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ṢAFAITIC is the modern name given to a group

of graffiti in a North Arabian language, expressed in a variety of the South Semitic script. They are found mainly on rocks in the deserts of southern Syria, north-eastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia, with isolated finds in ʿIrāḳ, Lebanon and at Pompeii (see M.C.A. Macdonald in *Syria*, lxx [1993], 304-5 for references), and their distribution and content show that they were written almost exclusively by nomads. They are conventionally dated between the 1st century B.C. and the 4th century A.D.

While the majority consist of the author's name and between one and 17 generations of his genealogy, a significant number also contain statements describing his actions or emotions, or events of which he was aware. Many also contain prayers to a variety of deities, and a considerable number refer to adjacent rock-drawings. This was the only period in which literacy has been widespread among the nomads of the Syro-Arabian desert—there are inscriptions by men, women and slaves [*fty*]—and these texts (and most of the Thamudic [*q.v.*] graffiti) are therefore the only surviving first-hand records of their way-of-life, before the pre-Islamic poetry. They are thus of considerable importance since they contain historical, linguistic and palaeo-ethnographic information which is not available from any other source. For a discussion of the phenomenon of literacy among these nomads, see Macdonald, *op. cit.*, 382-8.

The inscriptions were first discovered in 1857 near the eastern edge of the Ṣafā [*q.v.*] in southern Syria, and continue to be known by the 19th-century misnomer "Ṣafaitic", despite the fact that none have even been found within the Ṣafā itself (see *ibid.*, 305-10). More were discovered in 1860, and by 1901 the script had been deciphered. Throughout the 20th century a handful of expeditions have recorded vast numbers of these texts, and by the 1990s over 20,000 had been found in the limited number of areas which have been searched. There are clearly scores of thousands still awaiting discovery.

The Ṣafaitic alphabet belongs to the North Arabian branch of the South Semitic script. The palaeographical development, and the exact relationships within and between the North and South Arabian branches of this script are still disputed (see B. Sass, *Studia alphabetica*, Freiburg 1991, 28-93, and Macdonald in *Anchor Bible dictionary*, New York 1992, iii, 418-19 with script table). The Safaitic script appears to have been used solely for graffiti and to have been spread informally rather than in schools (idem, in *Syria*, lxx [1993], 382-8). Gemination of consonants is not represented, and, in contrast to Lihyanite [see LIḤYĀN], *matres lectionis* are not used, nor is there any notation of diphthongs (if they existed). Writing is continuous and without word-dividers and can be in any direction.

The language of the Ṣafaitic graffiti belongs to the group known as "North Arabian". Safaitic, together with Lihyanite/Dedanite, the different types of Thamudic, and Hasaitic, form a sub-group, known as "Frühnordarabisch", which is most obviously distinguished by its use of the definite article *h-/hn-*, in contrast to the other sub-group (which includes pre-Islamic and later Arabic), which uses *al-* (see W.W. Müller, in W. Fischer (ed.), *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie*, Wiesbaden 1982, i, 17-36). For descriptions of the grammar, see E. Littmann, *Safaitic inscriptions*, Leiden 1943, pp. xii-xxiv, and Müller, in *Procs. of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, x [1980] 68-72.

The nature and number of the Ṣafaitic inscriptions have produced an extraordinarily rich onomasticon (see Müller, *op. cit.*, 72-3 for a brief survey). Affiliation to a social group is expressed by taking the lineage back to the eponymous ancestor, or to one of his immediate descendants, or by use of the *nisba* (*h-dfy* "the Ḍayfite") or by use of the phrase *dh ʾl* at the end of the genealogy (*dhʾl df* "of the tribe of Ḍayf"). However, the word *ʾl* (cf. Ar. *ʾāl*) is used of all social groups from immediate family to tribe, and even of peoples such as the Romans. On tribes, see Lankester Harding, in *al-Abḥāth*, xxii (1969), 3-25, and Macdonald, in *Syria*, lxx (1993), 352-67.

