Some time in the mid-sixth century AD, an Alexandrian merchant, known to history as Cosmas Indicopleustes, was traveling through the Sinai Peninsula when he noticed that many of the rocks were covered with writing, in a script which he took to be Hebrew (fig. 16). These inscriptions excited his curiosity, and after copying some and having them “translated”—alas rather inaccurately—he decided that they must be graffiti carved by the Children of Israel during their forty years in the Wilderness. From this, he reasoned that the script must be the God-given primeval alphabet in which the Israelites had received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and from which, he thought, all other alphabets were derived. He would have been surprised to learn that these inscriptions were in fact no more than three or four centuries old when he saw them and that their authors were not the Israelites of the Exodus but, for the most part, the pagan inhabitants of the Sinai in the Roman period. However, unlike many later writers, he was at least correct in identifying the texts as graffiti.

Although innumerable travelers and pilgrims in the Sinai must have noticed these inscriptions in subsequent centuries, it was more than a thousand years before they are mentioned again in surviving records, this time in the works of seventeenth-century European travelers. From then on, there were numerous speculations as to who had written them and what they might say but, though many copies were published, the script remains undeciphered and unidentified.

It was only in 1818 that the English traveler W. J. Bankes made the first copy of an inscription at Petra, in southern Jordan. With great perceptiveness, he immediately connected the script of this beautiful monumental text (fig. 17) with that of the roughly pecked graffiti in the Sinai (fig. 16) which he had seen and copied three years earlier, and suggested that both were the work of the Nabataeans.2

Unfortunately, Bankes never published his copy of the Petra inscription nor his speculations about it and so it was not until 1840 that the connection between the Nabataeans and the graffiti in the Sinai was finally suggested in print.3 This was the work of the brilliant young German scholar E. E. F. Beer, who produced a virtually complete decipherment of the script and an extraordinarily accurate analysis of the content and background of the texts. To the shame of the scholarly community of his day, “he died of starvation and neglect, just as [his monograph] had acquired celebrity enough to procure him aid too late.”4

It was not until twenty years later that M. A. Levy, following the publication of new texts, was able to show palaeographical connections between the script of the graffiti in the Sinai, and the scripts used in texts at Petra and the Aramaic inscriptions of the Hauran (southern Syria).5 Then, in the 1880s, Charles Doughty returned from a journey in northwest Arabia with many copies of inscriptions, some of which were immediately recognized as being in a script similar to those which were by this time known as “Nabataean.”6

Since then, almost 6,000 texts on stone in similar scripts have been found in Arabia, Jordan, and Syria, as well as in the Negev, in the Sinai, in Egypt,7 and as far away as the Greek islands and southern Italy.8 In addition, several papyri bearing Nabataean writing by both scribes and non-scribes, have been found in caves near the Dead Sea.9 Finally, a few fragments of plaster bearing writing in ink or paint have been excavated,10 as well as a handful of informal texts written in ink on potsherds or pebbles.11

Unfortunately, this large body of writing represents a very narrow range of content. For example, we have no Nabataean literary, philosophical, or scholarly texts; no codes of laws, religious liturgies or scriptures, no historical annals, administrative

All numbers refer to the texts in CIS 2.
17. The inscription on the Turkmaniyyah Tomb, Petra, thought to be mid-first century AD. See fig. 38.5.

18. The earliest inscription so far found in Petra. A dedication by Aslab son of Aslab, dated to the first year of Obodat I, c. 96/95 BC. See fig. 38.4.

19. A fragment of a Nabataean inscription from Petra dated to year 18 of Aretas IV (– 10 AD) commemorating the construction of buildings at Petra by a commander of cavalry “for the life of” King Aretas, his queen, Hagaru, and their children. Department of Antiquities, Amman, Jordan.

20. Signature (“May Aslab be safe and sound”) carved on a rock-face on the route between the Deir plateau and the small High Place at Jabal Qarun, Petra (cf. Lindner 1986, 98 and 100).
archives, business letters or accounts; and most of what we know of the history, way-of-life, and commercial activities of the Nabataeans comes, not from their own writings but from relatively brief descriptions by Greek and Roman authors.

The label "Nabataean" is nowadays applied to a number of related forms of the Aramaic script, found in texts spread over a wide area of the Near East and beyond. It is convenient to use this label but it is important to remember two things. Firstly, these varieties of the Aramaic script have been grouped together and called "Nabataean" by modern scholars, and we do not know whether those who used them in antiquity would have seen the same connections between them, or whether they called all, or any, of them "Nabataean."

