

Badia Epigraphic Survey

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The Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES) was established in 2015 to make systematic surveys of inscriptions and rock art of all periods in the basalt desert of northeastern Jordan. It aims to record and give accurate GPS locations not only for new inscriptions and drawings but also for those copied and/or photographed before GPS was available and which therefore have imprecise provenance and/or unreliable images.

In 2018, the BES surveyed the area where the basalt desert (*ḥarrah*) runs out and the limestone desert (*ḥamād*) reappears. This “border,” in the region of Qasr Burqu‘, runs roughly north-south through southern Syria and northeastern Jordan to the border with Saudi Arabia. It is where the ancient nomads, who some 2,000 years ago carved their graffiti in the Safaitic script, gathered at the end of the dry season waiting for the first rains, after which they could pasture their animals on the herbage of the *ḥamād*.

As well as discovering several thousand new inscriptions, we also rediscovered large numbers previously published from hand copies or often unclear photographs and with little or no accurate provenance. As well as Safaitic texts, we found several Greek, Nabataean, one Palmyrene, early and medieval Arabic, and large numbers of modern Arabic graffiti—now that the Bedouin are literate once more—as well thousands of rock drawings. The texts by the modern Bedouin are of great importance not only ethnographically but for comparison with the subject matter of the Safaitic graffiti carved by their predecessors 2,000 years ago.

All these are in the process of being studied and the ancient texts are being entered into the *Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia* (OCIANA) and so should be online shortly.

In the BES 2019 season we completed the survey of those areas of Wadi Sarah, Wadi Hashad, Wadi Qassab, and Wadi Salma that we had been unable to finish in previous seasons. We also surveyed Tall Dhiyab, Tall al-Jathum, Zumlat Umm Khunaysir, and Far‘ Umm Khunaysir (Fig. 1). Finally, with the kind permission of the Jordanian army negotiated by Ali Al-Manaser, and accompanied by soldiers, we were allowed to survey large areas in Wadi Jathum and Far‘ al-Majama‘ right up to the razor wire of the border, areas that had not been searched for inscriptions since 1950. In all these places we found very large numbers of graffiti and rock drawings and, whereas the inscriptions discovered in Wadis Salma, Hashad, Qassab, and Sarah were almost entirely new finds, some of those in the border area had been published previously from hand copies made in 1950 (Winnett 1957: nos 1–242). The readings of these can now be confirmed or corrected and their exact provenances established. Again, all these texts



with their photographs, coordinates, improved readings, and translations are in the process of being entered into OCIANA and will be available online.

Reference

Winnett, F.V. 1957. *Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan*. Near and Middle East Series 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.



Fig. 1. A modern burial cairn in Far' Wadi al-Mahdath found in the 2018 season. It was built by the Ahl al-Jabal Bedouin in 1985. It has an elaborate structure, and the coffee pots, at the left edge, were placed there to signify the deceased's hospitality. Some of the stones bear modern Arabic inscriptions mourning the deceased, now that the Bedouin are literate again, a practice very similar to that of their literate predecessors 2,000 years ago.