr' l of the lineage of 'mrt and he halted to be sociable the year the king of Nabataea died.</p> | 1 | KhNSJ | |
| <p><i>l whb' l bn ḥnn bn 'bd bn ḡṭ bn s'rk</i> <i>bn s'krn ḍ- 'l qs²{m} w s²ty h- dr {m-}</i> <i>} rk s'nt ṭrq mk mlk nbṭ ṭlṭn m' t qtl 'l</i> <i>rm w s'q tmr l- -h z{ 'm gd' wḍ w h</i> <i>lh w h s²'hqm ḡnyt w s'lm m- ḍ ḥrṣ</i> <i>w ḡnmt l- ḍ d' y h- ḥṭṭ</i> By Whb' l son of Ḥnn son of 'bd son of Ḡṭ son of S'rk son of S'krn of the lineage of {Qs²m}. and he spent the winter here {on account of} an area on which a small amount of rain had fallen the year [in which] Mk king of Nabatṣ smote one hundred [and] thirty warriors of the Romans and {the spokesman} [chief] of Gd' wḍ drove Tmr to him [Mk]. And O Lh and O S²'hqm [grant] plenty and safety from whoever is on guard and [grant] booty to whoever leaves the carving intact</p> | 1 | ZeWA 1 | |
| <p><i>l 's'yb bn mrh bn 'bṭn ḍ- 'l mḥrb w</i> <i>wgm 'l- 'ḥt -h ḍb w qṣṣ s'nt mlk</i> <i>rb' l</i> By 's'yb son of Mrh son of 'bṭn of the tribe of Mḥrb. And he grieved for the sister of ha- ḍb. And he followed in pursuit the year of king Rb' l</p> | 1 | ISB 57 | |

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|--|----------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <p><i>l 's'ybn bn mr(h) bn 'btn d- 'l mħrb w qşş s'nt tlt l rb 'l f h lt w ds²r s'lm</i> By 's'ybn son of Mr[h] son of 'btn the lineage of Mħrb and he followed pursuit in the third year of Rb'l. So O Lt and Ds²r [grant] security</p> | 1 | AbKRI 1 | <i>See</i> AbKRI 2 |
| <p><i>l ns²l bn m'n bn mtl d- 'l tm w n²r 'l-dmsy b-ħms¹ m't frs¹ s'nt ħrb 'mm</i> “By Ns²l son of M'n son of Mtl of the lineage of Tm and he served as a guard under Dmsy in (a troop) of five cavalry units, the year of the war of 'mm”.</p> | 2 | Al-Rawabdeh, and Al-Housan 2017 | |
| <p><i>l ħr bn 's¹ bn ħr d- 'l ms¹kt w wld b-h-dr s'nt mrd mħrb w s'nt mrd dmsy w ħrş h-s²n' f h lt w ds²r s'lm w mwgd</i> “By Ĥr son of 's¹ son of Ĥr of the lineage of Ms¹kt and he helped to give birth in this place [Jawa] the year of the rebellion of Mħrb and the year of the rebellion of Dmsy, and he kept watch for the enemies, so, O Lt and Ds²r, let there be security and {abundance/glories}”.</p> | 2 | SIJ 287 | |
| <p><i>l mgd bn zd bn qdm bn mr' d- 'l d²f w qşş b'd d²f s'nt mrd dmsy {l} ---m {n} 's'lm f {}</i> “By Mgd son of Zd son of Qdm son of Mr' of the lineage of D²f and patrolled on behalf of the D²f the year of the revolt of Dmsy”.</p> | 2 | SIJ 823 | |
| <p><i>l tm bn ms¹k bn qtl bn brd bn ħmt w wgm 'l- ġyr w 'l- qtl w 'l- mtl s'nt 'ty s'ly m- rm w ħrş h- s'nt f h b'ls¹mn ġwt w s'lm w qbll l- d 'ħb</i> By Tm son of Ms¹k son of Qtl son of Brd son of Ĥmt and he grieved for Ġyr and for Qtl and for Mtl the year S¹ly came from Rm and he kept watch this year and so O B'ls¹mn [grant] help and security and [show] benevolence for whoever 'ħb</p> | 2 | AbNSJ 1 | |
| <p><i>l tm bn ms¹k bn qtl bn brd bn ħmt w wgm 'l- ġyr w 'l- qtl w 'l- mtl s'nt 'ty s'ly m- rm w ħrş h- s'nt f h b'ls¹mn ġwt w s'lm w qbll l- d 'ħb</i> By Tm son of Ms¹k son of Qtl son</p> | 2 | Rawabdeh and Abbadi | <i>See</i> Al-Rawabdeh, 2015 |

