

The Religion and Rituals of the Nomads of Pre-Islamic Arabia

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The Religion and Rituals of the Nomads of Pre-Islamic Arabia

A Reconstruction Based on the Safaitic Inscriptions

By

Ahmad Al-Jallad



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For James Marquaire-Jallad
mon bibihou
mon cœur



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Preface

The most popular reference for pre-Islamic Arabian religion is Hišām ibn Al-Kalbī's *kitābul-ʿaṣnām* (The Book of Idols). The text presents a series of folktales recounting the history of human belief, beginning with absolute monotheism, moving on to the development of polytheism, and ending in the Twilight of the Gods ushered in by the appearance of Mohammed. The cult of Al-ʿUzzē, for example, ended not through mass conversion to Islam but in combat with Mohammed's commander, Khālīd bin al-Walīd. It is worth quoting the tale in full.

We were told by al-Anazī abū-ʿAlī that ʿAlī ibn-al-Ṣabbāḥ had told him that he himself was informed by abū-al-Mundhir, who reported that his father had related to him on the authority of abū-Ṣāliḥ that ibn-ʿAbbās said: Al-ʿUzzā was a she-devil which used to frequent three trees in the valley of Nakhlah. When the Prophet captured Mecca, he dispatched Khālīd ibn-al-Walīd saying, "Go to the valley of Nakhlah; there you will find three trees. Cut down the first one." Khālīd went and cut it down. On his return to report, the Prophet asked him saying, "Have you seen anything there?" Khālīd replied and said, "No." The Prophet ordered him to return and cut down the second tree. He went and cut it down. On his return to report the Prophet asked him a second time, "Have you seen anything there?" Khālīd answered, "No." Thereupon the Prophet ordered him to go back and cut down the third tree. When Khālīd arrived on the scene he found an Abyssinian woman with dishevelled hair and her hands placed on her shoulder[s], gnashing and grating her teeth. Behind her stood Dubayyah al-Sulamī who was then the custodian of al-ʿUzzā. When Dubayyah saw Khālīd approaching, he said:

"O thou al-ʿUzzā! Remove thy veil and tuck up thy sleeves;
Summon up thy strength and deal Khālīd an unmistakable blow.
For unless thou killest him this very day,
Thou shalt be doomed to ignominy and shame."

Thereupon Khālīd replied:

"O al-ʿUzzā! May thou be blasphemed, not exalted!
Verily I see that God hath abased thee."

Turning to the woman, he dealt her a blow which severed her head in twain, and lo, she crumbled into ashes. He then cut down the tree and killed Dubayyah the custodian, after which he returned to the Prophet and reported to him his exploit. Thereupon the Prophet said, "That was

al-‘Uzzā. But she is no more. The Arabs shall have none after her. Verily she shall never be worshipped again.

Trans. FARIS (1952: 21–22)

While the historicity of these accounts has rightly been questioned, they do bring into relief an important point made by W. Saleh—“the opponents of Muhammad did not live to tell their side of the story.”¹ What we know about them, and those who came before them, has traditionally been reconstructed from polemical sources such as these. Their worldview and beliefs are filtered through an Islamic lens and reach us in a fragmentary and garbled form; the line between what might be genuine kernels of truth and literary license, tropes and topoi is not clear.

This book approaches the religion and rituals of the pre-Islamic Arabian nomads using different sources, the Safaitic inscriptions. These texts were carved at the latest some three centuries before the rise of Islam and stretch into the distant past. Unlike Islamic-period literary sources, this material was produced by practitioners of traditional Arabian religion; the inscriptions are eyewitnesses to the religious life of Arabian nomads prior to the spread of Judaism and Christianity across Arabia. In the following pages, I will attempt to reconstruct this world using their own words, interpreted through comparative philology, pre-Islamic and Islamic-period literary sources, and their archaeological context.

I owe thanks first to M.C.A. Macdonald, who read with a very careful and critical eye a previous version of this text and suggested several important corrections and references. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to the following scholars who have suggested references, made corrections, and improved the overall quality of this book: Laïla Nehmé, Benjamin Suchard, Marijn van Putten, Sean Anthony, Daniel Varisco, Jérôme Norris, Charles Häberl, Michael Cooper-son, Alessandro Mengozzi, Michael Lecker, Francesco Grande, Yaara Perlman, David Kiltz, Duncan MacRae, Sandy Said, A. Melle Lyklema, Daniel Beck, Kurt Thomas, Arnaud Fournet, and Jerome Parker.

Ahmad Al-Jallad

Columbus, Ohio, July, 2021

1 Saleh (2019: 92).

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Sigla

ABSWS	Safaitic inscriptions published in Abbadi 2006.
AMSI	Safaitic inscriptions collected by A. Al-Manaser in 2004 and published on OCIANA; AMSI 41 is edited in Al-Jallad (2018b).
C	Safaitic inscriptions in G. Ryckmans (1950–1951).
CAL	<i>The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon</i> (http://cal.huc.edu/).
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> , K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van der Hors (1999).
HASI	Safaitic inscriptions collected by A. Al-Huṣan, published on OCIANA.
HAUI	Safaitic inscriptions published on OCIANA.
HCH	Safaitic inscriptions published in G.L. Harding (1953).
HH	Safaitic inscriptions published in H. Hayajneh (2016).
HTHAM 1	Thamudic B inscription published in H. Hayajneh et al. (2015).
HWS	Safaitic inscriptions from Wādī Salḥūb published in Hayajneh (2018).
KNGQ	Safaitic inscriptions in E.A. Knauf (1991).
KRS	Inscriptions recorded by Geraldine King on the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey in north-eastern Jordan in 1989 and published on OCIANA.
KHUNP	Safaitic inscription in Hayajneh and Ababneh (2015).
KWQ	Inscriptions recorded by Geraldine King at Wādī Qaṭṭāfi, north-eastern Jordan, and published here.
LANE	Lane's Lexicon; Lane (1863–1893).
MA	Safaitic inscriptions in S.'A. Al-Maani and F. Al-Ajlouni (2003).
MNSA	Safaitic inscriptions published in S.'A. Al-Maani (1996).
MSSAF	Safaitic inscriptions published in Al-Manaser and Al-Sa'dūn (2017).
OAM 1	Safaitic inscriptions published in A. Al-Jallad (2021b).
OCIANA	<i>Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia</i> .
PALMYRA MUSEUM	Safaitic inscriptions published in Abu Asaf (1975).
RDNH	Safaitic inscriptions published in M. Al-Rusan (2009).
RWQ	Safaitic inscriptions published in M. Al-Rusan (2004).
SAFDICT	Safaitic Dictionary, A. Al-Jallad and K. Jaworska (2019).
SD	<i>Sabaic Dictionary</i> , A.F.L. Beeston, M.A. Ghul, W.W. Müller, and J. Ryckmans (1982).
SIJ	Safaitic inscriptions in F.V. Winnett (1957).
SS	Safaitic inscriptions in Al-Jallad (2020d).

UMM DARAGĀ	Hidalgo-Chacón Díez (2016).
WH	Safaitic inscription in F.V. Winnett and W.L. Reed (1970).
WTAY	Taymanitic inscriptions in F.V. Winnett and W.L. Reed (1970).
WTI	Thamudic/Dumaitic inscriptions in F.V. Winnett and W.L. Reed (1970).
ZEGA	Safaitic inscriptions in H. Zeinaddin (2000).
ZSIJ	Safaitic inscriptions published on OCIANA.
ZEWA	Safaitic inscriptions in Zeinaddin (2002).

Editorial symbols

{x}	damaged glyph
[x]	supplied glyph
<<x>>	inserted glyph
----	damaged section
/	word divider
PN	personal name

Introduction

The oldest surviving records from North Arabia are religious invocations carved on rock in an indigenous family of alphabets we call Ancient North Arabian.¹ One of the earliest texts of this sort comes from the upper Wādī Sirhān, the site of Bāyir in Jordan. While undated, its contents suggest that it was composed sometime in the first half of the first millennium BCE.² It records an anonymous supplication for refuge addressed to the three gods of the Iron Age kingdoms east of the Jordan:

HTHAM 1³

h mlkm w-kms w-qws b-km 'wḏn

'O Malkom and Kemosh and Qaws, in you we seek refuge.'

The city of Dūmat—ancient Adumatu “the mighty stronghold of the Arabs”⁴—had its own writing tradition conventionally labelled Dumaitic.⁵ An inscription from near that site invokes another triad of gods to fulfill the wishes of its anonymous author.

-
- 1 The scripts classified under the Ancient North Arabian rubric are sisters of the Ancient South Arabian script and together comprise the South Semitic script family. On these alphabets and their distribution, see Macdonald (2000a). See Al-Jallad (2018a) on their linguistic features. See Sass (1991, ch. 3) for a discussion of how the Ancient North Arabian scripts might relate to the South Arabian and Northwest Semitic alphabets.
 - 2 This text is carved in the Thamudic B alphabet. Thamudic is a blanket term applied to the poorly understood and classified South Semitic scripts of North Arabia; it is provisionally divided into three categories—B, C, and D. See again Macdonald (2000a), and (2000b) specifically on the history of the term Thamudic. The most up-to-date description of the Thamudic B corpus is Norris (2018a).
 - 3 This text is accompanied by a Canaanite inscription, which unfortunately remains undeciphered. The Thamudic B script was in use in the middle of the first millennium BCE but we do not know its upper chronological limits. The dating of this text is further supported by the paleography of the Canaanite inscription, the letter shapes of which are rather close to the Mesha Stele (~840 BCE).
 - 4 This is how the oasis is described in the Esarhaddon prism; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1929-1012-1; see also Leichty (2011: 19).
 - 5 See Winnett and Reed (1970) on the identification of the script type and Norris (2018b) for the latest survey of Dumaitic and other scripts found at the oasis.

WTI 23

h rḏw w-nhy w-ʿtrsm sʿd-n ʿl-wdd-y

‘O Ruḏaw and Nuhay and ‘Attarsamē,⁶ help me in the matter of my wish.’

A recurring phrase carved in the script of the oasis of Taymāʿ, probably written sometime in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, could preserve a quotation of liturgy associated with the tutelary deity of the city, Ṣalm.⁷

WTAY 1

mn smʿ l-ṣlm l twy

‘those who heed Ṣalm will not perish’

And to the southwest in the Ḥigāz, the god Dū Ġaybat, perhaps “Master of the Unseen,” received pilgrims at his sanctuary near ancient Dadān (mod. Al-ʿUlā).⁸ The Dadanitic inscriptions were carved sometime in the second half of the 1st millennium BCE.⁹

UMM DARAĠ 22

ḏr/w ʿ----w{r}

ḥggw/[l-] dġbt

f rḏ-hm/w ʿḥrt-hm

ḏr and ʿw----w{r}

performed the pilgrimage [for] Dġbt

and so favor them and their posterity.’

Texts such as these provide a direct vista into the religious and ritual world of the pre-Islamic North Arabians—settled folk and nomads alike.¹⁰ Yet they

6 On the vocalization of this name, see Macdonald et al. (1996: 479–480) and Al-Jallad (2021a, n. 43).

7 This inscription was first recorded by Philby and discussed by Van den Branden (1956, Ph 266.b). Winnett (1970) discusses the text further with a photograph and some speculative remarks on the god Ṣalm. On the Taymanitic inscriptions, see Kootstra (2016). Macdonald has suggested that this phrase may have been a war cry, based on the fact that it has been carved on a guard post. The two views are in fact not mutually exclusive, as liturgical phrases are often used in military contexts, for example, *allāhu ʿakbar* “Allāh is greater.”

8 On the inscriptions of ancient Dadān, see Sima (1999) and Kootstra (2019); on the scripts and languages of the oasis, see Macdonald (2018) and (2019) for a concise summary of Dadanitic.

9 Kootstra (2019: 6–14); Macdonald (2019a); Rohmer and Charloux (2015: 299–303).

10 I am employing the traditional understanding of religion and ritual throughout this book:

remain underutilized.¹¹ Rather, Islamic-period narrative sources, such as the famous book of Hišām ibn al-Kalbī, *kitābu l-ʿaṣnām* (The Book of Idols), and reports in the *sīrah* literature, continue to be the first port of call for understanding the beliefs of pre-Islamic Arabia's tribespeople.¹² These materials, however, are riddled with problems of reliability. Paganism was an established trope used to bring into sharp relief the distinction between Islamic practice and what came before.¹³ As Hawting convincingly argues, the narrative arch of *kitābu l-ʿaṣnām*—the earliest work in the Islamic tradition devoted to the matter of pre-Islamic Arabian religion—is the movement from primeval monotheism to polytheism resulting from the excessive veneration of ancestors and foreign influences, ending ultimately with the restoration of monotheism by the prophet of Islam.¹⁴ Mentions of the ancient gods and traditional rites primarily served to fill out this narrative, warn against practices that could lead to “shirk” (association with God), and—no less important—to entertain the reader. While many of the divine names and rituals have their source in legitimate pre-Islamic beliefs (what Hawting calls the “kernel of truth”), none of the information contained therein comes directly from practitioners of these traditions. What reaches us seems garbled and stereotyped.¹⁵ Ibn al-Kalbī

a system of ideas and actions concerning superhuman agents and forces and the ways in which humans might interact with them.

- 11 An important exception is M.C.A. Macdonald's forthcoming article “The Oral and the Written in the religions of ancient North Arabia,” which provides a bird's-eye view of the religious material in the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions.
- 12 One may also add to this list pre-Islamic (Jāhili) poetry and the Quran. The classic attempt to reconstruct pre-Islamic Arabian mythology by synthesizing Quranic material and Jāhili poetry is J. Stetkevych's *Mohammad and the Golden Bough* (1996). The Quran also contains fragments of pre-Islamic beliefs, most famously the mentioning of the three goddesses *allāt*, *al-ʿuzzē*, and *manōh*, but not much more can be gleaned from what survives. As Saleh (2019) astutely puts it, Mohammed's opponents did not survive to tell their story and therefore their world and ideology must be reconstructed from the Quran. The nature of these Quranic citations, however, is unclear—are they accurate quotations of pagan Arabians or something more creative? For the reconstruction of pre-Islamic beliefs based on the Quran, see Hawting (1999) and Crone (2010).
- 13 See Hawting (1999) for an in-depth discussion of these issues.
- 14 Ibn al-Kalbī (1913); Hawting (1999, ch. 4). Klein (2018: 561–564) argues convincingly that ibn al-Kalbī's account on the origins of idolatry reflects a reworking of a Christian narrative, the *Spelunca Thesaurorum* (Arabic translation: *kitābu l-maǧāll*).
- 15 For a clear example of this, see Al-Jallad (2021a), where the god Roḍaw—who makes several appearances in the inscriptions cited in this book—is met with confusion by ibn al-Kalbī. Narrative sources reimagine him as a temple destroyed by a superhuman zealot, al-Mustawǧir, who reportedly lived for over 300 years.

assembles fragments of folklore that preserve vague details of a distant past,¹⁶ but patches together something new—a quilt depicting a universal history of faith.

What is noticeably absent from such works is any sense of a mythological framework—the gods are isolated idols, stones, statues, and carvings, each one revered by a different social group with no narrative connection between them or their role in cosmos.¹⁷ The narratives are filled with descriptions of rituals, but their purpose and meaning seem lost. Of course, none of these details were important for the goals of this genre of folklore, namely, to present a *jāhiliyyah* antithetical to Islam.

The present work approaches pre-Islamic Arabian religion in another way, relying primarily on the inscriptions, rock art and their archaeological context. Practitioners of traditional Arabian religion produced these artifacts; they are not filtered through a later monotheistic lens nor were they re-appropriated for polemical purposes. They are eyewitnesses to the religion and rituals of the pre-Islamic nomads. Yet the evidence is fragmentary, and in languages and writing traditions that have long gone extinct. A comparative approach is, therefore, necessary to interpret and synthesize this material, but that comes with the inevitable pitfalls of circularity. Thus, our reading of the inscriptional evidence must prioritize the epigraphic and archaeological context, a *tafsīru n-nuqūši bi-n-nuqūš*, as it were. In this way, literary sources, such as the lore assembled by ibn al-Kalbī, can aid in arbitrating between competing understandings but should not act as an interpretive filter.

16 See M. Lecker (1993; 2005) on the possibility of mining historical information from such accounts.

17 The exception being the three “daughters” of Allāh, no doubt based on Q 53:19–20. On the possible background of the daughters of the deity see, see Robin (2000).

1 Religion and the Inscriptions of the Pre-Islamic Nomads: From Thamudic B to Safaitic

Whatever circumstances brought writing to the nomads in the early-mid 1st millennium BCE, it is clear that the skill was popularly applied to the public invocation of divine figures, to the carving of sacred messages.¹⁸ The Thamudic B corpus, the oldest datable member of the Thamudic category,¹⁹ consists primarily of personal names, sometimes accompanying rock art.²⁰ But when a text contains any content at all, it is invariably a prayer following a very strict formulaic structure:

h + DIVINE NAME + IMPERATIVE + OBJECT²¹

This peculiar phenomenon of writing achieves its most elaborate form by the turn of our era—the nomads east of the Ḥawrān expanded on the limited themes of the Thamudic B texts²² to produce relatively lengthy inscriptions following a structure quite similar to the monumental texts of Dadān (see below), in a script we conventionally call Safaitic.²³ Putting aside isolated names and signatures, inscriptions containing narrative content virtually always employ the following formulaic structure.

18 Macdonald (2010), and in several other places earlier, suggests that the nomads had learned writing from oasis dwellers and passed it on amongst each other in the desert as a way to pass the hours while pasturing. While this hypothesis for the diffusion of the script seems quite likely, the great variation in alphabets attested in the inscriptions suggest a complicated history of transmission, and none of the scripts can be directly derived from any of the oasis alphabets that we know of.

19 See Norris (2018a: 207–215) for a discussion on the chronology of this script family.

20 On the writing formulae of Thamudic B, see Norris (2018a: 188–194).

21 Each major script type is associated with its own compositional formulae. Roughly speaking, the Thamudic C inscriptions tend to follow the structure *wdd* + PN *f* + PN, and no prayers are attested in this variety. Thamudic D texts are mostly amorous; they introduce the author with the pronominal element *n* + PN, followed by a verb or adjective of love and the name of the beloved. No prayers are so far attested in this script type either. Thamudic C texts are impossible to date, while a single Thamudic D text is associated with a Nabataean inscription dated to 267 CE (JSNAB 17); see Macdonald in Fiema et al. (2015: 402–405) for the most recent edition of the text; see Al-Jallad (2020b: 42–43) for a discussion of its language.

22 I have suggested, based on the letter shapes and formulaic connections, that Safaitic grew out of the Thamudic B writing tradition; see Al-Jallad and Jaworska (2019, ch. 1).

23 On the writing formulae employed in Safaitic, see Al-Jallad and Jaworska (2019, ch. 1). On the structure of Dadanitic, see Sima (1999) and Kootstra (2019).

l- GENEALOGY

w- NARRATIVE

w-/*f*- PRAYER/CURSE

These literate nomads augmented their cultural practices with writing: graves could be marked,²⁴ ritual mourning commemorated,²⁵ and prayers—as before—were preserved long after the moment of their utterance.²⁶

2 Scope and Methodology

Ancient North Arabian is a blanket term encompassing all the varieties of the South Semitic script—excluding the Ancient South Arabian *musnad* and *zabūr*—employed across the Peninsula for more than a millennium.²⁷ The label is a modern scholarly invention and negatively defined. For this reason, a study of all the inscriptions belonging to this category as reflective of a single cultural complex would be misguided. Rather, each corpus should be investigated separately, with due attention to its geographic, chronological, and linguistic peculiarities. In the present work, I focus on the Safaitic inscriptions and the scant material evidence that accompanies them, with due attention to comparanda from other Ancient North and South Arabian texts and Near Eastern traditions.

24 For example, Musée du Louvre AO: 4986.2 *l' n bn kst h-nfs* “this funerary monument is for ‘n son of Kst”; C 4206: *l zl bn m'nn h-qbr* “this grave is for Zl son of M'nn”; HCH 2: *l hn' bn 'qrb bn hn' bn hyr w h-rgm* “this (inscription) and funerary cairn are for Hn' son of 'qrb son of Hn' son of Hyr.” See OCIANA (s.v.) for the latest edition of these texts.

25 Writing was not only used to mark the grave of the deceased but also commemorate the grief of their loved ones. Mourners, in addition to helping construct a funerary monument, would carve expressions of grief on a memorial stone. The classic study of this phenomenon is Harding (1953), an intact burial cairn with 97 associated inscriptions. For example, HCH 5: *l š'tm bn 'qrb bn hn' w bny w wgm 'l-hn' 'l-'h-h* “By Š'tm son of 'qrb son of Hn' and he participated in the construction (of the funerary cairn) and grieved for Hn', for his brother.” This text belongs to the same funerary installation as HCH 2 above. These issues are discussed in detail in § 5.

26 Safaitic prayers usually follow the narrative, but it is important to note that the Thamudic B isolated prayer type continues in Safaitic, e.g. IS.L 319: *h rdw hb l-qdm nqmt mn 'sd 'bl-h* “O Roḏaw, grant Qdm vengeance against those who raided his camels.”

27 It has been previously suggested that the South Semitic script family has two main categories, Ancient North Arabian and Ancient South Arabian, but this assumes that the scripts belonging to the former category share a common ancestor to the exclusion of the latter. This has not been demonstrated and indeed seems unlikely. Rather the South

Safaitic too is a blanket term—but a more restricted one—given to the writing tradition and script the nomads of the basalt desert east of the Ḥawrān employed some twenty centuries ago.²⁸ Most of the inscriptions can be classified as graffiti as defined by M.C.A. Macdonald—that is, self-authored personal expressions written in a public space.²⁹ But this does not diminish their significance to their audience nor does it suggest that such texts had no role to play in the ritual life of those who carved them. Indeed, in a nomadic society without a professional scribal class or masons, nearly any text will qualify as a graffito, no matter its significance.³⁰

To illustrate this point, let us consider a monumental genre of inscriptions from Dadān, an important oasis in northwest Arabia on the trade route linking South Arabia to the Levant. The oasis was a center of pilgrimage in the second half of the first millennium BCE; nearly 200 texts document the performance of a religious ritual, the *zll*-rite, for the sake of the oasis' tutelary god, *ḡ-ḡbt* (Dū-Ḡaybat). While the exact purpose of this rite is not clear, these texts, concentrated at Ḡabal 'Ikmaḥ, follow a strict formulaic structure to announce publicly its performance.³¹ They begin with the name of the nominal author, then the performance of the rite, and terminate with prayers for their well-being.

Semitic script seems to have several parallel branches and the interrelationships between them have not yet been worked out. See Al-Jallad (2015b: 26–27).

28 For the description of Safaitic and its associated writing tradition, see Al-Jallad and Jaworska (2019) and Al-Jallad (2019) for the latest grammatical sketch. This dating is a rough estimate. The upper limits of Safaitic documentation are unknown, but the small minority of dated texts suggest that authors were particularly active at the turn of the era. There is some circumstantial archaeological evidence that the Safaitic script was employed as early as the 3rd c. BCE (Akkermans 2019). The inscriptions are thought to cease sometime before the 4th c. CE as there are no explicit mentions of Christianity (Macdonald 1992a; Al-Jallad 2019). There may be, however, at least one Safaitic inscription with a clear reference to Jesus. The edition of this inscription is currently in preparation by the author and will appear in the *Journal of the International Quranic Studies Association* in 2022.

29 See Macdonald (2010; 2015).

30 Opinions on the function of the Safaitic inscriptions vary from personal expressions of present-time conditions (Littmann 1940; Macdonald 2010) to a magico-sacral artform (Grimme 1929; Eksell 2002). Most authors correctly note that the corpus contains both sacred and profane material. The difference between these views rests on the assumed cultural motivation for writing—whether the act of carving an inscription was ritualistically significant or playful activity, comparable to the use of the Tifinagh among the Tuareg (Macdonald 2009, 1: 58). On this further, see § 2.1.

31 On the various opinions regarding the purpose of this rite, see Scagliarini (2002: 573–575).



FIGURE 1 The Dadanic inscription AH 52
COURTESY: OCIANA

	AH 52 (Figure 1) ³²	
1	<i>ḥmyh bnt</i>	Ḥmyh daughter of
2	<i>nṣrh/ʔft/h-ṣl-</i>	Nṣrh accomplished this
3	<i>ll/dh/l-dḡbt</i>	ṣll-rite for Dḡbt
4	<i>b-khl b'd ml</i>	at Khl on account of her
5	<i>-h/f-rd-h/w s'd-h</i>	property so favor her and aid her.

Kootstra argues convincingly that many, if not all, of these texts were the works of professional scribes and masons, employing various degrees of skill in their production.³³ Those performing the ṣll-rite could commission a mason to carve a text commemorating their fulfilment of the ritual, and its contents may have been drawn up by a scribe. Dadān was a literate society, where writ-

32 Reading and translation from OCIANA.

33 Kootstra (2019, esp. 23–28 and ch. 7).



FIGURE 2 The Safaitic inscription AMSI 71
COURTESY: OCIANA

ing was widespread and essential to its functioning;³⁴ both professional scribes and masons are attested in the inscriptions.³⁵

Now let us turn to Safaitic. The following inscription, like the *zll* one above, begins with a personal name, then commemorates the performance of a religious act and terminates in a prayer for its author.³⁶

AMSI 71 (Figure 2)

l bny bn bny bn nʒr w dbḥ f h lt slm

‘By Bny son of Bny son of Nʒr and he made an animal sacrifice so, O Allāt, may he be secure.’

The difference between the Dadanitic and Safaitic examples does not lie in their structure, contents, or necessarily even in their motivation, but rather in

34 Macdonald (2010: 12–15).

35 Kootstra (2019: 22–23).

36 On the structure of the Safaitic inscriptions, see Petráček (1973) and Voigt (1980); see also Avanzini (2018: 97–98).

the process of their production. While in settled areas, those wishing to commemorate rituals could employ professionals to set up an inscription, there do not seem to have been masons or a professional scribal class among the nomads. Instead, the Safaitic texts were, in large part, carved by their authors and are in this sense personal, public expressions (graffiti), although their contents may overlap with the inscriptional genres typical of settled areas.

Safaitic inscriptions often interfaced with socially important rituals, such as grieving for the dead, and authors were very keen on their texts being seen, read, and left undamaged. The following inscription illustrates how the aforementioned formulaic structure is applied to the expression of these themes.

RSIS 126

GENEALOGY	<i>l 'lwqr bn y'mr bn dkr bn grm'l</i> 'By 'lwqr son of Y'mr son of Dkr son of Grm'l.'
NARRATIVE	<i>w wgm 'l-mġny w 'l-š'd</i> 'And he grieved for Mġny and for Š'd.'
PRAYER/CURSE	<i>w hyy l-d yqr' h-ktb w 'wr l-m 'wr</i> 'So may he who would read this writing have long life but let whosoever effaces it go blind.'

This structural consistency provides an important methodological key to understanding the compositional unity of a Safaitic text. While the narrative component often mentions secular activities, such as pasturing animals or going to water, the following prayer is almost always semantically connected to that which precedes it; the two are bound to each other. In many cases, this is obvious:

KRS 1886

l mġyr bn msk bn 'md bn mlk bn qhś w r'y h-'bl f h š'qm ġnyt m-r'yt
'By Mġyr son of Msk son of 'md son of Mlk son of Qhś and he pastured the camels so, O Shay'haqqawm, may pasturing bring abundance.'

LP 180

l msk bn znn'l bn nr bn y'mr w trwḥ l-yśrq l-mdbf h lt m'dt w slm m-śn'
'By Msk son of Znn'l son of Nr son of Y'mr and he set off at night to migrate towards the inner desert so, O Allāt, [grant] a return and security from enemies.'

But there are less obvious cases. Narratives of all sorts are often followed by a prayer for *slm* "security." Although one would certainly desire safety while pas-

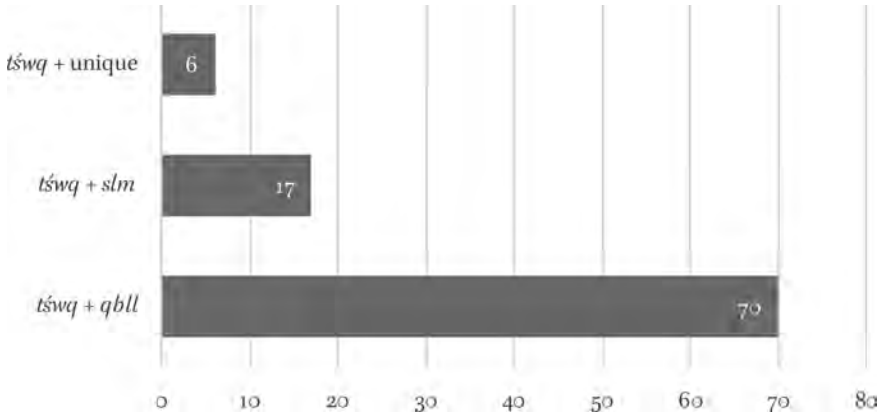


CHART 1 Types of prayers following *tšwq* “longing”

turing or engaging in any other activity in the desert, its broad applicability could raise doubts as to the necessary interdependence of the narrative and prayer. Once we turn our attention to narratives containing the formula *tšwq* ʾl- “he longed for,” the semantic dependence of the prayer upon what comes before is brought into clear relief.

Unlike pasturing, longing is a very specific condition; pain resulting from this emotion can only be resolved through the reunification of the author and his loved ones or perhaps by the reassurance that the absent are secure. The OCIANA corpus contains 93 inscriptions in which the longing formula is followed by a prayer.³⁷ The data break down as in Chart 1.³⁸ The overwhelming majority of prayers, 75%, following the longing formula are for *qbll* “reunion.” And even in cases where *tšwq* ʾl is followed by a prayer for *slm* “security,” it can still be understood in relation to the narrative—authors in these cases could be requesting security for themselves because they are far from their kingroup, or for their absent loved ones who may somehow be at risk. Thus, it seems that one did not only record longing as a statement of fact in the moment of experiencing that emotion, but also to have their situation alleviated through a petition to the gods.

