

## **“Analytical Study of Four Arabic Inscriptions from Jordanian Badeyā”**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an analytical study of four Arabic inscriptions inscribed on a basalt stone uncovered in Wādī Al-ṣbeḥiAlġarbi (the west Al-ṣbeḥi valley), in the Jordanian Ḥarrah (black desert), in northeastern Jordan. The earliest one was written by Jumā‘ah bin Rajab in 749 AH = AD 1348), the second undated text was inscribed by Salim Bin Shafi‘, the third was written by a certain Suleimān in 801 AH = AD 1398 and the last one was written by Zakarīyya bin Rif‘at and is dated to 14th of Rajab in 1346 AH=AD 6th January 1928.

The inscriptions contain beside personal names, wisdom phrases, Islamic prayers, and the name of two important towns: Damascus and Taymā’.

The paper discusses the reason behind the consequence of the inscriptions on the same stone, and sheds light on the valley where they were discovered, which seemingly was a major way linking Syria with northwest Arabia.

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## دراسة تحليلية لأربعة نصوص عربية من البادية الأردنية

يونس الشديفات

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زياد السلامين

### ملخص

يناقش هذا البحث بالدراسة والتحليل أربعة نقوش عربية، كتبت على حجر بازلتي، عثر عليه في وادي الصبحي الغربي، في الحرة الأردنية، في شمال شرق الأردن.

نُقلت هذه الكتابات متتابعة، وعلى فترات تاريخية مختلفة، أقدمها كتابة جماعة بن رجب في عام 749هـ، والموافق لعام 1348 ميلادية، ثم نقش سال (م) بن شفيع (دون تاريخ)، تبعه نقش سليمان وأرخ بعام 801 هـ، والموافق لعام 1399 ميلادية، وأخيراً جاء نقش زكريا بن رفعت في 14 رجب عام 1346 هـ، والموافق للسادس من كانون ثاني لعام 1928 ميلادية.

يرد في هذه الكتابات إضافة لأسماء الأعلام، والحكمة، والدعاء، أسماء مدينتين مهمتين هما تيماء ودمشق.

يناقش البحث أيضاً سبب تتابع هذه الكتابات على نفس الحجر، وهل كان هذا الوادي ممراً، أو طريقاً يصل ما بين سوريا وبين شمال غرب الجزيرة العربية، عبر وادي السرحان.

## **Introduction:**

The Jordanian Badeyā in general and the northern-east Badeyā, known as the Jordanian lava plains in particular are rich in too many archeological sites as well as the inscriptions written on their black basalt stones and rocks. The Arabic Safaitic inscriptions are the most prevalent and date back to the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Arabic Islamic inscriptions are in the second rank in terms of their prevalence (Al-Jbour, 2001: 667-673). The excavations also revealed few inscriptions in the Aramaic and Syriac languages (Al-Khreisheh, 1999; Harahshah and Desreumaux, 2016), the Nabataean (Winnett and Harding, 1978: 540), the Greek (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaseer, 2015), and Palmyrene,(Winnett and Harding, 1978: 541).

The findings of the excavations and the archeological surveys performed in the region reflected an image about the social and economic life which manifested the region during and after the modern Stone Age (Betts et al, 1985), as well as the activities of hunting and grazing (Helms and Bitts, 1987:41-67); which also reflects a continuous image in the region recently.

Additionally, the inscriptions give us information about the political situations, as well as the relationships with the neighboring regions ( Al-shdaifat, 2005; Al-Harahsheh and Al-shdaifat, 2006; Al-Harahsheh and Al-shdaifat, 2007). They also tell us about the economic circumstances and the living methods (Al-Jbour, 2011), information about the tribes and their political and social conditions (Al-Rousan , 1992; Al-Ahmad, 2008), in addition to the religious information's (Al-Maani, 1993).

The Jordanian Badeyā, throughout history, was a center of civilized interaction with the neighboring regions and a pathway for trade caravans as well as for the tribes in their continuous travelling in search for food and water. It wasn't separated from the events that took place in the region, as it affected and was affected with the surrounding events, and the inscriptions referred to in this study give an example for that. These inscriptions give the dating of three different stages; they were written on one stone by several people who passed through that specified site, indicating that there was a way for communication, transportation, as well as civilized connection in the region where the stone was found.