There is no trace of Christianity or Islam in the Ṣafaitic inscriptions. Prayers are offered to a number of deities among which the commonest are *Lt* (variants (?) *ʾlt* (as in Nabataean and Palmyrene), and in theophoric names *h-ʾlt*, presumably equivalent to the *hn-ʾlt* in the 5th century B.C. Aramaic inscriptions on bowls found at Tell al-Maskẖūṭa in Egypt, one of which is by a king of Ḳēdār (Rabinowitz, in *JNES*, xv [1956] 1-9 and xviii [1959] 154-5), the *Alilat* of Herodotus 3:8, and Arabic al-Lāt [*q.v.*]); *Lh* (variants (?) *ʾlh* and *h-ʾlh*); *Rḍw/Rḍy*—apparently variants of the same name, for a deity of uncertain sex, but probably male and to be identified with *Ruldaiu* mentioned in the Assyrian Annals, *Orotalt* in Herodotus 3:8, *Arṣû* at Palmyra (see J.T. Milik, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux*, Paris 1972, 49) and *Ruḍan* of Ibn al-Kalbī, *K. al-Aṣnām*, Cairo 1914, 30-1; *Bʿlsʾmn* (the great Aramaean sky god, whose name usually appears in Ṣafaitic as a direct loan from Aramaic *Baʿalshamīn*, though occasionally it is found as a calque in the form *Bʿlsʾmy*); *Dsʾr* (a loan from Nabataean *Dwshrʾ*, Dushara, but with variants *dsʾry*, *dhsʾr*, and the etymologically correct *dhsʾry* (cf. *Dhu ʾl-Sharā* [*q.v.*]), which is, naturally, the common form in the Thamudic E texts of southern Jordan); *Sʾʿ-h-qm* (equivalent to Nabataean *Shyʿ-ʾl-qwm*) "the companion [or "succour", cf. Syriac *sûyāʿā*] of the group"; and *Ythʿ* (see Macdonald, in *Anchor Bible dictionary*, iii, 422). Invocations are also made to the *Gd* (i.e. *Tyche* or "Fortune") of the two major tribal groups, thus *Gd-Df* and *Gd-ʿwdh*.

Any of these deities can be invoked singly or together and there is no discernible difference in the requests made to them. By far the commonest is for security (*sʾlm*), but there are numerous prayers for relief (*rwḥ*) from privation, freedom from want (*ghnyt*), booty (*ghnmt*), etc., as well as curses on those who damage the inscriptions or drawings and, less often, blessings on those who leave them intact. Other religious expressions include *ʿwdh b hʾlh* ("and he sought protection in *h-ʾlh*" (WH 3923, re-read by Macdonald in M. Ibrahim (ed.) *Arabian studies in honour of Mahmoud Ghul*, Wiesbaden 1989, 65-6) which is paralleled by *ʿwdh b rdy* (WH 390). A number of other deities are attested in Ṣafaitic only in theophoric names, *Mnt* (cf. Nabataean *Mnwtw*, Arabic *Manāt* [*q.v.*]), *h-ʿzy* (cf. Nabataean *ʾl-ʿzʾ* and Arabic *al-ʿUzzā* [*q.v.*]), and, most common of all, *ʾl* (*ʾĪl*).

Of religious practice we have virtually no hint. The supposed Ṣafaitic evidence for pilgrimage to the temple of *Baʿalshamīn* (LP 350) is based on a misreading (see Macdonald, in *Syria*, lxx [1993], 315, n. 75 and 366, n. 414), though another text (CSNS 424) which refers to *Bʿlsʾmn* as "the god of Sīʿʿ", suggests that the author knew of his famous temple at that place. Inscriptions mentioning sacrifice (*dhbḥ*) are usually found in groups, and seldom specify either the victim or the deity, though two texts (C 4358 and 4360) say their authors sacrificed to *Bʿlsʾmn* and the authors of two others (unpublished) refer to a high place or altar (*ṣmd*) on which they sacrificed a camel (*dhbḥ gml ʿlh*).

Some texts record the building of a cairn (*rgm*) over

the dead (though cairns were often used for other purposes as well), a practice maintained by the modern inhabitants of the area, the Ahl al-Djabal (on "Ṣafaitic" cairns, see Macdonald, in Zaghloul *et alii*, *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan. IV*, Amman 1992, 303-7, and references there; on modern cairns, see W. and F. Lancaster in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, iv [1993], 151-69). Some Ṣafaitic texts also refer to a *baliyya* [*q.v.*], or camel left to die at the grave of its master, a pre-Islamic practice described by Islamic writers, and which is also mentioned in an unpublished Nabataean inscription from southern Jordan, which was found associated with a burial of this type. Large numbers of texts are concerned with mourning (*wgm, ndm, wlh,* etc.) and a belief in a personified Death or Fate (*Manāl/Manaⁿ, Manāyā*), paralleled in the pre-Islamic poetry, is suggested by the phrase "humbled by Fate" (*rgẖm mny*), which is often used of the dead.

It is clear from these texts that their authors were aware of events beyond the desert. Herod the Great and his successors appear to be mentioned several times, as are (unspecified) Roman emperors (*ḳṣr*) and at least one Nabataean king (see Macdonald, in *Syria*, lxx [1993], 323-46, and in *Trade, contact, and the movement of peoples in the Eastern Mediterranean. Studies in honour of J. Basil Hennessy*, Sydney 1994) and there are a number of (mainly enigmatic) references to the Romans (*Rm*), the Nabataeans (*Nbṭ*), possibly the Ituraeans (*Yẓr*), and the Persians (*Mdẖy*). Unfortunately, in most cases it is impossible to identify the exact events referred to. There are also indications that some of the nomads were recruited into auxiliary units of the Roman army (see Macdonald, in *Syria*, lxx [1993], 368-77). The Ṣafaitic inscriptions provide no evidence of a "nomadic threat" to the Roman provinces of Syria and Arabia.