37 All statistics used in this book are based on the OCIANA corpus accessed in April 2021. There are a further 111 cases of this formula without any associated prayer. On the interpretation of these, see chapter 7.

38 In Chart 1 by unique, I mean prayers that express unformulaic requests. In most cases, these are compatible with the narrative, apart from SIJ 750, where the author longs for his father-in-law ʒnʾl (*hm-h*) and then asks Allāt to grant him and his sister a feast.

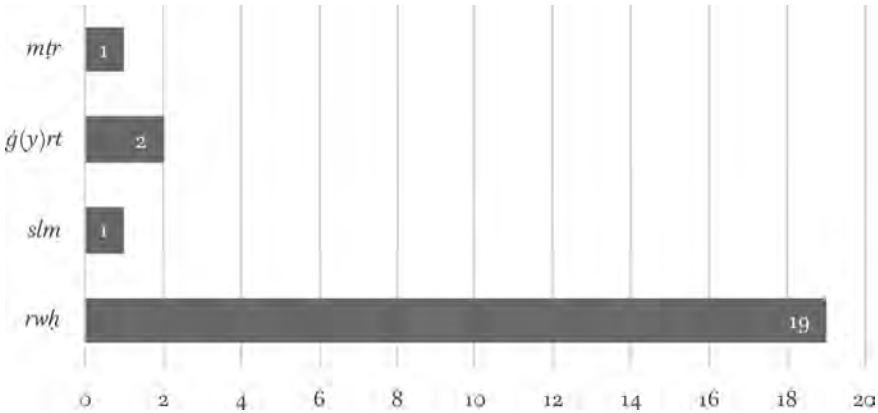


CHART 2 Prayers following *t(n)zr h-sm'y* “he awaited the rains”

Another narrative formula helps us see the relationship between the two compositional units, *t(n)zr h-sm'y*, “he awaited the rains.” This statement seems to imply that the rains were delayed, and authors feared a drought. The phrase is not as frequently attested as the longing formula, but the evidence reveals the same thing: the prayer is semantically dependent upon the narrative. Twenty-three inscriptions contain *t(n)zr h-sm'y* followed by a prayer. Of these, nineteen invoke the gods for *rwh* “relief” or “sending the winds,” sometimes with the instrument of this relief clearly mentioned, *mtr* “rain” and *gyrt* “abundance” (Chart 2).

If the prayer and narrative were not semantically linked, then there would be no reason for the requests to pattern in this way. In other words, writers could just as likely petition the gods for *qbl* “reunion” while awaiting the rains or for “relief by rain” while longing for a loved one. Moreover, if *rwh* were simply a generic petition for relief, without any implied reference to precipitation, then one would expect the various requests to be more evenly distributed.

The same pattern emerges once we consider the deities invoked. Prayers following *t(n)zr h-sm'y* are overwhelmingly to Ba‘al-Samīn, the storm god (Chart 3).³⁹ So then, if the narrative and prayer go hand and hand, then it stands to reason that the prayer can shed some light on the meaning of the narrative and its purpose. This fact will guide our understanding of the religious and ritualistic dimension of the Safaitic inscriptions. By treating the inscription as a single unit, we may bring into focus a sharper image of the sacred world.

39 See § 3 on Ba‘al-Samīn and the function of other Safaitic deities. Bennett (2014: 48) noted the connection between Ba‘al-Samīn and rain but she did not examine invocations to him in light of the narrative section.

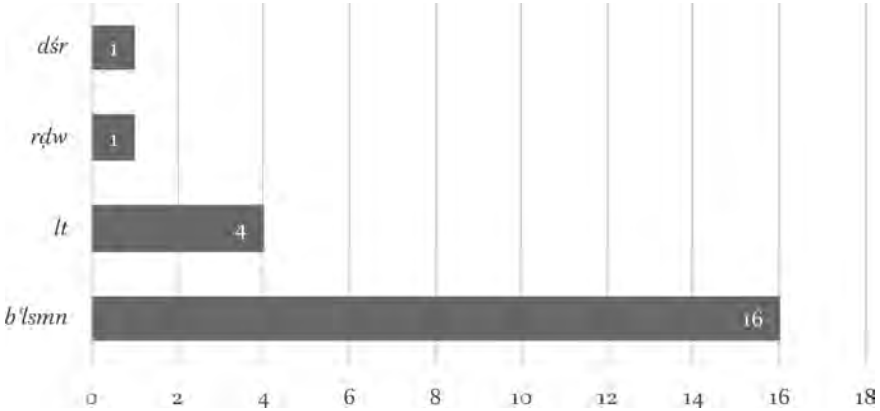


CHART 3 Gods invoked in the prayer following *t(n)zr h-smy*

While the Safaitic inscriptions reflect a rather homogeneous writing tradition—in both its language and themes—they were not the product of a single, self-conscious community.⁴⁰ There were many tribal groups in the area who made use of this alphabet, and it is unclear how broadly applicable the cultural data in the available texts are, that is, whether the rites and customs attested therein were practiced by all tribal groups or only a limited subsection of them. Moreover, there are great uncertainties regarding the chronology of the Safaitic inscriptions; most texts are not dated and even those that are only provide rough chronological information.⁴¹ These factors make it impossible to distinguish between regional variation and diachronic changes in religious trends, if there were any. Nevertheless, the relatively stable writing tradition and restricted geographical area suggests some degree of cultural homogeneity; the comprehensive examination of this material, therefore, allows us to reconstruct the worldview and rituals of the nomads of this region, so long as we keep in mind that every rite described herein may not have been performed by every group.

We should also draw attention to the context of writing among the nomads and its consequences for our image of the religious landscape. Unlike the monumental temple inscriptions of Ancient South Arabia or those commemorating

40 On this point, see the important articles in Macdonald (2009). But also see Al-Jallad (2020a) on some of the commonalities that must have bound these communities together.

41 The conventional chronology of Safaitic places the production of these texts between the 1st c. BCE to the 4th c. CE, but see Macdonald (2009, 1) on problems with these assumptions, and Akkermans (2019) for possible archaeological evidence pushing the starting date back to the 3rd c. BCE. See also n. 28.

pilgrimages and festivals at ancient Dadān, there was no institution in place to ensure uniformity in the production of these texts. It is unclear what motivated authors to commemorate a ritual act with an inscription. Do these texts simply reflect an individual choice of a literate person or did certain circumstances—lost to us now—call for an inscription? This uncertainty biases our data in a way that we cannot understand. As such, we should not assume that what was put into writing encompasses the full spectrum of religious practices. Gaps in our knowledge are made clear when we look to liturgical language. We have only isolated literary specimens of poems, songs, and liturgy; all appear to be ad-hoc decisions by certain writers to carve selections of their oral literature on rock.⁴² But even with all of this said, the thousands upon thousands of Safaitic inscriptions constitute our clearest window into pre-Islamic north Arabian religion and ritual. They allow us to see what was there for certain, even if we cannot necessarily know what practices were absent based on these texts alone.

2.1 *Previous Works and Present Goals*

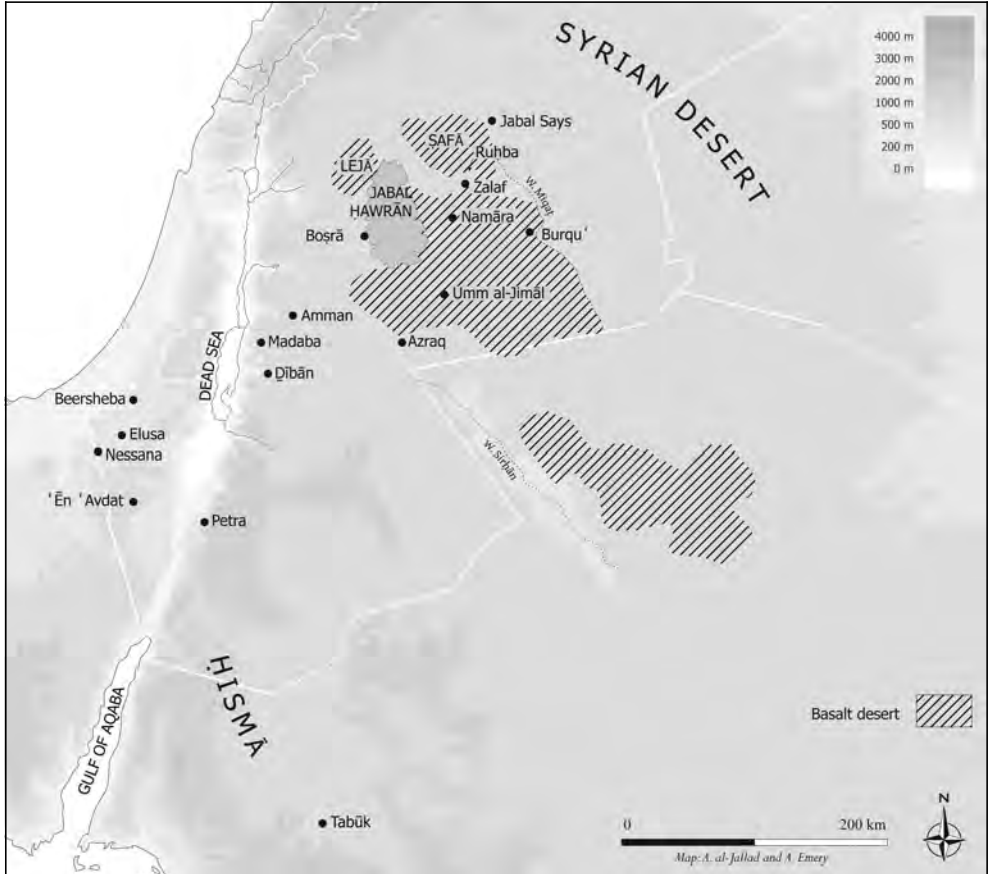
Perhaps the first major work on pre-Islamic Arabian religion based on the Safaitic inscriptions was Grimme's 1929 study *Texte und Untersuchungen zur safatenisch-arabischen Religion*. In this book, Grimme advances the theory that the inscriptions were part of a cult of the dead centered in the Ḥarrah, which their authors, he argues, considered sacred land. Scholars have rejected this hypothesis and for good reason: most of Grimme's claims were only loosely based on the inscriptional evidence.⁴³ Given their laconic language, most studies of North Arabian religion as reflected in the Safaitic texts have focused primarily on divinities, with only passing references to rituals and no attempt to reconstruct a religious system or worldview.⁴⁴

Eksell has, in some ways, picked up again on Grimme's approach. Rather than investigating the sacred through only those texts that contained explicit references to religious rites, she proposed that the writing tradition itself had

42 The discovered literary texts so far number only two, Al-Jallad (2015b) and (2017).

43 See the discussion in Eksell (2002: 105–115).

44 See Macdonald (1992a: 421–422) for an outline of the religious themes in the inscriptions and deities contained therein. For previous descriptions of Safaitic religion and divinities, see Littmann (1940: 105–108); Ryckmans (1951); Dussaud (1955: 140–147); Clark (1979: 125–135); Knauf (1985b); Ababneh (2005: 54–57); Al-Manaser (2008: 24); Bennett (2014). An important exception again to this generalization is Macdonald (forthcoming), which considers a range of cultural issues across the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, including henotheism, the gender of divinities, and more.



MAP 1 The Ḥarrah (basalt desert)

a magico-sacral dimension, which she described as “a complexity of codes reflecting a multirelational cosmos.”⁴⁵ Her arguments that the inscriptions were not mainly frivolous are sound—indeed, many of the text genres that we encounter in Safaitic are found in neighboring monumental traditions. And it is undeniable that some of the texts interface with sacral activities. Yet, the crux of the matter is this: was the act of inscribing itself sacral? Or was the skill in and of itself neutral and only achieved a sacral status once applied to the commemoration of rites and people? Macdonald holds the latter opinion; for him, the script was normally employed for the carving of secular texts, personal records of daily life, and was only on ad-hoc occasions used for other purposes.⁴⁶

45 Eksell (2002: 172).

46 Macdonald (2006: 293).

The present study will examine the evidence from the bottom up, refraining from applying an all-encompassing label to the writing tradition. A significant section of the Safaitic corpus contains culturally important information: commemorations of religious rites and the dead, petitions to the gods, and prayers and curses to protect the inscription, its inscriber, and its reader. These texts clearly address both a human and divine audience and so they will be our main focus. Rather than etymologizing divine names, I will attempt to reconstruct the ritual world of the nomads based on the contents of the aforementioned genres of inscriptions and the religious and invocational language contained therein. The final section will turn back to the religious underpinnings of the written word in an attempt to explain the motivation for carving several genres of inscriptions. The main body of this work is followed by a glossary of divine names (Appendix 1) that occur in Safaitic with some cultural, historical, and etymological remarks and editions of the unpublished inscriptions cited in the present study (Appendix 2).

Rites

1 Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is the most common religious rite commemorated in the inscriptions and appears to have occupied a central role in the ritual life of the nomads.¹ G. Ryckmans² produced an article-length study of the phenomenon in Safaitic, but it is now quite outdated due to the discovery of many new texts. Macdonald also treats sacrifice in detail, covering themes and motivations for the performance of the ritual.³ The following section hopes to build on the progress made by Macdonald and Ryckmans by synthesizing the information from the available inscriptions to reconstruct the details and motivations of this practice.

There are 91 texts that mention sacrifice with the verb *dbh*, a large enough number for basic statistical analysis. Charts 4–7 give the breakdown of this data according to whether *dbh* texts occur with a prayer (Chart 4); sacrifices mentioning explicitly to which gods they are dedicated (Chart 5); gods in prayers following sacrifices (Chart 6); narrative themes associated with sacrifices (Chart 7).⁴

Animal sacrifice was practiced widely in the Ancient Near East and in Classical Antiquity, and seems to have continued into Late Antiquity in Arabia, eventually being incorporated into Islamic practice.⁵ In the Safaitic context, the rite was intended to motivate the gods to respond to their worshippers.⁶

The primary verb signifying this rite was *dbh*, which finds cognates across the Semitic language family.⁷ Inscriptions occasionally employ other verbs, per-

1 According to OCIANA (accessed 25/3/2021), there are 91 occurrences of the verb *dbh*, to which we may add a handful of other reference to sacrifice using synonyms.

2 Ryckmans (1950–1951).

3 Macdonald (forthcoming).

4 All data are based on OCIANA, consulted on 25/3/2021.

5 For an outline of sacrifice in Antiquity, see Ekroth (2014). On sacrifice in the religions of ancient Canaan and Israel, see Nakhai (2001), and across South Arabia as well, see J. Ryckmans (1993); Robin (2012, § 2d). Sacrifice figures prominently in literary accounts of pre-Islamic Arabian religion (Hoyland 2001: 162–166).

6 A related function is attested in South Arabia; sacrifice was meant to produce a “divine response” through an oracle (Hoyland 2001: 154).

7 Canaanite *zbh*, Aramaic *dbh*, Ugaritic *dbh* (DNWSI, 301–302). Ancient South Arabian *dbh* (Beeston et al. 1982: 37–38).

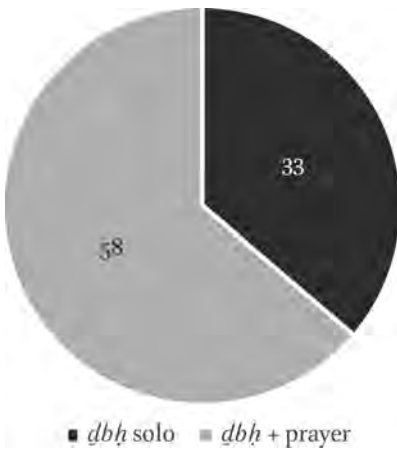


CHART 4
The occurrence of prayers with *dbh*-inscriptions

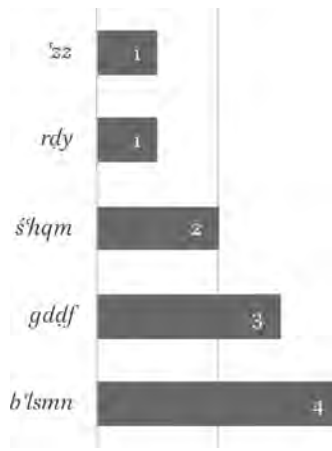


CHART 5
Gods to whom sacrifices are explicitly dedicated

haps referring to different types of sacrifices: *šmy* (KRS 68), *hrq* (AAEK 9).⁸ None of the inscriptions that attest this rite are accompanied by any information as to what was done with the carcass following the animal's destruction. Occasional attestations of terms for "burnt offerings" (see § 6.2) suggest that immolation of the animal, or at least part of its remains, sometimes followed.

The most basic commemoration of the sacrifice is accomplished with the verb *dbh* in the narrative section of the inscription, often, but not necessarily, followed by a prayer. Sometimes authors will mention to which specific deity an animal was slaughtered and others might note its purpose.

C 4410, 4409 = LP 894 = MR.A 5

w dbh l-b'lsmn

'and he performed an animal sacrifice to Ba'al-Samīn'⁹

Whenever an animal is specified, it is a camel. If this is not simply an accident of attestation, it could suggest that the sacrifice of such a valuable and culturally

8 SAFDICT, 66, 78b. The verb *hrq*, whose Classical Arabic cognate means "to pour," could reflect a sacrifice and libation.

9 I quote only the relevant portions of the cited inscriptions in the next sections for the sake of space. In most cases, the genealogies, which can be quite lengthy, have been omitted.



CHART 6
Gods mentioned in prayers following the sacrifice

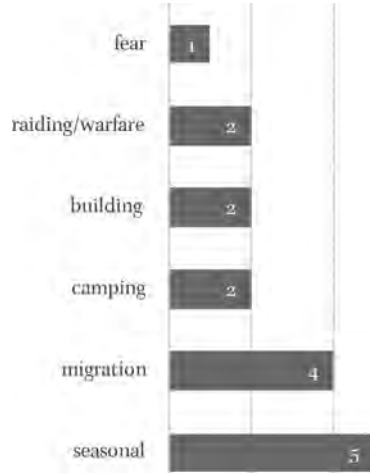


CHART 7
Themes in narratives associated with sacrifice

important beast merited explicit mention in the texts.¹⁰ None of the inscriptions so far discovered indicate that the sacrifice required the officiation of a priest—if we take the texts at face value, the rite was performed by the worshipper directly as an individual act of devotion or involving a small number of people (see §1.3).¹¹

Texts commemorating sacrifice are often followed by prayers: requests for security, successful raiding, the return of lost loved ones, or simply to improve the condition of the author.

ABWS 8

dbḥ l-gddf wqyt m-b's

'he performed an animal sacrifice to Gadd-Ḍayf to be protected from misfortune'

MA.1

dbḥ {l}rḍy w ġnm nqt

'he performed an animal sacrifice to Roḍay so may he obtain a she-camel as spoil'

10 Camel sacrifice is common in The Book of Idols, e.g. the tale of the idol Sa'd (ibn al-Kalbī 1913: 37) and also the Quranic tale of Šāliḥ, Q 26:155–157.

11 Ryckmans (1950–1951: 435–436).

KRS 756

ḏbh f h š'hqm slm [m] 'l-h-'bl mt't l-mḏbr

'he performed an animal sacrifice so, O Shay'haqqawm, keep secure what is upon the camels, provisions for the inner desert'

AHS 10

ḏbh w ḥrṣ dd-h 'sr f h gḏḏf rwh

'he performed an animal sacrifice and kept watch for his paternal uncle, who was taken captive so, O Gadd-Ḍayf, send relief'

RWQ 315

ḏbh w ḥḏr

'he performed an animal sacrifice because he was weary'

1.1 *Sacrifice before/during Dangerous Activities*

Several inscriptions record the performance of sacrifice before embarking on a raid or journey.¹² It seems that in these cases, the sacrifice was meant to ensure divine protection during activities involving danger and uncertainty. HH 1, for example, is by a man charged with keeping watch while his companions set off to raid. He takes his position and performs a sacrifice for the successful outcome of his raiding party's enterprise.

HH 1¹³

n{s}b w ḏbh w ḥll w ḥrṣ {}šy'-h ḏb'n f h lt w ḏsr [s][l]m w qb{l}{l} {f} {h} {l}t {r}w[h] w {g}nmt

'he erected a cult stone and performed an animal sacrifice, then encamped and kept watch for his companions who were on a raid, and so, O Allāt and Dusares, [grant] {security}, and {a reunion of loved ones} {and then} {O} {Allāt} [grant] {relief} and {booty}'

The author of ABSWS 11 makes a sacrifice while taking part in a rebellion, which has separated him from his companions. He invokes the god Shay'haqqawm to grant a safe reunion with loved ones.

12 For an important typological parallel of this type of sacrifice from ancient Greece, see Jameson (2014, ch. 6 "Sacrifice before Battle"). I thank Prof. Duncan MacRae for this reference.

13 This is my interpretation as discussed in Al-Jallad (2017); Hayajneh (2016) suggests the understanding of *ḥll* as "to return to a profane condition."

ABSWS 11

ḏbh w mrd f tswq l-šy-h fh š'hqm qbl l'slm

'he performed an animal sacrifice and took part in the rebellion and longed for his companions so, O Shay'haqqawm, may there be a safe reunion'

1.2 *Seasonal Sacrifices*

The performance of a sacrifice is sometimes connected with the transition of seasons and migration. In these cases, it seems the rite was intended to influence the gods to provide favorable meteorological and environmental conditions, in addition to protection during journeys. Some inscriptions, such as c 860, suggest that a sacrifice could be made to improve seasonal circumstances as well.

c 860

ḏbh fh gd'wḏ slm w trd frmd bqr snt 'ty 'sf qr

'he performed an animal sacrifice so, O Gadd-'Awīd, may he be secure and have bounty as the cattle froze the year the cold came during the early summer'

AL-NAMĀRAH.M 58¹⁴

ḏbh <<>> f šdy {l}š'hqm {w}-drbt m'-h f slm w dt' snt {}{m}{r}{t} šbrš h-mdnt

'he performed an animal sacrifice and called out to[?] Shay'haqqawm while Drbt was with him, so may he be secure while he spends the season of the later rains the year Severus took control of the province'

RWQ 307

ḏbh w dt'

'he performed an animal sacrifice and spent the season of the later rains (here)'

14 This is my reading and interpretation; the *editio princeps* (OCIANA) read the dating formula as *s'nt {}{/k}{k}{r}{h}šfrš h-mdnt* and does not provide an interpretation. The verb *šdy* is attested for the first and only time here. Considering the context, one may connect it to Classical Arabic *tašdiyātun* "the clapping with the hands," perhaps a type of prayer. Lane gives an example of the tD-stem in such a context: *šalātu-humu t-tašaddī wa-l-mukā'* "their prayer is the clapping with the hands and whistling" (LANE, 1670b).

AWS 279

dbḥ w ʾsrq f h gdʿwd w h dśr slm w mgdt

'he performed an animal sacrifice and then set off for the inner desert so,
O Gadd-ʿAwīd and Dusares, may there be security and abundance'

1.3 *Location of Sacrifice: The ṣamd*

The inscriptions discussed above demonstrate that sacrifices did not need to be performed at temples.¹⁵ Rather, animals were slaughtered in the Ḥarrah itself. Yet, not all places were equal. Ababneh and Harahsheh document a fascinating site called Tell al-Rāhib, in northeastern Jordan (Figures 3 and 4).¹⁶ On the summit of this imposing hill was a stone installation, the eastern wall of which contained fifty-three inscriptions. Twenty-three of these commemorate animal sacrifices. Four inscriptions (1, 6, 7, 9) record that the sacrifice was performed for Gadd-Ḍayf, and the same god is mentioned alone in the prayer component of five further texts (2, 4, 5, 8, 10). The remaining sacrifice inscriptions record prayers to Allāt (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24) or the pair, Allāt and Dusares (13, 19, 21, 23, 27). It is impossible to know if these were all produced at the same time, but such a high concentration of sacrifice texts in one place suggests that the site was of ritual importance. None of the inscriptions mention tribal affiliation so we cannot know if the site was used by more than one group. All of the texts except one (#27, which is carved in the Safaito-Hismaic variety) were inscribed in the fine variant of the Safaitic script. Nevertheless, the diversity of deities attested here suggests that the site was not associated with a single god—worshippers were free to sacrifice to the deity of their choice at this sacred place.

Ababneh and Harahsheh published a rough drawing of the site.¹⁷ The installation consists of a tailed stone circle, facing east. The cleared-out area in the center may have been the place where sacrifices were performed, but no altar or other cultic objects were identified by the authors.

This phenomenon of the “high place” finds parallels across Near Eastern traditions, most clearly the *bāmā* “high place” of the Hebrew Bible, which was also associated with animal sacrifice and other religious rites.¹⁸ The large open-air Nabataean ritual site Jebel al-Maḏbaḥ “the mountain of the altar” pro-

15 Ryckmans (1950–1951: 436).

16 Ababneh and Harahsheh (2015).

17 Ababneh and Harahsheh (2015: 48).

18 See, for example, 1Sam 9 12–14; Kings 3:4; 11:17. For a discussion of the High Place and the sacrality of landscape, see Eksell (2002: 133–137); see also Healey (2001: 73) and Alpass



FIGURE 3
Tell al-Rāhib
ABABNEH AND HARAHSHÉ
(2015)

vides an important, near-contemporary parallel. The sacrificial ritual site sits atop a 200 m ridge. It boasts a rock-cut altar on which sacrifices were likely performed. Basins near the site point towards an associated ablution or libation ritual.¹⁹ While all of these elements are present in the Safaitic inscriptions, and are associated with high places, we must await the discovery of another sacrificial site and the complete archaeological investigation of it to draw secure parallels. Unfortunately, shortly after Ababneh and Harahsheh's visit to Tell al-Rāhib, the top of the hill was cleared to make room for a Jordanian military installation. Any hopes of determining what ritualistic role the stone circle and cairn described in their article may have played are now lost.

Another site provides us with the name of the high place in Safaitic. Two authors—a father and son—record sacrificing a camel at a *šmd*, which corresponds to Classical Arabic *šamdun* “high ground.”²⁰

KRS 818

l wdm'l bn grm'l bn nḥr bn ḡrb h-šmd w dbḥ gml 'l-h f slm yṯ' m-šn' w 'wr m 'wr h-šfr

‘By Wdm’l son of Grm’l son of Nḥr son of Ḡrb, at the high place, and he sacrificed a camel upon it so, O Yayṯe’, grant security from enemies and blind whosoever effaces these writings.’

(2013: 68–73) on the role of high places in Nabataean religion. On the distribution of the inscriptions and rock art, see Macdonald (1992b); Brusgaard (2019, ch. 6).

19 See the discussion in Healey (2001: 48) and Alpass (2013: 68–73), and the references there.

20 SAFDICT, 129a.



FIGURE 4 Summit of Tell al-Rāhib
COURTESY: ALI AL-MANASER

KRS 824

l qdm'l bn wdm'l bn grm'l bn nḥr bn ḡrb bn slm h-šmd dbḥ gml

'By Qdm'l son of Wdm'l son of Grm'l son of Nḥr son of Ḡrb son of Slm, who sacrificed a camel at the high place.'

"High" is relative and not all *šmd*'s were at such imposing places in the landscape as Tell al-Rāhib. Figure 5 is of a site in Wādī al-Khuḍarī, northeastern Jordan, that is identified as a *šmd* by an inscription. It is not on a very tall hill, but simply at an elevated place in the landscape relative to the wādī before it.

A vague memory of the sacrificial *šmd* may be found in a tale about the destruction of the ancient tribe of 'Ād related in the *Akhbār al-Yaman*, a 9th c. work attributed to 'Abīd b. Sharyah, who according to legend was the tutor of Mu'āwiyah I.²¹ In this story, Mu'āwiyah asks about poetry relating to the idols of 'Ād. 'Abīd relates the following line:²²

21 There is much controversy surrounding the dating of this text, the existence of 'Abīd b. Sharyah, and even on the vocalization of his name (an alternate vocalization 'Ubayd exists). The text as we have it is known from one 16th c. manuscript and its contents are traced back to al-Barqī (d. 249/863). On these matters, see Crosby (2007). It is unclear how much of this material in fact goes back to a historical 'Abīd, if such a person did in fact exist, but its contents are largely folkloric and, with the exception of certain theonyms, anthroponyms, basilonyms, and tribal names, do not reflect a faithful transmission of pre-Islamic knowledge.

22 This line he attributes to one Abū Sa'īd al-Mu'min.



FIGURE 5 A “Safaitic” *šmd*

ʿAḥbār, 326

la-nā šanamun yuqālu la-hū šamūdun

wa-yuqābilu-hū šudāʿu wa-l-buḡāʿu

‘We have an idol called *Šamūd*, facing it is *Šudāʿ*’ and *al-Buḡāʿ*.’

A poem ʿAbīd attributes to a Muslim man (*qāla raḡulun mina l-muslimīn*) mentions *al-šamūd* in a sacrificial context, although the exact sense of the line is difficult to ascertain on account of its difficult syntax.

ʿAḥbār, 330

fā-ttabaʿat mina l-maḥārībi ḡamḥun

mīna š-šamūdi dīḥatan limā dūbiḥ

‘and they cleaved to the altars performing sacrifices, a wayward course of *al-Šamūd*’

The idol *šamūd* could reflect some tradition that preserves knowledge of high places associated with sacrifice, reimagined as the name of a god. The Muʿallaqah attributed to Ṭarafah may also preserve a sacral meaning of *šmd*, there applied to a noble temple.