The site: The inscriptions were found on a stone located in a small hill, in Al-ṣbeḥi western valley, about 46 km south east of Al-Ṣafāwi (map 1), with the coordination (E 37, 44, 34, 9; N 31, 54, 46, 8). It is a fertile valley extends from the north-east towards the south-west, it usually floods during winter, and the water is used for growing barley until the recent time. The hill is located in the middle of the valley; it is about 30 m from the valley bottom and about 725 m above sea level. The hill includes some stone piles with Safaitic inscriptions on some stones. The stone was found in the western side of the hill beside a Safaitic stone pile, within an area that was used as a mosque during the Islamic period, which is 6m long × 2m wide.

### Map 1: The inscriptions Site (Google Earth)

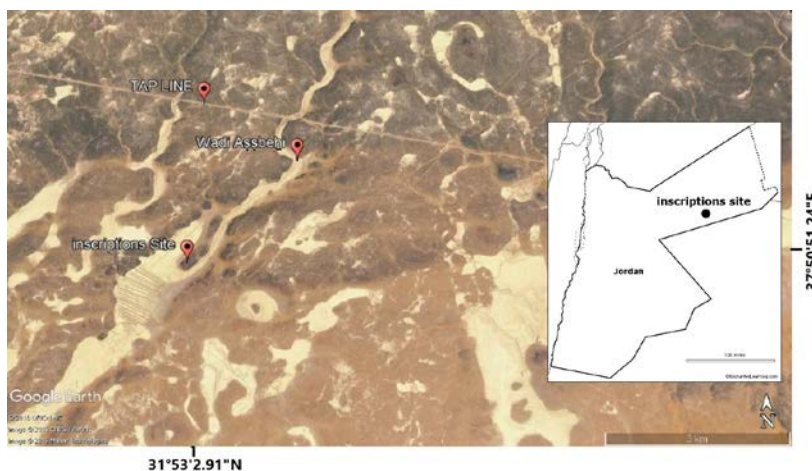
#### The stone description:

It is a basalt stone with a smooth surface and an inconsistent rectangular shape (30cm long×29 wide). In addition to the inscriptions, it also contains

Other scabbles in the shape of multi-direction lines, which refer to a later period. The right side of the stone shows the shape of a camel, and that hid a part of the first three inscriptions, so we couldn't verify the exact reading of this part, while the other inscriptions were clear, especially the dates which represent the most important part of these inscriptions.

#### The inscriptions Reading (panel 1):

#### The First Inscription:



كتبه جماعه ابن (كذا) رجب الجسمي سنة تسع واربعين  
وسبعمايه (كذا) أحسن وازرع لك زرعن (كذا) تعيش به  
وعامل الله في (محن؟) فتلقاه كتب جماعه غفر الله له ولمن  
.... وقرأه وقال امين

It was written by Jumā'ah'ibn Rajab Al-Jašmi in 749; do well and grow for yourself to live from; worship Allah in all the circumstances and He won't disappoint you. Jumā'ah also wrote, may Allah forgive its writer, reader and those who say Ameen.

The Second Inscription:

اللهم اغفر لسال (م)  
..ابن (كذا) شفيح ابن محمد ابن قادر (قاهر)  
من تيماء

May Allah forgive Salem 'ibnŠafi' 'ibnMuḥammad'ibn Qadir (Qahir) from Taima'.

