The Legendary Tribe of Ṭṣʿm: The First Evidence for Its Existence in a Safaitic Inscription from Jordan

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Abstract

This research studies a remarkable Safaitic inscription recently recovered in the al-Lazāyym region in the north-eastern Bādiyah of Jordan. This inscription is important because it mentions the extinct Arab tribe of Ṭṣʿm. This inscription represents the first recognizable reference of Ṭṣʿm ever to appear in a Semitic inscription.

Keywords: Extinct Arab tribes, Ṭṣʿm, Safaitic, Semitic Inscriptions, Bādiyah of Jordan.

Introduction

Finding unique Safaitic inscriptions has become frequent lately, especially under the many surveys done by multiple teams from different countries around the world and especially by the Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES) team associated with the Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA) (http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana).¹ The BES team documented thousands of inscriptions (Safaitic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Greek, Arabic, mediaeval and Modern Arabic inscriptions)² and also compiled a huge database to serve all researchers in the field.

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¹ (The Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA) was started at the University of Oxford. The project aims to renew our knowledge of ancient Arabia in term of history, cultures, and languages. This objective is achieved by crafting an electronic corpus of all identified pre-Islamic engravings from Central and North Arabia. The database offers a reading of each script—both reproduced fonts of the ancient letters and in roman transliteration—as well as an English translation, references to previous readings, explanation where needed, bibliography, and all recognized data about the inscriptions, such as origin, the technique of engraving, and relation to other scripts or to petroglyphs. The record of each text is supplemented with photographs (when possible) and facsimiles, and these can be downloaded for free at adequate resolutions for publication purposes. The Corpus can be straightforwardly updated when new findings are reached and can be entirely searched based on words, names, subjects, and grammatical features, http://krc2.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/).
² There have been many projects in the Jordanian Badia to document the inscriptions. These include: the Hashemite University Project supervised by Sultan Al-Maani and Hussein Al-Qudrah; Mahdi, a project at Yarmouk University supervised by Hani Hayajneh; and the Surveys Project of the South of Wadi Al-Khadari by Younis Shdeifat, Ziad Al-Salamin, and Rafie Harahsheh.
of inscriptions.

In the corpus of inscriptions, many names of tribes are found, as well as historical references to the Romans, the Persians, or Roman emperors, which indicate a cultural connection between these communities and the “Safaitic,” though it should be noted that in inscriptions it was common to mention the name of the kings and the people from a historical point of view. This inscription was found during a recent epigraphical survey, it contains clear evidence mentioning the Ṭs‘m tribe, which was considered a legendary tribe: so, do we have the first evidence of its existence?

Figure 1: A map showing the sites where inscriptions were found and recorded.

Description of the Stone

A small basalt stone with dimensions of approximately 45×50cm, contains two Safaitic inscriptions (Nos. 1 and 2), apparently engraved with a sharp tool. The letters in both inscriptions are clearly incised and the reading provided below is certain (Figure 2).
Figure 2: Photograph of the stone

![Photograph of the stone]

Figure 2: Tracing of the stone

Inscription No 1

Translation

\[ l\ h\n\ 'b\ n\ h\ g\ y\ b\ n\ h\n\ 'l\ d\ -\ l\ t\ s\ 'm\ w\ t\ s\ 'w\ q\ 'l\ t\ s\ 'm\ w\ 'l\ q\ y\ m\ t\ w\ 'l\ c\ s\ 't\ r\ w\ g\ l\ s\ ' m\ n\ r\ m\ h\ w\ n\ d\ m\ 'l\ s\ ' h\ m\ b\ b\ n\ b\ -\ f\ r\ t\ f\ h\ d\ s\ ' t\ r\ m\ h\ w\ l\ t \]

Translation

By Hn' son of Hgy son of Hn' of the lineage of Ts'm and he longed for Ts'm and Qymt and C's'tr, and he halted galloping (horse), and he grieved for his companions of beloveds in the Euphrates, Ô Ds' [grant] vengeance from Hwlt.

Commentary

The importance of this inscription comes from the mention of the extinct Arab tribal name of Ts'm; a tribal name hitherto unrecorded either in other Safaitic inscriptions or in ancient Semitic inscriptions.

Ts'm

The noun Ts'm has been noted as a personal name in other Safaitic inscriptions (see: OCEANA: C 1273, 4390), but it is mentioned here for the first time in Safaitic as a tribe name.