Ṭarafah, *Mu'allaqah*

48 *wa-'in yaltaqi l-ḥayyu l-ḡamī'u tulāqi-nī*

'ilā dīrwati l-bayti l-karīmi l-muṣammadi

'and if the entire tribe assembles,²³ you will find me at the summit of the noble temple on high ground (*muṣammad*)'

1.4 *Thanksgiving?*

While it appears that sacrifice was intended to increase the effectiveness of an invocation, that may not have been its only purpose. Several inscriptions record a sacrifice to a deity followed by a prayer to another, implying that the ritual was performed out of obligation, perhaps in thanksgiving, rather than to obtain some future favor.²⁴ Indeed, such request may reflect the expectation of the author to be rewarded by the second deity for dutifully performing his religious obligations.

AHG

dbḥ l-gddf f h lt slm w mgdt

'he performed an animal sacrifice to Gadd-Ḍayf so, O Allāt, may he be secure and have abundance'

2 *Erection of the nšb Stone*

At least one installation is associated with the performance of the animal sacrifice: the *nšb* (and other variations thereof), conventionally translated as a "cult stone." This corresponds to the standing stones and altars of the Bible, the *maṣṣēbôt*, and the aniconic betyls that were widely used as representations of the divine throughout the ancient Near East.²⁵ Nabataean attests several forms

23 The occasion for the assembly of the tribe implies a sacral communal activity, such as a pilgrimage.

24 Thanksgiving sacrifices are recorded in South Arabia as well (J. Ryckmans 1993; Hoyland 2001: 154; Robin 2012, §2d.) and one can understand the 'Aqīqah sacrifice performed by Muslims today on the occasion of the birth of a child along these lines as well.

25 For a broad comparative perspective, see the masterful study of Mettinger (1995); on *nšb*-stele in Phoenicia, see Doak (2015).

The substantive *nšb* is attested throughout West Semitic, where it refers generally to a stele, usually funerary; see DNWSI, 750. In Ancient South Arabian, the *nšb* also has a funerary function (SD, 99).

of this word, *nšyb'*, *nšbt'* and *mšb'*, which all signify a cult stele of the deity, a *betyl*.²⁶ Reflexes of this tradition stretch back to the Bronze Age, in the form of the *sikkānum/skn* “standing stones” of the Syrian city states Mari, Ugarit, and Emar.²⁷ While clearly from a different root, Mettinger establishes a semantic connection between *skn*, which derives from the root “to dwell,” “to abide” and the Greek term for such cult stones, βαίτυλοι, which renders the Semitic phrase *byt 'l* “dwelling of (the) god.”²⁸ The various sources converge on the idea that these stone stelae were originally regarded as vessels that divinities could occupy for the duration of a ritual.

In the Bronze- and Iron-Age Syrian context, sacrifices made before the *nšb/skn* stones belonged to a ritual of divine feasting. As S. Sanders argues, a supernatural presence in such stele was signified by appetite—sacrifices before them were part of a mortuary ritual where humans and the divine shared a meal.²⁹

The Quran associates the *nuṣub* and *ʿanṣāb* with sacrifice explicitly, and prohibits the consumption of animals slaughtered before them. This appears to echo the dietary codes of the Pentateuch, which seek to curb participation in the rituals of other gods.³⁰

Q 5:3

wa-mā ʿakala s-sabuʿu ʿillā mā dakkaytum wa-mā dubiḥa ʿalā n-nuṣub
 ‘(forbidden is) what the predator has eaten save for that which you have purified and (forbidden is) what was slaughtered upon the stone altars’

Hoyland connects this Quranic reference to sacrifices before stone idols mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry and in the South Arabian inscriptions.³¹

Ibn al-Kalbī describes the *naṣb* as an act of erecting an idol or stone representation of a divinity.³² Indeed, one frequently encounters references to blood libations before altar stones in the pre-Islamic poems, but nothing—as far as I

26 Healey (2001: 156). For a comprehensive treatment of the Nabataean Betyls, see Wenning (2001).

27 See Hutter (1993).

28 Mettinger (1995: 130–131).

29 Sanders (2013: 99–100).

30 Also cf. Acts 15:29 and 1 Corinthians 8; see Reynolds (2018: 189).

31 Hoyland (2001: 186).

32 Ibn al-Kalbī (1913: 8); see also Wellhausen (1897: 101). Littmann (1943: 56) interprets this phrase as setting up a statue for the god, but it seems more likely that the deity was represented by a natural, unworked stone. See also Al-Azmeh (2014: 214).

know—suggests the existence of a ritual feast involving gods and men. Rather, the “blood at the *nšb*” theme appears to be a stereotyped topos connected to oath making in this corpus.

Ṭarafah, °10

ʾinnī wa-ḡaddi-ka mā haḡawtu-ka

wa-l-ʾanšābi yusfaḡu bayna-hunna damu

‘By your Gadd and the cult stones among which blood is poured, I have not disparaged you.’

The *nšb* of the Safaitic inscriptions resembles Biblical and Arabian traditions as mentioned in the Quran and later sources rather than functioning as a funerary stele.³³ The notion of a divine presence embodied in the *nšb* is implied by the association of these stele with particular gods; for example, the author of SESP.S 1 erects the cult stone of the deity ʔ^c (*nšb* ʔ^c) while RQ.A 9 records the erection of the cult stone of the Goddess of Dtn (*nšb* ʾlt dtn).

When *nšb* and *dbḥ* co-occur, *nšb* comes first, suggesting that the structure had to be in place to fulfill the sacrificial rite, as illustrated in HH1 above, *nšb w dbḥ* “he set up a cult stone and made a sacrifice.”³⁴

JAS 100.1

l bgt bn ʾdy bn lsms w nšb w dbḥ

‘By Bgt son of ʾdy son of Lsms and he set up a cult stone and performed an animal sacrifice.’

Several inscriptions record the erection of *nšb* stones without mentioning a sacrifice or any other associated ritual or deity. It is possible that the simple mentioning the installation implied a sacrifice. In other words, *nšb* and *dbḥ* could have been components of a single sacrifice ritual, which could be referred to in its entirety *nšb w dbḥ* or perhaps by synecdoche, either *w nšb* or *w dbḥ*. On the other hand, the comparative evidence provides several other possibilities, such as libations, the taking of oaths, or simply to commem-

33 The path to funerary stele is beautifully illustrated in the Katamuwa stele, where the *nbs* “life force” of the deceased resides in the *nšb*, just as the presence of a deity would have occupied such a stele. See Pardee (2009) for the edition of the text and Sanders (2013) for further analysis.

34 This might be compared to the sacrificial altars in South Arabia; see Maraqtan (2021: 452–456).

orate an interaction with a divinity.³⁵ Like the *dbh* inscriptions, *nšb* ones can be followed by a prayer.

C 527

l mfn̄y bn mś'r h-nšb fyt' flt mn-sqm

'This cult stone (was erected) by Mfny son of Mś'r so, O Yayte', deliver from illness.'

C 2019

l mr' bn mfn̄{y} bn mś'r h-nšb f h 't} ' slm w rwh

'This cult stone (was erected) by Mr' son of Mfny so, O 'Ayte', [grant] security and relief.'

While most *nšb* inscriptions are followed by an invocation to a deity, for whom it is natural to assume the cult stone was erected, some texts directly associate the *nšb* with a particular deity yet invoke another in the prayer. Like the *dbh* texts, these types of inscriptions could be understood as commemorating, or be in thanksgiving of, a previous interaction with a deity or a divine boon.³⁶ In RQ.A 9, for example, the author erects the cult stone for the Goddess of Dtn but then calls upon Gadd-'Awīd to protect him and the writing. LP 237, which records the erection of the cult stone of *hlt* and then invokes *lt*, could also reflect the same phenomenon, but it is my opinion that both *hlt* and *lt* are phonetic variants of the same goddess.

RQ.A 9

w dt' h-wrd w nšb 'lt dtn f h gd'wd slm w l-h h-ḥtt

'and he spent the season of the later rains in the lowland/watering place and erected a cult stone for the goddess of Dtn so, O Gadd-'Awīd, may he be secure, and these carvings are his'

LP 237³⁷

w nšb h-lt f lt slm snt {g}lh h-d'b 'ns w nq't l-dy'wr h-sfr

'and he erected the cult stone for (h)Allāt so, O Allāt, may he be secure the year the wolf attacked mankind and may he who would efface this writing be thrown out (of the grave)'

35 Nakhai (2001: 49).

36 See Macdonald et al. (1996: 456 and forthcoming) for further discussion.

37 Littmann interprets this strange dating formula to refer to a drought (1943: 56). Note the similar wording of the narrative in SG 1, which may refer to the same event: SG 1: *trd*

2.1 *The nšb, nfs, and Mortuary Installations*

There is a small amount of evidence to suggest that the *nšb* played a role in funerary rituals, as it did nearly a thousand years earlier across ancient Syria. In 2009, P. Bikai published a collection of inscriptions from a cairn located on Jabal al-Muqallah in Wādī Rāḡil in eastern Jordan. He recorded 125 inscriptions, but not all seem to be associated with the structure or to have been produced at the same time or by the same social group. Among these, however, eight attest to a funerary ritual of a deceased man named 's (ʿAws). In BRCM 37.3, a man called Ġlb records his grief for several relatives and then terminates his inscription with *w bny ʿl-s* “and he built upon 's.” This phrase is associated with other burials, most famously the burial cairn of Hāni', and seems to signify the placing of stones upon the dead by the bereaved.³⁸ Other members of this procession recorded their participation using the same phrase or by employing the typical grieving formula, *wgm ʿl-s* “he grieved for Aws.” The author of BRCM 14, however, inscribed the following:

BRCM 14

nšb w l-h [h-] frs w bny ʿl-s

‘he erected a cult stone and this (image) of the horseman is by him and he built upon 'Aws’

The mentioning of the cult stone could imply that the object played some role in the funerary ritual, although the laconic language of the texts prevents us from knowing what that entailed. Another collection of inscriptions further supports the possible mortuary role of the *nšb*.

h-dʿb zlʿm-mn ʿkdyḡlh “he drove away the wolf, which was seeking to mate, from Mn after it attacked” (SAFDICT, 71). In light of the latter inscription, it seems more likely that the “wolf” refers to some marauding group rather than a drought. The *h* preceding the first *lt* could be a writing error as the name is usually preceded by the vocative, or it could reflect a variant pronunciation, *hallāt*. One might suggest that the two spellings in this text, *lt* and *hlt*, should be regarded as separate deities, but as far as I know, there is only one other case where *hlt* occurs outside of a vocative context, S1J 840. The narrative and prayer of this inscription read: *w mty fh hlt slm w ḡnmt* “and he set off on a journey so O *hlt* grant security and spoil.” On the same stone, however, another inscription (S1J 841) carved in the same hand contains the same narrative and prayer yet this time invoking *lt*: *w mty fh lt ḡnmt w slm* “and he set off on a journey so, O *lt*, grant spoil and security.” Thus, I think it is better to explain the divine name *hlt* in the former inscription as the result of dittography.

38 Harding (1953); SAFDICT, 61.

G. King documented a number of texts from a single site during her 1989 survey in north eastern Jordan that employ the verb *ḥd* in a funerary context. I have suggested that *ḥd* refers in some contexts to the reuse of funerary installations, that is, “taking” them for the dead.³⁹ This is supported by the phrases such as KRS 1429: *ḥd h-rqm l-’b-h*, literally “he took the funerary cairn for his father,” but probably meaning “he interred his father in the funerary cairn.”

In King’s collection of texts, there can be no doubt that *ḥd* signifies some funerary activity. KRS 945 states: *l gdy bn tmhm h-dfy w ḥd l-ṣ’d* “By Gdy son of Tmhm the Dayfite and he took (it) for Ṣa’d” (i.e. interred him in the cairn/funerary installation); KRS 939 states the same thing: *l šḥtr bn s’d bn s’d bn skrn w ḥd l-ṣ’d* “by Šḥtr son of S’d son of S’d son of Skrn and he took (it) for Ṣ’d.” A third associated inscription, however, mentions the *nšb*.

KRS 929

l ’n’m bn hn’ w ḥd w nšb f h dśr slm

‘By ’n’m son of Hn’ and he took (it for Ṣ’d) and erected a cult stone so, O Dusares, may he be secure.’

A fourth inscription, carved at a later point, confirms the hypothesis that this collection is funerary, as its author provides an elaborate description of his grief after finding the *ṭr* “trace” of a dead man named Ṣ’d.

KRS 941

l n’mn bn ṣ’d bn ysm’l w wgd ṭr ṣ’d f ng’ w b’s m zll w rġm m{n}{y} { }{n}{y} {w} {q} l ḥbl-h trḥ w h lt ’wr d y’wr h-s{f}r

‘By N’mn son of Ṣ’d son of Ysm’l and he found the trace of Ṣ’d and then grieved in pain; and those who remain (alive) despair and Fate strikes down sufferers (or: he was struck down by Fate, suffering); and he said aloud: “grief drove him mad,” so, O Allāt, blind him who would efface this writing.’

What further merits consideration is the presence of a drawing of a horse on the stone of KRS 929, similar to BCRM 14, which explicitly references the image. We shall return to this issue in § 6.

39 SAFDICT, 41; and earlier in Al-Jallad (2015: 298).

So then, these texts suggest that a *nšb* could be a component of at least some mortuary complexes and the rituals involved with the burial and commemoration of the dead. Despite this, its function remains unknown—does the association with animal sacrifice elsewhere imply a mortuary feasting ritual, as in the Bronze Age Syrian context? While one cannot rule out such a possibility, there is yet no direct evidence that sacrifice and feasting were part of Safaitic funerary rituals. Only one Safaitic text mentions eating, and there is no explicit funerary or ritual context.⁴⁰

The funerary dimension provides a new interpretive lens through which to view *nšb* texts of the type: *l PN + h-nšb*. The dative preposition may refer to the deceased rather than the agent. In other words, such texts could translate as “this *nšb* is for PN” rather than “by PN is this *nšb*,” bearing the name of the dead.

A variant of this installation is known, *maššeb* and *maššebat*. These could refer to the cult stone itself or the sacral/mortuary installation in its entirety. This form is directly compatible with the Biblical *maššēbâ* < *maššibat and Nabataean *mšb*.⁴¹

ZEGA 1

l gfft bn kn d-’l ’ty w l-h mnšb f h ’lh slm

‘By Gfft son of Kn of the lineage of ’ty and this cult-stone was [set up] by him so, O Allāh, may he be secure.’

C 3097

l šqr bn hgg t h-mšbt w ngb

‘This cult-stone was (set up) by Šqr son of Hgg t so may he be rewarded.’

KRS 3250

l zmhr bn kbr h-mšbn

‘these two cult-stones were (set up) by Zmhr son of Kbr’

40 This text is RWQ 325 *l ’dnt bn ’bd bn kn h-sbqy w ’kl lhm smn w zm w nžr* “By ’dnt son of ’bd son of Kn the Sbq-ite and he consumed fatty meat and a dish of milk and kept guard.” One Hismaic inscription (KJC 46), however, seems to record a votive offering of a meal to the gods Dusares and Kutbay. We will return to the relationship between the *nšb* and the *ḥš* in their mortuary context, specifically how they related to the notion of an afterlife, in §5.

41 Compare also with Classical Arabic *maššibun* and modern Arabic *maššib*, both meaning “a place where something is planted” or “rank,” “office.”

HNSD 196

l 'bn bn wsmt h-mšb

'This cult-stone was (set up) by 'bn son of Wsmt.'

I would, however, stop short of seeing the *nšb* as a funerary stele as such. Rather, Safaitic uses the term *nfs(t)* = *nepheš*-stele, a widespread monument type in Levant and North Arabia, for the purpose of commemorating a dead person.⁴² We can be sure that the two are not synonymous as they have a different distribution in the corpus. While *nšb* stones can be erected for specific deities, there are no examples of such in the case of the *nfs*. And while inscriptions of the type *l PN h-nšbf* + PRAYER exist, this is a rather rare construction for the *nfs(t)*. One clear example of this is attested which requests the protection of the *nfs(t)* itself from vandals rather than containing more general petitions to the gods for favor and bounty.⁴³ Finally, unlike the *nšb*, the erection of which is signified by its own denominal verb, the *nfs* is built, *bn*, just like the funerary cairn. Multiple *nfs(t)* (pl. '(n)*nfs*) can be constructed and associated with a single individual.⁴⁴

Inscriptions commemorating the construction of the *nfs(t)* do not appear to be inscribed on the funerary monument itself but are rather carved on a nearby surface. A new set of Safaitic inscriptions discovered during the 2019 summer campaign of the Badia Survey project illustrate this clearly.⁴⁵ These texts are inscribed upon a single stone (Figure 6) positioned on the perimeter of a stone enclosure in the area of Wādī al-Khuḍarī, northern Jordan.⁴⁶ The first text contains the name of the dead man and indicates that the '*fs* "funerary monuments" belong to him. Two of his sons are present along with a friend—together they build the '*fs* and grieve for him. The final text contains a

42 On the development of the *npš*-stele, see Steiner (2015). See Mouton (1997) on its spread in Arabia. Hayajneh (2018) surveys the Arabian evidence and publishes a new Safaitic (or Thamudic) *nfs*-text from the region of Gerasa on a stone slab.

43 RWQ 328 *l t'l bn 'md bn mlk bn qhš h-nfs t f h lt 'wr ḡ-y'wr* "This funerary monument is for T'l son of 'md son of Mlk son of Qhš so O Allāt blind him who would efface (it)."

44 The most common form of the word is *nfst*, but I have argued that the final *t* may be understood as the feminine demonstrative as the word appears as *nfs* in all other languages and the basic form *nfs* is also attested in Safaitic. The plural construction is also occasionally followed by the plural demonstrative '*y, h-'fs 'by* "these funerary monuments," further supporting the idea that this formula includes the use of a proximal demonstrative; see the discussion under the lemma *nfs* in SAFDICT, 103.

45 This mission was led by Ahmad Al-Jallad and Ali al-Manaser.

46 The site is described in Appendix 2.



FIGURE 6 The *ʔs*-inscriptions, BESS19 3a–e
PHOTO: A. AL-JALLAD

two-generation name; this text may have been carved at a later point and have nothing to do with the original mortuary procession.

- a) *l š' bn 'dr bn wdm h-ʿfs*
'These funerary monuments are for Š' son of 'dr son of Wdm.'
- b) *l mġny bn š' bn 'dr w bny h-ʿfs w n's m-ħrn*
'By Mġny son of Š' son of 'dr and he built these funerary monuments,
and he carried (him) upon the bier (to this place) from the Ḥawrān.'
- c) *l 's bn š' bn 'dr w wgm 'l-š'*
'By 's son of Š' son of 'dr and he grieved for Š'.'
- d) *l šmt bn šn' bn grm w wgm 'l-ħbb w bny h-ʿfs*
'By Šmt son of Šn' son of Grm and he grieved for a beloved and built the
funerary monuments.'
- e) *l kḥsmn bn s'd*
'By Kḥsmn son of Š'd.'

What these *ʿfs* may have been is unclear.⁴⁷ The site itself where this stone was discovered contains a large cleared-out area and to its west a straight line of four small cairns running northeast to southwest (Figures 7 and 8).⁴⁸

While we cannot be sure as to the antiquity of these structures, if they are coeval with the Safaitic inscription, then I would *very cautiously* hypothesize that these small tumuli are what the term *nfs(t)ʿ/(n)fs* signifies in the desert context. There appears to be nothing else in the area that could be regarded as “built,” but this may only mean that the site had been reused by later groups who had dismantled whatever structure the loved ones of Š' had constructed in his memory.⁴⁹

In settled areas, the Safaitic *nfs* seems to resemble more the funerary stele as known from Northwest Semitic cultures. In 2017, H. Hayajneh published

47 M.C.A. Macdonald (2006) advanced a cogent argument that the *nfst* referred to the name of the deceased inscribed on stone, similar to the meaning of *npš* in the Aramaic of the Ḥawrān. At the time only two occurrences of *bny h-nfst* existed. In light of the present discovery, however, such an interpretation seems difficult to maintain, at least for every occurrence. One text clearly states the name of the dead person associated with the *ʿfs* and the other texts on the stone record “building” the *ʿfs*. This panel demonstrates that the *nfs* is some type of installation.

48 A full archaeological and epigraphic examination of the site, and another related one, are in preparation. Their publication has been delayed by the COVID-19 phenomenon, which has prevented the team from returning to the field.

49 The site clearly served a funerary function as several other groups of texts surrounding the enclosure recording grieving/funerary narratives. These are edited in Appendix 2.



FIGURE 7 *nfs*-site in Wādi Khuḍarī, Northern Jordan
PHOTO: A. AL-JALLAD



FIGURE 8 A possible *nfs* in the background with *nfs*-inscriptions in the foreground



FIGURE 9
North Arabian inscribed Nefesh Stele from
Jerash (H. Hayajneh 2017)
PHOTO: @ARSCAN, F. VILLENEUVE

an interesting example of a Safaitic *nepheš* from the vicinity of Jerash, Jordan. It is an inscribed stone slab stating simply *l-nhb h-nfs* “this funerary monument is for Nhb” (Figure 9), resembling the inscribed Aramaic *nepheš* stones from the Ḥawrān.⁵⁰

So then, to round up our discussion: the Safaitic *nšb* appears to be a stone medium that serves as a channel for the presence of deities during ritual acts. The evidence we have suggests that it was erected before sacrifices and as a part of certain mortuary installations, although ambiguous inscriptions could indicate that other ritual functions required it as well. The *nšb* contrasts with the *nfs(t)*, which seems to be purely funerary and associated with humans rather than divinities. The Safaitic *nfs(t)*—at least in the desert context—does not seem to be an inscribed stone or slab but rather some type of memorial installation, very possibly a small tumulus. Multiple *nfs*-monuments can be dedicated to a single deceased person.

3 The Ritual Shelter

The term *str*, and a variant, possibly a diminutive *strt*, are translated in the Safaitic dictionary neutrally as “shelter.”⁵¹ Like the *nšb* texts, the *str*-inscriptions often contain the name of a dedicant or the person who constructed the installation. Besides the word’s etymology, there is nothing that clearly indicates what the function of the *str* was. While it is certainly possible that many of these *str*-texts simply record the building of temporary structures to shield from the elements, similar perhaps to the *zlt* or the *m’mr*,⁵² some inscriptions describe the construction of the *str* before the performance of sacral activities, such as sacrifice and mourning. These would suggest that it may not necessarily

50 Nehmé (2010: 459–460); Hayajneh (2017).

51 SAFDICT, 124.

52 SAFDICT, s.v.

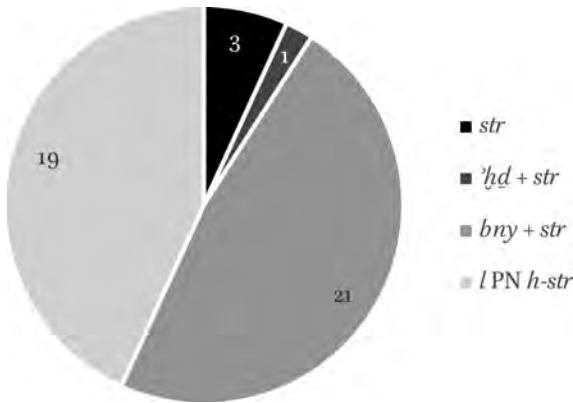


CHART 8 Typology of *str*-inscriptions⁵³

refer to a habitation but rather to a ritual installation, perhaps comparable to the biblical Tabernacle.⁵⁴ Before discussing these cases, let us look at how the inscriptions mentioning the *str(t)* break down.

The corpus presently contains 46 *str* texts. 44 of these deal with the construction of the *str* or name its owner (Chart 8). In two *bny + str* inscriptions, the act is followed by the performance of an animal sacrifice. And in BES15 871, this coincides with the seasonal encampment by water.⁵⁵

AHS 19

bny h-str w dbḥ f h lt w dśr slm

‘He built the *str*-shelter and performed an animal sacrifice so, O Allāt and Dusares, may he be secure.’

53 *str* = a denominal verb “to construct the *str*,” *ḥd h-str* “he took possession of the *str*”; *bny h-str* “he constructed the *str*”; *l PN h-str* “this *str* belongs to/was constructed by PN.”

54 For a comprehensive treatment of Israel’s Tabernacle, see George (2009); see also the classic study of Cross (1947).

55 It is tempting in these cases to interpret *ḥdr* along the lines of the Ancient South Arabian cognate, namely, “to perform a pilgrimage” and the C-stem *hḥdr* “to hold a festival for a deity” or “to offer,” see the discussion in Maraqtan (2021: 433–434), but there is no independent evidence in Safaitic to support such an understanding. In most cases, *ḥdr* is ambiguous being the only verb in the narrative, yet in all cases that provide any context, the understanding of “to encamp by water” is best supported; see Macdonald (1992d: 29); SAFDICT, 84.

BES15 871

ḥḏr f bny ʿ-str w dbḥ

‘He encamped by water and then built the *str*-shelter and performed an animal sacrifice.’

Indeed, *ḥḏr* is twice more associated with the construction of the *str*.

WH 3597

l zʿm h-strt b-ḥḏr

‘This *str*-shelter is for Zʿm during the encampment by water.’

HASI 22

ḥḏr d ʿl tm w str

‘He of the lineage of Taym encamped by water and constructed the *str*-shelter.’

Finally, the *str*-shelter is associated with burials and ritual mourning. A text from the Cairn of the Mermaids, discussed above, couples the *str* with the *nfs*, again pointing towards the presence of ritual installations (cf. *nšb*) at burials for the performance of mortuary rites.

BRCM 19.4

wgm ʿl-mʿyr w ʿl-ʿs w ʿl-ḥḏr w ʿl-sr d-ʿl----ʿ w bny ʿ-nfs w str

‘He grieved for Mʿyr and for ʿs and for Rḏwt and for Sr of the lineage of ----and he built the funerary monument and the *str*-shelter.’

The author of QZMJ 477 provides us with an illuminating description of the ritual function of the *str*-structure: *qʿd b-h-str*, which can be rendered as both “he sat inside the *str*-shelter” or “he halted at the *str*-shelter.” Indeed, another inscription KRS 2415 attests a similar construction—*gls ʿ-rgm* “he stopped at the funerary cairn.” The use of *b-* in the present inscription rather than simply taking at a direct object may therefore prefer the interpretation “he sat inside,” indicating that the *str* could be occupied while performing certain rituals.

QZMJ 477

qʿd b-h-str w wgm ʿl-ḥl-h ṭrq-h [h-]-qfy

‘He sat inside the *str*-shelter and grieved for his maternal uncle, whom the Qf-ite had struck down (or: Ṭrq the Qf-ite).’

As such, the *str*-shelter has a very similar distribution to the *nšb*, occurring in both seasonal and mortuary contexts and preceding the performance of an animal sacrifice. I would therefore suggest that *str* can refer to a ritual installation, a temporary structure associated with the performance of sacral activities, finding a typological parallel in the biblical Tabernacle.

Literary sources from the early Islamic period provide further support for this hypothesis. Sean Anthony draws our attention to a passage from the *Khūzistān Chronicle* (~660 CE) that describes the rituals of the Arab conquerors.⁵⁶ The “Ishmaelites”—as they are called—are associated with a ritual site called *qwbth d-’brhm*, which Anthony convincingly renders as the “tent/tabernacle of Abraham” (cf. Syriac *qūbtā*). Such a description, moreover, seems to be compatible with early Muslim descriptions of the Meccan sanctuary itself.⁵⁷ According to the *Chronicle*, the *qwbth* was a place of worship and the performance of animal sacrifices, *qwbth d-dbh’*, very much like the *str*-shelter of the Safaitic inscriptions. While this Arabian ritual practice had clearly been Abrahamicized by the early 7th century, we may consider the possibility that its roots are to be found in a ritual shelter like the *str*.

None of the known Safaitic texts provide information on the constitution or dimensions of the *str*-shelter. The best guess is that it was simply a tent, constructed of poles and hide. None of the sites at which *str*-inscriptions have been found have been excavated and so it is impossible to say more at the moment. One may suggest, however, that the cleared-out spaces associated with funerary sites may have hosted the temporary *str*-shelter.⁵⁸

3.1 Statues

A single inscription records the offering of an image, *šlm*, as a means to obtain security from impending doom.⁵⁹ The text appears to begin with *mn* “from” rather than the *l* that begins most texts,⁶⁰ suggesting that the this was indeed a votive object.

56 Anthony (2018: 35–36).

57 Anthony (2018: 36) provides the description of Ibn Jurayj, an early Meccan scholar, who describes the primitive Ka’bah as an *’arīš*, “a tabernacle-like structure.” See also Rubin (1986).

58 See the *nš* complex in Appendix 2.

59 This word is cognate with Classical Arabic *šanam*; see SAFDICT 129a. The term, *šlm*, is much more common in Nabataean as a votive object (Healey 2001: 159).

60 The introductory *l* is called the *lām auctōris* and is usually translated as “by” but can often mean “for,” as in the case of grave inscriptions; see Macdonald (2006) for a discussion. In the present inscription, the first <m> takes the slender form, which differs from the other

RSIS 309

mn nšbt bn 'gr h-šlm w tẓr mny w yt' rwḥ

'This statue is from (set up by) Nšbt son of 'gr and Fate lay in wait so, O Yaye', send relief.'

4 The Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages to the shrines of deities and the celebration of annual and seasonal festivals are attested throughout the ancient Near East.⁶¹ The pilgrimage was called *ḥg* in Safaitic and its verbal counterpart, *ḥgg/yḥg*. Inscriptions mentioning this rite are few as it seems that the pilgrimage sites were not located in the Ḥarrah—or at least none have so far been discovered. There are, therefore, no texts commemorating the rites performed on the pilgrimage itself; instead, the event is mentioned as a chronological anchor in dating formulae. One text commemorates the embarking on the pilgrimage in a certain year.