Secondly, we should not assume that all those who wrote or commissioned a text in what we call the "Nabataean language and script" thought of themselves as ethnically or politically "Nabataean," any more than someone who writes in the language we call "English" is necessarily "English" by nationality. This is vividly illustrated in several of the papyri just mentioned, where some members of a Jewish community in the Nabataean kingdom wrote in Nabataean and others in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. Conversely, there is an inscription in the Palmyrene language and script, commissioned by a man who specifies that he was a Nabataean but who happened to be working in the area of Palmyra. Other Nabataeans, out in the desert east of the Hauran, wrote graffiti in the language and script of the local nomads (fig. 22). Thus, when someone wrote a document or commissioned an inscription, the language and script they used would depend more on where they had been brought up, or where they happened to be at the time, than on their ethnic or political affiliations.

In view of this, and of the fact that the "Nabataean" language and script were used, often extensively, in geographical areas which did not form part of the kingdom (e.g., the Sinai and Egypt) and at periods after it ceased to exist (e.g., in the Hauran, Arabia, and the Sinai), it seems wise when discussing the inscriptions and their language and script to distinguish...
between, on the one hand, the "Nabataean cultural area" and, on the other, political entities such as "Nabataea" or the "Nabataean kingdom."

THE USES OF WRITING
Social, political, and environmental conditions differed from region to region of the Nabataean cultural area and this is reflected in the ways in which writing was used in each. This means that Nabataean written documents do not form a coherent, homogeneous corpus and it is misleading to assume that a feature in a text from one area is typical of "Nabataean" as a whole. Like everything else, a document is much better understood when seen within its context. In this chapter I shall therefore describe not only the various types of Nabataean texts which have survived but examine what they can tell us about the use of written languages in each region of the cultural area.

Over 90 percent of the surviving Nabataean inscriptions are "signatures." These texts consist of the name of the author with usually that of his father and sometimes a longer genealogy. Occasionally other members of his family (e.g., brothers, sons, daughters, etc.) are included. This "signature" can appear alone but, more often, it is preceded, followed, or enclosed by conventional words of blessing such as šlm "may he be safe and sound,"14 ākyr "may he be remembered," brŷk "may he be blessed," b-th "in well-being," etc.

Thus, for example, šlm N br N b-th "May N son of N be safe and sound in well-being."

**Petra** In Petra, these signatures (fig. 20) make up approximately 82 percent of the known written documents.15 In the past, they have been regarded simply as graffiti and dismissed as uninformative and of little interest. However, in an important study of the geographical distribution of the inscriptions in Petra, Laila Nehmé has recently pointed out that large numbers of the signatures are grouped at particular sites.

Among these are five small sanctuaries, such as that of Obodas the god at An-Nmeir, which alone has 132 of these texts, and other meeting places of the thiasoi, or "dining-clubs" associated with religious or funerary cults. These meeting places are only found in certain parts of Petra and are usually associated with Strabo's statement that the Nabataeans "prepare common meals together in groups of thirteen persons, and have two singing-girls for each banquet."16 These signatures, which are rarely found elsewhere in Petra such as the great high-places of sacrifice or the city center, seem to have been intended to commemorate the authors' participation in these ritual banquets.17

Of the monumental inscriptions at Petra, the largest group is funerary, though this represents surprisingly few texts given the large numbers of tombs there. Moreover, of these, only the Latin epitaph of the Roman governor, Sextius Florentinus,18 and the Greek epitaph of a Roman soldier,19 were carved on the exterior of tombs and both these date from after the Roman Annexation in 106 AD and so may reflect a practice different from the local Nabataean one. These are also practically the only true epitaphs in Petra.20 The only Nabataean text which could be called an epitaph reads

this is the nefesh of Petraios son of Threptos and he is honored because he had been at Raqmu [the Semitic name for Petra]. He died at Jerash and his master Taymu, buried him there.21

A nefesh is a memorial which usually took the form of an elongated pyramid on a base which could be carved on the interior or exterior walls of a tomb, or could be engraved or carved in relief on a rock-face, as a simple memorial independent of a tomb. The inscriptions on these usually say simply "nefesh of so-and-so." Other grave markers were engraved on the rock inside the tomb near the loculus where the body was placed, or on a stone used to close the loculus, or were painted on the plaster which covered the interior wall of the tomb. However, those found so far give no more than the name, patronym, and occasionally profession or title of the deceased.