Ts'm is the name of one of the famous extinct tribes of the Arabs (al-'arab al-bāʾida). It is considered among the oldest classes of Arabs, as they are the sons of Lūdḥ bg. Sām bg. Nūḥ (Ibn Ḥazm 1962: 1-9). We do not have reliable sources to date Ts'm's history precisely, as they have not been identified in archaeological work, and the writings of other people unsurprisingly did not mention Ts'm. They have been written about in classical Arab poetry, and in the reports of Arab classical historians, geographers, and travelers (Ali 1993: 334). Thus, some researchers have tried to produce a picture of Ts'm that is closer to myth than to actual history: for example, some claimed that Ts'm and Jidis were cousins who lived together in al-Yamamah between 110 BCE and 525 CE, which was one of the most fertile countries during that time (Ali 1993: 334).

Some researchers propose that Ts'm is a mythical tribe, and that the story with Jidis is not true, particularly one part about a woman who belonged to the tribe of Ts'm but was married to a member of the sister tribe Jidis. She was called Zargāʾ al-Yamāma, “the blue-
eyed woman of Yamāma”; it said that she had a rare gift, as she was believed to have the ability to see riders from the distance of one week (Ali 1993: 334).

Regarding our inscription, the subject of the study, we only have a few indications that confirm the existence of Ṭs’m. Firstly, a Greek text dating back to the year 322 CE was found by D. H. Müller at Salkhad in Syria. It mentioned a person who belonged to the Ṭs’m tribe, called ‘Anam Tassam (Müller 1877: 67). Secondly, it is suggested that the Ṭs’m tribe is directly linked with Biblical genealogies, and thus precedes the split into Northern and Southern Arabs, as shown by Adnan. J. Zaydan (1922: 66), who identifies Ṭs’m with the Biblical "Letushim” of Genesis 25:3, as it is mentioned with another Arab tribe from Dedan, “Leummm.”

Genesis 25:3:

וְיַּקָּשֶׁן יָלָדוּת אֶת־שְׁבַּא וְאֶת־דָּדָן וּבְנֵי דָדָן הָיוּ אְשֻׁרִים וּלְטוּשִׁים וּלְאֻמִּים

“And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummm”

According to scholars, Ṭs’m land was inhabited by Jadis in the historical region of al-Yamamah, the now-extinct ancient village of Jaww al-Yamamah (al-Hamawi 1995: vol. 2: 96). For some scholars, it seems that this was not the first home of Ṭs’m (Mahran 1998: 167-168). In their early history Ṭs’m and Jadis lived together in the lands of Babylon, and when the Persians invaded the lands of Babylon they then moved into the Arabian Peninsula and settled between al-Ahqaf, al-Bahrain, and al-Yamamah (Heinrichs 2000: 359-360).

Both tribes were ruled by a king from Ṭs’m called ‘Amlīḳ (or ‘Amlūk), who was a vicious and tyrannical ruler. ‘Amlīḳ humiliated and dishonored Jadis who rebelled against him, crushed him and killed his entourage. A few men of Ṭs’m managed to escape the massacre, among them Reyāḥ ibn Murrah, the brother of Zarqā’ al-Yamāmah. Reyāḥ ibn Murrah headed south to King Ḥassān ibn Tubba’ of Yemen and asked him to avenge their dead. King Ḥassān seized the opportunity, as it was always his wish to expand his kingdom northwards to include al-Yamamah. He returned to Jadis territory and fought them until they were wiped out, and thus the two tribes perished (al-Mas‘ūdī 1990, Vol 2. 106-110). In Arabic literature, the story of Jadis and Ṭs’m is frequently told, such as by the poet al-Būsīrī who said: (al-Būsīrī :2011109)

هَلَكَتْ جَديسُ وطَسْمُ حِينَ تعاَدَتَا وكأَنَّ طَسمًا لمْ تكنْ وَجَديسا

“Jadis and Ṭs’m were wiped out when they were hostile to one another as if they had never been”

Our inscription, the subject of this study, is the strongest evidence yet that shows that Ṭs’m was not a mythical tribe. Moreover, this inscription hints that their original territory may be the Euphrates region.