AL-MAFRAQ MUSEUM 24

w ḥgg snt myt mn't bn rḏwt w ḥrṣ l'-hl-h f h lt w dšr slm w qbl

'and he set off on the pilgrimage the year Mn't son of Rḏwt died and he kept watch for his family so O Allāt and Dusares, may he be secure and be reunited (with loved ones)'

The author's prayer for reunion, *qbl*,⁶² is usually associated with verbs of motion and being distant from loved ones. This would imply that the pilgrimage took our author far away from his home and relatives; the performance of the pilgrimage does not seem to have included an entire tribe or family.

⟨m⟩ in the text. The slender form is typical of the Fine Script while the present inscription takes the Common letter shapes. If the first *m* is not associated with the text, then it might be possible to consider the first vertical stroke of the text the letter *l*, the *lām auctōris*.

61 See the chapters in McCorriston (2011). For Arabian pilgrimages, see Maraqtan (2021 and 2015) on the pilgrimage to the temple of Awām at Ma'rib, Yemen; Al-Ghul (1984) discusses the pilgrimage to Itwat. On pilgrimages in the Hebrew Bible and in the archaeological record, see Nakhai (2001).

62 SAFDICT, 109a.

4.1 *Time Period of the Pilgrimage*

In the ancient Levant and in South Arabia, pilgrimages were performed at set times in the cultic calendar.⁶³ Since the little information we have suggests that the nomads made pilgrimages to shrines in settled lands (see below), they would have followed the cultic calendars associated with those sanctuaries. But nothing would have prevented the authors of the Safaitic inscriptions from participating in the pilgrimage rites of various neighboring communities and cult-sites, and therefore we cannot know if the attestations of *hgg* referred to a single, annual event.

Two inscriptions provide chronological information regarding the pilgrimage. The first is KNGQ 4:

KNGQ 4 = AGQ 1

l ʿgrd bn fdy w syr b-hg

‘By ʿgrd son of Fdy and he returned to water during the pilgrimage (period).’

Since the return to permanent water—which is what the verb *syr* signifies—normally occurred in the period of *syr* or beginning of *qyz*, it is possible that the change of seasons was celebrated with a pilgrimage to a shrine.⁶⁴

The next text is WH 1771, which configures the *hg* with a calendrical period.

WH 1771

l dʿy bn nsl w rhq b-h-ngm l-yhg

‘By Dʿy son of Nsl and he ritually cleansed during Virgo to perform a pilgrimage.’

63 The pilgrimage to Awām seems to have taken place sometime in February–March (Maraqten 2021: 452); the Sabaean month *d-mhgt* further indicates that the pilgrimage was to take place at a fixed time of the year. In North Arabia as well, spring festivals appear to have been observed (Alpass 2013: 42–44; Healey 2001: 161; Wellhausen 1897: 79–101). The Bible records three seasonal/agricultural pilgrimages: Deuteronomy 16 describes these three: Pesach and Unleavened Bread (Deut 16:1–8); Shavuot/Weeks (Deut 16:9–12); Sukkot/Booths (Deut 16:13–17). The annual pilgrimage of pre-Islamic times continues into Islamic practice at Mecca, which takes place from the 8th to the 12th or 13th of the month *dū l-hiġġah*. On the Muslim pilgrimage, see Peters (1994).

64 The seasons of *syr* likely began in mid-April and stretched to June; during this period, depending on the year, there would have been herbage remaining from the seasons of the later rains, *dtʿ*, and surface water as well. During *qyz*, the desert would have been hostile, lacking water and herbage. See Macdonald (2020) and (1992c).

We cannot be certain whether the author was referring to the dawn or evening rising of *ngm*. Its dawn rising would have occurred in late August before the arrival of the Wasmī rains. Perhaps, then, the performance of the pilgrimage was connected to rituals of rain making, ensuring that the precipitation would arrive on time and be sufficient. On the other hand, if WH 1771 and KNGQ 4 = AGQ 1 refer to the same period, then we could suppose an evening setting of *Ngm*.⁶⁵

4.2 Pilgrimage Sites

Only one inscription, BRENV.A 1, gives the name of a pilgrimage site, *s*⁶⁶; that is Seī/Seia (mod. Sī⁶⁷), which is located about 3 km SE of Kanatha (Qanawat), a city of the Decapolis. This site was home to a sanctuary of Ba'al-Samīn, the storm god, which was constructed between the 1st c. BCE to the 2nd c. CE, and involved the participation of the tribe 'Obayśat, known in Safaitic as *'bšt*, Nabataean *'byšt*, and Greek Οβαισηνοί. Members of this lineage produced a number of Safaitic inscriptions and appear to have been active in the Ḥarrah. Indeed, a man of the 'Obayśat tribe called upon Ba'al-Samīn in the Safaitic inscription CSNS 424 for security as he participated in a rebellion against the Romans.⁶⁶ Other Safaitic inscriptions demonstrate that Seia was a focus of pilgrimage in honor of Ba'al-Samīn.⁶⁷

BRENV.A 1

l q'sn bn s{ly} bn q'sn bn hls bn nhb d-'l d'f w ngy n[]fr snt btl hg s⁶⁸

'By Q'sn son of {Sly} son of Q'sn son of hls son of Nhb of the lineage of D'f and he escaped {by fleeing} the year the pilgrimage to S⁶⁸ failed.'

It is impossible to know from such evidence what *btl* exactly meant.⁶⁸ Was this a seasonal pilgrimage intended to ensure the coming of rains? And did its failure mean that the nomads of the Ḥarrah suffered drought that year, as suggested by Macdonald et al.?⁶⁹ Drought is a common theme in dating formulae and so it

65 See Al-Jallad (2014; 2016) on the Safaitic parapegma.

66 Macdonald (2003: 278) cautiously suggests a connection between the Safaitic *'bšt* and the group mentioned in Greek and Nabataean texts; CSNS 424 makes this link highly probable.

67 Healey (2001: 65). While the term for "temple" is not attested in Safaitic, a Hismaic text from Wadi Ram, published by Farès and Zayadine (1998), commemorates the construction of the temple (*bt*) of Allāt by the tribe of 'd, likely Quranic 'Ād: *w bny bt lt d' l' d'* "and he of the lineage of 'd helped construct the temple of Allāt." The same term for temple is used in South Arabia as well; see Robin (2012: 19–20), and in the Quran, e.g. 22:26.

68 For a thorough etymological discussion of this root, see Prioletta and Hull (2020).

69 Macdonald, Muazzin and Nehmé (1996: 463 and n. 77); Macdonald (2003: 278).

is possible that this was simply a creative way of dating one's text to a year with little rain. But perhaps *bṭl* meant that our author and his group could not make it to the temple that year, maybe on account of war or the closure of the temple itself, which seems to have happened sometime before the 4th c. CE. Another inscription related to Seia suggests the latter possibility. It too is meteorological.

IS.M 198

l ḏb bn šḥr bn 'bd bn 'dm w tẓr h-smy w šlf h-{m}l snt brḥ h-šlm s“ {f} h lt slm

'By Ḍb son of Šḥr son of 'bd son of 'dm and he kept watch for the rains and the livestock grew thin the year the images were removed from S“ so O Allāt, may he be secure.'

Could both texts be dated to the same year and reference the same drought? Could the *bṭl* of BRENVA.1 therefore refer to the failure to complete the pilgrimage because temple was closed, which incidentally happened during a year of drought, allowing the nomads to assume a causal relationship between the two events?⁷⁰ Whatever the case, the link between pilgrimage and favorable meteorological conditions is strongly implied.

5 Ritual Purity

Two verbs of ritual cleansing are attested, *rḥḏ* “to wash” and *ṭhr* “to purify.”⁷¹ The *rḥḏ* ritual is performed before embarking on a pilgrimage (see WH 1771 above) and so presumably places one in a state of ritual purity. Ritual purity is observed before entering temples in the Sabaic inscriptions, making use of the verb *rḥḏ* as well.⁷² This custom continues into the Muslim pilgrimage, which requires the observer to enter a state of ritual purity, *iḥrām*.

70 Four pedestals at the site supported statues, one of which was of Herod the Great, and two reliefs of Mithra were recovered from the site and are now housed at the Damascus museum; <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0006:entry%3Dseia>. Macdonald (2003: 279) suggests that the departure of the idols may have been thought to have been the cause of a drought.

71 SAFDICT, 117a, 137a–b. In Classical Arabic, this root has largely been replaced by *ḡsl*, although it retains the meaning “to wash” as a transitive verb. The passive form *ruḥiḏa* “to be wet, covered in water” survives as an idiom referring to one covered in sweat from a fever (LANE, 1052c).

72 Maraqtan (2021: 448). Given the South Arabian parallel, I find it less likely that the term *rḥḏ* to be a non-sequitur referring to secular bathing or being ill.

Ritual ablution seems to have been required before engaging in other rites, like mourning. The author of KRS 2415 performs *rḥd* before stopping at a funerary cairn.⁷³ The building of cairns is closely associated with the *maṣṣēbā* in the Bible, although the two have not yet occurred together in the Safaitic inscriptions.⁷⁴

KRS 2415

l gfft bn n'rt w rḥd f gls 'rgm

'By Gfft son of N'rt and he washed and then stopped at the cairn.'

There are several other occurrences of the verb *rḥd*, but the inscriptions give us no specific information as to the purpose of ablution. Perhaps the most interesting of this category is C 4443, a long mourning inscription detailing both sacred (mourning for the dead) and secular activities. After grieving for several lost loved ones, including those murdered by an enemy tribe, he records pasturing and then washing during *tbr*, a time period, perhaps Sagittarius, and then keeping watch for the enemy. This sequence seems to follow the pattern we have seen with the *dbḥ* and *nšb* texts, that is, the performance of a ritual (ablution) before undertaking a dangerous activity (keeping watch for enemies).

C 4443

w wgm 'l-'m-h w 'l-dd-h w 'l-ḥl-h w 'l-'m w 'l-'n'm qtl-h } } l šbh f wlh 'l-bn ḥl-h trḥ w r'y h-d'n w rḥd b-tbr w ḥl h-š[n]' f h lt slm w wgd 'tr 'h-h f ndm

'and he grieved for his mother and his paternal uncle and his maternal uncle and 'm and 'n'm, who the lineage of Šabāḥ murdered, and he was distraught with grief for the son of his maternal uncle, who had perished, and he pastured the sheep and washed during *Tbr* (Sagittarius) and kept watch for enemies so, O Allāt, may he be secure and he found the traces of his brother and was devastated by grief'

Other inscriptions record the performance of ritual washing, with no further information. These can be compared to the simple *dbḥ* inscriptions, a com-

73 The *rgm* cairn seems to have had a funerary function as almost all details about the structure suggest (SAFDICT, 115). Another term for a cairn is *šwy* (SAFDICT, 130).

74 Nakhai (2001: 44); Gen 31:43–54, where Laban and Jacob set up a *maṣṣēbā* and then a *gal*, a pile of stones. The terms *gl* and *glt* (WH 1873 and KWQ 37, respectively) are attested in Safaitic, which are treated neutrally in the SAFDICT as “stone.” But I would cautiously suggest interpreting it as a type of cairn, cognate with the Hebrew *gal* and Syriac *gallā*, “a heap of stones.”

memoration of a ritualistic act which would have been clearly understood by its author and original audience.

MKWS 21

l qn'l bn 'ršt w {r}ḥd

'By Qn'l son of 'ršt and he washed.'

IS.H 641

l šg' bn šrk bn šdd w [.] rḥd b-wq't grm'l

'By Šg' son of Šrk son of Šdd and he washed in the pool of Grm'l'

The verb *ṭhr* is attested only once but in a clearly ritualistic context.⁷⁵ The author of MA 1 performs *ṭhr* to enter a state of ritual purity in order to perform an animal sacrifice to Roḏay. While it is unclear what actions *ṭhr* would entail, both it and *rḥd* appear to imply the requirement of a shift from the profane to the sacred to perform religious rituals.⁷⁶

MA 1

w ṭhr w dbḥ {l-}rḏy w ḡnm nqt

'and he entered into a state of ritual purity and made an animal sacrifice to Roḏay so may he gain a she-camel as spoil'

Conceptually, the performance of an ablution in the desert could be conceived of as a type of sacrifice. With water being scarce, the use of this precious resource for religious purposes could be understood in similar terms as the sacrifice and immolation of livestock for the deity.

6 Offerings

The inscriptions record several other types of offerings to the gods, but these are less frequently attested than the *dbḥ*-rite.⁷⁷ The texts simply register the

75 This is the primary verb used to express ritual purity in the Quran, Biblical Hebrew, and is attested in Sabaic as well (Maraqten 2021: 447–448; SD 153).

76 The rules for the performance of sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible, including matters of ritual purity, can be found in Leviticus 1–7 and in Deuteronomy; on this, see Anderson (1992a–b). The Ugaritic texts are concerned with matters of bodily purity when concerning the king and these are similar to the stipulations in the Hebrew Bible; see Pardee (2002: 234).

77 For an overview of the types of offerings made in pre-Islamic Arabia, see Hoyland (2001: 163–166).

performance of the offering and petitions to the gods, but do not provide any further contextualizing evidence. At face value, they too appear to be personal acts of devotion.

6.1 *Unspecified Offerings*

Several other verbs could signify the presentation of an offering to the gods, *qdm*,⁷⁸ *qrb*,⁷⁹ *qbl*,⁸⁰ and *ntn*.⁸¹ None of these attestations indicate what exactly was offered, but that they were intended to bring relief to those suffering from straitened circumstances is suggested by the prayers following them. This is much is stated explicitly in H 2411 and possibly WH 1731.

MNSA 2

qdm f h lt slm

'he made an offering so, O Allāt, may he be secure'

H 2411

qrb brkt w 'hs f n'm snt b'lsmy

'he made an offering (or: drew near to) at Brkt because he was suffering from scarcity so may Ba'al-Samāy show grace (this) year.'

C 1581

w qrb

'and he made an offering'

KRS 1836

h b'lsmn ḥlmt m-d qbl

'O B'lsmn, may that which he has offered bring forbearance.'

WH 1731

*'ny w ntn*⁸²

'he suffered and so made an offering'

78 Classical Arabic *qaddama* "to place before," "to offer."

79 Aramaic *qurbānā* "sacrifice," and in the D-stem "to offer, dedicate"; DNWSI, 1028–1030.

80 Perhaps *qabbala* "to cause to receive," cf. Classical Arabic G-stem *qabila* "to receive." Alternatively, it could be connected to the infinitive *qbl* "to be reunited" (SAFDICT, 109), but such a meaning does not seem to fit the current context.

81 Canaanite *ntn*, Hebrew *nāṭan* "to give."

82 The alternative understanding of this word would be to take *ntn* as Classical Arabic *natana* and *natnun* "to stink."

6.2 *Burnt Offerings and Libations*

Immolation of the sacrificed animal's corpse was an important sacrifice type in the Hebrew Bible, there called *ʾôlâ* "that which goes up (in smoke)."⁸³ The practice is attested at Ugarit as well with the verb, *šrp*.⁸⁴ Three verbs associated with the burnt offering occur in Safaitic: *ʕly*, *ʕrf* and *šʕd*.⁸⁵

The burnt offering in SIJ 293 precedes an oath and could be a way to guarantee its fulfillment.

SIJ 293⁸⁶

ʕly w ʕsm b-ʕlh ʕy l-hdy ʕzm

'he made a burnt offering and swore by Allāh, who is living (or: (his) life), that he will lead with greatness'

BS 456

l PN w ʕrf

'by PN and he made a burnt offering'

The verb *šʕd* was suggested by Winnett to signify a burnt offering as well, which would be the Arabic equivalent of *ʾôlâ*. It is attested only three times, all in unclear contexts and so it could possibly refer to a feature of the landscape as well or simply the verb "to ascend."

ASFF 456/SIJ 432

w šʕd

'and he made a burnt offering' (?)

WH 604.1

l PN h-šʕdt

'by PN is this burnt offering' (?)

83 See for example Exodus 20:20.

84 Nakhai (2000: 42); "to burn by fire" DNWSI 1194. The sound correspondences between Arabic *s* and NWS *ś* suggest that the verb was a borrowing. A connection with the Classical Arabic *ʾasrafā* "he transgressed" (LANE, 1351a) is also possible; see section § 4.

85 The verb *sbʕ* was suggested to have such a meaning in the SAFDICT, but it seems more likely to me now that it should be interpreted as a simple verb of movement, compare with Sabaic *sbʕ* "to undertake an expedition" (SD 122) and Classical Arabic *subʕatun* "a long journey" (LANE, 1287a). Thus, HASI 24 would read *w sbʕ m-ħrn w ʕyʕf ʕmgd w ʕħls* "he set off on a long journey from the Ḥawrān and travelled quickly so may he attain bounty and deliverance."

86 On the interpretation of this text, see Al-Jallad (2021b).

The libation is perhaps only attested once in the inscriptions, with no explicit connection to the sacrifice or mention of the type of liquid poured out.⁸⁷

C 4454

l ḥml bn nšbt w šbb b-ks' {g}ml

'By Ḥml son of Nšbt and he made a libation during the evening setting of *gml* (Gemini).'

6.3 Images

Safaitic inscriptions often accompany images of desert life, from animals to raids and festivals.⁸⁸ The associated texts usually comprise the signature of the artist, introduced by the *lām auctōris l-*, which signifies possession or authorship. On their own, the interpretation of such carvings is difficult—scholars interpreted their purpose along similar lines as the texts.⁸⁹ A few inscriptions, however, do suggest that such carvings could be a type of offering to a deity, perhaps comparable to the offering of cultic objects among settled peoples, such as clay figurines.⁹⁰ Such drawings are accompanied by a verbal adjective *qšy* “to dedicate” followed by the name of a god.⁹¹

LP 317 = IS.M 92 (Figure 10)

l ḥr bn qn'l bn qḥs bn ḥḍg h-nqt qšyt l-nh{y}

'By Ḥr son of Qn'l son of Qḥs son of Ḥḍg is this she-camel, which has been dedicated to Nhy.'

KRS 1307 (Figure 11)

l ḥtst bn skrn bn ḥtst bn zkr h-gml qšy l-š'hqm

87 Numbers 28:6–7 indicates that libations accompany the twice-daily burnt offerings required of Israel; 1 Kings 18:33 records the pouring of a libation over the burnt offering.

88 On the classification of rock art motifs and their distribution in the landscape, see Brusaard (2019).

89 Compare Macdonald (2006) to Eksell (2002).

90 See Lacerenza (1988–1989: 142–144).

91 Littmann (1943: 78) interpreted such texts as “bills of sale,” but there is no mention of the transfer of money and property and it is hard to understand what function a public bill of sale on a rock in the middle of the desert would serve. Ryckmans (1950–1951: 436) suggests that these were drawings of animals dedicated to the gods, but given that none of the other narrative components are accompanied by illustrations, I think this tips the scale of understanding in favor of the carving itself being an offering, which I have suggested in (2015b: 204). Charloux, Guagnin, and Norris go on to suggest that a similar interpretation could be applied to the monumental camels of North Arabia, including those associated with Thamudic B inscriptions (2020: 102).



FIGURE 10
The Safaitic inscription LP 317
COURTESY: OCIANA



FIGURE 11 The Safaitic inscription KRS 1307
COURTESY: OCIANA

‘By Ḥṭst son of Skrn son of Ḥṭst son of Zkr is this camel, which has been dedicated to Shay‘haqqawm.’

C 1658

l wq{r} bn y‘l h-gmln qšyn l-‘lt w l-rđw f h yt‘ ‘wr m ‘wr h-[h]tṭ

‘By Wqr son of Y‘l are these two camels dedicated to ‘Allāt and Roḏaw, so O Yaye‘ blind whosoever effaces these carvings.’

It may be the case that the participle *qšy* was optional, as the purpose of an image was clear in its original context, not requiring redundant written elaboration. Prayers accompanying some signed rock art also open the possibility that they were votive images.

ASFF 428

l rgl bn hmt bn ‘m bn mṭ‘ bn ‘md h-gml w tẓr h rđw flt-h mn šḥl

‘By Rgl son of Hmt son of ‘m son of Mṭ‘ son of ‘md is this camel and he kept watch; O Roḏaw deliver him from weakness.’

Rock art is also associated with burials. BRCM 14 mentions an image of a horseman with the verb *nšb* and the construction of a funerary installation. This context could allow for the interpretation of these images as burial offerings.

BRCM 14 (Figure 12)

l ‘bḥt bn gls bn fšgt bn glḥn w nšb w l-h [h-]frs w bny ‘l-‘s

‘By ‘bḥt son of GlS son of Fšgt son of Glḥn and he set up a cult stone and this (image of a horse) is by him and he built over ‘s.’

If the *str*-shelter is in fact a cultic installation, then the inscription ABSWS 81 (Figure 13) may also connect a drawing of a camel with cultic ritual. While the exact archaeological context was not recorded, the stone seems to lie within the boundaries of a stone enclosure, perhaps where the *str*-shelter was set up.

In most cases, however, we cannot be sure if carved images at mortuary installations were originally components of the burial ritual or if they were later additions by passersby.

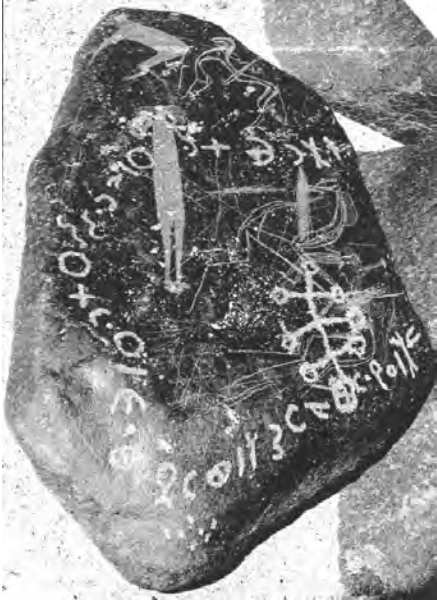


FIGURE 12
The Safaitic inscription BRCM 14
PHOTO: P. BIKAI. COURTESY: OCIANA



FIGURE 13 The Safaitic inscription ABSWS 81
PHOTO: S. ABBADI. COURTESY: OCIANA

7 Vows and Oaths

The verb *ndr*—the common verb for taking a vow across Semitic—is attested only once in KWQ 42; it may be significant that it occurs in the context of water or perhaps this is a situation in which it is better to understand *hḏr* as “during a festival.”⁹²

KWQ 42

l 'zm bn mr't w ndr hḏ{r}

‘By ‘zm son of Mr’t and he made a vow {while camping by water/during a festival}.’

The *qsm* oath (see SJJ 293 in § 6.2) is also attested, cf. Quran 5:53. See the discussion of this inscription above.

Finally, oaths of self-amputation are thrice attested, twice in the context of retribution. The oath-taker offers to cut off his hand in promise of vengeance against those who have wronged him.

C 25

wgd 'tr 'h-h f wlh 'l-h f hy lt w h śms 'tn 'l-km yd-h l-t'r m-d 'slf

‘he found the trace of his brother so he was distraught with grief for him, so, O Allāt and Śams, may he cut off his hand for you (in promise) for vengeance against him who has committed this act’

AKSD 5

tqb yd-h w dśr 'l-ksr wq'-n

‘may he cut off his (own) hand so that Dusares act against any destroyer of our inscription’

C 4453

w qš'yd-h f hy w rḏw

‘and may he cut off his hand and life that Roḏaw ...’

None of the texts provide information about other rituals that might accompany such oaths.⁹³

92 Northwest Semitic *ndr/nzr* (DNWSI 717–719); Hismaic *ndr* (Graf and Zwettler 2004; Al-Jallad 2020); and frequently in Dadanitic *ndr*, see Kootstra (2019) and OCIANA for references.

93 For example, in Gen 31:44–49, the construction of a cairn accompanies the taking of oaths

8 Sacred Water

One inscription seems to refer to a sacred water source associated with Ba'al-Samīn; BESS19 1 records a so far unique invocation to the storm god.

BESS19 1⁹⁴

l rġd bn ġsm bn šhl w ħrṣ 'l-ħmlt sqm f h b'lsmn ħnn nq'-k f-yql 'l-h ṣdq

'By Rġd son of Ġsm son of Šhl and he kept watch over Ĥlmt who had fallen ill so, O Ba'al-Samīn, show mercy though your watering places so that his folk will say he is just.'

The term *nq'* is attested for the first time here but a related word, augmented with the feminine *t*, *nq't*, is attested several times as the goal of the verb of motion *wrd*, "to go to water."⁹⁵ This movement is often configured with periods in the rainy seasons, implying that such inscriptions were carved during droughts, and that *nq't* was a place of permanent water to which the nomads would flock when the rains failed. The present noun *nq'* could reflect a plural "watering places" or perhaps a different derivative from the same root. Whatever the case, the use of sacred water connected to a deity to alleviate illness is a well-attested cross-cultural practice. In the Arabian context we may furnish two examples. The first is a legend recounted by ibn al-Kalbī which goes as follows:⁹⁶

It was al-Harith who used to be the custodian of the Ka'bah. But when 'Amr ibn-Luhayy came [to Mecca] he disputed his right to its custody, and with the aid of the children of Ishmael, fought the Jurhumites, defeated them, and cleared them out of the Ka'bah; he then drove them out of Mecca, and took over the custody of the Sacred House (al Bayt) after them. He then became very sick, and was told, "There is a hot spring in al-Balqā', in Syria (al-Sha'm); if you would go there, you would be cured." So he went to the hot spring, bathed therein, and was cured. During his stay there, he noticed that the inhabitants of the place worshipped idols. He, therefore, queried them saying, "What are these things?" To which they replied, "To them we pray for rain, and from them we seek victory over the enemy."

while oaths are made following a sacrifice in Jonah 1:16. For more, see Hutter (1993); Bloch-Smith (2005).

94 See Appendix 2 for the edition of this text.

95 SAFDICT, 105b–106a.

96 I thank Mr. Asad Uz Zaman for bringing this connection to my attention.

Thereupon he asked them to give him [a few of those idols], and they did. He took them back with him to Mecca and erected them around the Ka'bah.

trans. FARIS 1952: 7

While certainly not historical, it illustrates the trope of the healing power of waters associated with gods. The second is the Zamzam well of Mecca, which Muslims believe to have healing properties.⁹⁷

97 For example, Sahih al-Bukhari 3261: "Abū Ğamrah al-Ḍuba'ī narrated: 'I used to sit with Ibn 'Abbās in Mecca. Once I had a fever and he said (to me), "Cool your fever with Zamzam water, for Allāh's Messenger said: 'It, (the Fever) is from the heat of the (Hell) Fire; so, cool it with water (or Zamzam water).'" Compare also with the story of Na'amān the Aramaean in 2Kings 5.

Divinities and Their Roles in the Lives of Humans

The Safaitic-writing nomads worshipped a large number of gods, both ones known only locally and ones honored by neighboring peoples as well (see Appendix 1). The most frequently invoked god in the inscriptions is Allāt, which has led many to assume that she was the chief divinity of the Safaitic authors. Bennett produced a study of the petitions made to the deities and showed that any deity could be asked to respond to any type of prayer, although requests for security (*slm*) are the most frequent.¹ Thus, no individual or specialized role in the cosmos seemed apparent from the type of requests alone. But once we examine the contents of the inscriptions holistically, it seems that at least some of the gods were connected with astral and natural phenomena, and had specialized roles.² In some cases, this is clear from the very name of the deity: c 25 invokes *śms* which is literally the “sun”; the inscription KRS 1941 perhaps refers to the same deity by the epithet *blg* “radiant one.”³ Astral interpretations of other deities are common but more difficult to substantiate.

The existence of a kin-based pantheon comes from a small number of texts. A pair of inscriptions from Wādī as-Sū‘, Syria indicate that the goddess Allāt was the daughter of Roḍaw.

AWS 283

h 'lt bnt rḍw flt m-snt h-ḥrb flt' l bn ḥzr bn ḥdy bn wkyt

‘O’Allāt daughter of Roḍaw deliver Flt’l son of Ḥzr son of Ḥdy son of Wkyt from this year of war.’

AWS 291

h 'lt {b}nt rḍw ḡwt-h ḥld bn ḥḍrt bn 'brr w l-h h-dr

‘O’Allāt {daughter} of Roḍaw aid him, Ḥld son of Ḥḍrt son of ’brr and this place is his.’

1 Bennett (2014).

2 On the astral signification of the South Arabian deities, see Robin (2012); see also Prioletta (2012); Beeston (1991).

3 The epithet is not identified on the OCIANA edition (accessed 12/3/2021); the text reads *h blg s'dykfl bn 'rh* “O radiant one, help Ykfl son of ’rh.”

Allāt was known by the epithet *mlkt try* “queen of abundance/fertility,” possibly linking her with the Venus/Aphrodite/Ishtar complex.⁴

MSSAF 6

h 'lt mlkt try s'd bn'm qsy bn zgr bn šrb w-r'y bql w h rđw mhlt l-m-ʿwr
 ‘O Allāt, queen of abundance/fertility, help Bn'm Qsy son of Zgr son of Šrb and he pastured on fresh herbage, and O Rđw, may whosoever effaces (this writing) experience a dearth of pasture.’

No clear epithet for Rođaw is attested in Safaitic, but a single Dumaitic inscription calls him the one “from Chaldaeae.”⁵ If we assume a similar mythological complex as other near eastern traditions, the two could form an astral pair of father and daughter, where Allāt is Venus and Rođaw is the Moon.⁶ In this light, the divine title *n'r* “luminous one” (CSNS 98) may apply to him.⁷

The god of rain and storm was Ba'al-Samīn, sometimes simply called Ba'al. Like Allāt, he takes the epithet “master,” namely, *mlk h-smy* “master of the rains/heaven” (KRS 1944). The texts do not relate Ba'al-Samīn to Allāt or any other deity explicitly. He is described as directly controlling the rains, withholding them in bad years.