In Hegra (modern Madâ'in Śaliḥ), the Nabataean city in northwest Arabia, a number of tombs have inscriptions on the façades. These are not epitaphs but copies or summaries of the title deeds to the property (see below under Hegra). There is only one text of this type at Petra, the elegant five-line inscription on the façade of the so-called Turkmaniyyah tomb (fig. 17).22 Although in some ways it is similar in content to the Hegra texts, there are significant differences, most notably that it does not mention the owner of the tomb (compare the Hegra tomb inscription quoted below). It has been suggested that the tomb was carved by a property developer, possibly working on behalf of a temple or religious corporation, and that the names of the eventual owner and occupants were to be inserted in the original deeds, written on papyrus, which were probably lodged at a temple.23

Scholars have long tried to explain why there are so few monumental inscriptions carved directly onto the façades of tombs at Petra, but none of the explanations which have been proposed is particularly convincing. It should be remembered that the only Nabataean inscriptions on the exteriors of the tombs at Hegra or Petra are, without exception, deeds of real estate not epitaphs, grave-markers, or memorials. Hegra has yet to be comprehensively explored, but at Petra, the commonest
surviving commemoration of the dead is on a nesfiah memorial, while grave-markers in both Hegra and Petra are found inside the tombs near the loculus, not on the exterior.

Thus, it may simply be that there was a difference in legal practice between Hegra and Petra in this matter. It is possible that, at Petra, the deposition of a deed of ownership in a temple was deemed sufficient protection for the owner(s) of the tomb and it was not felt necessary to carve a “private property” notice on the monument itself. Or it may simply be that the Petrans were less litigious than the population of Hegra.

The Greek philosopher Athenodorus of Tarsus, who had lived in Petra, noted that it was only foreigners living there who initiated law-suits “both with one another and with the natives. None of the natives prosecuted one another, and they in every way kept peace with one another.” This, possibly idealized, view seems to reflect a general reluctance to go to law among the Petrans, which is in marked contrast to the impression presented by the tomb inscriptions at Hegra.

Of the small number of Nabataean inscriptions of a religious nature at Petra, most are simple dedications or identifications of cult statues, baetyls or niches. However, fragments of what appears to be a decree listing religious obligations and penalties, found in the Temple of the Winged Lions at Petra, hint at a much more sophisticated use of monumental writing in the service of temple and cult, though, alas, we have at present no other evidence for this.

In Petra, as in all parts of the Nabataean realm, there are only a handful of Nabataean honorific inscriptions, all of them referring to kings. This is in marked contrast to Palmyra, for instance, where the great men of the city were regularly honored with statues or busts. In Si‘it, too, which was in an area of the Hauran that was not under Nabataean rule, statues were erected to public benefactors (see below). We can only guess at the reasons for this apparent difference in practice, but both Palmyra and Si‘it were far more heavily hellenized than Petra, while in Palmyra, at least, the key civic institutions were modeled on those of a Greek city. Interestingly, the situation in Petra seems to have changed in the period after the Roman annexation in 106 AD, when inscriptions in Greek and Latin honoring individuals begin to appear, albeit in very small numbers.

On the present evidence, it seems that within the Nabataean realm, and especially at Petra, a living individual could only be commemorated in an inscription, “obliquely” by stating that he had erected or dedicated a cult image or structure to a deity “for the life of” the king, and often other members of the royal family. This practice is documented from the earliest inscription so far found in Petra (fig. 18), which reads:

This is the chamber and the cistern which Aṣḥāb son of Aṣḥāb made … for Dushara, the god of Mankātū[ or Manbātī] for the life of Obodat [I], king of Nabatā, son of Aretas king of Nabata, year 1 (?) and continues right up to the end of the first century AD when an inscription was set up “to the god of […]ll […] for the life of Rabbel [II]” and his family. An elegantly carved example, alas broken, is illustrated in fig. 19. Apart from semi-honorific dedications of this sort, there are very few Nabataean inscriptions at Petra which record the construction or cutting out of buildings, though one is the so-called Bab al-Siq Nabataean–Greek bilingual inscription which records that a certain ’Abd-Mankū made the tomb for himself and his descendants in perpetuity.

Thus, as might be expected, Petra, the principal city of the Nabataean realm, has examples of most types of inscription, both public and private, but they have survived in meager quantities. Whereas at Petra just under 1,100 inscriptions in Nabataean, Greek, and Latin have been discovered, of which 82 percent are simple signatures, at Palmyra, if one excludes the inscribed ressena (small tokens), there are more than 2,100 inscriptions, in Palmyrene, Greek, and Latin, of which the vast majority are public texts, such as official pronouncements, honorific or commemorative inscriptions, and hardly any are signatures. Moreover, while in Palmyra large numbers of inscriptions adorned the city center in Petra the equivalent area has provided less than 1 percent of a much smaller total.

Individual Nabataean funerary inscriptions, dedications, and signatures have been found in other parts of Transjordan. However, only in Wadi Ramm is there a concentration of Nabataean inscriptions of different sorts.