These graffiti provide a picture of the daily life of their authors which shows them to have been fully nomadic, rather than sedentaries or semi-nomads, as has sometimes been suggested (see discussion in Macdonald, in *op. cit.*, 311-22). They were mixed pastoralists, migrating annually with their herds, both of camels and of sheep and goats, between the *ḥarra* (or basalt desert) of southern Syria and north-eastern Jordan, and the *ḥamād* (which they called *mdbr*), in what is now western ʿIrāḳ and northern Saʿūdi Arabia (see Macdonald, in *JRAS*, 3rd series, vol. ii [1992], 1-11, and in *AAE*, iii [1992], 27-30). Many record returning to the same campsites [*dr*] year after year (ʿ*m f* ʿ*m*) and the sadness they felt on finding the traces (ʾ*thr*) of friends or relatives—a commonplace of nomadic life elevated to an artistic convention in pre-Islamic poetry. Relatively few mention raiding (*ghzz*), which is sometimes supposed to have taken up most of a nomad's time, but it clearly played a part in both the culture and the economy. There are rock drawings showing raids (Macdonald, in *AAE*, i [1990], 24-28) and many other activities, especially hunting and fighting both on horseback and on foot. It is clear from these drawings that these nomads used the North Arabian (*shadād*) camel-saddle but, contrary to a common misapprehension, there is no evidence that these, or any other, North Arabian nomads ever fought from camel-back (see Macdonald in *Archaeology and the rise of Islam*, Special number of *Antiquity* [1995], and in *ZDPV*, cvii [1991], 103). Other entertainment was provided by singing and dancing girls (*ḳnt*, or simply *ghlmt*) who are also depicted in the drawings with bare breasts and swinging tasselled belts.

"*South Ṣafaitic*". E. Knauf has proposed that some of the texts labelled by Winnett "Thamudic E" (later, inappropriately, "Tabuki Thamudic") should be reclassified as "South Ṣafaitic" on the grounds that in style and onomastic content they had more in common with Ṣafaitic than with other forms of Thamudic (Knauf, in *Annual Dept. of Antiquities, Jordan*, xxvii [1983] 587-96). However, the fundamental work on these inscriptions by G.M.H. King has shown that they form a clearly definable group, related to, but distinct from, Ṣafaitic, and that they cannot be divided in the way Knauf suggests (see her *Early North Arabian Thamudic E*, diss. London 1990, in preparation for publication). It is therefore preferable to retain the old neutral label, "Thamudic E", rather than "Tabuki Thamudic" (only a small minority of the texts have been found near Tabuk) or "South Ṣafaitic", which blurs important distinctions. As would be expected, there are a handful of texts which seem to display features of both Ṣafaitic and Thamudic E and these are generally known as "Mixed texts" (see THAMUDIC and Macdonald, in *ADAJ*, xxiv [1980] 188).

Bibliography: In addition to works cited in the text, see for bibliographies, W.G. Oxtoby, *Some inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin*, New Haven 1968, and V.A. Clark, *A study of new Safaitic inscriptions from Jordan*, diss. available from University Microfilms International Ann Arbor 1979 [= CSNS].

General surveys: M.C.A. Macdonald, in *Anchor Bible dictionary*, New York 1992, iii, 418-23 (with script table and examples of texts) (N.B. the section on "South Ṣafaitic" should be corrected by reference to the present article), and W.W. Müller, in *PSAS* (1980), 67-74 and the works of Oxtoby and Clark mentioned above. For a detailed discussion of the historical content of the texts, see Macdonald in *Syria*, lxx (1993), 303-408.

Major collections: *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum, pars v*, Paris 1950-1 [= C], E. Littmann, *Safaitic inscriptions*, Leiden 1943 [= LP] which contain texts mainly from Syria; F.V. Winnett, *Safaitic inscriptions from Jordan*, Toronto 1957, idem and G. Lankester Harding, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic cairns*, Toronto 1978 [= WH], and the works of Oxtoby and Clark cited above, which contain texts from Jordan. Several thousand texts recorded in Jordan by Macdonald, King and Clark are in preparation. Safaitic inscriptions from northern Saudi Arabia are published by A. Jamme, in F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Christentum am Roten Meer*, Berlin 1971, i, 41-109, 611-37, and idem, in *Oriens Antiquus*, vi (1967), 189-213, and ix (1970), 129-32 (the interpretations in these three works should be treated with caution). Finally, G. Lankester Harding, *An index and concordance of pre-Islamic Arabian names and inscriptions*, Toronto 1971, is still an indispensable tool.

(M.C.A. MACDONALD)

SAFĀḲUS, conventional European form SFAX, a town of Tunisia, on the eastern coast to the north of the Gulf of Gabès.

The historical study of the towns of Tunisia poses a series of problems, the approaches to which are far from uniform, given the sparseness of information. The urban societies did not preserve the pieces of evidence, above all, the written ones, concerning their own past nor did they transmit them intact to us. Given these lacunae, stretching over a long period of centuries, historical information is necessarily laconic and disparate.

There was nothing which destined Sfax to become a great regional centre. In order to achieve this, the