LP 722 = SG 1

'f h-m'zy snt b's w hgz-h b'lsmn
 ‘he fed the goats on dry fodder the year of misery because Ba'al-Samīn withheld it (i.e. the rain)’

C 1240

šyr m-mdbr snt hgz-h b'lsmn 'l-h-mdnt w wrd h-mqzt bdr f h lt slm w 'wr w 'rg l-đy'wr h-ḥtt
 ‘he returned to permanent water from the inner desert the year Ba'al-Samīn withheld it [i.e. rain] from the province [or region]. And he watered in the place where one spends the dry season at the end of the dry season,

4 On the identification of *try* as abundance/fertility rather than “the Pleiades” see Al-Jallad (2021a).

5 See Al-Jallad (2021a).

6 Idem. And on the suggestion that Rođaw was a lunar deity, see Knauf (1985a: 85). Others have made a connection with Venus, but in light of the newly discovered texts mentioned above, this seems unlikely.

7 Compare with Q 10:5 *huwa llađī ġa'ala š-šamsa điyā'an wa-l-qamara nūrā* “he (Allāh) is the one who made the sun *điyā'* (bright) and the moon *nūr* (light).”

so O Allāt, may he be secure, and may he who would efface these carvings be made blind and lame’

He can dispatch the winds with rains and dozens of texts record desperate pleas in times of drought for respite.⁸

ASWS 185

w r’y h-ḏ’nf hy lt slm w tẓr h-smyf h b’lsmn rwḥ b-mṭr

‘and he pastured the sheep so O Allāt may he be secure; and he awaited the rains so, O Ba‘al-Samīn, send the winds with rain!’

While Ba‘al-Samīn was chiefly responsible for sending rains, when he failed other deities could be called upon to provide relief.

C 4010

[w] [t]z[r] h-{s}my w h lt r{w}ḥ m-ḏ b’s-h

‘and he awaited the rains so, O Allāt, send relief from that which has caused him affliction’

This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in the following inscription.

ASWS 37

w wgm m-dn b’l f h rḏw rwḥ

‘and he grieved in the absence of Ba‘l so, O Roḏaw, send relief/the winds’

Bennett shows that the deity most often partnered with Allāt in invocations is Dusares (*dśr*), the national deity of the Nabataeans.⁹ Unlike the case with Allāt and Roḏaw, no inscription gives us the reason for this. The image is equally murky when we turn our attention to the Nabataean material. Healey brings our attention to the inscription C1S II 185 from Ṣalkhad (a city referenced in the Safaitic inscriptions and in which a handful of Safaitic-writing people dwelt)¹⁰ which calls Allāt *’m ’lly’ dy m’rn’ rb’l* ‘mother of the gods of our lord Rabb-’El’ and suggests that a familial relationship between the gods was possible. As Healey goes on to point out, Dusares is explicitly called the ‘the god of our

8 Cf. Quran 30:48.

9 On *Dśr* see Appendix 1 and Healey (2001: 85–106). Dusares is called the god of the Nabataeans, *’lh nbṭ*, in BES17 1326.

10 See KRS 2813.

lord the king” in another inscription implying that Allāt was then his mother.¹¹ If the same relationship held true in the Safaitic context, then invocations to Allāt and Dusares would be to mother and son, and with Roḏaw, we would have three generations of a divine family.

1 Location of the Deities

The deities have three locative aspects. The first is the sky, which appears to be where the gods assemble. A single text from the northeastern Jordan invokes the deities as such:

ZSIJ 16¹²

l'n'm w tdy h lt w dšr w b'lsmn w gdhr ... w gdnbt w gdwhb'l w kll 'lh b-h-smy ...
 ‘By ‘An‘am and he called out: O Allāt, Dusares, Ba‘al-Samīn, Gadd-Ḥr ...,
 Gadd-Nabaṭ, Gadd-Wahb‘el and every god in the heavens ...’

In a few cases, writers invoke the gods in association with what appear to be their mythological earthly residences. Allāt is twice called (the one) from *‘mn*, a lost location, but perhaps the original name of Jebel Ram.¹³ Dusares is invoked in a similar manner, as (the one) from *rqm*, that is Petra.¹⁴ The third type of association is made using the construct phrase *‘lh/’lt* + toponym or tribe, e.g. *‘lh tm* “the god of the tribe Taym,” *‘lh ‘l’bgr* “the god of the lineage of Abgar (Edessa?),” *‘lt dtn* “Goddess of Daṭan.” Occasionally the proper name of the gods is given along with the locative epithet: *šalm*, who was worshipped at Taymā’ in the mid-first millennium BCE, is called *‘lh dmt* “God of Dūmat” in one text,¹⁵ and the storm god once as *b'lsmn ‘lh s*“ “Ba‘al-Samīn, god of Sī’.”¹⁶

11 Healey (2001: 81, 86). See inscription *CIS II*, 350:3–4 on page 86.

12 The word *tdy* is new. It appears to be a T-stem of the root *ndw*, meaning “to call out,” perhaps *ettadaya*, compare to the T-stem of *nzr*, *tzr* /*ettazara*/. See the commentary on BESI9 2 in Appendix 2 for more.

13 Jebel Ram was home to a temple (*bt*) of Allāt as known from the Nabataean and Himaic inscriptions there (Farès and Zayadine 1998).

14 Al-Jallad (2020).

15 KRS 30.

16 CSNS 424.

2 The Gadds

Gadd is an ancient West Semitic deity, the deification of fortune, cf. Greek *Tychē* and Latin *Fortuna*.¹⁷ Gadd does not occur on its own in Safaitic, but appears to be a protective divinity associated with specific social groups, comparable to the *ʿs²ms¹* divinities of South Arabia.¹⁸ Teixidor argues that the Gadds of Palmyra and the Ḥawrān personified the protection given by a god to specific individuals and groups.¹⁹ The great tribal confederations of Ḍayf and ‘Awīḍ each have their own Gadd, but so do outside nations, such as the Nabataeans (Gadd-Nabaṭ) and possibly even the Romans (Gadd-har-Rūm).²⁰ The Gadds are primarily called upon by members of their social group but in principle anyone could invoke them. The inscription c 2446 (given in § 7 below) recounts the murder of a man named Nr brother of S’d at the hands of the Nabataeans while he was pasturing the livestock of the tribes ‘Awīḍ and Ḍayf. S’d calls upon the gods for vengeance, mentioning the Gadds of both tribes. As Macdonald suggests, one could suppose that these tutelary deities would be especially responsive to calls for justice given that Sa’d’s brother died serving their tribes.²¹

A faint memory of the Gadd’s may survive in the Classical Arabic oath, *wa-ǧaddi-ka*. This is traditionally understood to be an oath by “one’s lot in life” (LANE, 385b), but one wonders if it could possibly reflect a fossilized expression: “by your Gadd (i.e. the protective deity of an individual or their group).” Following the shift to monotheism, such a phrase would have been reinterpreted through a literal reading of the word *ǧadd* as fortune or lot.

3 The Gods and Their Worshipers

The gods were believed to play an active role in the lives of their worshippers, who were called *ʿbd* “slave,” “worshipper” and *ṣdq* “righteous one” or perhaps “devotee.”²² General requests, such as for security (*slm*), relief (*ryḥ/rwḥ*), deliverance (*fṣy(t)/flt(t)*), and protection from enemies or misfortune (*śnʿ* and *bʿs*, respectively) are the most common and appear to be made of any deity writers

17 DDD, 339–314; on the Gadds of the Safaitic-writing tribes, see Knauf (1985b).

18 Robin (2012, §A2).

19 Teixidor (1979: 88–199).

20 On Gdhrm, see BESS19 2 in Appendix 2.

21 Macdonald (forthcoming).

22 IS.MU 550 and AMSI 41, respectively.

hoped to favor them. This type of prayer is most often connected to preceding narrative, but isolated prayers are also found.

C 31

štky 'l-lt f ḥnn w slm m-śn'

'he petitioned Allāt, so show compassion that he may be secure from enemies'

KRS 1910

h yṭ' s'd ḥr' bn gml 'l-d wd

'O Yayte', help Ḥr' son of Gml with the one he loves.'

LP 495²³

h rḏw flt-n m-b's w nḥyy

'O Roḏaw, deliver us from misfortune that we may have long life.'

WH 135²⁴

l qny f h lt qbll 'hl slm f nngy

'By Qny so O Allāt, grant a safe reunion with family that we may be saved.'

The faithful sought refuge in the gods and even put their carvings under their protection, often using the verb 'wd.²⁵

ASFF 260

l qdmt bn hmśt w 'wd b-rḏw

'By Qdmt son of Hmśt and he sought refuge in Roḏaw.'

AWS 380

w 'd-h b-yṭ'

'and he placed it (the image) under the protection of Yayte''

KRS 32

zł' mtyf 'dm b-ś'ḥqm

'he developed a limp while journeying so he sought protection in Shay'-haqqawm'

23 Compare with Matthew 6:13.

24 Compare with Q 26:169.

25 Compare with Q 113 and 114, the so-called *mu'awwidatān*. SAFDICT, 56b.

3.1 *Travel*

The gods were meant to provide safety during travels and migrations. As noted earlier, the performance of sacrificial rites sometimes concerned travel and the changing of seasons.²⁶

C 663

mt̄y tdmr f h lt slm

'he set off on a journey for Palmyra so, O Allāt, may he be secure'

C 1664

syr tdmr f h lt slm

'he set off for Palmyra so, O Allāt, may he be secure'

WH 1173

šrq f h gdd f slm

'he set off for the inner desert so, O Gadd-Ḍayf, may he be secure'

C 823

šrq f h lt m'dt

'he set off for the inner desert so, O Allāt, may there be a (safe) return'

3.2 *Far from Home and Reunion*

One of the main themes of the *raḥīl* section of the Qaṣīdah is the *jadātu l-bayn*, the day of separation from the "loved one" *ḥabīb*, mainly referring to women.²⁷ This appears to be a major concern in the Safaitic inscriptions as well, introduced by the longing formula *tšwq 'l-*. As discussed in §1.2, the prayer almost always petitions the gods to grant a reunion.

KRS 214

tšwq 'l-'hl-h f h lt slm w qbll

'he longed for his family so, O Allāt, may he be secure and reunited (with them)'

26 These prayers recall Q 6:6:

qul man yunağğī-kum min zulumāti l-barri wa-l-baḥri tad'ūna-hū taḍarru'an wa-ḥufyatan la'in 'anğā-nā min ḥādihī la-nakūnanna mina š-šākirin

'Say: who delivers you from the perils of the land and sea; you call upon him in abject supplication and within the heart: if he would deliver us from this then we will be forever grateful.'

27 On this motif, see Ezz El-Din (1994: 165–179).

KRS 1965

tšwq 'l-ḥbb b-šhr sbṭf h lt qbl

'he longed for a beloved in the month of Shubāt so, O Allāt, may there be a (safe) reunion'

KRS 2018

šṭrf ḥnn 'lh

'he was distant (from family) so may 'Allāh show compassion'

KRS 1834

w tẓr 'hl-h mb'df h lt slm w qbl

'and he kept watch for his family who were far away so, O Allāt, may he be secure and be reunited (with them)'

3.3 Assistance and Justice

The gods could be invoked to intervene in difficult situations, for instance, to help find lost animals and to grant boons. When humans fail to act fairly, they could interfere and enact justice.

KRS 1715

fqd šwt h lt 'gd-h

'he lost (a) sheep, O Allāt, cause him to find it (them)'

SIJ 75^o*h lt 'db l-h wlm w 'ḥt-h rḥlt*

'O Allāt, grant him a feast and his sister a ewe-lamb.'

KRS 306

h rḏw bdd-h m-'grt-h

'O Roḏaw, compensate him by means of his share of livestock.'

KRS 1563

w tẓr 'smy b-mlḥ 'tq w ḥrṣ h-df 'grf h rḏw bdd-h m-n'm m-'grt-h

'and he awaited the rains during Aquarius as a freeman and served as a guard for the Ḍayf (tribe) as a hired man so, O Roḏaw, compensate him for his labor through livestock'

C 3212

h rḏw ṭ'mt w ḡnmt bddt

'O Roḏaw, nourish (him) and (grant) a share of spoil.'

Related to this theme of justice is vengeance; the gods were often called upon to give the opportunity to the wronged for retribution, *nqmt* and *ṭr*.²⁸ Inscriptions of this type sometimes detail the offence and often name the offender.

SIJ 825

h rḏy nqmt m-lkm {b}n ṭb gr-h

‘O Roḏay, let there be vengeance upon Lkm son of Ṭb, his neighbor.’

LP 460

h rḏw hb l-‘bd’l nqmt

‘O Roḏaw, grant vengeance to ‘bd’l.’

C 2947

w ndm ‘l-ḥ-h mlṭ mqt l b-hld f h lt w dśr nqmt mn-mn mṣr-h

‘and he was devastated by grief for his brother Mlṭ, who was murdered at Hld so, O Allāt and Dusares, let there be vengeance upon the one who attacked him’

C 1854

h rḏw nqmt m-‘q}tl

‘O Rḏw, let there be vengeance upon murderers.’

The expectation that the gods be just, responding positively to the correct performance of ritual and prayers, is attested in Bess19 1 above (§ 2.8). The supplicant calls upon Ba‘al-Samīn to heal a sick man so that his people ‘l-h would say that the god is just, *ṣadaqa*.

The gods may also provide martial assistance.

ABNH 1²⁹

h dśr hb s’d l-nbṭ ‘l-ḥwlt

‘O Dusares, grant aid to the Nabataeans against Ḥwlt.’

LP 146

h lt w b’lsmn śy‘ h-gś h-rdff nqḏ

‘O Allāt and Ba‘al-Samīn, escort the rear guard that they may be safe.’

²⁸ Cf. Ps. 58.

²⁹ On this conflict, see Norris and al-Manaser (2017).

SIJ 39

mrd f h lt slm w nqmt m-d 'slf

'he took part in a rebellion so, O Allāt, may he be secure and have vengeance against those who committed wrong'

They guided their worshippers through difficult situations, much like a guide would through unknown territory. The same root *hfr* is used for both.³⁰

HAUI 182 = AL-MAFRAQ MUSEUM 25³¹*h lt w gd'wd w s'hqm w dsr b-hfrt-k 'wd-k*

'O Allāt and Gadd-'Awīd and Shay'haqqawm and Dusares, through your guidance comes your protection.'

KRS 68

h s'hqm ... b-hfrt-k fltn m-mt

'O Shay'haqqawm ... through your guidance comes deliverance from death.'

3.4 *Curing Illness and Prolonging Life*

Divine intervention can be sought for the removal of illness and preventative protection from pestilence. As a result, the gods can lengthen the lives of the faithful, but not permanently. AMSI 41 resigns to this fact; and after asking Allāt to give him long life *'ammerī* and to protect him *gannenī*, he admits—*wa-men-mawt laysa faṣāy* "and from death there is no deliverance."³²

30 Cf. Ps. 23. In the Quran, the term *hudan* is used for guidance. Its cognate in Safaitic *hdy* appears to do with military leadership. On guidance metaphors, see Zehnder (1999).

31 The use of the singular pronoun here is curious. It could be possible that the feminine singular *ki* was referring to the plurality of deities or perhaps what we have here is the first attestation of the plural pronoun *kū* found in later dialects of Arabic (e.g. Egyptian). The word *hfrt* is attested in Sabaic meaning "protection," which could apply here as well. However, I prefer the sense of guidance, which is a kind of protection after all, given its other occurrence in Safaitic, where it seems to apply to a guide. This text was published by Al-Salameen et al. (2019). I give my reading and interpretation of the narrative here: *qyz m'-l tdmr 'l-fnyt hfr l-hm* "and he spent the dry season with the people of Palmyra on the edge of Fnyt acting as a guide for him"; the *editio princeps* incorrectly reads *qyz* as *qyf* and translates *hfr* as "protecting them." The prepositional phrase *l-hm* suggests that *hfr* is a noun and it would be a big job indeed for a single man to protect an entire Palmyrene caravan. Rather, our author would seem to be functioning as a guide through the Ḥarah.

32 On the decipherment of this text, see Al-Jallad (2018b).

C 3365

w rḏw ḥlw l-bny-h mn-sqm

‘O Roḏaw, cure his son(s) from illness.’

C 4148

w r’y h-m’zy w wld f h ʔ’ slm ʔgd{-h} mn-sqm

‘And he pastured the goats and helped them to give birth so, O ‘Ayte’, keep his kids safe from illness.’

BES17 1853

w ḥrs ʔ-hgr sqmt f h lt rwḥ m-sqm

‘and he kept watch over Hgr, who had fallen ill, so O Allāt, send relief from illness’

KRS 1797

w ḥyw rḏw

‘may Roḏaw grant life’

Death was referred to by several terms, *trḥ* “to perish,” *m(y)t* “to die,” but one euphemism echoes Hebrews 2:9 and foreshadows Quranic idiom—“to taste.”³³

SHNS 4

w ḏwq ḥl-h frty f rwḥ l-d s’r yṯ’ l-h w tẓr

‘and his maternal uncle tasted (death) and so he grieved; and so Yayeṯ’ send relief to those who remain (alive) (and) to him while he kept watch.’

4 Sin, Obedience, and Repentance?

Unlike the Ancient South Arabian inscriptions and the Hismaic texts from the Madaba region,³⁴ the Safaitic inscriptions do not clearly record offenses against deities. But a few texts suggest that the gods expected “obedience,” which we can interpret as the fulfillment of rituals like sacrifice and pilgrimage.

33 For example, Q 29:57.

34 On these South Arabian penitence texts, see Robin (1992); Kropp (2002), and on the North Arabian examples, see Al-Jallad (2020a); these texts are discussed in Graf and Zwettler (2004), but they offer a different interpretation.

The word *ḥtʾ*, literally “to err,” is attested in one damaged text in what appears to be the curse formula, but no details as to what this verb signified, that is, whether it represented an offense against the gods or something more mundane.³⁵

KRS 2604

l mʾyr bn ʾs bn nʾ--- h bʾlsmn rwh w sʾlm w ḥtʾ l {d} ʾrw{s}r

‘By Mʾyr son of ʾs son of Nʾ ... O Baʾal-Samīn, send the winds! And may he who would {efface this writing?}³⁶ fall into error.’

The faithful make supplications to the deity and lament. Two related verbs appear in this context—*ḥwb* and *ḥby/w*. The former is also used in grieving contexts, but as Della Puppa argues convincingly, it seems to refer to a supplication or crying out when followed by the preposition *ʾl*.³⁷ She goes on to identify the inscription WH 300 (Figure 14) as a caption next to a drawing of a woman with her arms raised to the heavens, perhaps an illustration of the gesture of praying.

KNGQ 5

w ḥwb ʾl-rḏw

‘and he cried out to Rḏw’

I have further suggested that the verb *ḥbw* and *ḥby* imply an act of supplication. Etymologically, both verbs correspond to Classical Arabic “to crawl,” “to be lowly.” Terms with such a meaning often give rise to verbs of supplication and repentance, compare the Classical Arabic verb *taḏarraʿa* “to supplicate,” which derives from the root *ḏr* “to be low.”³⁸

WH 1629

l PN w ḥbw

‘by PN and he made a supplication’

35 SAFDICT, 82b, there translated neutrally as “to do wrong.”

36 This part appears to be garbled—the formula CURSE + *l ʾwr* is common but *ʾrw* is unknown and so may be the result of metathesis. Likewise, the word *wsr* is not attested but the word *ṣfr* “writing” is expected to end the formula. The author may have therefore mistakenly omitted the *f*.

37 Della Puppa (2018).

38 SAFDICT, 83.



FIGURE 14
The Safaitic inscription
WH 300
PHOTO: F.V. WIN-
NETT. COURTESY:
OCIANA

BS 464

rdy slm l-d hby

‘O Roḏay, may he who makes a supplication be secure.’

Finally, one text from Wādī Salḥūb may indicate that prayer went also by the name *šlt*. This word occurs in a curse formula of a long inscription requesting security while encamping. The author curses any would-be vandal of the text as follows:

HWS 12

sb' šlt m-ʿwr sfr

‘curse the *šlt* (prayer) of whosoever effaces the writing’

The verb *lym* “to be blameworthy” may also signify a kind of misconduct. Interestingly, in BS15 1192, the author confesses to being blameworthy, *lym*, and then

expresses his fear of looming Fate. This recalls Q 75:2 *lā 'uqsimu bin-nafsi l-lawwāmah* “I swear by self-blaming spirit.”

BES15 1192

l'y'ly bn mn'm w wgm w lym w tẓr mny

‘By Y’ly son of Mn’m and he grieved and was blameworthy and so Fate lay in wait.’

Conversely, one inscription suggests that obedience—perhaps meaning the proper performance of rituals—would result in rewards.

WH 3129

h rḏw t'tb t'wb

‘O Roḏaw, may he be rewarded for obedience.’

In a newly discovered inscription from Wādī al-Abyaḏ in the Northeaster Ḥarrah, which shall be published in the near future by A. al-Manaser and M. al-Zoubi, brings all of the aforementioned elements together.

AZUNP 1

h 'lt s'd b-dt wd w tẓw' w dl

‘O Allāt, help with that which he desires, as he was obedient and subservient (or: supplicated).’

The verb *tẓw'* corresponds to Quranic and Classical Arabic *tā'a* and *'atā'a* both meaning “to obey.” It signifies obedience to a divine order in the Quran, often with Allāh and his messenger as its object: *wa-man yuṭī'i llāha wa-rasūla-hū yudḥil-hu ḡannātin taḡrī min taḥti-hā l-'anhār* “whosoever obeys Allāh and his prophet shall be brought into gardens under which rivers flow” (Q 48:17).

The meaning of the final verb *dl* is more difficult to ascertain. The semantic core of this root is “to be lowly,” like *ḥbw* and *ḏr'* discussed above. In the Quran, it is used to signify divine humiliation (Q 20:134; 3:26) but can also describe humility in a positive sense: Q 5:54 *ya'tī llāhu bi-qawmin yuḥibbu-hum wa-yuḥibbūna-hū 'adillatin 'alā l-mu'minīna wa-'a'izzatin 'alā l-kāfirīn* “Allāh will bring forth a people whom he will love and who love him, humble towards the believers and powerful against the disbelievers.”

The present inscription does not provide enough context to determine whether the author is complaining of being in a desperate or subservient state, or if *dl* should be understood as another verb of supplication, like *tḏr'*. But it nevertheless ties divine assistance to obedience, which conversely implies that

failure to obey the gods, i.e. the failure to carry out prescribed rituals, would lead to divine neglect if not worse.

4.1 *Forsaken by the Gods*

Several texts imply the absence of divine favor through verbs need—*ḍrk* and *ʔz*—with the deity as the direct object.³⁹

WH 1255

w ʔz rḍy

‘and he was in need of Roḍay’

WH 81

w ḍrk rḍy

‘and he was in need of Roḍay’

Another term that may indicate a state of having been abandoned by the gods and deprived of divine favor is *ytm*, the basic meaning of which is “to be an orphan.”⁴⁰ In Classical Arabic, the word had developed several metaphorical extensions referring to need and scarcity. The earliest example known to me is a line in the poem of ‘Adiyy b. Zayd al-‘Ibādiyy (d. 588 CE), *wa-lam yakun la-hum yatamun* “and they are not lacking in resolve.”⁴¹

While it is possible that writers employing this term were in fact orphans, its coupling with *ḍrk* and expressions of need regarding rain and pasture prefer a metaphorical understanding. The question then is—what would such a metaphor imply? The orphan is characterized by the lack of a provider, which results in a state of misery and want. In a mythological framework where the gods are responsible for the natural phenomena upon which humans are dependent, *ytm* may refer to situations in which they fail to provide, resulting in drought, scarcity, disease, or whatever other misfortune that might be attributed to cosmic negligence.

39 SAFDICT, 57b. The translation of *ḍrk* as “weary” given in OCIANA is based on the nominal form in Arabic *ḍarikun* “poor, suffering from misfortune,” and the stative verb *ḍaruka*. This interpretation misses the fact that *ḍrk* takes an object *rḍy* and parallels the construction *ʔz rḍy*. I therefore find it more likely to take the verb as “to be in need of,” cf. Hebrew *šarak*.

40 This is a reconstructable Proto-Semitic noun meaning orphan; other meanings appear to be metaphorical extensions of this basic sense.

41 Diwān ‘Adiyy bin Zayd al-‘Ibādi (1965: 45).

BES17 2349

w ytm w drk f ndy dšr ġnyt w tZR ʿ-ṣ}nt f h lt rwh w ġnmt m-šnʿ

‘and he was orphaned and in need so he called upon Dusares for abundance but awaited (the rains) this year so, O Allāt, send relief and spoil from enemies’

One of the most frequent prayers to the gods is for relief and security from misfortune, *slm m-b’s*. Our man Bddh below complains in the narrative that he suffers from the affliction of *b’s*, suggesting that his prayers had gone unanswered. He turns desperately to Roḏay as a *ytm*—perhaps one whom the gods had abandoned and whose prayers were ignored—for aid.⁴²

CSNS 779

l bddh bn šbn w b’s l-h f h rḏy s’d h-ytm

‘By Bddh son of Šbn and he suffered misfortune so O Roḏay, help the orphan.’

We can only guess as to how the nomads conceptualized the cause of this absence. If obedience is connected to divine favor, then perhaps the failure to complete rituals properly resulted in the gods abandoning their worshippers.⁴³ Or perhaps the gods were simply capricious, and the performance of rituals was the only way to exert some small influence upon them. The latter view is supported by the final phrase of BESS-19 1—the author invokes Ba’al-Samīn to heal his kinsman so that his folk will say that the deity is “just.” This statement would seem to imply that one could not take for granted that the gods would respond reciprocally to offerings or sacrifices, and therefore our author seems to appeal to the deity’s sense of honor.

5 Malignant Magic

Very few texts mention magical forces and none so far attest priestly offices, such as sorcerers, diviners, or soothsayers. Two inscriptions give us insight into the types of magic practiced in the desert. The first appears to be the evil eye,⁴⁴ called *nag’at*, and the effects of its magic, *šr*.⁴⁵

42 Compare with Q 93:6.

43 Cf. Is. 49:14.

44 See Al-Jallad (2020d) and the literature there.

45 This text is quite close to Q 113; see Al-Jallad (2020d).

SS 1

*w r'y sb't 'gm ḥlf ḡnyt w lm ys'd f sm' ng't w r'y śr mn-h f h lt mn 'mn w dśr
mn rqm ḡnyt w slm m-b's*

'and he pastured during the rising of Pleiades on herbage of the (season of) abundance but he did not prosper, and he suspected the evil eye as he saw its evil and so O Allāt from 'mn and Dusares from *rqm* (Petra) [grant] abundance that he may be secure from misfortune'

A second text that contains such a reference is AWS 219, but its interpretation is much more difficult on account of its laconic language. The author sets up a cult stone and then calls upon Roḏaw to aid him *ḡwt-h* in the face of *trb srr*. This phrase may be understood as “mischief of secrets,”⁴⁶ or if we take *srr* as a participle, “whisperer’s mischief.” The prayer seems reminiscent of Q 114:4: *min šarri l-waswāsi l-ḥannās* “from the evil of the concealed whisperer,” and the phenomenon of cultic whispering widely attested in the classical and ancient Near East.⁴⁷

AWS 219

l ḥwq bn kwlt h-nṣb w rḏw ḡwt-h trb srr

'This cult stone (was erected) by Ḥwq son of Kwlt so, O Rḏw, aid him against a whisperer’s mischief.'

Sorcery, *šhr* = Quranic *siḥr*, is mentioned in one text in a migratory context, suggesting perhaps that malignant magic could affect one’s seasonal activities.

KWQ 91

l 'md bn hkmn h-dr w šyr l-h m-mdbf h 'lt flt-h m-šhr

'By 'md son of Hkmn, at this place, which he had returned to from the inner desert so, O Allāt, deliver him from sorcery.'

46 LANE, 334b, *tarraba* “doing evil or mischief”; LANE, 1338a, *sirrun* “a secret, a concealed thing.”

47 See Häberl (2015) on whispering with regard to the Aramaic incantation texts, specifically 371 on the relationship between “whispering” and “charming,” and the possible connection with Quran Q 114. On the possibility of malignant charming through whispers, see Stein (2013).

Fate

The inscriptions register another supernatural force, *mny* “Fate.” The Safaitic spelling of this word suggests that it is cognate with the Classical Arabic *manan* <mny>.¹ The concept of Fate, *manāyā* and *maniyyatun*, plays a prominent role in the Jāhilī odes: it is presented as a ruthless force that dooms humans, indiscriminate and inevitable. The following examples will help bring this image into focus, which as we shall see, is quite compatible with the Safaitic evidence.

Zuhayr, *Mu‘allaqah*

*ra‘aytu l-manāyā ḥabṭa ‘ašwā’a man tuṣīb
tunit-hu wa-man tuḥṭi’ yu‘ammar fa-yahrīmi*

‘I regard Fate like the blows of a nearly blind she-camel, whomsoever it strikes, dies but whom it misses, lives on and ages.’

*wa-man hāba ‘asbāba l-manāyā yanalna-hū
wa-‘in yarqa ‘asbāba s-samā’i bi-sullami*

‘And whosoever fears the ropes of Fate will nevertheless be ensnared by them, even if one manages to ascend the courses of heaven with a ladder.’

Arrows are the preferred metaphorical weapon of Fate, launched at unwitting victims.

Elegy of Rabī‘ah b. Mukaddam²

*lākin sihāmu l-manāyā man yuṣībna la-hū
lam yuḡni-hī ṭibbu dī ṭibbin wa-lā rāqī*

‘But the arrows of Fate, whomsoever they strike, no medicine man nor sorcerer can avail.’

Labīd, *Mu‘allaqah*

‘inna l-manāyā lā taṭīšu sihāmu-hā

‘Indeed, Fate’s arrows never miss their mark.’