Ramm Southeast of Petra the land continues to rise until you come to the edge of a great escarpment. From here, the land falls away several hundred meters to the Hisma desert from which multicolored mountains stick up like islands in a sea of sand which stretches from southern Jordan down into northwest Saudi Arabia. In the Nabataean period, this was home to tribes of camel-breeding nomads, some of whom were in close contact with the Nabataeans since they gave their children names such as Taym-Obodat or ’Abd-Haretat, that is “servant” or “worshipper” of the Nabataean kings Obodas and Aretas. These nomads were literate and left thousands of graffiti on the rocks and cliff-faces of the region, not in Nabataean but in a language and alphabet of their own called “Hismaic” (fig. 21), though a few were able to write their names in both scripts.

This region is one of the few places in the Nabataean cultural area where we can glimpse what must have been an
23-26. Nabataean handwriting. Compare the hands of experienced scribes on plaster (23) and on papyrus (24), with those of literate laymen on papyrus (25) and on a pebble (26).

23. Dedication to the goddess Allat written in ink on plaster in her temple at Ramm, southern Jordan. Dated to year 40+ (?) of Aretas IV (= between 33 and 40 AD) or of the Roman Province of Arabia (= between 146 and 154 AD). See fig. 38.14. (See Savignac and Horsfield 1935, pl. X.)

24. Part of a papyrus from Nahal Hever, P. Yadin 22 [130 AD], showing (1) part of the Greek text, (2) the 5-line witness statement in Nabataean, in the hand of a literate layman with a Jewish name (Yohanan son of Makhousha), see fig. 38.16, followed by signatures in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (3 and 5) and Greek (4). (See Lewis, Yadin, and Greenfield 1989, Pl. 27.)

25. Part of a papyrus from Nahal Hever, P. Yadin 22 [130 AD], showing (1) part of the Greek text, (2) the 5-line witness statement in Nabataean, in the hand of a literate layman with a Jewish name (Yohanan son of Makhousha), see fig. 38.16, followed by signatures in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (3 and 5) and Greek (4). (See Lewis, Yadin, and Greenfield 1989, Pl. 27.)

26. A list of names written in Nabataean in ink on a pebble from Nessana in the Negev. 1Kbyw br Mnbbw 2. Mnmw br Bny 3. 'bd'lq' br-h 4. Mwtnw br 'bd'bdt l. Zy'd'bl'y br lhw 6. — br 'lyw. (See Rosenthal 1962, pl. XXXIV, 1.)
almost universal phenomenon: the symbiosis and interaction of the Nabataeans with neighboring peoples using other languages and scripts. The Hisma, whose mountains contain many springs, has been a favorite route from Arabia to the Levant for millennia and so seems to have been a rather cosmopolitan place in which merchants, nomads, soldiers, and pilgrims traveled, mixed, and sometimes left graffiti. As well as thousands of Hismaic and tens of Nabataean inscriptions, there is a fragment in Latin, and small numbers of texts in Greek, Minaic (from south Arabia), Dadanic (from northwest Arabia), Thamudic B, C, and D (by nomads from central Arabia), and early Arabic, as well as thousands of rock drawings from many periods.

One of the valleys in this desert is Wadi Ramm, which has many springs, some of which were regarded as holy places in antiquity. One of these is today called Ain Shalalah, and here we find the signatures and prayers of worshippers of the goddess Allat, as well as the baetyls of several other deities carved on the same cliff-face and identified in accompanying inscriptions. At this sanctuary there was also a small building on which was placed a dedication, presumably to Allat (the divine name is lost), “who is at Iram,” “for the life of” the last Nabataean king, Rabbel II, and at least seven members of his family, a type of text familiar from Petra. Interestingly, this is the only formal Nabataean inscription so far found in Ramm.

In the shadow of Jabal Ramm itself there was a temple to Allat. Here a fragmentary dedication to the goddess in Nabataean was written in ink on the plaster of the interior walls together with signatures in Greek and Nabataean (fig. 23). A stone re-used in the building bears a graffito in the Hismaic language and script by a man who took part in the construction of the temple.

On the opposite side of Wadi Ramm, at a place today called Khashm Judayyah, near the entrance to a small building which may have been another sanctuary of Allat, three signatures were carved into the rock, two by a kahin (i.e., “soothsayer, diviner”) of the goddess, and the third by a certain Hayyân “in the presence of Allat the goddess who is at Iram for ever.”

Ramm and its environs seem therefore to have been an area where the settled Nabataeans and their nomadic neighbors joined in the worship of Allat and probably in many other activities. It is important because it provides more evidence than any other region of the Nabataean cultural area for interaction between the Nabataeans and their neighbors, though it should be recognized that even here the evidence is very meager. The inscriptions reveal the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the area not only in their range of languages and scripts but in their religious content. While only one Nabataean text mentioning Dushara has yet been found here, there are numerous prayers to him in Hismaic. The Nabataean baetyls and their inscriptions are dedicated to deities from all over the Nabataean kingdom. Thus, besides Allat “who is at Iram,” there is Allat “who is at Bosra,” al-Kutba “who is at Ga’ya” (modern Wadi Musa, outside Petra), al-Uzza and the “Lord of the temple,” whose worship is found throughout the Nabataean cultural area and beyond, and Baal-Shamin, the lord of Heaven, whose principal cult-sites were in Syria.