The Third Inscription:

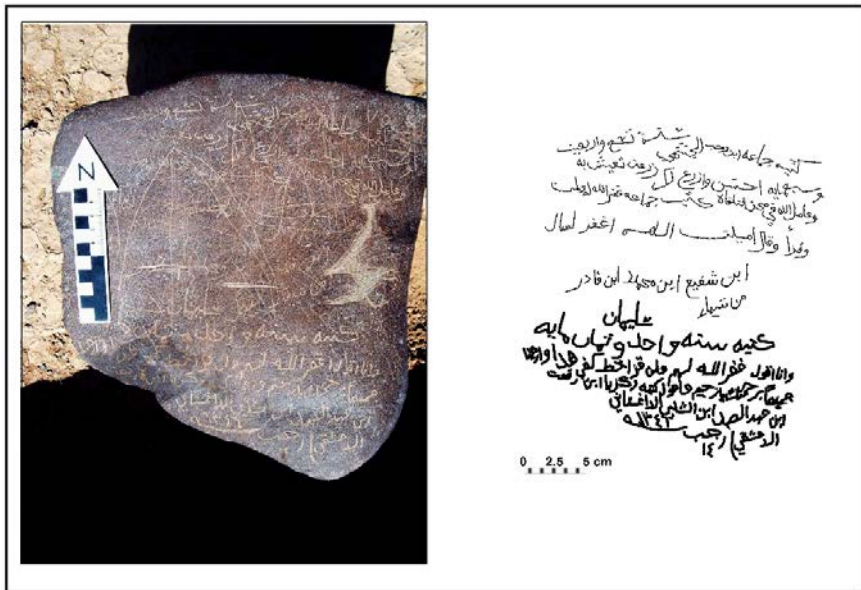
سليمان  
كتبه سنه (كذا) واحد وثمان مايه(كذا)

Suleiman wrote it in eight hundred and one

The Fourth Inscription:

وانا اقول غفر الله لهم ولمن قرا خط كفي هذا وارحمنا  
جميعا برحمتك يا رحيم واقول كتبه زكريا ابن (كذا) رفعت  
ابن (كذا) عبد الصمد ابن(كذا) الشلبي الداغستاني الدمشقي / 14 رجب 1346

And I say , may Allah forgive them and for those who read this my hand writing, I ask Allah to include us within his mercy, written by Zakariya 'ibn Rif'at 'ibn 'bd Al-Şamad 'ibn Al-Şalabi Al-Daġistani Al-DimaŞqi/ 14 Rajab, 1346.



Panel 1: Photo and drawing of the inscriptions (by Rafe‘Harahşah)

**Comments:**

The first inscription began by the word "wrote it" and then the name of the writer, "Jumā‘ah 'bn Rajab", after that the date was mentioned "749", followed by a wisdom "do well and grow something for yourself to live from" and worship Allah in all the circumstances and he won't disappoint you ( since the good deeds and fear from Allah give the future fruits at the times if crises, as Allah helps the believers). Then, the first name of the writer is repeated “Jumā‘ah wrote", followed by asking for Allah forgiveness for himself, the reader and the one who says Ameen.

The second inscription: the writer begins by asking for Allah forgiveness, followed by the writer's name " Salem 'bn Şafi' 'bn Qadir or (Qahir), and finally he mentions that he is from Tayma'.

The third inscription: the writer mentions his first name "Sulaimān", and then he writes the year "801".

The fourth inscription: certainly, he wrote it after reading the previous inscriptions. The inscription started by the phrase "and I say", then he asked Allah to forgive all of them and forgive those who read his handwriting, and asked Allah to include everyone within his mercy. Then, he mentions his full name (Zakariya 'ibn Rif'at 'ibn 'bd Al-Šamad 'ibn Al-Šalabi Al-Daġistāni Al-DimaŠqi), and finally he writes the date in day, month and year 14 Rajab, 1346.

The calligraphy type: The simple Nuskha script was used in the first three inscriptions, while the Ruq'ah script was used in the fourth inscription, and sometimes in interacted with the Nuskha script; we can see that in writing the letter "K" in the words "Kaffi" and Zakariya".

Ornament: the four inscriptions are free from ornament, except for simple ornament that appeared above the letter "S" in the first and second inscriptions, and took the form of number "7" with a decline downward at the end. This kind of ornament is well-known in such inscriptions during the Mamluk period (Al-Jbour, 2011:11).

The implementation method: the first and second inscriptions were written by using the method of light scratching on the stone surface with a sharp tool, and the fourth inscription was written in the same way, but with a thicker tool and a frequent scratch on the stone surface, while the third inscription was written by the continuous hammering using a thicker tool.

