Unpublished Nabataean Inscriptions from Southern Sinai

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors present a group of previously unpublished Nabataean inscriptions discovered in three sites in the southern Sinai Peninsula, and these are Wadi Kharig, Wadi al-Humryat, and Wadi el-Bdʿ. As part of the study, the personal names and the vocabulary mentioned in them have been thoroughly analyzed.

Keywords

Introduction

The texts being discussed were found in the following sites:

Site 1. Wadi Kharig (Nos. 1–7): Located approximately 7 kilometers west of Serabit el-Khadem; this site contains many inscriptions dating back to the Nabataean period.[1]

Site 2. Wādi Al-Humryāt (Nos. 8–19): The site is located one kilometer north of Wadi Mukattab.[2]

Site 3. Wadi Al-Bdʿ (Nos. 20–21): It is located about 30 kilometers north of Serabit el-Khadem. It can be reached from the Umm Ridim area.[3]

Inscriptions

Site 1. Wadi Kharig

Inscription no. 1

Transliteration

slm grm ʾlb ʿly br
ʾ ʾl ʾ bṭb w slm
M (n) qdm dwšr (ʾ) ʾlh ʾ

Translation

Good greeting of *grm ʾlb ʿly* son of *ʾ ʾl ʾ* and good luck in front of the god *dwsr ʾ*

Commentary

slm: A noun in the masculine singular absolute, that means 'peace or greeting',[4] and *salām* in the Arabic language means peace and safety.[5] The word is found in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions.[6]

grm ʾlb ʿly: A compound personal name in the verbal sentence form, consisting of two syllables, the first syllable is *grm* which means *cut* in language[7] and 'decided' in Semitic inscriptions. The name appeared in other Nabataean inscriptions in a simple form *grm- grm ʾ- grmw, ʾlgrmw*, and in compound forms with the names of gods, such as *grm ʾlb ʿly, grmil, grm ʾlhy*.[8] The name appears in various forms in a number of Semitic inscriptions, such as Aramaic,[9] Palmyrene,[10] and Thamudic.[11]

ʾ ʾl ʾ: A simple personal name, meaning 'high status'.[12] It occurs frequently in Sinai Nabataean inscriptions in a variety of forms, such as *ʾ ʾl ʾ, ʾ ʿly, y ʿl ʾ*,[13] and appears in Safaitic,[14] as well as Thamudic.[15]

M[n]: Preposition, it occurs frequently in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions.[16]

qdm: Adverb meaning before or in front of.[17] It appears in Aramaic,[18] and Sabaic in the same form.[19]

dwšr[ʾ]: A compound divine name, consisting of two syllables, the first syllable is *dw* 'owner', and *šr ʾ,* which is derived from Sharah mountains. He is the supreme god of the Nabataeans, and his name appears in the majority of the Nabataean regions.

ʾlh ʾ: A singular masculine noun, meaning God. The name is mentioned in the Nabataean inscriptions in the forms *ʾlh, ʾlhy, ʾlh ʾ, ʾlhy*,[20] and appreared in Aramaic in the form *ʾlh*,[21] and in Palmyrene.[22]

Inscription no. 2

Transliteration

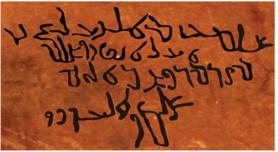*slm w ʾlʿrfw*

Translation

sālem and *Al-ʿRf*

Commentary

slmw: Sālem is a simple personal name. It means innocent of pests, defects, and all kinds of evil.[23] It is one of the common personal names in Nabataean[24] and other Semitic inscriptions such as Aramaic in the form *slm, slmʾl, slmy, slmn*.[25] The name appeared in Palmyrene in the form *Slm, slmw*,[26] and mentioned in Thamudic in the form *slm*,[27] and appeared in Safaitic and Lihyanite.[28]

ʾlʿrfw: A simple personal name. The name was mentioned in other Nabataean inscriptions in the form *ʿrfw, ʿrfwn*,[29] perhaps derived from the Arabic *al-Irfaan* meaning knowledge,[30] and it was mentioned in the form *ʿrfn* in the Safaitic inscriptions.[31]
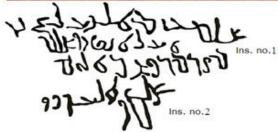

Fig. 1. Inscription Nos. 1, 2. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Inscription no. 3

Transliteration

ḏkyr zydw br wʾ(lw)