**Hegra and Arabia** Hegra rivals Petra in the range, if not the number, of its inscriptions. There are many more monumental texts than at Petra, but they are almost all of one particular type: legal documents proclaiming property rights. The property in question is always one of the elaborately carved tombs cut into the rock-face that resemble those at Petra. Thus, although they are often known as “tomb inscriptions,” it is important to recognize that they are in no way epitaphs. An example may make this clear (fig. 27).

This is the tomb that Kamkam daughter of Wailat daughter of Haramû, and Kulaybat her daughter, made for themselves and their descendants. In the month of Teber, the ninth year of Haretat king of Nabatê, lover of his people. And may Dushara and his Motab, and Allat of Amnand, and Manûtû and her Qaysha curse anyone who sells this tomb or who buys it or gives it in pledge or makes a gift of it or removes from it body or limb or who buries in it anyone other than Kamkam and her daughter and their descendants. And whoever does not act according to what is written above shall be liable to Dushara and Hubâlû and to Manûtû in the sum of 3 shamads and to the priest for a fine of a thousand Hegaratite sela’s, except that whoever produces in his hand a document from the hand of Kamkam or Kulaybat her daughter, regarding this tomb, that document shall be valid.

These texts have many interesting features. Firstly, in contrast to the situation at Petra, they are carved directly onto the façades of the tombs, usually within a frame that is in relief (e.g., fig. 27). Secondly, when one examines them closely they are often rather carelessly laid out, with lines running over onto the frame (e.g., the last line on fig. 27). In addition, the masons have very often added their signatures at the bottom of the text, on the bottom of the frame, or immediately under it (see fig. 27). However, most of this is more or less invisible without binoculars since the inscriptions are usually positioned too high to be read with any ease from ground level. Given that they are detailed and complex legal documents, one might have expected them to be placed in a position where they could easily be read. As noted above, one inscrip-
ments that so-and-so made a tomb for himself and/or another, which are found occasionally at other places in Arabia, and are fairly common in the Hauran (see below). Only one inscription at Hegra is of this sort, and that is inside a tomb which has a property inscription on the façade.

There are also some simple prayers, and a handful of dedications and identifications of niches and baetyl, but the vast majority of the Nabataean inscriptions of Hegra are property-inscriptions and signatures.

Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to subject the inscriptions of Hegra to the same meticulous analysis that Nehmé has provided for Petra, but preliminary indications suggest that the distribution of signatures in the two cities may well be similar. In addition, however, at Hegra, though interestingly not at Petra, we also have the signatures of some of the masons who carved the great rock-cut tombs in the first century AD. One of these can be seen below the frame round the tomb inscription on fig. 27.

The Nabataeans were also established at other centers in northwest Arabia, for instance at Dedan just south of Hegra, where many inscriptions have been found, and Duma (modern al-Jawf) where they seem to have had a military presence. They also let large numbers of graffiti, mainly signatures, on the rocks along the tracks between the various oases of the area. The most southerly Nabataean inscription so far found is northeast of Najran near the border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

**Hauran** Of all the regions within the Nabataean cultural area, the Hauran is epigraphically the most complex. Our knowledge of the chronological and geographical limits of Nabataean rule there is very sketchy, but it seems to have been at best intermittent and localized. At the same time, at least one “native” form of the Aramaic script seems to have been in use in the Hauran in parallel with the Nabataean script from Petra (see below, under *Script*).

Moreover, only about 180 inscriptions in the local and the Nabataean versions of the Aramaic script have been published from the whole of the Hauran, with an unknown number of additional texts—probably little more than 100—found but still awaiting publication. We therefore have about the same number of Aramaic inscriptions from the whole region of the Hauran as from the single city of Hegra, and this is only about a quarter of the total from Petra.

The inscriptions found in the Hauran are very different in content and purpose from those of Petra and Arabia. Firstly, no groups of signatures have been found here. This may partly be due to topography, for in areas such as the Hauran, as also in the Negev, where buildings were con-

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27. Arabia. The earliest dated inscription [1 BC/AD] on the façade of a tomb at Hegra (H 1.8). Note that the last line of the text is carved on the bottom of the frame and below it is the mason's signature, "Wamb-`Allah son of Abd-Obodat made it." See fig. 38.8. (See Healey 1993, 154-162.)