1 DDD, 556–558; Isaiah 65:11. This word is cognate with the Classical Arabic <mny> *manan*, rather than the common plural form *manāyā*, which would appear in Safaitic as *mnyy*.

2 Jād Mawlā, et al. (1941: 317).

Fate personified takes the form of a hunter, stalking the living. It cannot be bargained or reasoned with and is unceasing in its pursuit.³

Ṭarafah, °10

'arā l-mawta lā yur'ī 'alā dī qarābatin

wa-'in kāna fī d-dunyā 'azīzan bi-maq'adi

'idā šā'a yawman qāda-hū bi-zimāmi-hī

wa-man yaku fī ḥabli l-maniyyati yanqadi

'I know that death does not spare kin

Even if mighty in rank in life

When he (death) wills, he will drive him with his reins

For whosoever is entrapped by the rope of Fate is destroyed'

Safaitic *mny* appears in two main formulaic contexts: in the phrases *tẓr mny* and *rġm mny*. The latter expression occurs 69 times in the OCIANA corpus and is always found in a funerary context as an expression of grief for the deceased. The dead are lamented as having been “struck down,” that is, made to cleave to the earth, *raġām* or *raġm*, by Fate, clearly a euphemism for death. KRS 2298 clearly equates *rġm* with death: *f h lh w dśr ġyrt l-d rġm* “O Allāh and Dusares, let there be blood money (in retribution) for those who were struck down.” The construction takes two forms—it is most often a passive participle with Fate as an accusative agent:

c 4988

wgm 'l-g{----} ḥbb-h w-'l-šy' h rġmn mny

'he grieved for {G----} his beloved and for his companions who were struck down by Fate'

Yet sometimes *rġm* is active, taking a direct object. This particular construction disproves previous interpretations that regarded the agent of *rġm* as the author or deceased person.⁴

3 For a thorough discussion of *manāyā* and the related force, *ad-dahr*, see Al-Azmeh (2017: 179–182). The latter does not appear in the Safaitic inscriptions, but the root occurs in personal names.

4 I suggested the translation “struck down by Fate” in Al-Jallad (2015b: 337–338); Al-Jallad and Jaworska (2019 17–18). Jamme (1967) understood it as “he abhorred death,” while Littmann (1943) took it sometimes as a passive, “forced by fate,” and other times as active “he disliked fate.” Winnett (1951) understood it as passive “humbled by death.”

SG 5

fqd 'h-h 'n'm trh rjm-h mny

'he lost his brother 'An'am, who perished, whom Fate stuck down'

Finally, the construction *rjm mny 'l-hm* is attested once (KRS 6), which should be understood as a nominal phrase—"Fate's striking down was upon them." The appearance of Fate in these funerary contexts suggests that the force was regarded much in the same way as in the Jāhili poems—the ultimate cause of death.

This compatibility offers us an interpretive key to understanding the second phrase, *t(n)zr mny*. It has usually been translated as "he awaited Fate," with the author of the inscription being the subject of the verb *tzr*.⁵ However, in light of our understanding of *rjm mny* and the close reading of the contexts in which *tzr mny* occurs, I would suggest that Fate is in fact the subject of *tzr*, and the image this phrase presents is similar to that in the Jāhili poems, namely, of Fate as a concealed hunter.

Tzr mny is attested 52 times so far, usually as an isolated statement following the genealogy or a series of unfortunate events, as illustrated in OAM 1 (below). A minority of cases attest a prayer following *tzr mny*; the data break down as in Charts 9 and 10.

OAM 1

l 'qwm bn slm bn gyz bn ws' bn rb bn mlkt w slt h-n'm fwlh w ls hlf f tzr mny

'By 'qwm son of Slm son of Gyz son of Ws' son of Rb son of Mlkt and the livestock was captured and so he was distraught and there was no compensation, so Fate lay in wait.'

Our man 'Aqwam had his entire flock plundered with no hope of recompense. He is left without any property or livelihood, overcome by misfortune. And so the image of Fate as a concealed hunter lying in wait (*tzr*) captures perfectly the helplessness of one in the face of such uncertainty and impending doom. Other examples bring this image into relief. Nearly all prayers attested so far request escape from the manifestations of Fate: misfortune and adversity. Verbs of deliverance *flt*, *fšy* along with *rwh* "to send relief" make up the bulk of requests. But perhaps the most fascinating case is the unique prayer for *gnmt*; this attestation may shed light on the circumstances under which some people carved these texts.

5 This is the translation found in c and wh.

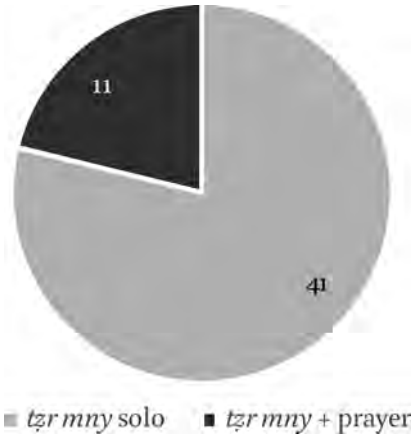


CHART 9
tẓr mny in context

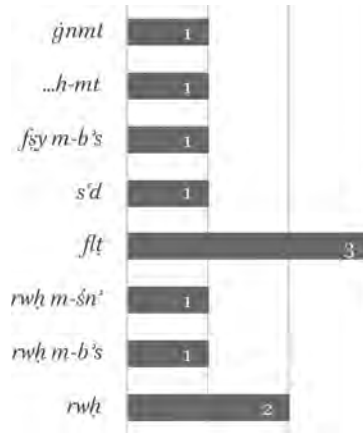


CHART 10
Prayers following *tẓr mny*

SIJ 126

l'dm bn l̄tmt w wgm 'l- ħbk 'l- 'gr f tẓr mny f h lt ġnmt

'By 'dm son of L̄tmt and he grieved for Ĥbk, for 'gr, and Fate lay in wait so, O Allāt, let there be spoil.'

The prayer for spoil suggests that the author was embarking on a raid; the previous statements of grief (*wgm*) could even indicate that the raid was in vengeance for the murder of relatives or loved ones. *Mny* may therefore represent the chaos of war and the real possibility of death. If this interpretation is correct—but others are naturally possible—the petition for spoil is essentially a request for the goddess' protection during the author's enterprise and his ultimate survival through battle to obtain booty. As such, Fate is clearly the more natural subject of *tẓr*—the author will depart into battle where Fate awaits *him* and may take him by surprise. It is in fact this concealed nature that causes authors to call out to the gods for relief from uncertainty, deliverance, and help from misfortune that they cannot anticipate. Such invocations make much more sense if Fate is stalking the living rather than if the author is simply awaiting what must happen to come to pass.

WAMS 19.2

w tẓr mny f h r̄dw fl̄t-h

'and Fate lay in wait so, O Roḏaw, deliver him'

WH 3133.1

l'šll bn yḥtyr w tẓr mny f h r̄dw s'd-h

'By 'šll son of Yḥtyr and Fate lay in wait so, O Roḏaw, help him.'

The verb *tẓr* is also used of lying in wait by hunters and raiders.

HANSB 257

l nẓmt bn škr w tẓr h̄yt

'By Nẓmt son of škr and he lay in wait for game.'

SIJ 784

l šbht bn d̄ky w tẓr h-f̄r'

'By Šbht son of D̄ky and he lay in wait for wild asses.'

CEDS 412

l d̄hd bn ḥg w tẓr ṭrd

'By D̄hd son of Ḥg and he lay in wait for prey animals.'

ASWS 305

q̄b' w tẓr f h r̄ḍy ḡnmt

'he went on a raid and lay in wait so, O R̄ḍy, let there be spoil'

WH 290

tẓr šn' ḡzz

'he lay in wait for enemies on a raid'

Unlike the gods, there are no prayers to *mny* itself, nor are there any attempts to appease it. This absence suggests that our Safaitic authors regarded it, much like its Jāhili counterparts, as blind and cold, unresponsive to invocations and indifferent to offerings.

While a number of authors called out to the gods to be saved from Manay, one text illustrates the limitations of divine intervention. Fate may be avoided and beguiled, but ultimately it prevails and everyone meets their death, an image illustrated beautifully by the following prayer:

AMSI 41⁶

q'ḍ 'd wrd w dkr h-mt w qsf f h lt 'mr ṣdq-k w gnn w m-mt ls f̄ṣy

'he stopped again while going to water and remembered the dead and grieved, so O Allāt, grant long life to your righteous worshipper and protect (him) but from death there is no deliverance'

6 On this interpretation, see Al-Jallad (2018b).

Afterlife

The inscriptions do not provide any explicit details regarding an afterlife and so what can be said about it derives from the interpretation of burial types and mortuary rituals. One may assume some sense of an underworld, a *sheol*, based on a few indirect facts. The first is the great concern for having a burial remain intact. One of the commonest curses upon vandals is *nq't* “ejection, throwing out,” which occurs in a full form in LP 282 *nq't mn qbr* “ejection from the grave.”¹ This could of course simply be a matter of respect for the corpse and rites of burial, but may also suggest that there were consequences in the afterlife if a grave were disturbed.

LP 282

w {{{h}} 'lt rm'n nq't m-qbr l-d y'wr-nh

‘O Goddess of Rm'n, may he who would efface it (the image of the camel) be thrown out of the grave.’

Another burial practice, rarely attested in Safaitic (*bly*) and Nabataean (*btw'*), but known from Islamic-period accounts of pre-Islamic practices, suggests that the dead person's being did not end with the demise of their physical body: the *baliyyah*. Islamic-period sources describe this as the custom of hamstringing a camel at the grave of its owner to provide a mount in the afterlife.² No *bly*-graves associated with Safaitic inscriptions have been found intact and excavated so we cannot be entirely sure whether such burials simply involved the hamstringing of the camel—as preserved in Islamic tradition—or the interring of the camel itself. An excavated *baliyyah* from Wādī Ramm did contain a buried camel, suggesting a slight difference between the two traditions.³ The existence of this burial type would, nevertheless, suggest a belief in an afterlife where the deceased would require their mount.

1 On the etymology of this term, see Al-Jallad and Macdonald (2015) and SAFDICT, 105b.

2 Macdonald (1992: 304; 1994: 762). On the Nabataean practice, see Hayajneh (2006).

3 Given that the camel was not buried, it is rather unlikely that any part of its corpse would survive the centuries exposed to the elements. Hayajneh (2006: 110) does however mention an excavation of such a grave in Ḥaḍramut which in fact mentioned “a place of a camel.” See Nehmé (2020) on the camel burials in the Nabataean and Safaitic contexts, esp. p. 211.

1 Burial Installations

The commonest type of mortuary structure is the cairn, *rgm* and perhaps *šwy*. The *qbr* “subterranean grave” is also attested, but much less frequently. While the basalt desert is strewn with cairns and other stone installations, it is very difficult to positively associate these structures with the Safaitic-writing nomads. The Landscapes of Survival Archaeological Project at the site of Jebel Qurma (eastern Jordan) recorded a large number of installations that were classified as funerary. And although many were spatially associated with Safaitic inscriptions, none of the recorded texts referred specifically to a burial.⁴ Thus, the presence of inscriptions at the investigated burial cairns may have been the result of the re-use of inscribed rocks in the construction of these cairns or simply the opportunistic carving of texts at prominent places in the landscape by Safaitic writers.

In a comprehensive 2012 article, Kennedy rounded up the evidence for burial cairns associated with Safaitic inscriptions—there are six so far that have been published, and only four exhibited a burial. He moreover finds no pattern in the orientation of the dead or in the typology of their graves and the construction of the cairns themselves.⁵ The best-preserved example is the well-known “Cairn of Hāni’,” excavated by Harding in 1951.⁶ The burial was discovered intact with 97 memorial inscriptions associated with it, carved by family members and loved ones. The dead man was placed into a chamber cut into the bedrock and covered with mud and stones, which was then covered with a large conical cairn. The body lay on its back with its head pointing west and its face south. Hāni’ was buried with several items: a deliberately broken wooden bowl, a staff, cut into five pieces, a water skin and an iron ladle.⁷ A second grave—that of a female—was discovered to the south of Hāni’'s grave outside the supporting wall of the cairn. She too was buried with a number of humble possessions—a comb, a bundle of cloth containing eye paint, a few blue beads, and a mother-of-pearl bead around her neck. She wore only a leather headband when buried. Could burial offerings such as these imply, as does the *baliyyah*, a belief that materials from the present life could be taken along to the underworld? In contrast, another excavated cairn called the “Cairn of S’d” exhibited no burial goods and its construction was much humbler than that of Hāni’. The Cairn of the Mermaids, which boasts several mortuary inscriptions, seems to have lacked a

4 See Huigens (2019, ch. 5).

5 Kenney (2012: 491).

6 Harding (1953).

7 Kennedy (2012: 485).

detectible burial altogether, suggesting perhaps that the dead man was interred in the cairn above ground rather than in a subterranean chamber. In any case, these differences could reflect different customs among tribes or perhaps different rituals according to the rank and social status of the deceased.

The erection of cult stones *nšb* at graves does suggest the presence of a divinity during mortuary rituals. As discussed in § 2.2, two installations are further associated with the mortuary complex of the deceased—the *nfs*-monument, perhaps a ceremonial tumulus, and a ritual shelter, *str*. The ritual *str*-shelter may have functioned in a mortuary context as a ceremonial assembly tent in which mourners would sit, grieve, and perhaps perform other mortuary rituals. Finally, memorial inscriptions left after the burial indicate that mortuary sites were frequented by loved ones later on in a ritualized way. This arrangement bears some resemblance to the mortuary complex described in the Kuttamuwa inscription at Sam'al as interpreted by S. Sanders. He took the noun *syd* as referring to a guest chamber (= *str*), where mourners would engage in ritual feasting; the presence of an “image” (= *nšb*) allowed for supernatural participation.⁸ Finally, the site was intended to be visited annually and offerings made by mourners and kin (*wgm* and perhaps rock art). It is worth repeating his edition of the text here.

¹*nk.ktmw. 'bd.pnmw.*
zy.qnt.ly. nšb.b²hyy.
wšmt.wth.bsyd. 'lmy.
whggt.s³yd.zn.
šwr.lhdd.qrpd.
wybl.lng⁴d.šwr/dn.
wybl.lšmš.
wybl.lhdd.krmn
⁵*wybl.lkbbw.*
wybl.lnbšy.zy.bnšb.zn.
⁶*w't.mn.mn.bny. 'w.⁷mn bny š.*
wyhy.lh.⁸nsyd.znn.
wlw yqḥ.mn ⁹ḥyl.krm.znn.
^{š.}¹⁰*ywmn.lywmn.*
wyh¹¹rg.bnbsy
¹²*wyšwy ¹³ḥy.šq*

SANDERS (2013: 100)

I am Kuttamuwa, servant of Panamuwa, who acquired a stele for myself while alive and set it up in the guest-chamber of my tomb and ritually instituted this guest-chamber (thus:) a bull for Hadad the Host, and a ram for the Chief of Provisions, and a ram for Shamash, and a ram for Hadad of the Vineyard, and a ram for Kubaba[!], and a ram for my being which is in this stele.

And as for any of my or anyone's offspring if this guest-chamber [!] becomes his he must take from the best of this vineyard an annual offering, and make a slaughter where my being is, and apportion a thigh-cut for me.

8 Cf. Ancient South Arabian *ms³wd* “guest chamber of the tomb,” Sanders (2013: 88).

2 Invoking the Names of the Dead

The inscription plays an essential role at mortuary complexes, enabling mourners to identify the dead at a particular site and invoke their names. The inscription may therefore act as the *ʾtr* “the trace” of the deceased. One of commonest curses is against vandals who would efface an inscription, essentially obliterating the ability for an individual to be remembered across generations. Thus, post-mortem personhood, to use S. Sander’s term, was embodied in the inscription; the dead could be made present by the mentioning of their name in prayers, perhaps alongside other rituals that have not left their trace in the epigraphic record. This is illustrated clearly in KRS 1120, in which a man named *ʿd* “finds the trace of his father” (*wgd ʾtr ʾb-h*) and “grieves in pain” (*ngʿ*). He terminates the inscription by saying that “he read his father’s inscription aloud” (*hdt sfr ʾb-h*). The inscription of his father, KRS 1121, is found on the same stone and it states *l ʿqrb bn hmyn bn zhrn* “By ʿAqrab son of Ḥamyān son of Zahrān.” Thus, *ʿd* must have simply read his name aloud. The destruction of the name of the deceased meant the destruction of their persona (see also §7). This would explain the elaborate curses left to protect the inscriptions, and the curse carved by the author of inscription ZMMS 117: *shq ʾtr dʿyʿwr* “may the trace of him who would efface (this inscription) be obliterated.”

Besides protecting the inscriptions of the dead, the gods do not seem to affect affairs in the afterlife. There are thousands upon thousands of curses directed towards enemies and vandals, yet not even one concerns matters after death; the punishment of the gods always ends at the grave. Two prayers associated with mourning inscriptions highlight this fact. After grieving for the dead and finding the traces of absent and presumably deceased loved ones, authors will inscribe *w slm l-m sʾr* “and may those who remain (alive) be secure” or *w fšy l-m sʾr* “and may those who remain (alive) be delivered.”⁹ These prayers are attested 101 times, always following verbs of grieving and inscription finding (Chart 11). In this light, absence of any requests from the gods on the part of the dead must be considered significant.

9 Winnett and Reed (1978) understood *sʾr* to mean “to leave the inscription untouched,” but the clear funerary context here seems rather to suggest that it refers to the humans that “remain” alive. NWS TL 1 demonstrates this point well. The text author finds the writing of his companions and grieves and calls upon the goddess of Namārah to give security to those who *sʾr*, that is, those left alive. The inscription concludes with a curse and prayer protecting the inscription—*nqʿt l-dʿyʿwr h-sfrw ʿgnmt l-d dʿy* “may he who would efface this writing be thrown out of the grave but may he who would read it aloud have spoil.” It should also be noted that *sʾr* never takes writing as a direct object.

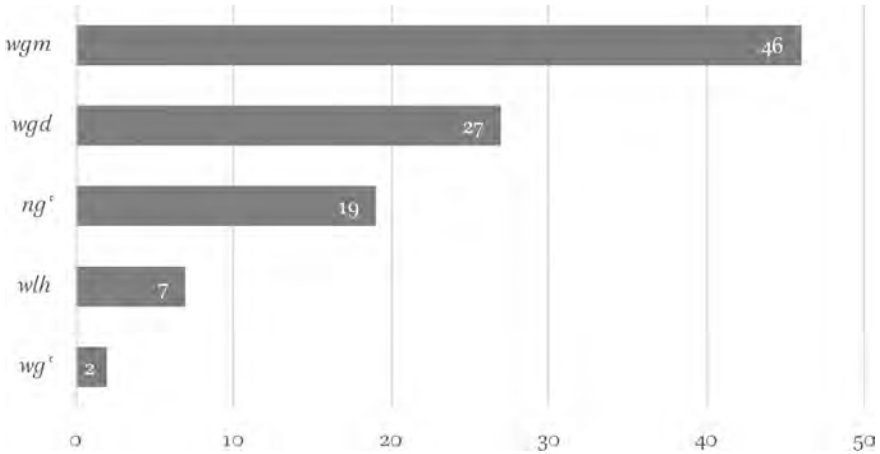


CHART 11 Main themes preceding *s'r*

The second phrase is *b's m(n) zll*, and variants thereof, also occurs exclusively in mourning and inscription-finding contexts.¹⁰ I have suggested that it communicates a similar sentiment—*b's* in this case should be taken as a verb, “to despair” followed by the indefinite relative pronoun *m(n)* and the verb *zll* “to remain” (alive). The implication seems to be that the dead are at peace while the living suffer.

ASFF 300

wgm 'l-ġt f b's m zll

‘he grieved for Ġt, for those who remain (alive) despair’

SESP.U 7

wgd 'tr 'b-h f zll b-b's

‘he found the traces of his father and he (the author) remained (alive) in despair’

AMSI 24

wgd 'tr dd-h f b's m zll-h

‘he found the traces of his paternal uncle and his existence was despair’

To summarize our discussion: the funerary site contained several mortuary installations 1) the structure in which a dead body was placed—*rgm* “cairn,” *qbr*

¹⁰ According to OCIANA, the phrase is attested 42 times.

“grave,” perhaps in the cairn; 2) the *nfs*-monuments, which appear to memorialize the deceased; 3) a *nšb* cult stone for the presence of a divinity during the performance of rituals, and 4) the *str*-shelter allowed for the assembly of mourners. The grave inscription—and potentially any inscription—allowed the persona of the deceased to continue in this world through speaking their name aloud and perhaps through the continued performance of grieving rituals.

Visual Representation of Deities and the Divine World

In the popular imagination, anthropomorphic images and statues played an important role in pre-Islamic Arabian religion. Perhaps this motivated some scholars to identify some of the figurative rock art that occurs alongside Safaitic texts as representations of gods—indeed, drawings of females figure prominently in the rock art. In an important 2012 article, however, M.C.A. Macdonald established that most of the images identified by previous scholars as goddesses were in fact depictions of dancing and singing girls, often in the context of battle.¹ Other images of anthropomorphic figures depict hunts, acts of celebration, including dancing and playing instruments.²

While figurative representations of divinities are found in Ancient South Arabia and Nabataea, the Safaitic authors appeared to have had an aversion to this, which seems to hold true in general for North Arabia. Betyls, stelae with only carved eyes, were common in Nabataea.³ The eventual anthropomorphic representation of deities that emerges in the Nabataean realm is reflective of Hellenistic influence.

Still, there are some images that cannot be explained in mundane ways. These suggest that authors on occasion used visual art to represent cosmic events, perhaps including deities. The following panel comes from the region of Jebel Qurma, published in Brusgaard (2019; Figure 15). It depicts seven figures—three heavenly bodies, surrounded by seven orbs, a procession of three camels, perhaps a calf, female, and male, followed by a human. The associated inscription has been obliterated but I do not suspect it would have provided information to help interpret the scene. Most inscriptions accompanying figurative rock art simply refer to the images as *dmyt* “drawing” or *ḥṭṭ* “carvings.”

1 Macdonald (2012).

2 See al-Manaser (2017) on rock art depicting dancing scenes with musical instruments; see Della Puppa (2018) on the case for depicting individuals in prayer.

3 Healey (2001: 156); Hübner and Weber (1997: 116). Such stele are known from Taymā', but there they appear to have served a funerary function. The god of the oasis of Taymā', *šlm*, was represented graphically, as a horned bull or head; for the latest discussion, see Hausleiter (2012) and Macdonald (forthcoming).



FIGURE 15 Safaitic rock art depicting a supernatural event (Brusgaard 2019: 49; QUR-294-55, Jebel Qurma region, Jordan)

COURTESY: PETER AKKERMANS

Abstract symbols can also accompany an inscription—these include different arrangements of orbs, dots, lines, and oftentimes sundisks (Figure 16). Scholars have suggested that such symbols carried some apotropaic power, but this is simply a guess. No text so far has provided an explanation of their purpose.⁴

And yet other images, sometimes haunting, are completely open to interpretation. So, while we cannot demonstrate that the gods were depicted in anthropomorphic terms, there is some evidence that the divine world was sometimes visually represented in the rock art (Figure 17).

4 Winnett and Harding (1978: 26) have suggested an astral interpretation which is followed by Clark (1979: 45–54). See Macdonald (2012: 263 ff.); Brusgaard (2019: 80–81); Al-Jallad (2020d: 303–304).



FIGURE 16
A Safaitic inscription accompanied by seven dots (NE Jordan)
PHOTO: A. AL-JALLAD



FIGURE 17 Rock art depicting a Demogorgon-like figure (NE Jordan)
PHOTO: A. AL-JALLAD

Amplification and Why Write

Inscriptions rarely invoke more than a couple of deities at a time, but a few texts suggest that a prayer was more likely to be answered the more widely it was heard. Long lists of gods often accompany very sincere invocations for vengeance, underscoring the petitioner's resolve.

KHNUP 1

*l'dm bn whb'l bn hl bn whbl bn 'dm bn ḥḏg bn swr w ḥrṣf {h} lt nqmt m-dkr
bn zlm fh lt nqmt w h b'lsmn w š'hqm w dśr w 'lh tm w gddf w gdnbt w 'lh
h-fls nqmt w 'wr d'y'wr h-sfr w šhq w mḥq w nq't b-w{d}d d yḥbl m-h-sfr*
'By 'dm son of Whb'l son of Ḥl son of Whbl son of 'dm son of Ḥḏg son of Swr and he kept watch so {O} Allāt let there be retribution against Dkr son of Zlm and again O Allāt let there be retribution! and O Ba'al-Samīn and Shay'haqqawm and Dusares and the god of (the tribe) Taym and Gadd-Ḍayf and Gadd-Nabaṭ and the god haf-Fals let there be retribution! And blind him who would efface this inscription and may ruin and misfortune befall him who would efface any part of this inscription and may he (finally) be thrown out of the grave by a loved one.'

A similarly long list accompanies the text of a desperate man whose brother was unjustly killed while peacefully pasturing livestock. He invokes four gods, sincerely expressing his pain and demanding justice.

C 2446

*l's'd bn mr' bn nr w wgm [l-]'ḥ-h nr qtl-h 'l-{n}bty <<m>>{r} 'y n'm 'wd w df
fh lt m'mn w 'lt dtṅ w gd[](w)d w gddf t'r m-d 'slf w wlh k{b}{r} šḥr 'l-'ḥ-h
ḥbb-h l-'bd*

'By S'd son of Mr' son of Nr and he grieved {for} his brother Nr whom the Nabataeans killed {when} he {was pasturing} the livestock of (the tribes) 'Awīd and Ḍayf so, O Allāt from 'mn and goddess of Dṭṅ and Gadd-'Awīd and Gadd-Ḍayf, let him have vengeance against the one who committed this act and he was {continuously} distraught with a broken heart over his brother, his beloved forever.'

If the effectiveness of a prayer could be increased by expanding its divine audience, then perhaps it could be amplified by reaching a wider human audi-

ence as well. The inscriptions ask the passerby to read and/or invoke (*qrʿ*, *dʿy*) the inscriptions. This alone suggests that narrative texts were intended to be viewed and consumed, but why? A small number of men who upon encountering the names and prayers of their kin paused and carved what was normally only said aloud—an oral interaction with the inscription.

SIJ 688¹

*l ġt bn {k}hl bn ---- w w{g}{----} b-rʿy n[] {s}{n} m-ʿsb w {ʿ}{l}{f} m-ʿ{h}-mʿzy
w gls snt nzz ʿlyhd w wgd ʿtr hnʿ ħyr f ql l-ʿl-h h- {m}rf h bʿlsmn rw{h}*

‘By Ġt son of Khl son of ---- and he ---- at the rising of (the asterism of) Nisan on account of green pasture and he stayed with the goats; and he halted the year of the expulsion of the Jews; and he found the traces of Hnʿ Ĥyr (or: well preserved?) and said: may his people have long life, so, O Baʿal-Samīn, send the winds.’

Another man finding the traces of the tribespeople of Ḍayf makes an all-encompassing oral prayer to protect them for all time.

KRS 1015²

*l šhl bn nšrʿl bn škrʿl bn nšrʿl bn ġbdy w wgd ʿtr ʿl ḏf w rb-h qyl hy lt slm w
b-ʿn-h slm w {k}m-h ʿbd w h lt {l}ʿn m-ħbl mʿl-ħwq*

‘By Šhl son of Nšrʿl son of Škr son of Nšrʿl son of Ġbdy and he found the traces of the lineage of Ḍayf and exalted them saying: O Allāt may they be secure and in the present time secure and remaining so forever and, O Allāt, may whosoever effaces (this) from jealousy be cursed.’

Such inscriptions provide only a glimpse at what must have been an oral tradition of interacting with inscriptions. The repetition of prayers contained within the text, or making a prayer upon the text’s author and kin, would seem to be a way to increase its effectiveness. If more people prayed for one’s security, it

- 1 This interpretation is given in Al-Jallad (2018c); the *editio princeps* understands the inscription as: “By Ġt son of Khl son of ---- and he ---- at the appearance of ... green pasture. And ... a shelter of goats. And he set (it) up the year of the expulsion of the people of the Jews. And he found the traces of the excellent (people) and he examined (them). Verily he is the builder. And, O Bʿlsʿmn, [grant] relief.” On inscriptions dating to the “expulsion of the Jews,” see Al-Jallad, (forthcoming).
- 2 Upon examining the photograph again closely, it seems better to read what I have taken previously as {q}m as rather {k}m, equating it with Classical Arabic *kamā*, giving us the phrase *kamā-hu ʿabada* “as it is forever.”

was more likely that the gods would provide it. This notion could have motivated the sincere to carve prayers into stone in hopes that others would lend them their voice. This practice foreshadows what we encounter centuries later in Islamic Arabic inscriptions, which invoke Allāh to have mercy upon or forgive the writer and reader of the text.³

The connection between the narrative and the prayer also helps us understand the contents of the Safaitic inscriptions in general. The narrative section deals with very limited themes, mainly activities involving danger and uncertainty. This is hard to explain if authors were writing as if logging entries in a diary. Why should they mention primarily droughts, migrations, warfare, and pasturing? Why are there no clear references to the birth of children? marriages? Or even mentions of abundant rain? If we regard the narrative as a description of difficult circumstances, which the following prayer is meant to address, then the restriction of subjects to those involving uncertainty is easily explained.