‘ṣ’tṛ: pn. It is not hitherto known in Safaitic. We may compare it with the name ‘ṣ’tṛt attested in Oxtoby no. 275, which according to Oxtoby (1968: 84, no. 275), may be derived from the divine name Ishtar.

gls’: v.g-stem. “To halt”. Root: gls “(see: Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019: 72). It is the equivalent of the Arabic جَلَسَ/galasa “to halt” (see: Ibn Manẓur: galasa). rmḥ: v.g-stem. Root. rmḥ. rmḥ as a noun “Lance, Spear” is frequently attested in Safaitic. It is attested here for the first time as a verb in Safaitic. It could be the equivalent of the Arabic رَمَحَ.
Iramaha “Spearing, or galloping horse”. رمـح /ar-ramḥ in Arabic is the fastest a horse can move (Ibn Manẓur 2003: rmḥ). It is noteworthy that other Safaitic inscriptions used the formula rmḥ b-rmḥ to express the act of striking with a spear (See: Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019). Thus we think that it is better to translate rmḥ in this inscription as “galloping horse”.

mḥbbn: n.pl. “beloved ones”. Root: ḥbb. The noun mḥbb has been noted as a singular noun in many other Safaitic inscriptions (see: Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019: 95), but it is attested here for the first time in Safaitic in its plural form.

frt: Top. “Euphrates”. This noun has been noted in other three Safaitic inscriptions. It is attested as a personal name in CSNS, and as a toponym in other two inscriptions: the first is RNQ 329: lʿqr b bn grmʾl bn bḥtn w ḥrṣ ʾbgʾ -h šmkʾ -l- {n} hr frt f ḥ rḏf sʾlm “By ʿqr bn of Grmʾl son of Bḥtn and he kept watch for ʾbgʾ, his brother, at Ṣmkʾ bordering the {river} Euphrates, so, O Ḫḏf, let there be security”; and the second is: 3 lḥrt bn nmgn ḍ- lʾsʾ w ṭjm l- ṭj w ṭjm l- frt f ḥ l ṭ sʾlm “By Ḥrt son of Nmgn of the lineage of ṣʾ and he grieved for {Yʾṯ} and he had perished and he travelled quickly to Frt and so Ô, Lt [grant] security.”

Inscription No 2

Transliteration
ltm bn bln ḍ- lʿlyn wgls

Translation
By tm son of bln of the lineage of ‘lyn, and he encamped

Commentary
This short inscription was found above the first one (no. 1) on the same stone. It contains the author's name and his genealogy. Tm son of bln—the author of the inscription—mentions that he encamped (in this place). Bln is a personal name that has been noted on eight other Safaitic inscriptions (see OCIANA)4.

ʿlyn: is a tribe name attested here for the first time in Safaitic inscriptions. It was a branch of a Hamadan tribe, which is one of the most famous Kahlani tribes that were known before Islam, and it had a great reputation after the advent of Islam.

Conclusion
This research presents and analyzes unique Safaitic inscriptions found during an epigraphic survey in the al-Laẓāiym region of the north-eastern Bādiyah of Jordan. The first inscription mentions the legendary tribe of Ṭsʾm, which is one of the most famous extinct Arab tribes. The inscription contains the first reference to this tribe in the ancient Semitic inscriptions discovered so far. Both inscriptions reveal new verbs, personal names, and tribe names hitherto attested for the first time in Safaitic.

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3 URL of this record (for citation): http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0024104.html
4 URL of this record (for citation): http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0004958.html
## Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BES</td>
<td>Badia Epigraphic Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>g-stem</td>
<td>ground stem (form I).</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSNS</td>
<td>Clark, V.A. 1979. A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan</td>
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قبيلة طسم الأسطورية: أول دليل على وجودها في نقش صفوي من الأردن

مهدي عبدالكريم محسن الزعبي١، خالد سليمان مناحي الجبور٢، اسماعيل ناصر عبد الله أبو عامود٣

ملخص

ينتناول البحث دراسة واحد من النقوش الصفويَّة المهمَّة، الذي جرى اكتشافه مؤخَّرًا في منطقة اللظايم في البادية الشمالية الشرقية الأردنية؛ إذ يرد فيه اسم قبيلة طسم، وهي إحدى القبائل العربيَّة البائدة.

ويعد هذا النُقش أول دليل صريح على تكرر هذه القبيلة البائدة في نقش سامي.

الكلمات الدالة: قبائل عربيَّة بائدة، طسم، الصفويَّة، نقوش ساميَّة، بادية الأردن.

1 إدارة الموارد التراثية، كلية الملكة رانيا للسياحة والتراث، الجامعة الهاشمية.
2 قسم الآثار، كلية السياحة والآثار، الجامعة الأردنية.
3 قسم الإدارة السياحية، كلية السياحة والآثار، الجامعة الأردنية.

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