28. Inscription refers to a copy of the text which was deposited in one of the temples and it may be that this was the version used for reference, while the one inscribed on the tomb was intended to have a more talismanic than practical function.

None of these texts mentions the achievements of the dead or displays any grief for him or her, for they were probably carved before any of the prospective occupants of the tomb had died. Only in three cases does a second text, inside the tomb, refer to the deceased. From this it seems clear that tombs at Hegra were considered to be pieces of real estate that were either commissioned by a family, or carved by a developer as a speculation, and could be purchased, transferred by gift, leased, or mortgaged. There are even sections of cliff on which no tomb has been carved, which seem to have been reserved by an individual.

This situation is paralleled at the neighboring oasis of Dedan, twenty kilometers away, where inscriptions in the local language and script, Dadanitic, record the construction and taking possession of tombs—or sections of cliff-face preparatory to the carving of tombs—using the same word for assuming ownership of a piece of real estate, 'id in Nabataean, ḫd in Dadanitic.

There are no epitaphs at Hegra. The emphasis is always on tombs as property, in marked contrast to the simple state-
structured from blocks of stone rather than carved out of the rock, lists of members of *thiawī*, if they existed, were probably written on perishable materials which have not survived, such as plaster (as at Ramm), papyrus, or wood.

By contrast, it seems to have been common in the Hauran for sculptors and masons to carve their names in prominent places on their work and there are a number of such signatures on reliefs and sections of architectural decoration, a practice which does not seem to be found at Petra, though the masons' signatures on the Hegra tomb inscriptions provide a parallel. Thus, the base of a sculpture of an eagle bears the text carved in relief: "this is the eagle which Rabū son of Ḥanīpū, the mason, made." The pedestals of statues have the artists' signatures along the bottom, while on the arch of a niche another artist has signed his work in a crude *tabula ansata*, this time in Greek: "Taūēlos son of Rabbo son of Socheros made it." On the lintel of a mausoleum shown on fig. 28, the mason's "signature" is as prominent as the name of the deceased (see the translation below).

Although in every case the signature of the artisan is carved in a prominent position on the object, with the exception of the last, it is seldom an integral part of the composition. Usually, it is squeezed into an area of unused space or carved on the frame or base, and, to our eyes, often mars the effect of the sculpture. This practice is comparable to that of the masons who left their signatures on or below the tomb inscriptions at Hegra, but those would have been less obvious from ground level. A closer parallel is with the funerary and religious sculptures at Palmyra, where the inscriptions giving the name of the deceased or the dedicant are again often squeezed into unused spaces between the figures in an apparently haphazard manner.

These artists' signatures and a handful of graffiti in the desert, and very occasionally elsewhere, seem to be the only texts of this type found so far in the Hauran, in stark contrast with all other regions of the cultural area.

Another distinctive feature is that a large proportion of the Nabataean and other Aramaic inscriptions in the Hauran are grave markers. The normal custom seems to have been to set up simple gravestones with just the name of the deceased and his or her patronym (e.g., fig. 29), though there are some more elaborate texts, occasionally on stele, but more often on lintels, probably intended for the doorways of stone-built mausolea (e.g., fig. 28). However, even these latter simply record the name of the occupant of the tomb and, sometimes, who built it and/or a date. Thus, for instance, the lintel from St mentioned above (fig. 28), which is in Greek and the local Aramaic script, rather than Nabataean, reads:

[Greek] The monument of Tanenō son of Anāēks
[Aramaic] For Tannū son of Ḥannī'el [is] the funerary monument [}* الشمال [was] the mason.

As will be described below, the Hauran was a region in which several languages were used. Greek and Aramaic were the principal ones spoken and written in the settled areas, but the nomads in the desert east and southeast of the Hauran spoke, and at this period wrote, a different language, using an Ancient North Arabian script that today is known as Safaitic (fig. 22). The contact between these nomads and the population of the Hauran is symbolized by a handful of Safaitic-Greek and Safaitic-Nabataean bilingual inscriptions and by a cave-tomb not far from the Roman fort at Deir al-Kahf (northeastern Jordan). There, a Nabataean inscription was carved around three of the four walls explaining that the tomb was built by Khaliyū son of Awšū for himself and his brothers, while on each sarcophagus the deceased's name and patronym were written in Safaitic.

Of all the regions in the Nabataean cultural area, the Hauran has the largest concentration of inscriptions recording the construction of sacred buildings and the dedication of
altars and sacred objects. They are found in Greek, Nabataean, and Hauran Aramaic and in some cases are bilingual.