Nevertheless, there are many texts that contain only narratives without a prayer and others that contain a prayer with no narrative. But these continue to express the same limited repertoire of themes. I would therefore suggest that they should be understood in light of the more elaborate texts. Carving an inscription is laborious and time consuming. It is likely that not all authors wished to put into writing what was obvious under such circumstances. Clear evidence of this approach is found in prayers for rain. Ba'al-Samīn is almost always called upon to *rwḥ* "send relief" or "send the winds," but only in rare cases do authors add on the completely redundant *mṭr* "rain." Another example is the curse formula meant to protect the inscription. The full form of the curse is *ʿwr m(n) ʿwr h-sfr* "blind whosoever effaces this writing." But often times authors simply write *ʿwr m(n) ʿwr* "blind whosoever effaces," with writing implied. And an even more compressed form is known, simply *ʿwr* "blind!" In all situations, the meaning of this curse is known and its appearance on rock simply reflects the desire of the author to carve it all out. But here a crucial point needs to be made: are we to assume that only authors who wrote this phrase at the end of their texts wanted them to remain unspoiled by vandals? I doubt it. Likewise, those texts containing only a narrative or even a name could be understood in a similar way: while the prayer is not put into writing, the very presence of the text could have sufficed as a request for it. And a kinsman, loved one, or just a sympathetic person would know what to do upon encountering the inscription—to recite a prayer for the author's security. This scenario is proven

3 See Lindstedt and Harumaki (2016: 77–78).

by SIJ 688, which contains a transcription of an oral prayer upon finding the inscription of a man named Hn'. A text bearing this name comes from the same site (Tell al-'Abd), which simply states:

SIJ Extra 26

l hn' bn šhm bn ḥṭst

'By Hn' son of Šhm son of Ḥṭst.'

Worldview—A Reconstruction

From the facts above, I will permit myself the following paragraph to speculate on the way the ancient nomads who produced Safaitic inscriptions conceptualized the world and their place in it. The universe consisted of two primary hierophanies: the gods *ʾlht*, sentient representations of nature and emotions, on the one hand, and Fate, *mny*, a malevolent and deaf force that causes misfortune and death. Fate is ever present, stalking mankind, able to manifest at any moment as an enemy's arrow, a hungry predator, or even as drought itself, dooming the entire land. There are no prayers to Mny; no inscriptions attempt to petition it for mercy or compassion. The only hope humans had to survive was to seek the intervention of the gods, but this was never guaranteed. The performance of religious rites—the ritual slaughter of animals, burnt offerings, libations, votive images, and pilgrimages—motivated the gods to respond to human appeals and to provide deliverance from perils, that is, manifestations of Mny. Indeed, the regularity of the rains and the alternation of the seasonal cycle depended upon them. Ba'al-Samīn could withhold the rains when unsatisfied, providing no refuge from Mny. Sometimes the gods even concerned themselves with the day-to-day affairs of humans, such as economic justice, vengeance, and the reunification of loved ones. But it was impossible for any person to keep the favor of the gods permanently. When they lost interest and abandoned someone, leaving their prayers unanswered, death was imminent, *w tʿr mny*.

Glossary of Divinities

- ʾlht** “The gods”: A term to refer to all the deities collectively, cognate with Classical Arabic *ʾālihatun*.
- ʾḥd** “The One”: This deity is attested in one inscription, alongside Allāt. It appears to be an Arabicization of the Greek epithet εἰς θεός, found in a Palmyrene inscription as *mrmʾ ḥd*. See Al-Jallad (forthcoming).
- (ʾ)lh** “Allāh”: A deity likely introduced from the west, literally meaning “the god,” and attested frequently in Nabataean personal names as *ʾlh*, *ʾlhy*, and *lhy*. As in Nabataean, the first syllable appears to be a vowel, which in some cases is preceded by a euphonic glottal stop. This produces two spellings in Safaitic: *ʾlh* (15 times) and *lh* (26 times). We can be sure that the spelling *lh* represents Allāh based on Greek-Safaitic bilinguals, e.g. WH 1860 *whbllh* = WH Greek 2 Ουα-βαλλας. Allāh can be invoked alongside other gods; that he is invoked beside *dśr* in KRS 2298 seems to exclude the identification of these two gods as one and the same. C 2816 calls upon him alongside Shayʿ-Haqqawm and Allāt. In SIJ 293, the author makes an oath to Allāh whom he calls “living”—*ʾqsm b-ʾlh ḥy*.¹
- hʾlh** “the god”: Perhaps a calque of Nabataean *ʾlh* /ʾAllāh/ into Safaitic (cf. *śʾhqm* below) producing /haʾ-ʾelāh/. It is attested once in the inscriptions, in WH 2923, ingeniously restored by M.C.A. Macdonald. The divine name is encountered in theophoric names such as *ʾshʾlh* /ʾaws-haʾ-ʾelāh/; *bdhʾlh* /ʾabd-haʾ-ʾelāh/, etc.²
- ʾlh ʾlʾbgr** “the god of the lineage of ʾAbgar”: This divine name is attested once in ASFF 122, and seems to refer to a tribal tutelary deity or, perhaps, the deity of the Abgarids, an Arab dynasty that ruled over Edessa and Osroene between 134 to 242 CE.
- ʾlh h-ḥrt** “God of the Ḥarrah,” perhaps the tutelary deity of the entire basalt desert, attested one time in MSSH 9. It is possible that this a title of *gdḥrt* attested elsewhere.
- ʾlh h-nmrt** “God of Al-Namārah”: a site of permanent water and a Roman fort in the Syrian Ḥarrah, the location of the famous Namārah funerary inscription of Marʾalqays son of ʾAmro.

¹ On this invocation, see Al-Jallad (2021b).

² Robin (2020: 65).

- 'lh rhy** “God of Ruhay”: This attestation remains tentative as it occurs once in a damaged context, BESS19 2 (Appendix 2). If the reading is correct, then he would be the tutelary god of the North Arabian tribal group *rhy*, attested as *rhw* in the Thamudic B inscriptions between Ḥā'il and Hegra³ and as adversaries in the Safaitic inscriptions (e.g. WH 3736.1).
- 'lh tm** “God of Taym”: a tribe known from several Safaitic inscriptions. This particular divine name is attested only once, KHUNP 1.
- 'lhn** “Our god”: perhaps a general label for a deity worshipped by the writer and his group, compare to the generalized *rabbīna* in Egyptian Arabic. The title is attested twice: SSWS 186; C 2526.
- (')lt** “Allāt,” the most popular goddess in the inscriptions. She is invoked 1437 times according to the OCIANA corpus in all orthographic variations of her name. Like Allāh, the first syllable is inconsistently represented with ' , twice within the same inscription. These cases have been used to argue that *lt* and *'lt* are two different deities, but this is not necessary. Allāt is often called upon multiple times in an inscription, and so the rare appearance of *lt* and *'lt* together could easily reflect a prosodic difference between their two occurrences. The first syllable of this name appears to have been vocalic (as in the Classical Arabic definite article), and so in isolation, a glottal stop would have been pronounced, *hamzatu l-qaf*; 'Allāt, while in context, it would be elided. Perhaps the vocative particle, depending upon stress, could either combine with Allāt forming one initial syllable or be treated independently: that is, *hällāt* vs *hā 'ällāt*, respectively.⁴ There is one case where *lt* is followed directly by *'lt* (IS.H 296), but the rest of the inscription is broken and it is likely that the latter was simply the first element of a compound divine name. Indeed, *lt* and *'lt dtn* co-occur and may be invoked together here. In terms of origin, two Safaitic inscriptions invoke Allāt as coming from a place called *ʿmn*.⁵ Its identification is unclear but it may refer to Jebel Ram, in Iram (mod. Wādī Ram), where an important temple of Allāt was located.
- 'lt 'ss** “Goddess of the mountain 'Usays”: modern *Jebel Says* in Syria.⁶ The element *'lt* is likely the feminine of *'el*, so *'elat*, rather than Allāt.
- 'lt dtn** “Goddess of Dtn”: see *dtn* below. On this particular title, see Macdonald et al. (1996: 474–476), attested once in C 2446.
- 'lt 'gb** “Goddess of the unseen”: This title, attested once in KRS 3074, could be compared to the name of the primary deity of the oasis of Dadān, *djbt*, which

3 Norris (2017).

4 On the etymology of Allāt, see Robin (2020: 72).

5 Al-Jallad (2020d).

6 See Macdonald (forthcoming, 12).

has most often been understood as “he of the thicket,”⁷ but which the rare by-form of the name *dġybt* suggests rather a connection with the term *ġayb(at)*, “unseen.”⁸
ʿlt ʿhgr “Goddess of Ḥegrā?": This title is attested once in KWQ 119, and could reflect the goddess of the Nabataean town Ḥegrā, rendered in Safaitic with the prefixed ʿ-*article*.

ʿlt rmʿn “Goddess of Rmʿn”: This title is attested once in LP 282. Rmʿn may be an unidentified toponym.

ʿtʿ “He who saves”: see *yfʿ*.

ʿbdt “Obodas”: A Nabataean deity thought to be the deified Nabataean king, Obodas I (96–85 BCE) or Obodas III (30–9 BCE).⁹ He is attested in one inscription so far, BESS19 2 (Appendix 2).

ʿzz “Mighty”: The Palmyrene god ʿazīzu, invoked in a Safaitic inscription from Palmyra, PALMYRA MUSEUM 1357.1 and in BESS19 2 (Appendix 2).¹⁰

blg “The radiant one”: Compare to Classical Arabic *bāliġun* (LANE, 245b), likely an epithet of *šms* “(divine) Sun.” The epithet is attested in only one inscription KRS 1941, an isolated prayer type: *h blg sʿd kfl bn ʿrh* “O Bāleg, help Yfkl son of ʿrh.”

bʿlsmy / bʿlsmn “Master of the heavens”: The storm god, whose temple was located at Seia, and was worshipped at Palmyra. The deity is invoked some 180 times by this name and 8 times by the Arabicized name *bʿlsmy* /baʿal-samāy/. Baʿal-Samīn’s temple at Seia was a goal of pilgrimage by the nomads and the tribe *ʿbšt* participated in its construction.¹¹

bʿl “Master”: This is likely a contracted form of Baʿal-Samīn, two out of its four occurrences appear in inscriptions by men travelling to Palmyra (C 1649; C 1665). Bʿl is grieved for in ASWS 37 and in KRS 2453; *bʿl* appears in a mythological context related to the *bʿl* myth of Canaanite literature.¹²

dśr / dśry / dśr / dśry “Master of the Šarē (mountains)”: The national deity of the Nabataeans—called BES17 1326 *ʿlh nbṭ* “god of the Nabataeans”—is invoked 205 times in various pronunciations.¹³ The commonest form is *dśr*, which Macdonald argues indicates a direct port from the Nabataean Aramaic pronunciation, probably *dīšar*. The form *dśry* is attested 2 times, reflecting the presence of the final diphthong. The form *dśr* likely reflects the Nabataean Arabic pronunciation *dū-šarē*, Δουσαρης, *dwšrʿ*, while the Arabian form *dśry* /dū-šaray/, as attested in

7 Höfner (1965: 438); Caskel (1953: 44); Healey (2001: 89).

8 Kootstra (2019).

9 See Healey (2001: 147–151) for a detailed discussion.

10 Teixidor (1979).

11 Macdonald (2003).

12 Al-Jallad (2015a).

13 Healey (2011: 85–106).

Hismaic, is attested only once (WH 61). Dusares is called the one from *rqm* (Petra) in one Safaitic inscription.¹⁴

dt̄n This obscure god is invoked 9 times, sometimes as *'lt dt̄n*. The etymology of the name is unclear, but the same deity could be invoked in a group of inscriptions from North Arabia previously classified as Thamudic C. The reading of the barbell sign in these texts remains unclear and could be regarded as either *g* or *t̄*. If it is the former then the Thamudic C god should be identified with Dagan, known from 2nd millennium BCE NWS inscriptions. It is impossible to say if there is any relationship between these two deities.

fls This god is invoked once as *'lh fls* in an inscription with a long list of gods of various peoples, KHUNP 1. Macdonald and I (2015) have suggested that it is to be identified as the god of Ṭayyi' as recorded in the ibn al-Kalbī's *The Book of Idols*.

gd "Fortune," "Tyche": Gadd is usually associated with places and groups.¹⁵ It is attested once without any qualifying term in CSNS 1029 in a prayer: *slm-h gd wḥd*, which could be understood as "may Gadd keep him, who is alone, safe." But since all other examples of *gd* occur in conjunction with some other term, perhaps *wḥd* here refers to a group; indeed, *wḥd* is a common personal name in the Safaitic inscriptions. Gadd may correspond to the deity Sa'd recorded in *The Book of Idols*.

gddf "The Gadd of the tribe Ḍayf": This Gadd is invoked 58 times.

gdnbt̄ "The Gadd of the Nabataeans": It is called upon three times. This particular Gadd also appears in a Palmyrene inscription where he is equated with a deity called *ṣ'bw*: *'lh ṣ'bw dy mqr' gd 'nbt̄* "The god Ṣa'bo, who is called the Gadd of the Nabataeans."¹⁶

gdwhb'l "Gadd of the tribe Whb'l": This appears to be the ancestor of Ḍayf, the eponymous ancestor of the tribe. It is invoked 3 times. This is the tutelary god of the ancestor of the tribal groups Ḍayf and 'Awīd.¹⁷

gd'wd "Gadd of the tribe 'Awīd": This is the most popular Gadd, called upon 64 times.

gdhbḥr "Gadd of *hbḥr*": Another deity attested only once (BESS19 2, Appendix 2). The location of *hbḥr* is unclear; it could refer to a large river, the sea, or simply an open tract of land.

gdhrm "Gadd of Hrm": This is possibly the Gadd of the Romans or perhaps of a tribe called Hrm; he is invoked only once, in BESS19 2 (Appendix 2).

14 Al-Jallad (2020d).

15 Healey (2001: 153).

16 CIS II, 3991; apud. Healey (2001: 153).

17 Macdonald (forthcoming, 12).

- gdhrt** “Gadd of the Ḥarrah”: This appears to be the protective deity of the Ḥarrah itself, rather than of a single group or people. It is so far invoked only twice.¹⁸
- khl** “Wise man”: This deity is popular in the Thamudic B inscriptions of Central Arabia and appears to have been one of their gods. It is unclear if its two attestations (KRS 2028; SIJ 516) in the Ḥarrah are by visitors to the area or whether locals called upon him as well. Both inscriptions are written in a script that is virtually identical to Thamudic B.
- rḏw/rḏy** “Satisfaction”: Together, *rḏw* and *rḏy* are invoked 630 times total, 365 for *rḏw* and 265 for *rḏy*. The two deities are never invoked together in a single inscription, which suggests that they are in fact one and the same, reflecting different pronunciations of the name.¹⁹ Indeed, the confusion of III-w and III-y roots in Safaitic is widespread. Only *rḏw* occurs in Thamudic B, which suggests that this is the original form. A Dumaitic inscription indicates that North Arabians in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE considered Chaldea the mythological residence or cult center of Roḏaw. It is unclear if this idea continued into the Safaitic context.
- mlk** “Master”: This deity is attested once in a poor hand copy and so its existence is unclear. It is likely an epithet; a deity by this name is possibly attested in the Ḥā’il area in Thamudic B.²⁰
- mlk h-smy** “Master of Heaven”: An epithet for Ba’al-Samīn attested once, KRS 1944.
- mnt** “Fortune”: The goddess *manōt*, widely worshipped in the Nabataean realm but attested only once in Safaitic.²¹ That she occurs in an invocation alongside Dusares suggests that she was introduced from Nabataea.
- n’r** “Luminous one”: A participle of the verb *nāra*, *yanūru* “to radiate light,” a suitable epithet for any astral deity. If we assume that Roḏaw was regarded as a lunar deity, then perhaps this was one of his titles, cf. Quran 10:5 *huwa lladī ḡā’ala š-šamsa ḏiyā’an wa-l-qamara nūran* “he is the one who made the sun to shine and the moon to give light.” This title is attested once in CSNS 98.
- nhy** “Intellect?”: this deity is only attested 4 times in Safaitic but is quite common in Thamudic B and Dumaitic. In the early 1st millennium BCE, Nuhay was one of the primary gods of the oasis of Dūmat in North Arabia. In one Thamudic B inscription, Nhy is called *’lh t’t* “god of salvation”²²
- rḥm** “The merciful one”: this epithet is attested only 3 times and it is unclear if it is the proper name of a deity or a title of one of the better attested gods. One can

18 Macdonald (forthcoming, 15).

19 Al-Jallad (2021); Macdonald (forthcoming, 16).

20 Al-Theeb (2000, #46).

21 Healey (2001: 132–136).

22 Al-Jallad (2021: 10), Hu 789e.

compare it to *rhmn'* at Palmyra and eventually the monotheistic title in South Arabia *rahmānān*. The absence of the *n* indicates that it was probably pronounced *rahīm*.

š'hqm / **š'qm** / **š'qm** "Guiding the people/host": The god was worshipped by Nabataeans, where his name appears as šy^c-l-qwm, as well. In the latter tradition, he is depicted as abstaining from wine.²³ The name has been rendered in the local dialect of the Ḥarrah, using both forms of the definite article: šay^c-haqqawm 134 times and only once as šay^c-ʾaqqawm, with the ʾa-definite article. An abbreviated form may be attested in WR.D 8: š'y. We find it once without any article as well šay^c-qawm. Teixidor has suggested, based on its etymology, that the god was a protective spirit, offering safety to travelers.²⁴ A prayer to the god in the Safaitic inscription KRS 68 could support this hypothesis: Š'hqm is called the one whom the author seeks, bgy-h, and whom he follows qfyt-h; his guidance hfirt-k grants deliverance from death, fltn m-mt.

š'n'r "Guiding lads": Perhaps the protective deity of young men, cf. Hebrew *na'ar*. The god is attested 5 times. In KRS 36 he is asked to provide protection to the one who is alone. The other invocations are not specific.

šms "(divine) Sun": This pan-Semitic deity is invoked only once in C 25, although it does appear in the theophoric name *lšms*, 27 times according to the OCIANA corpus.

šlm "Effigy": the ancient god of Taymā' is invoked once in KRS 30 as the god of Dūmat by a man from the city. On the deity, see Macdonald (forthcoming).

ymyt "He who causes death": This epithet is attested only once in C 4351. It appears to be a D-stem verb of the root *myt/mwt*, "to cause to die." This verbal epithet can be compared to *yṯ'*.

yṯ' "He (who) saves": The Thamudic B inscription Hu 789e calls Nuhay the god of *t't* "salvation," and so this may be an epithet which has replaced the proper name of the god, perhaps explaining the virtual absence of *nhy* in the Safaitic inscriptions. The divine attribute appears in both South Arabian and Amorite onomastica; Arab chieftains mentioned in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal carry names derived from this root: *Abiyata* and *Uaite*.²⁵ The anthroponym name *yṯ'* exists in Safaitic as well, and appears once in Greek transcription as *Ιαιθεου*, suggesting the vocalization *yayte*.²⁶

23 *CIS* II, 3973, apud. Healey (2001: 145).

24 Teixidor (1979: 8).

25 Eph'al (1984: 113).

26 *WH* 3563 (= Greek 3).

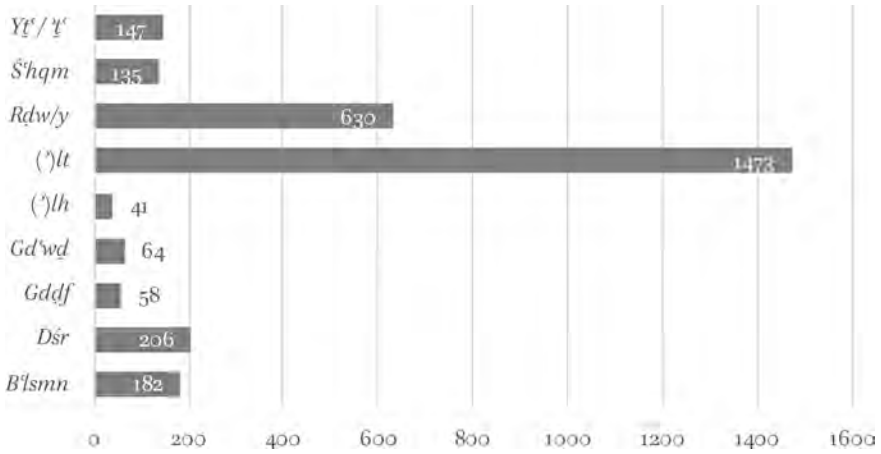


CHART 12 Frequency of deities in invocations

Frequency

Chart 12 illustrates the frequency of deities within invocations in the Safaitic inscriptions. It includes only deities called upon over 40 times and does not distinguish between orthographic by-forms, e.g. *dsr*; *d'sr*; *d'sry* and *d'sry* are all counted as one deity. The data do not differ significantly from Bennett (2014).

Previously Unpublished Inscriptions

The texts edited here were discovered during the summer campaign of the 2019 Badia Survey mission.¹ They come from three different sites indicated on Maps 2 and 3.

BESS19 1

This text was discovered near a tributary of Wādī Salmā in the same vicinity as the 'dr inscription, published in Al-Jallad (2020d).

l rǧd bn ġsm bn šhl w ħrṣ 'l-ħmlt sqm f h b'lsmn ħnn nq' k-f-yql 'l-h ṣdq

'By Rǧd son of Ġsm son of Šhl and he kept watch over Ĥmlt who had fallen ill so O B'lsmn, show mercy though your water pools so that his folk will say you are just.'

Commentary

The author of this text appears for the first time in the corpus here.

ħrṣ 'l- "he watched over": This construction is well attested and can be applied to humans or animals (SAFDICT, 82).

ħnn "to show compassion": This verb is well attested, but appears for the first time as an imperative here, cf. KRS 2018 *štr f ħnn 'lh* "he was far from home so may Allāh show compassion" (SAFDICT, 86).

nq' "watering places": This word seems to be a derivative of the attested *nq't* "watering place" (SAFDICT, 105–106), likely a depression where water collects. This would seem to fit the present context, as the inscription was carved near a wide bend in the wadi which would fill with water in the rainy seasons.

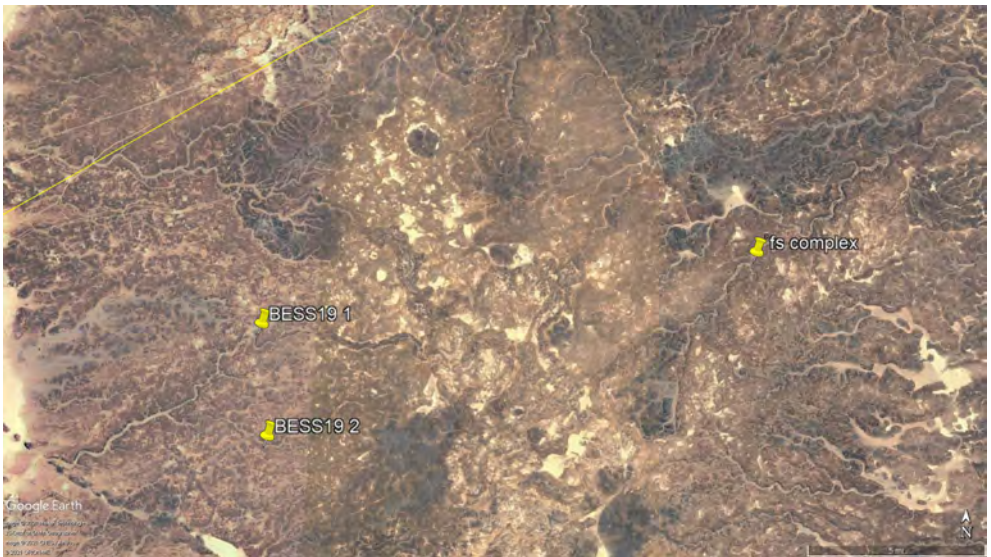
yql "that they say": This is the modal prefix conjugation of the verb *ql* (SAFDICT, 110); the prefix conjugation is attested for the first time here.

ṣdq "he is just": The complement of *yql*, cf. Classical Arabic *ṣadaqa* "he spoke the truth" (LANE, 1666c).

1 This campaign was led by Ahmad Al-Jallad and Ali al-Manaser, in collaboration with the Ḥuṣn Research Center, Abu Dhabi, represented by Mr. Zuhayr and Al-Qaḍi, and within the framework of *The Missing Link* project in June 2019. The Badia Survey project was initiated by M.C.A. Macdonald in 2015 with the goal of comprehensively documenting the inscriptions and archaeological sites of the Jordanian Ḥarrah.



MAP 2 Survey Area



MAP 3 Location of the three sites in detail



FIGURE 18 BESS19 1



FIGURE 19 Location of BESS19 1 near the bend in the wadi

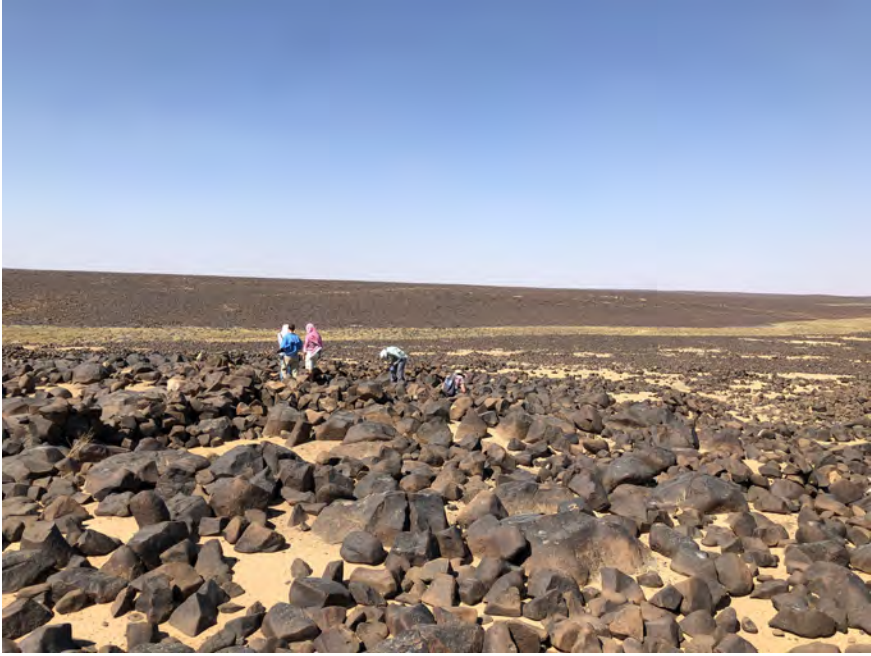


FIGURE 20 The team surveying the site of BESS19 2

BESS19 2

This text was discovered among a number of Safaitic and early Arabic inscriptions in another large tributary of Wadi Salmā about 4 miles south of BESS19 1. The stone contains two inscriptions. BESS19 2a is the primary text containing 73 words while BESS19 2b is a short camping text carved on the side of the rock.

*l mǧyr bn 'hrr h-rm w ngy l-ṛb' 'srt snt mn h-bḥr 'mr swy-h ṛb't 'šhr fy's mn nfs-h f
tdy gdhbḥr w gddf w dśr w 'bdt w š'hqm w gdhrm [w] { }zz w 'l{h}{r}² {h}y dl m 'hm
w drs h-ṛd w r'y n{z}{r}t w y's swy h-bḥr f ngy l-h-mdnt f q'd w wgd 'tr {m}{h-}r{m}
f ng' f dkr hrm w tśwq f h lt m'dt l-d d'y h-s{f}r*

'This white oryx³ is by Moǧayyer son of 'Aḥrar and he went forth from *h-bḥr* to fight fourteen years ago, dwelling apart from it for four months and despaired

- 2 The {r} is closed, causing it to resemble an enlarged *g*, but its shape is rather distinct from the other occurrences of this letter in the text. Moreover, the reading *g* would produce an incomprehensible *ghy*. I would propose, therefore, that the *r* was closed by error by connecting the two arms of the glyph.
- 3 I Thank M.C.A. Macdonald for this identification.



FIGURE 21 BESS19 2

from the depths of his soul so he called upon the Gadd of *h-bhr* and the Gadd of Dayf and Dusares and 'Obodas and Shay'haqqawm and the Gadd of *hrm* and 'Azīzu and the God of Ruhay, let whosoever causes sorrow be debased, and he returned time and time again to this land and was on the look-out to guard (against enemies) but he despaired of being away from *h-bhr*, he then set off to the province to fight but stopped and found some traces of *hrm* and grieved in pain and was mindful of *hrm* and was filled with longing so, O Allāt, may he who would read this writing have a (safe) return.'

This is an atypical Safaitic inscription in its length and contents. It consists of two NARRATIVE + PRAYER blocks following the signing of the rock art. The drawing depicts a rider carrying what appears to be a throwing spear (*rmḥ*) pointing in the direction of the white oryx. The smaller size of the oryx may serve to give the perspective of distance. The rider wears a Roman-style plumed helmet; the lines drawn on his torso may be an attempt to represent some type of armor or cloth tunic. He appears to be sitting on a tasseled saddle.⁴

The text structurally conforms to Safaitic formulaic composition but the author employs a number of unique expressions that challenge our interpretation of the text.

4 On the topology of rock art depicting equids and riders in the Safaitic inscriptions, see Macdonald (2019b).

Moreover, his use of the verb *ngy* requires us to revisit its spectrum of meanings and the implication its interpretation has on the identification of two group names/toponyms mentioned in the inscription, *h-bhr* and *hrm*.