### **The inscription characters:**

The first inscription: Jumā'ah 'ibn Rajab Al-Jašmi. The name of this writer and the name of his son Harūn were mentioned many times within the Arabic inscriptions in the Jordanian Ḥarra, and in one of them he described himself as the orator, which is a job for clergiesor those who teach reading and writing (Al-Jbour, 2011: 4). Jumā'ah was interested in trading and discourse (Al-Jbour, 2011), so he travelled a lot, and wrote many inscriptions; his name was mentioned in an inscription in Ma'anin the south of Jordan (Al-Abidi, 1973:271). Within his writings, he referred to a lineage of Zobaid tribe and Al-Masa'id tribe. These tribes are still existing and live in the north-east regions of Jordan.

The second inscription: Salem 'Ibn Shafia 'Ibn Mohammad Ibn Qadir (Qahir) (unknown).

**The Third inscription: Suleiman (unknown).**

The fourth inscription: Salem 'ibn Šafi' 'ibn Muḥammad 'ibn Qadir (Qahir) (photo 1). Using the social network, we were able to reach his son Dr. Rif'at, who provided us with information about his father. He said that his father was born in Damascus in 1901 and died in 1965; he had a secondary certificate and masters the Turkish, English and French languages. He worked as an assistant manager for the castle prison in Damascus in the 1920s. After the great Syrian revolution in 1925, he helped a number of revolutionaries to escape from prison, and then he escaped and joined the Syrian revolution. It seems that he was in the region where the inscription was found during that period, since the Jordanian Ḥarra was a secure place for the Syrian revolutionaries. Then, he went to Palestine where he stayed until 1936, and went back to Damascus after declaring the general amnesty. He worked as an employee in the ministry of endowment in 1939. Later, he became the champion of the Syrian republic in the game of wrestling.



**Photo1: Zakariya and his brother 'zzat (Dr Rif'at Archive)**



The sites names: the inscriptions included the names of two important cities; Taima' and Damascus. The city of Damascus was mentioned as his lineage and references in the fourth inscription.

Damascus: the capital of the Syrian republic. It is situated on the edge of low land in the eastern side of the Lebanon eastern mountain ranges, and at the borders of the Syrian Badeyā. The settlement began in it since the early Stone Age and continued until the recent time (Pitard, 1987:1-17). It became the capital of an important Aramaic kingdom in the first millennium B.C. the Assyrian conquered it in 732 B.C. Then, it was ruled by the Babylon, Persian, Greek and the Nabataeans, and was lately conquered by the Romans in 64 B.C and was incorporated in the Decapolis ally (Burns, 2005:8-54).

Damascus underwent the Islamic rule after Al-Yarmouk battle in 636 AD, and then it became a capital for the 'Umayyad caliphate, while its position declined during the Abbasid caliphate. However, it maintained its economic and strategic position which continued over the following periods.

Taima': it is situated north west the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is about 64 km in the south east of Tabūk, and 350 km south east of Al-Jouf, and 150 km north west of Al-Ula ( Mada'in Saleh) ( Al-Taima'i, 1991:15). It is a low-lying oasis which is (9km long × 6km wide) (Abu Darak, 1986:2). In the middle of the city, there is Haddage well, the greatest and the most famous well in Saudi Arabia (Al-Sinani, 2009:43). The city is a commercial center which connects the northern and southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula with the ports of the Arab Gulf, Syria, and the ports of the Mediterranean (Al-Taima'i, 1991: 29).

### **Conclusion:**

The existence of inscriptions in the same place, and on one stone, indicates that the site was a pathway; it could be a commercial path that connects Syria with the Arabian Peninsula. It could had also been related to the important commercial way across Wadi Al-Serḥān that connects between Al-Jawf in the north west of Saudi Arabia and al-Azraq Oasis in Jordan, and then completes its way towards Boşra and Damascus, which was known as the Diocletian road ( Al-shadaifat, 2006:11) ( map 2).



Map2: Proposed Route.

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