While, in Petra, the only traces of statues seem to have been those of kings, in those parts of the Hauran outside Nabataean control, such as Si', statues of non-royal individuals were erected. Thus, the pedestal shown on fig. 31 bears the inscription

In the year 33 of our lord Philip [the Tetrarch], Witrū son of Bard and Qasîyū son of Shuday, and Hann'el son of Mashak'el, and Munâ' son of Garmū, made this pedestal (?) of the statue of Galishū son of Banūth. 96

As usual in the Hauran, the mason has signed his work, this time along the bottom of the object.

Thus, the Aramaic epigraphy of the Hauran consists almost entirely of formal, i.e., monumental, inscriptions, the very few simple signatures being mainly those of artisans “signing” their work. In this it is in marked contrast with the rest of the Nabataean cultural area, where signatures vastly outnumber formal texts. The epigraphy of the Hauran is also unique in the range of subject matter and the variety of objects that bear inscriptions. Finally, it is one of only two regions where Nabataean coexisted in close proximity to a different form of the Aramaic script, the other being the southern end of the Dead Sea, to which we will turn next.

**The Southern Dead Sea Valley** In the late first and early second centuries AD, Maḥōza at the southern end of the Dead Sea, was a prosperous settlement with large numbers of
date palms. It was part of the Nabataean kingdom until the annexation by Rome in 106 AD, after which it became part of the Roman Province of Arabia. As well as the gentle population, it also had a thriving Jewish community, at least until the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135 AD) led by Simon Bar Kokhba, when some of its members took refuge in a cave in the Nabal Hever, on the western side of the Dead Sea.

Among them were two women, one called Babatha and the other called Salome Komaise. Each of them took with her a bundle of legal documents on papyrus relating to property and family matters, and others from the community probably did the same. It seems that they died before they could return to their homes and the documents remained in the cave until their discovery there in 1961.

The majority of these papyri were written in Greek, but some are in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic [JPA] and others are in Nabataean (e.g., fig. 24). A number of the Greek documents also bear the signatures and statements of witnesses in Greek and/or Nabataean and/or JPA (e.g., fig. 25).

As might be expected, legal documents written before the annexation were couched in Nabataean and those composed under Roman rule were generally written in Greek, though there is at least one exception to this, P. Yadid no. 6, which apparently dates to 199 AD. The continued use of Nabataean in official documents more than ten years after the annexation is extremely interesting.

It is significant that in most of the papyri written in Nabataean the people involved, both as principals and witnesses, are all Jews. Similarly, in the signatures and statements of witnesses on many of the Greek papyri, some witnesses wrote in JPA and others in Nabataean. Some of those who wrote in Nabataean have Jewish names and are very closely involved with the Jewish family of Babatha. Thus the division does not seem to be between Jews writing in JPA and gentiles using Nabataean. Members of the Jewish community in the same village appear to have used both, and this suggests that, while some were locals and wrote in the Nabataean dialect of Aramaic and the Nabataean form of the Aramaic script, others may have moved to the Nabataean kingdom relatively recently (perhaps after the Romans crushed the First Jewish Revolt in 70 AD) bringing with them the dialect and form of the Aramaic script used in Judaea (i.e., JPA).

The Negev Our knowledge of the Nabataean epigraphy of the Negev is still very patchy. Although large numbers of informal inscriptions on the rocks of the desert have been reported, only a handful have been published. Similarly, many of the inscriptions found during the excavations of the Nabataean sites there apparently remain unpublished, and those that have appeared are almost all fragmentary. On the other hand, the site of Nessana has produced some of the very few Nabataean texts in ink (e.g., fig. 26), in a script comparable, but not identical, to that used in the signatures and witness statements in Nabataean on the Greek and Nabataean papyri from the Dead Sea area. From northwest of Beer-Sheba has come an incantation text of about 100 BC written in ink on a pebble in a pre-Nabataean script (fig. 38.1), and from Khalaşa/Elusa, an inscribed stela dated to the mid-second century BC and mentioning “Halâjetat king of Nabatû,” which is probably in another pre-Nabataean Aramaic script of the Negev (fig. 38.2).

Apart from these, almost all the published Nabataean inscriptions from the Negev, most of which are fragments, come from the ruins of Oboda/Avdat and its environs. Among them are parts of two well-carved texts on fragments of marble, one of which apparently mentions three of the sons of Aretas IV. There are also three interesting and enigmatic religious inscriptions on large stone troughs found in and around Oboda, the most complete of which refers to “Dushara the god of Ga’a.”

Even more extraordinary, however, is a six-line inscription on a rock at En ‘Avdat, not far from the city of Oboda, which was the cult center of the deified Nabataean king Obodas I. The text was written (“in his own hand”) by a certain Garm-‘allah son of Taym-‘allah and records that he set up a statue before Obodas the god. He then includes two lines of Old Arabic verse (written in the Nabataean script), in praise of Obodas, which may have been part of a liturgy used in the worship of the god.