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| of Brd son of Hmt and he grieved for Ġyr and for Qtl and for Mtl the year S ¹ ly came from Rm and he kept watch this year and so O B ¹ ls ¹ mn [grant] help and security and [show] benevolence for whoever ḥb | | | |
| <i>l drb bn qn h- nbty</i> By Drb son of Qn the Nabataean | 3 | CSNS 661 | See C 2446 |
| <i>l mn¹m bn¹ rs²mnwt bn¹ bgr bn¹ 'tl h- nbty</i> By Mn ¹ m son of rs ² mnwt son of bgr son of 'tl the Nabataean | 3 | MISS.B 1 | |
| <i>l 'tq bn¹ s¹d h- nbty</i> By 'tq son of s ¹ d the Nabataean | 3 | MISS.B 2 | |
| <i>l ḥly bn hmlk bn nhḍ bn ḥmyn bn ḡḍḍt w nḗr f h rḍw s¹nt ḥrb h- n{b}{t}</i> By Ḥly son of Hmlk son of Nhḍ son of Ḥmyn son of Ḡḍḍt and he was in need of aid so, O Rḍw, the year of the war of the {Nabataeans}. | 5 | C 220 | |
| <i>l 'n¹m bn qḥs² w ḡnm s¹nt ḥrb nbṭ</i> By 'n ¹ m son of Qḥs ² and he raided the year of the war of Nabataea. | 5 | C 3680 | |
| <i>l wgdṭ bn ḗnn bn mhr w ḡzz s¹nt ḥrb nbṭ f h yṭ¹ flṭ</i> By Wgdṭ son of Ḍnn son of Mhr and he fought the year of the Nabataean war. O Yṭ ¹ , deliver [him]. | 5 | WH 2113 | |
| <i>l 's¹lh bn s¹dlh bn ḡdy w 'lf s¹nt ḥrb nbṭ yhd</i> By 's ¹ lh son of S ¹ dlh son of Ḡdy and he fed [the animals] the year of the war the Nabataeans and the Jews | 5 | AbHYN 1 | |
| <i>l 's¹d bn 'n¹m bn 's¹d bn rb¹l w ṡyr m mdr s¹nt qtl 'l ḥl 'l nqd h- s¹lṭn w ḥrṡ ḥrb nbṭ</i> By 's ¹ d son of 'n ¹ m son of 's ¹ d son of Rb ¹ l and he returned to the watering place from the inner desert the year the lineage of Ḥl [and] the lineage of Nqd the government fought and he kept watch the war of the Nabataeans | 5 | AWS 341 | |
| <i>l 'n¹m bn ḥmṭn bn 's¹d bn mt¹ bn</i> | 5 | RWQ 326 | |

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| <p><i>s'ṣmd bn ḥlf bn 's'ḥm bn 'zz bn hr bn bhṭlt bn hgg bn 'm'l bn 'm bn yb's' w 'lf mlḥ f dkr nbṭ f y's' m s'ṣms'my w 'wr 'l s'rt s'mḥr'zmy w ḥṣqt nbṭ m ṣḥw s'nt ḥrbt yhd f h lt w ḏs'r s'lm w ḥlṣt w nq't l- ḏ y'wr</i></p> <p>By 'n'm son of Ḥmṭn son of 's'd son of Mt' son of S'ṣmd son of Ḥlf son of 's'ḥm son of 'zz son of Hr son of Bhṭlt son of Hgg son of 'm'l son of 'm son of Yb's' and fed [the animals] [because of] dearth and he remembered the Nabataeans then he despaired from S'ṣms'my w 'wr 'l s'rt s'mḥr'zmy w ḥṣqt nbṭ m ṣḥw [in] the year of [the Yhd] war and O Lt and ḏs'r [grant] security and deliverance [from dearth] and [inflict] ejection from the grave on whoever scratches out [the inscription]</p> | | | |
| <p><i>l mn't bn mgd bn mr' bn znn'l w wgd 'tr 'l ḏf glyn m ḥrb nbṭ (fl)t l mdnt</i></p> <p>By Mn't son of Mgd son of Mr' son of Znn'l and he found the trace(s) of the lineage of ḏf erased, plundered by the Nabataeans ... for the province.</p> | 5 | RWQ 334 | |
| <p><i>l s'r bn nṣr bn ṣhyn bn g'l bn rs'l w {n}fr m- rm s'nt ws'q ḏ- 'l rhy nbṭ mḡwt f h lt s'lm w q't l- ḏ {y} '[w]r</i></p> <p>By S'r son of Nṣr son of Ṣhyn son of G'l son of Rs'l and he escaped from Rm in the year that those of the lineage of Rhy contended against Nbṭ in a plot (?) and O Lt [grant] security and vengeance on whomsoever scratches out the inscription.</p> | 4 | C 742 | <i>Rm</i> |
| <p><i>l ḥny bn 'k---- bn b----s' bn {'}' l bn hgml h- dr s'nt ws'q bn rm nbṭ</i></p> <p>By Ḥny son of 'k---- son of B----s' son of 'l son of Hgml was here the year of the struggle between Rome and the Nabataeans</p> | 4 | C 4866 | |
| <p><i>l 'bd bn {y}ḡt ḏ- {'}l {b}{s'}</i> w ngy</p> | 4 | WH 2815 | |