Commentary

mgyr bn 'hrr: This individual is has not produced any other Safaitic inscriptions in the OCIANA corpus. The name *mgyr* is rather common, attested 140 times so far, and is found in Greek transcription as well, Μογαίρου, Μογαίου, Μογερος and variants therefore, suggesting the pronunciation *mogayyer* “raider.”⁵ The related name *muḡīrah* is common in Islamic-period genealogies. The name *'hrr*, on the other hand, is attested for the first time here. It appears to be an *ʾafʿal* form of the root *hrr* “to free.”⁶

h-rm “the white oryx”: This word appears to refer to the animal depicted in the hunting scene, the Oryx leucoryx. Safaitic *rm* would therefore correspond to Classical Arabic *rīm*. It is attested for the first time in the text to my knowledge. The absence of the glottal stop is unexpected as Safaitic normally maintains this sound even in places it is lost in Classical Arabic (compare Safaitic *ʾlht* /ʾaʿlehat/ to Classical Arabic *ʾālihatun*, both “gods”). The glottal stop **rīm-* can be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic although the exact type of animal it signified is unclear.⁷ Nevertheless, its reflexes across the Semitic family show that it originally contained a glottal stop, e.g. Ugaritic *rʾum*, Hebrew *rəʾēm*, and both *rʾm* and *rym* in Aramaic, and *rīmun* in Classical Arabic but *rīm* in Old Hīgāzī and most forms of Modern Arabic, owing to the loss of the glottal stop. This particular spelling may suggest the word is borrowed from a dialect lacking the glottal stop or from some form of Aramaic.

First Narrative

ngy “to go forth (to fight),” “to depart”? A unified interpretation of the word *ngy* in all its contexts has proven difficult. It has traditionally been understood as “to escape” or “to deliver,” which successfully produces meaningful sentences in many contexts. However, Macdonald drew our attention to the re-occurring dating formula, *snt ngy PN hdy* which would translate as “the year PN *ngy* a commander/leader.”⁸ As he points out, the meanings “escape” or “save” seem to be unsuitable. Instead, he draws a connection with the Sabaic and Minaic verb *ngw* “to announce,” “to declare,” and sees this formula as a reference to the year a certain individual was appoint commander of a military unit. Such an interpretation is further supported by the fact that inscriptions containing this

5 Wuthnow (1930: 77).

6 Note that the names *hr* and *hrt* are rather common in Safaitic. In Ancient South Arabian, *'hrr* is a plural noun meaning “freemen.”

7 Kogan (2011: 208).

8 Macdonald (2014: 154–161).

type of dating usual refer to other military activities, such as *srt* “to serve in a troop,” *qšš* “to patrol,” etc. Macdonald does, however, maintain the meaning of “escape” for some contexts.⁹ Indeed, this interpretation is compatible with several instances that take a complement with *m(n)-*, however their context does not allow one to prove this interpretation beyond a doubt and other meanings are possible.

ABANS 349

ngy m-nbt

‘he escaped from the Nabataeans’

HANSB 344

ngy m-ḥrn mksʿ

‘he escaped from the Hawrān wounded’

LP 406

snt ngy wdn m-rm

‘the year Wdn escaped from Rome’

SESP.U 1

snt ngy h-lyyn m-bšry

‘the year the Legion escaped from Bostra’

The occurrence of the verb with a complement introduced by *l-* further supports the idea that it is a verb of motion but its broader context in the inscription makes the interpretation of “to escape” difficult.

CSNS 1004

snt ngy mk l-rm

‘the year Mk *ngy* to Rome’

It is tempting to equate *mk* as one of the Nabataean kings called *mnkw*, considering the mentioning of Rome.¹⁰ But if this is the case, then the translation “he escaped” makes little sense. None sought refuge in Rome. Rather, Malichus II is reported to have sent

9 Macdonald (2014: 154).

10 The Nabataean king Malichus appears in Nabataean Aramaic as *mnkw* and *mlkw* reflecting the shift of *l* to *n*, and in Himaic as *mk* in the basileophoric name ‘*bdmk* (King 1990, § 6). The name is attested in three forms in Greek transcription: Αβδομαχος /‘Abdo-Mank/ (IGLS XXI 54a), Αβδομαλιχος /‘Abdo-Malik/ (IGLS XIII 9239a), and Αβδομαχος /‘Abdo-Mak(k)/ (IGLS XIII 9265). The Nabataean king *mk* is also mentioned in the dating formula

forces to support the Romans in quelling the Jewish revolt in 66 CE. If this is indeed a reference to him, then *ngy l-* could, in this context, refer to “leaving” or “departing” a place in a military context to provide support, where *l-* marks the benefactive. In this sense, I would compare *ngy* to the Classical Arabic *nāğada* “to go forth to fight” and *ʾanğada* “to assist, aid,” and with the indirect object introduced by *ʾalā*, *ʾanğada-hū ʾalay-h* “he aided him against him.”¹¹ Etymologically, this would be a D-stem (form II) meaning “to provide *ngy*” that is, aid and deliverance, cf. the verb *ʾmd* “to provide military assistance.”¹²

There are two further inscriptions that connect *ngy* with verbs of motion, both referring to movement away from a source. The first pair was discussed by Rawabdeh and Abbadi¹³ in reference to a person called *sly*, which they tentatively connect with the Nabataean minister Syllaeus. His departure from *rm* is described in one inscription as *ʿty m-rm* and in the second as *ngy m-rm*. While Rawabdeh and Abbadi suggest that the latter reflects his leaving Rome on bad terms, one could expect in such a context something like *nfr m-rm* “he fled Rome” rather than “he escaped.” Rather, it is possible that *ngy* simply refers to purpose—“he was dispatched from Rome (to fight)” vs. the neutral “he came from Rome.” Indeed, *ʿty* is used to refer to military movement, for example, *snt ʿty h-mđy bšry* “the year the Persians came to Bostra” (SIJ 78), which corresponds to the *snt hr̥b h-mđy ʾl rm b-bšry* “the year the Persians waged war against the Romans at Bostra” (C 4448). The second pair concerns “the Legion.” In *SESP.U 1*, the event is described as *snt ngy h-lgyn m-bšry* “the year the Legion *ngy* Bostra to fight” and in *ZEGA 15* as *snt br̥h h-lgyn bšr* “the year the Legion left Bostra.” While we cannot be sure as to what even this text describes, the equation of *ngy* with *br̥h* favors the interpretation of a voluntary departure rather than a forced evacuation. The verb *ngy* can be better reconciled with these verbs of movement if we posit that it refers to movement + military purpose.

So then, with this understanding in hand, we can now resolve a series of problematic attestations.

BES15 Unpublished

snt ngy qšr w h-mđy

‘the year Caesar and the Persians went forth to fight’

of the Safaitic inscription *ZEWA 1*, *snt tr̥q mk mlk nb̥t t̥ltn mʾt qtl ʾl rm* “the year Makk, king of Nabataea, struck (down) thirty units, warriors of the Romans.”

11 LANE, 2767a.

12 The verb *ʾmd* is attested in Safaitic (SAFDICT, 44), cf. Classical Arabic *ʾamdadu-hū bi-madadin* “I strengthened him with an army.”

13 Rawabdeh and Abbadi (2016).

SESP.U 1

wld h-mʿzy snt ngy h-lygn m-bšry

‘he helped the goats give birth the year the Legion went forth from Bostra’

SIJ 88

hdy snt ngy qšr h-md

‘he served as a commander the year Caesar went forth to fight the Persians’

LP 540

snt ngy m-nmrt h-sltn l- l ʿwd

‘the year he went forth to fight from Namārah of the governor against the lineage of ‘Awīd’

LP 675

snt ngy h-rmy

‘the year the Romans went forth to fight’

The present interpretation of *ngy* does not supersede Macdonald’s understanding of *ngy* in the dating formulae *snt ngy* PN *hdy* or *snt ngy qšr h-mdnt*, both of which prefer the “announce” meaning, nor does it replace the basic meaning of “to save,” “to escape” and “to deliver.” Rather it likely reflects a different verbal derivation of the root; context and syntax must therefore help arbitrate between the various meanings signified by this consonantal skeleton.

Now we return to the present inscription. The verb *ngy* in the context of our man Moğayyer speaks against the idea of escaping. He seems to long for his place of origin which is called *h-bhr*. It would, therefore, seem that Moğayyer was dispatched or perhaps conscripted nearly a decade and a half ago from *h-bhr*, and had spent four consecutive months prior to the writing of this inscription without returning, which caused him great sorrow. This narrative is replete with *hapax legomena*, which I shall treat in detail below.

ngy l-ʿrbʿ šrt snt m-h-bhr “he went forth fourteen years ago”: The rendering of *l-ʿrbʿ šrt snt* as fourteen years ago rather than “for fourteen years” comes from the fact that it seems he occasionally returned to *h-bhr* as implied by the adverbial clause following it. Perhaps the dative preposition serves this purpose as the following phrase also lacks it when talking about a consecutive span of time.

ʿmr swy-h ʿrbʿt šhr “dwelling apart from it for four months”: the verb *ʿmr* is previously attested,¹⁴ but the syntax here suggests that *ʿmr* is an active participle, /ʿāmer/.

14 SAFDICT, 53.

The word *swy*, attested for the first time, could be interpreted in two ways. The first is to connect it with Aramaic *sawē*, *sawyū* “to desire” (CAL, s.v.), meaning he dwelt here *desiring it* (that is, *h-bhr*). The other interpretation would connect it to Classical Arabic *siwan*, which is regarded as a near synonym of *gayr* “except,” “other than.”¹⁵ This would suggest taking it as “apart from.”

h-bhr: This is likely a hydrological toponym, cf. Arabic *baḥrun* “sea.” While it is tempting to identify this place as the Mediterranean or perhaps a place on the Red Sea, the word may refer to any large body of water in Classical Arabic, including a great river or lake.¹⁶ Moreover, the feminine form *baḥratun* can refer to a spacious tract of land, apparently cognate with the Gəʿəz *bəḥər* meaning “region,” “province,” “country,” etc.¹⁷ An inscription published by al-Salameen et al. may shed light on the meaning of *h-bhr*, if it indeed refers to the same place.¹⁸ The short text is accompanied by a drawing of a boat. The original editors read and translated the inscription as follows:

l hbl bn wdm w ngy b-h-sfnt f ʿqd m-ʿbhrn tlt n snt

‘By Hbl son of Wdm and he escaped with the ship, then clung to the seas for thirty years.’

M.C.A. Macdonald has re-read the narrative of the inscription in his edition published on OCIANA as *w ngy b-h-sfnt š/tʿy l-mʿ h-bhrn tlt n snt* and translates it as “he escaped on this boat *t/šʿy* to the waters of the two rivers for thirty years.” The photograph is not of high enough quality in the publication to scrutinize the glyphs effectively but Macdonald’s reading of *h-bhrn* rather than *ʿbhrn* appears secure. This would appear to be a dual and therefore could likely refer to the two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. It should be noted, however, that the river Euphrates has previously appears in Safaitic as *nhr frt* (RWQ 329). And *nhr* as a toponym has appeared in HASI 23, *dbʿ nhr* “he raided at Nhr,” but it is impossible to determine which river was known simply as “River.”

There is, however, nothing that proves that *h-bhr* in this text and the *h-bhrn* of al-Salameen et al.’s inscription have the same signification, or even if *h-bhr* refers to a body of water. We must, therefore, err on the side of caution and keep this term untranslated until future finds clarify its meaning.

tdy “he called upon”: This verb appears to be the Gt-stem of *ndy/ndw/nd* attested previously, cognate with Classical Arabic *nadā* “to call out.”¹⁹ The present context sug-

15 LANE, 1479a.

16 LANE, 156c.

17 Leslau 1987: 91; cf. Sabaic *bhr* “sea.”

18 Al-Salameen et al. (2018).

19 Only the form *ndw* was attested at the time of the compilation of the Safaitic Dictionary (SAFDICT, 102), but the other forms have appeared in unpublished texts since.

gests that the G- and Gt-stems have an identical—or nearly identical—meaning. The gods our writer calls upon are discussed in Appendix 1 of this book.

dl m 'hm “let whosoever causes sorrow be debased”: *dl* appears to be a by-form of the previously attested *dll* “to be contemptible,” “to be debased.”²⁰ The verb *'hm* should be understood as the C- stem of *hamma* “to be concerned, distressed,” and so would mean “to cause sorry or distress,” comparable to *'b's* “to inflict misfortune.”²¹

Second Narrative

The second narrative concerns the author's present activities in the area.

drs h-ʾrd “he returned to this land time after time”: This expression is attested for the first time here and does not seem to have any parallels in the corpus thus its interpretation must remain extremely tentative. The word *ʾrd* and perhaps *ʾrdt*, if the *t* is not a demonstrative element, are attested 9 times, four times as the object of the verb *r'y* “to pasture,” once of *byt* “to spend the night,” once of *'mr* “to dwell,” and once of *ǰzz* “to raid.” The verb *drs* however does not seem to belong to this family of activities. Rather, it recalls the use of *darasa* in later Arabic literature to describe the obliterated campsite as in the Muʿallaqah of Imruʿu l-Qays, *hal 'inda rasmin dārisin min mu'awwali* “is there any place for crying among an obliterated trace?” In this case, we should take *h-ʾrd* as the subject, but the masculine gender of the verb is anomalous, although not without precedent.²² If we choose to allow this grammatical irregularity, then it would produce *darasa ha'-arš* “the land's traces were obliterated,” a reasonable enough statement. If we, however, wish to maintain Moǧayyer as the subject, then perhaps it should be understood in a more literal sense—“he has returned again and again to this land,” drawing on the sense of repetition that this verb signifies. Indeed, such a sentiment is captured in other inscriptions: C 1860 *hl h-dr 'mf'm* “he camped in this place year after year”; WH 3636 *l qdmt bn 'hwf h-dr w r'y 'mf'm* “by Qdmt son of 'hwf, at this place, and his pastured year after year”; WH 3094 *l qsr bn 'hsn h-zrt 'rb' snn tly* “By Qsr son of 'hsn, at this shelter for four consecutive years.” I would prefer taking *drs* as “to return to a place again and again” in light of the Safaitic parallels.

wr'y nzt “and he kept watch to guard (against enemies)”: The verb *r'y* is attested previously as well and seems to overlap with other verbs of watchkeeping like *nzt/t(n)zr* and *hrš*. CEDS 298 states: *r'y šn' qrb* “he kept watch for enemies nearby.” The sense of *nzt* is also unclear. The verb *nzt* is used of keeping guard, usually with *šn'* “enemies” as its object or animals as a benefactive, *nzt b'd m'zy-h* “he kept guard on account of his goats.” If we choose to take *nzt* as the direct object, then perhaps it should be under-

20 SAFDICT, 66.

21 SAFDICT, 38.

22 For example, Q 2:48 *wa-lā yuqbalu min-hā šafā'atun* “and no intercession shall be accepted.”

stood as the plural of the active participle *nāṭer* “guard” or perhaps even “scouts,” meaning “he was on the look-out for scouts.” On the other hand, it could be an infinitive complement, “he was on the look-out to guard,” with an implied subject of enemies, predators, or anything else that would cause distress.

w y’s swy h-bhr “and he despaired being away from *h-bhr*”: This phrase restates the two clauses of the first narrative *’mr swy-h ’rb’t šhr w y’s m-nfs-h*.

f ngy l-h-mdnt “then he set off to the province to fight”: The first narrative tells us where Moğayyer departed from to serve and this section explains that he set off to the province, presumably the Roman province of Syria or Arabia.²³ The use of this term implies a connection with the Romans so perhaps Moğayyer was conscripted into the Roman military and his activities here are in his capacity as a Roman auxiliary fighter.²⁴ This interpretation will bear on the understanding of *hrm* in the discussion below.

f q’d w wgd ’tr {m}{h-}r{m} “and he halted and found some traces of Hrm”: The typical stopping at a ruin phrase to find the *’tr* “traces” or *sfr* “inscription” of a loved one.²⁵ Moğayyer however discovers some traces, using the partitive, of a group called *hrm*. The area in which this inscription was found was surveyed in a comprehensive manner and no texts mentioning a lineage group *hrm* were discovered. It is therefore unclear if Moğayyer had found these traces at the location in which he carved his inscription or if he simply recognized the names of individuals whom he knew belonged to this group but who did not explicitly identify as such in their texts.

The final part of this inscription contains formulaic language and does not require any grammatical or lexical comments. We may conclude however with the observation that the author longs for *hrm* and wishes for anyone who finds his text to have a safe return, perhaps indicating a social or political affiliation with *hrm*.

The Identity of hrm

Macdonald skillfully treated the evidence for the relationship between *rm*, *’l rm*, and *hrm*.²⁶ He demonstrates that *rm* and *’l rm* refer to the Romans or Rome, while *hrm* could be parsed as either *rm* “Rome” with the article or a separate tribal group called *hrm*. In support of the latter interpretation, Macdonald argues that the dating formula of C 1713, *snt wsq ’l qdm ’l hrm* “the year the lineage of Qdm contended with the *’l hrm*” suggests that the *’l hrm* were simply a group of nomads like the *’l qdm*. While certainly possible, this interpretation is not required. RDNH 1 is dated in a similar way, *snt wsq ’l ḥwlt ’l nbṭ* “the year the lineage of Ḥwlt contended with the Nabataeans (lit. the people

23 For a discussion of the possibilities, see Macdonald (2014: 146–153).

24 On the involvement of local nomads in the Roman military, see Macdonald (2014) and Al-Jallad and Bernard (2021).

25 On this formula, see SAFDICT, 15–16.

26 Macdonald (2009, II: 331–334).

of Nabataea),” where *ḥwlt* is a nomadic tribe from North Arabia.²⁷ This would seem to suggest that *wsq* could apply to a conflict between a tribal group and state.

The group *hrm* is mentioned in two new texts that place it alongside *ḥwlt*:

AL-NAMARAH.M 3

ḥrṣ ḥwlt w hrm fh lt slm

‘he kept watch for Ḥwlt and Hrm so, O Allāt, may he be secure’

BES20 108

ḥrṣ hrm w ḥwlt

‘he kept watch for Hrm and Ḥwlt’

It may be significant that *ḥwlt* is always mentioned alongside outside groups in contexts such as these. For example, in WH 3736.1, the author invokes Roḏaw for aid against his enemies who are raiders from (or: by means of spoil from) Rhy, Nbṭ, and Ḥwlt. All three are groups whose bases lie outside the Ḥarrah and whose members do not normally produce Safaitic inscriptions. Another text, BES18 5, records keeping watch for enemies from a group called *hgr* and *hrm* (*tṣr šn’ hgr w hrm*).²⁸ These facts suggest that *hrm* is in fact a group that comes from beyond the Ḥarrah and is classified alongside other outside groups, like the Nabataeans and Ḥwlt. This could of course apply to Rome but it need not necessarily.

Another clue as to the identity of this particular group may come from the types of gods our author invokes. His invocation provides us with a political geography of our author’s world. He begins with the Gadd of *h-bḥr*, an unknown place, but then invokes Gadd-Ḍayf, the tutelary deity of the Ḍayf tribe centered in the Ḥarrah. The next three gods he invokes are also worshipped by the Nabataeans: Dusares, Obodas, and Šay’haqqawm. The former two are explicitly connected to the Nabataeans, *dśr* being their national deity and *’bdt* a deified Nabatean king. Next come the Gadd of Hrm, followed by ‘zz, most likely ‘azīzu worshipped at Palmyra,²⁹ and finally the god of the tribe of Rhy, if my reading is correct, which appears to have been a North Arabian group positioned between Liḥyān (Ḥegrā) and Ṭayyi’ (Ḥā’il), both groups mentioned in the Safaitic inscriptions.³⁰

27 See Norris and al-Manaser (2018) on the Ḥwlt in Safaitic and their historical context and Macdonald (2009, II: 308, n. 36) on the possible connection with Hegra.

28 The identification of *hgr* here is unclear. The same consonantal skeleton appears to refer to the city of Gerra in the South Arabian texts; see Robin and Prioletta (2013).

29 See Texidor (1979: 70).

30 See Norris and al-Manaser (2016: 14) for a rough geography of the social groups of North Arabia. On the tribe of *rhy*, which appears as *rhw* in the Thamudic B texts, see Norris (2017).

The deities mentioned cover the political and cultural centers of the early 1st millennium CE North Arabia and adjacent areas. In the east, 'zz represents Palmyra, while three deities of the Nabataeans are invoked, and then the god of *rhy* takes us into Northern/Central Arabia. Three centers of power that appear in the Safaitic inscriptions remain unaccounted for—the territory of the Romans, the important trading cities on the Euphrates, and Persia. Of course, it is not a requirement that these places be mentioned—indeed, Khnup 1 presents a similarly long list of deities, spanning from the Ḥawrān to the area of Ḥā'il, including a Gadd of the Nabataeans, but with no explicit reference to a “Roman” god. Nevertheless, if we are to follow the reasoning presented above, one could make the argument that *hrm* in this context reflects the Romans and their territory while *h-bhr* refers to the Euphrates, perhaps to places like Dura Europos, where Safaitic inscriptions have been found, or perhaps an area between the two rivers like Hatra, where unpublished Safaitic inscriptions are rumored to have been discovered.³¹ We may rule out a connection with the Persians, who are called *h-md(y)* in Safaitic.

A final piece of evidence may also support the identification of *hrm* as Rome. The rock drawing that accompanies this text depicts a mounted lancer wearing what appears to be a ceremonial Roman plumed helmet. His armor/tunic is more difficult to identify. The straight lines rule out musculata, scale armor. It could possibly represent a type of lamellar armor or simply a cloth tunic. In terms of style, one may compare drawing to the Bellerophon mosaic from Palmyra (ca. 260AD).³² In any case, if this drawing is a depiction of Moğayyer in Roman military garb, then it would suggest that *ngy* signifies his conscription into the Roman military—as would the phrase *ngy l-h-mdnt*—and therefore support the identification of *hrm* in the present context as “Rome.”

BESS19 2b

l grm'l bn ġyr'l bn šbḥ bn śmt w nḥl h-dr

'By Grm'l son of Ġyr'l son of Šbḥ son of Śmt and we (?) encamped in this place.'

Commentary

This individual appears in the epigraphic record for the first time here. The expression *nḥl h-dr* is new; the normal formula employs the third person masculine singular form *ḥll h-dr*. It is possible to take it as a first person plural of the prefix conjugation, indicat-

31 On the inscription from Dura Europos, see Macdonald (2005). Photographs of inscriptions from this area have been posted on the internet by amateurs but it is impossible to verify their provenance.

32 <https://www.theoi.com/Gallery/Z44.1.html>.



FIGURE 22 BESS19 2b

ing a shift in subject. Or one might understand it as an N-stem passive with “place” as its subject, but this would produced the awkward and unparalleled construction, “this place was encamped.”

The nfs Complex

The following texts come from the *fs* complex described in § 2.1. The site overlooks a large bend in Wādī al-Khuḍarī and contains two cleared out spaces, each about 3 meters in diameter, around which the inscriptions are clustered, along with a row of small tumuli running roughly east-west. There are 18 inscribed stones at the site bearing 38 inscriptions. Two individuals are grieved for at this site, *ś'* and *nr*. The texts in BESS19 3 are dedicated to *nr* and the construction of his *fs* while the texts of BESS19 9 record grieving *wqm* for *Nr*. BESS19 9b and 10b, however, grieve for both *ś'* and *nr*, which may indicate that the two groups knew each other. The cluster of grieving texts in this prominent place in the landscape, along with the tumuli and enclosures suggest that place functioned a mortuary site. No excavations were possible to determine if a grave was present or if—as in the case of the cairn of S'd—there was no grave and the dead men were placed in above ground installations.



FIGURE 23 Overview of the *nfs* site looking southwest



FIGURE 24 View of the *nfs* site looking northeast



FIGURE 25 Enclosure South



FIGURE 26 Enclosure North



FIGURE 27 BESS19 9–10 in context between the stone enclosures



FIGURE 28 BESS19 3

BESS19 3

- a) *l š' bn 'ḍr bn wdm h-ʿfs*
 'These funerary monuments are for Š' son of 'ḍr son of Wdm.'
- b) *l mġny bn š' bn 'ḍr w bny h-ʿfs w n's m-ḥrn*
 'By Mġny son of Š' son of 'ḍr and he built these funerary monuments, and he carried (him) upon the bier (to this place) from the Ḥawrān.'
- c) *l 's bn š' bn 'ḍr w wgm 'l-š'*
 'By 's son of Š' son of 'ḍr and he grieved for Š':'
- d) *l šmt bn šn' bn grm w wgm 'l-ḥbb w bny h-ʿfs*
 'By Šmt son of Šn' son of Grm and he grieved for a beloved and built the funerary monuments.'
- e) *l kḥsmn bn s'd*
 'By Kḥsmn son of Š'd.'



FIGURE 29 BESS19 4

BESS19 4

- a) *l bgt bn 'sd bn ḥwr bn 'tq*
- b) *l zṇ'l bn 'bd bn n'mn bn kn bn n'mn*
- c) *l 'n{f} bn grm'l*

Note: 'nf son of Grm'l may also have authored BESS19 9g.



FIGURE 30 BESS19 5



FIGURE 31 BESS19 6



FIGURE 32 BESS19 7

BESS19 5

- a) *l mn' bn šnf bn kšdy bn 'slm bn 'rbb bn byy w wgm 'l-gml w 'l-tqm*
 'By Mn' son of šnf son of Kšdy son of 'slm son of 'rbb son of Byy and he grieved
 for Gml and for Tqm.'
- b) *l khl bn db'l*

BESS19 6

l d'b bn mlk

BESS19 7

l mqm bn ymlk w wgd 'tr d'b w ḥrśn fng'fh lt slm
 'By Mqm son of Ymlk and he found the traces of D'b and Ḥrśn and grieved in pain
 so, O Allāt, may he be secure.'



FIGURE 33 BESS19 8

Note: Mqm son of Ymlk appears to be the author of the ^{rb} inscription and camel drawing published in Al-Jallad (2020a) from Naq'at al-Khuḍarī.

BESS19 8

- a) *l gdlṭ bn r[b] bn bny bn 'l w wgm 'l ḥbb*
 'By Gdlṭ son of [Rb] son of Bny son of 'l and he grieved for a loved one.'
- b) *l 'nzt bn n'r bn 'nzt bn ḥlm bn bn{y}*



FIGURE 34 BESS19 9

BESS19 9

Small Cartouche

- a) *lfrs bn nr bn rf't w wgm 'l-nr*
 'By Frs son of Nr son of Rf't and he grieved for Nr.'
- b) *lrf't bn nr bn rf't w wgm 'l-nr//w 'l-ś' w 'l-mty*
 'By Rf't son of Nr son of Rf't and he grieved for Nr//and for Ś' and for Mty.'
- c) *lḏr bn nr bn rf't w wgm*
 'By Ḍr son of Nr son of Rf't and he grieved.'

Large Cartouche

- d) *lsby bn 'by w wgm 'l-nr*
 'By Sby son of 'by and he grieved for Nr.'
- e) *lḥddn bn.frs*



FIGURE 35 BESS19 g top

Note: Frs son of Nr son of Rf't seems to be the author of RR 3. Frs, Rf't and Dr are brothers. Hddn may be the son of Frs. The relationship of Sby son of 'by to the group is not known, as he has not appeared in the corpus before, but he would appear to have some relation as he is grieving for Nr as well, presumably the father of the brothers.

BESS19 g Top

- f) *l hny bn 'nf bn grm'l*
 g) *l 'nf bn grm'l bn brk {b}{n} {?}{n} {f} {b}n 'n'm bn dhd bn w'l bn rbn bn s'*

Note: Hny son of 'nf son of Grm'l has produced two other texts, C 3945, 3986. 'nf son of Grm'l could be his father and also the author of BESS19 4c.

BESS19 10

- a) *l gml*
 b) *l's bn rzn bn {r} lbn'l bn ... w wgm 'l-nr w 'l-s'*
 'By 's son of Rzn son of {Rbn'l} son of ... and he grieved for Nr and for S'
 c) *l mlkt bn s' bn 's w t<>>zr h-hyt*
 'By Mlkt son of S' son of 's and he kept watch for the traveling party'



FIGURE 36 BESS19 10

- d) *l ngm bn 's*
 e) *l mhl bn 's*

Notes: The author of BESS19 10b grieves for Nr and Ś', mentioned in BESS19 9. He may have been part of the grieving party but added his text to a nearby stone as the others had exhausted the writing surface of BESS19 9. Mhl and Ngm may be brothers, sons of 's son of Rzn.

BESS19 11

- a) *l hbt bn grm bn śn' bn ghm*
 b) *l mn' bn śnf*

BESS19 12

- a) *l hrśn bn hlf bn n'mn bn ... bn n'mn bn w'l bn rbn*
 b) *... rbn bn ... ṭhrt bn hwsr bn b's bn dfw 'hd h-ḥsy snt qtl n'rt*
 '... Rbn son of ... Ṭhrt son of Hwsr son of B's son of Df and he took possession of this area with a small amount of surface water the year n'rt was killed.'



FIGURE 37 BESS19 11

BESS19 13

- a) *ly{s}y bn ḥn'l bn bdd bn 'b bn ysm^ol w wgd 'tr šy'-h fng' w h lt 'wr d 'wr*
 'By {Ysy} son of Ḥn'l son of Bdd son of 'b son of Ysm^ol and he found the traces of his companions and so grieved in pain; and, O Allāt, blind him who would efface (this).'
- b) *l mn't bn 'ḥwḏ bn zrd bn 'ḥwḏ bn r{ḡ}d{n} bn rbn bn šbq bn sl'*

BESS19 14

l bnt



FIGURE 38 BESS19 12



FIGURE 39 BESS19 13



FIGURE 40 BESS19 14



FIGURE 41 BESS19 15



FIGURE 42 BESS19 16

BESS19 15

- a) *l syh w wgm 'l-h-h l-gmm*
 'By Syh and he grieved for his brother, for Gmm.'
- b) *l syh bn 'gys bn lbdhm*

Note: The author of both of these texts may be one and the same.

BESS19 16

l {h}m{l} bn gl bn hml



FIGURE 43 BESS19 17

BESS19 17

l khl bn dr'l bn mlk bn rjđ w bwy h-{r}đ bql

'By Khl son of Db'l son of Mlk son of Rđđ and he returned to fresh herbage at this meadow.'

BESS19 18

l 'shr bn hđmt

'By 'shr son of Hđmt.'



FIGURE 44 BESS19 18

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