Translation

Remembrance of *zydw* son of *wʾlw*

Commentary

ḏkyr: A noun in the masculine singular construct (passive participle). Possibly from the verb *ḏkr*.[32] It occurs frequently in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions, especially in memorial inscriptions where it is used as an introductory form, the same form was used in the international Aramaic and Palmyrene.[33]

Zidw: *zydw*: Zaid, Ziyād a simple personal name meaning increase and growth.[34] It occurs frequently in Nabataean in numerous forms as *zyd, zydw, zyd ʾlhy*.[35] It occurs frequently in other Semitic inscriptions, such as Aramaic in the form *zyd, zydw*,[36] and Thamudic in many forms as *zdʾl, zd Sms, zd qm*.[37]

wʾ(lw): A simple personal name. Perhaps it was derived from the Arabic word *waal* which means to take refuge or escape.[38] It is one of the common names in the Sinai Nabataean inscriptions in the form *wʾlw- wʾlt*.[39] The name appeared in Safaitic and Thamudic in the form *wʾlt*,[40] and in the form *wʾlh* in the Lihyanite.[41]

Inscription no. 4

Transliteration
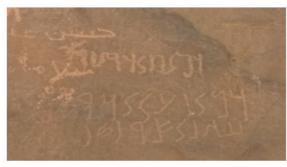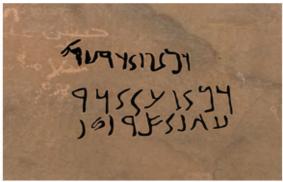
ḏkyr ʿyydw br ḥrySw bṭb

Translation

The good remembrance of *ʿyd* son of *ḥrySw*

Commentary

ʿwdw: A simple personal name. The name may be read *ʿwdw* which is derived from the root *ʿāḏ* meaning resorting to Him.[42] The name appeared in Aramaic in the form *ʿyḏw* as an abbreviated form meaning to take refuge in God,[43] and mentioned in Thamudic, Safaitic and Lihyanite in the form *ʿyḏ*.[44]

Ḥryšw: A simple personal name. The name appeared in Nabataean in many forms *ḥrš, ḥryš*,[45] and appeared in the same form in Palmyrene and Hatra,[46] and in form *ḥršt* in the Thamudic.[47]
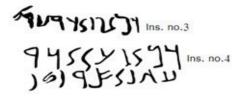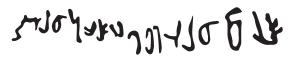
Fig. 2. Inscription Nos. 3, 4. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Inscription no. 5

Transliteration

slm ʾlgrmw br sʿdʾlhy

Translation

Greetings of *ʾlgrmw* son of *sʿdʾlhy*

Commentary

sʿdʾlhy: A compound personal name in the nominal sentence form. Consisting of two syllables, the first syllable is *sʿd*. It means happiness or good luck,[48] it occurs frequently in Nabataean in many forms such as *sʿdw- sʿdʾ- sʿdy*,[49] and the name *sʿd* was found in Palmyrene, Safaitic, Lihyanite in the same form.[50] In the form *Sʿdt* in Thamudic.[51] The second syllable is *ʾlhy* a masculine noun in the singular construct meaning 'my god'. It occurs frequently in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions,[52] so a compound name *sʿdʾl(hy)*, meaning *sʿd* is my god, or happiness of Allāhʾ.

Inscription no. 6

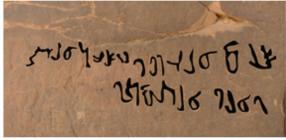**Transliteration**

(slm) wʾlw ʾltmryw

Translation

Greetings of *wʾlw ʾltmryw*

Commentary

This short memorial text must begin with the singular masculine noun *Slm* meaning 'greetings, peace', widely known in the Nabataean inscriptions followed by the name of the engraver of the text

wʾlw- wāel, while the last word is read *ʾltmryw*. Perhaps it is a personal name meaning 'who loves dates',[53] that has never been pronounced with the word *pr*. Or, it refers to the position of *wʾlw- wail*, who trades in dates.[54]

Fig. 3. Inscription Nos. 5, 6. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Inscription no. 7

Transliteration

d̲kyr ʾswdw

Translation

Remembrance of *ʾsd*

Commentary

ʾswdw: A simple personal name, meaning 'lion'. The name appeared in Nabataean in many forms as *ʾswdw, ʾsdw, ʾsydw*.[55] It appeared in Palmyrene in the form *ʾsd, ʾsdw*,[56] and in the forms *ʾsd, ʾsdt* in Thamudic.[57] The name was found in Sabaic in the form *ʾsd* in more than one meaning, such as men, warriors, soldiers.[58]