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|---|----------|-----------|------------|
| <p><i>m nf{r}t w 'h -h s'nt mrdt nbṭ 'l- 'l {r}mf 't s'lm f</i> By 'bd son of {Ygt} of the {lineage of} Bs¹ and he and his brother were announced [commander] of a party of near kinsmen the year the Nabataeans rebelled against the people of {Rome}, so may security come</p> | | | |
| <p><i>l 'n'm bn qdm bn 'n'm d- 'l nḡbr w r'y h- 'bl s'nt ws'q 'l ḥwlt 'l nbṭ f h lt s'lm w nq't l d- 'wr h- ḥtt</i> By 'n'm son of Qdm son of 'n'm of the lineage of Nḡbr and he pastured the camels the year the people of Ḥwlt struggled against the people of Nbt so O Lt [grant] security and [inflict] nq't upon him who scratches out this writing</p> | 4 | MRTA 1 | Ḥwlt |
| <p><i>l qhs² d- 'l 'rs² w wgm 'l- s'¹d'l w 'l-wtr w 'l- ḥdrgt w 'l- ḥf---- w ḥrs f h lt w ds²r w b' [l]s'm{n} ḡ{r}t w s'¹d h- {n}bṭ 'l- ḥwlt</i> By Qhs² of the lineage of 'rs² and he grieved for S¹d'l and for Wtr and for Ḥdrgt and for Ḥf---- and he was on the look-out and so Lt and Ds²r and {B'ls'mn} [grant] revenge and help the Nabataeans against Ḥwlt.</p> | 4 | Stehle 16 | |
| <p><i>l zyd bn m'z bn grm w r'y s'nt 'ys' f h lt s'lm w ḡnyt w h ds²r hb s'¹d l-nbṭ 'l- ḥwlt</i> By Zyd son of M'z son of Grm and he pastured in the year of 'ys¹, so, O Lt, [grant] security and abundance, and, O Ds²r, give aid to the Nabataeans against the Ḥwlt</p> | 4 | AbNH 1 | |
| <p><i>l 's'lh bn s'¹dlh bn gdy w 'lf s'nt ḥrb nbṭ yhd</i> By 's'lh son of S¹dlh son of Gdy and he fed [the animals] the year of the war the Nabataeans and the Jews</p> | 4 | AbHYN 1 | <i>Yhd</i> |

8. CONCLUSION

It appears from the Safaitic inscriptions that the authors considered the people of Nbt, or the Nabataeans, as a social group different from themselves. It is difficult to say how they considered the group, whether positively or negatively, because the evidence we have does not create a clear picture. These two inscriptions represent two more which mention the

word *nbṭ*, and it is hoped that as the small corpus of inscriptions which make reference to the Nabataeans grows, so will our understanding of the relationship between the Nabataeans and the authors of the Safaitic and Ancient North Arabian inscriptions.

9. EDITORIAL CONVENTIONS

{ } enclose letters and words of which the reading is doubtful

{/} indicates alternative interpretations of the same letter

[] enclose letters or words which are restored

10. SIGLA

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| AbHYN | Safaitic inscriptions in Abbadi 1996. |
| AbSWS | Safaitic inscriptions in Abbadi 2006. |
| AWS | Safaitic inscriptions in 'Alūlū 1996. |
| BS | Badia Epigraphic Survey |
| C | Ryckmans, G. <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> . |
| CSNS | Clark, <i>A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan</i> . |
| HCH | Safaitic inscriptions in Harding 1953. |
| KRS | Safaitic inscriptions recorded by G.M.H. King during the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey and published in OCIANA. |
| LP | Littmann, E. <i>Safaitic Inscriptions. Syria</i> . |
| OCIANA | Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia. http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/index.php |
| RSIS | Safaitic inscriptions in Rawan 2013. |
| RWQ | Safaitic inscriptions in Al-Rousan 2004. |
| SIJ | Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett 1957. |
| WH | Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett and Harding 1978. |
| ISB | Oxtoby, WG. <i>Some Inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin</i> |
| KhNSJ | Khaysheh, <i>New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan</i> . |
| ZeWA 1 | Zeinaddin, H. <i>Al-'alāqāt al-ṣafā' iyyat al-nabaṭiyyah min</i> . |
| AbKRI | Abbadi, S. King Rabbel II in a Safaitic inscription. |
| MISS.B 1 | Macdonald, M.C.A., Al Mu'azzin, M. & Nehmé, L. |
| MRTA | Al-Rūsān, <i>Ḍikr li-ṣirā' bayn al-anbāṭ wa qabīlat</i> |
| Stehle | Safaitic inscriptions in Stehle (1960) |

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