Fig. 4. Inscription No. 7. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Inscription no. 8

Transliteration

slm f ʾtw br grm ʾlb ʿly

Translation

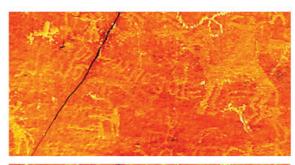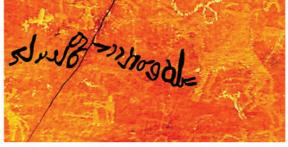Greetings of *fʾtw* son of *grm ʾb ʿly*

Site 2. Wadi Al-Humryāt

Fig. 5. Inscription No. 8. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Inscription no. 9

Transliteration

slm šmrḫ w ʿmyw
w šmrḫ bryh bṭb

Translation

Good greeting of *šmrḫ* and
his Sons *ʿmyw and šmrḫ*

Commentary

šmrḫ: A simple personal name. Perhaps it was derived in the Arabic language from ʾl- *šmrḫ*, which is a long round head at the top of the mountain. Or it is probably derived from *šmrḫ* word, which means the thin branch on which the palm fruits grow (dates).[59] Perhaps it is the intended meaning of the name for the spread of palm trees in the desert areas and their importance in the life of the Arabs, and this was reflected in their names and drawings in which palm trees had a great part. The name was mentioned in other Nabataean[60] and Thamudic inscriptions.[61]

W: A conjunction, meaning 'and'.[62]

ʿmyw: A simple personal name. Perhaps it was derived from the root ʿmm, which means included them, or means the man who became uncle and he generalized the people with the gift.[63] The name occurs frequently in other Nabataean inscriptions.[64] The name appeared in the Aramaic inscriptions in the form ʿmw which means 'the uncle'.[65] It also occurs in the form ʿmt in Palmyrene, which means 'completed',[66] and found in the form 'am' in Thamudic.[67]

bryh: His sons, his children. A masculine plural noun added to the relative pronoun.[68]

Inscription no. 10

Transliteration

slm ……
br grm ʾlb ʿl(y)

Translation

Greeting of… son of *grm ʾlb ʿly*

Inscription no. 11

Transliteration

slm ʿwdw br
ʿmyw tb bṭb

Translation

Good greeting, and Peace of *ʿwdw*
son of *ʿmyw*

Commentary

ʿwdw: A simple personal name. The name may be read ' *ʿwḏw* ' which is derived from the root ' *ʿāḏ* ' meaning of resorting to Him.[69] The name appeared in Aramaic in the form ' *yḏw* ' as an abbreviated form meaning to take refuge in God,[70] and mentioned in Thamudic, Safaitic and Lihyanite in the form *ʿyḏ*'.[71]

Inscription no. 12

Transliteration

slm ʿwdyw br …..

Translation

Peace of *ʿwdw* son of …..

Commentary

Incomplete inscription. The name of ' *ʿwdyw* ' is a simple personal name, a name that is a diminutive form from the previous name ' *ʿwdw* '.

Inscription no. 13

Transliteration

slm ʾwsw
br fṣyw bṭb

Translation

Good greeting of *ʾws* son of *fṣy*

Commentary

ʾwsw: A simple personal name. Perhaps it was derived in the Arabic language from the root ' *ʾsth* ' meaning gave him, so the name meaning is 'the gift'.[72] The name appeared in the Nabataean inscriptions, and it is one of the common names in the Sinai Nabataean inscriptions.[73] It is also found in Aramaic in the form ' *ʾys* ',[74] ' *ʾwsy* ' in Palmyrene, and in the form ' *ʾws* ' in Thamudic.[75]

Fṣyw: A simple personal name. Perhaps it means 'Getting out of distress to abundance and prosperity or getting rid of evil' in the Arabic language.[76] It occurs frequently in Nabataean (especially Sinai Nabataean inscriptions) and other Semitic inscriptions,[77] such as

Thamudic which exists in the form '*fṣy, fṣyt*',[78] and the name is known in Qatabanic inscriptions in the form '*f ṣ y*'.[79]

Inscription no. 14

Transliteration

Dkyr w'lt br 'myw bṭb

Translation

The good remembrance of *w'lt* son of *'myw*

Inscription no. 15

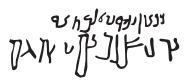**Transliteration**

slm s'd'(lhy)
br 'bd'lb'ly

Translation

Greetings of *s'd 'lhy (allāh)* son of *'bd'lb'ly*

Commentary

'bd 'lb'ly: A compound personal name in the nominal sentence form. Consisting of two syllables, the first syllable is ''*bd*' meaning 'servant'.[80] It occurs frequently in Nabataean and other Semitic inscriptions,[81] and it appeared in many forms ''*bd*'-'*bdyw*- '*bd*- '*bdy*'.[82] The second syllable is ''*lb'ly*' it appeared a lot meaning as 'masters, leaders, gods'[83] so a compound name means 'servant of *al b'ly*'. It occurs in Aramaic in many forms, such as ''*bdb'l*-'*bdb'lt*- '*bd b'lyt*'.[84]

Inscription no. 16

Transliteration

ḏkyr nbhw br 'l ktyw
br nšnkyh br bḥgh

Translation

Remembrance of *Nbhw* son of *'l ktyw* son of *Nŝnkyh* son of *bḥgh*

Commentary

Nbhw: *Nābh*, and *n'bēh*, a simple personal name. *N'bhw* in Arabic language meaning getting up and attention from sleep, or famous, and active.[85] The name appeared in Nabataean inscriptions,[86] and Ancient Arabic inscriptions in the form '*nbh*'.[87]

'l ktyw: A simple personal name. The name appeared in Nabataean inscriptions,[88] and Cantineau compares it to the Arabic name *K'tw'*, or perhaps the name has a Latin derivation and it is similar to the Latin name *Cutaiu*.[89]

Nŝnkyh: A simple personal name. No explanation was inferred for this name, or its source was known. Its appearance in the Nabataean was limited to the Sinai inscriptions, in which it was mentioned about twenty-four times before.[90] While a personal name similar to the formulation of this name was mentioned, but it is a feminine noun that was mentioned only once in the al-Ulā inscriptions in the form *nSkwyh*.[91]

bḥgh: A simple personal name. *'l bḥgh* in Arabic language meaning 'Beauty and happiness'.[92] The name appeared in Sinai Nabataean inscriptions.[93]

Inscription no. 17

Transliteration

ʿSmrw br ʾsdw...

Translation

ʿSmrw son of ʾsd

Commentary

ʿSmrw: (Uncertain reading of this name because the first letters are not clear). Maybe this name is a Latin name, and it appears for the first time.

ʾsdw: A simple personal name. Meaning 'lion'. The name appeared in Nabatean in many forms as 'swdw, sdw, sydw'.[94] It appeared in Palmyrene in the form 'sd, sdw',[95] and in the forms 'sd, sdt' in Thamudic.[96] The name was found in Sabaic in the form 'sd' in more than one meaning, such as men, warriors, soldiers.[97]

Fig. 6. Inscriptions Nos. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. (By Eslam Sami)

Inscription no. 18

Transliteration

slm
ʿbd ʾl ʾẖw
ʾbw br wʾlw

Translation

Greeting of ʿbd ʾl ʾẖw ʾbw son of wʾlw

Commentary

ʿbdʾlʾẖw: A compound personal name in the nominal sentence form. Meaning 'servant of al ʾẖw'. Perhaps this compound name appears for the first time in Nabataean inscriptions.

ʾbw: A simple personal name, that means 'father'. The name is mentioned in Palmyrene in the form ' ʾbʾʾ',[98] and in the form ' ʾb' in Minaic.[99]

Inscription no. 19

Transliteration

d̲kyr ʿw
dw br zydw
(b)tb……….?

Translation

Good Remembrance of *ʿwdw* Son of *zydw* ….

Inscription no. 20

Transliteration

ḏkyr y ʿly
br ʿmyw bṭb
slm

Translation

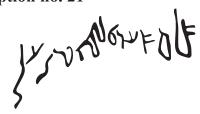Good greeting, remembrance of *y ʿly*
son of *ʿmyw*

Fig. 7. Inscriptions Nos. 18, 19, 20. (By Eslam Sami)

Site 3. Wādi Al-Bdʿ

Inscription no. 21

Transliteration

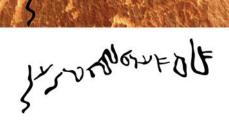*slm s ʿd ʾlhy br y ʿly*

Translation

Greetings of *s ʿd ʾlhy* Son of *y ʿly*

Fig. 8. Inscription No. 21. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Inscription no. 22

Transliteration

ḏkyr wdw br ʿmyw bṭ(b)

Translation

The good remembrance of *Wdw* son of *ʿmyw*.

Fig. 9. Inscription No. 22. (By Mahmoud Salem)

Conclusion

These inscriptions, which were thoroughly analyzed, provide details for the study of the history and the language of the Arab tribes who inhabited or passed the Valleys of Sinai.

These Nabataean inscriptions are memorial inscriptions, in which the traveler records his name, the name of his father, and sometimes the name of his grandfather, accompanied by words that express his wishes, such as the words (*Slm*: peace, greetings), (*ḏkyr*: for remembrance), and *(bṭb*: good luck, in goodness).

These inscriptions, as the shapes of letters indicate, data back to the period between the third and the second centuries CE, and indicate that Sinai was a crossing point for Nabataean trade caravans on their way to the cities of the Nile Valley.

The Nabataean inscriptions, which are also widespread in the eastern Nile Delta and the Eastern Desert of Egypt, indicate the existence of an integrated Nabataean community in Egypt. This is confirmed by archaeological evidence and Nabataean architecture found in Qasrawet in northern Sinai and al-Shuqafiya in the eastern Nile Delta.

The inscriptions in this study, provide thirty-six items of vocabulary and proper names, including: one-word names, such as (*ʾlʾ* – أعلى, *sʾlm* سالم,, *lgrmw* – الجرم, *ḥrySw* – حريش, *ydw* – عيد, *wʾlw* – وائل, *myw* – عمي, *smrḫ* – شمرخ, *w(ʾ)lt* – وائلة, *sdw* – أسد, *nbhw* – نبه, *fṣyw* – فصي, *wsw* – أوس, *wdw* – عود, *bḫgh* – بحجه, *nšnkyh* – نشنكيه, *ʾl kʾtyw* – الكتي, *yʾly* – يعلي, *Smrw* – عسمر).

Compound proper names, such as (*grm ʾlbaly* – جرم البعلي, *sʿd ʾlhy* – سعد الله, *ʿbd ʾlbʿy* – عبد البعلي); and abbreviated proper names, such as (*ʾwsw* – أوس, *Zydw* – زيد).

Annexes

Personal Names

Name	Inscription number
ʾwsw – أوس	(13)
ʾlgrmw – الجرم	(5)
ʾl kʾtyw – الكتي	(16:1)
ʾlʿrfw – العارفُ	(2:1)
ʾʿlʾ – أعلى	(1:1)
ʾsdw – أسد	(17)
ʾswdw – أسد	(7)
bḥgh – بحجه	(16:2)
grm ʾlbʿly – جرم البعلي	(1:1), (8), (10:2)
w(ʾ)lt – وائلة	(8), (14)
wʾ(lw) – وائل	(3), (6), (18:2)
Wdw – ود	(22).
Zydw – زيد	(3)
Zydw – زيد	(19:2)
ḥrysw – حريش	(4)
yʿly – يعلي	(20: 1), (21)
nbhw – نبه	(16:1)
nšnkyh – نشنكيه	(16:2)
ʿbd ʾlbʿly – عبد البعلي	(15:2)
ʿbd ʾl ḫw ʾbw – …)	(18:1)
ʿwdw – عود	(11:1), (19).
ʿwdyw – عود	(12)
ʿydw – عيد	(4)
ʿmyw – عمي	(9), (11:2), (14), (20:2), (22).
ʿsmrw – عسمر	(17)
fṣyw – فصي	(13:2)
sʾlm – سالم	(2:1)
sʿdʾlhy – سعد الله	(5), (15:1), (22)
šmrḫ – شمرخ	(9:1:2)

Vocabulary

Vocabulary	Meaning	Inscription number
ʾlhʾ	God	(1:2).
Br	Son	(1:1), (3), (4), (5), (8), (11:2), (12), (13), (14), (15), (16), (17), (18), (19), (20:2), (21), (22).
bṭb	Good	(1:1), (4), (9:2), (13), (14), (19), (20), (22).
dkyr	Remembrance	(1:1), (4), (7), (14), (16), (19), (20).
W	And	(2), (9: 1:2).
m(n) qdm	front of	(1:2).
Slm	Greetings	(1:1), (2), (5), (6), (8), (9), (10), (10: 2), (11:1), (12), (13), (15), (15), (18), (20:3), (21).

Divine Names

Inscription number	Name
(1)	dwsr(ʾ)

Acknowledgement

Acronyms

Arab Arch Epig: Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy.

BASOR: Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research.

BSOAS: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.

PJAEE: PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology.

PSAS: Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies.

Endnotes

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