All this amounts to approximately twenty-five published Nabataean inscriptions, most of which are fragments. There are far more texts in Greek, though all those that are dated come from the period after the Annexation. It is difficult to explain this apparent dearth of Nabataean inscriptions in a region which was of vital economic importance to the Nabataeans and which contained a number of cities including the cult center of the deified Obodas.

The Sinai By contrast, the Sinai Peninsula, another region crossed by important trade-routes, has produced more Nabataean inscriptions than any other part of the cultural area. Almost 4,000 have been recorded so far, but they are all graffiti (fig. 16) and not a single monumental Nabataean inscription has yet been found there. The handful of dated texts all seem to refer to the second and third centuries AD, the earliest apparently being forty-five years after the end of the Nabataean state. However, there is no way of telling how long before and/or after this period they were being written. At one end of the chronological scale there is nothing in the content of the inscriptions to connect the people who wrote...
them specifically with the Nabateans, and at the other, although a number of Nabatean and Greek graffiti in the Sinai are accompanied by crosses, none of the Nabatean texts contains any reference to Christianity. As might be expected, the graffiti of the Sinai are in a wide range of styles (fig. 16). A few are enclosed in a rough tabula ansata, others are very carefully, almost elegantly, carved, yet others are so messy that they are barely legible. Some may well have been the work of travelers or pilgrims, but the huge numbers of inscriptions, the limited range of names they contain, the fact that the same person seems often to have written several different texts, and the particularities and relative homogeneity of the script (see below under Script), all suggest that the vast majority were carved by the local population of desert herdsmen and cultivators of the oases. In this they would be comparable to the Safaitic and Hismic graffiti of the generally nomadic neighbors of the Nabateans in other regions.

The presence of huge numbers of Nabatean graffiti but a total absence of Nabatean monumental inscriptions makes the Sinai one of the most curious and intriguing regions of the cultural area. If, indeed, the vast majority of the texts are by the indigenous population and date to a period after the end of the Nabatean kingdom, we should be particularly careful about identifying their authors as “Nabateans” and drawing conclusions about Nabatean language or culture as a whole from features specific to these texts, though this has been a common practice among scholars in the past. By the beginning of the second century AD, the political and commercial activities of the Nabateans had made their script the prestige Semitic writing system throughout the whole region south of the Hauran, with the exception of Palestine, as far as the area of Sabean cultural hegemony in the southern half of the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, whatever their ethnic origins, if members of the population of the Sinai were going to learn to write at this period, the Nabatean alphabet was the most obvious, perhaps the only, one to choose.

Egypt Fewer than one hundred Nabatean graffiti have also been found in eastern Egypt, mainly on well-established trade routes, in the eastern Delta, and between the Red Sea and the Nile. Most have been published from extremely bad hand copies and their content is often uncertain, so it is not clear how closely related they are to the texts of the Sinai.

However, the site of Tell el-Shuqafa in the southeastern Delta has produced two monumental inscriptions of great importance. One is a dedication to the goddess al-Kutba, dated to year 4 of Ptolemy the king, that is either 77 BC (Ptolemy XIII) or 48 BC (Ptolemy XIV). The second is the dedication of a sanctuary “to Dushara the god who is at Daphne [?].” (identified as modern Tell el-Defenneh, in the eastern Delta), which is dated to “year 18 of Queen Cleopatra, which is year 26 of Malichus king of the Nabataeans” and year 2 of an unidentified person or institution named “Nabataeans.” This is a reference to the famous Cleopatra and the date is equivalent to 34 BC. These dedications of the first century BC suggest an established Nabatean presence and religious infrastructure in the eastern Delta at an early period, a situation in marked contrast to that which we find in the Sinai.

It will be clear from this brief survey that the term “Nabatean inscriptions” does not refer to a homogeneous group of texts, but to a wide range of documents that vary in both form and purpose from one region of the Nabatean cultural area to another. To take just one example, we have seen how signatures were used in one way in Petra and Hegra and quite another in the Hauran, and yet another in the Sinai. Similarly, while most of the texts in Petra and Hegra can probably be ascribed to people who were subjects of the Nabatean king, in the Hauran the texts reflect a complex, frequently changing, political situation that does not interlock neatly with the equally complex relationships of the different varieties of the Aramaic script in use there. Thus, the inscriptions cannot be treated as a single, uniform source for the Nabataeans. Instead, a regional approach is vital to an understanding both of the documents themselves and of what they can (and cannot) tell us about the Nabateans and their neighbors.

**Language**

The Nabateans lived in a region of many languages and scripts and their commercial activities would have brought them into contact with others from further afield. In southern Jordan, they might have encountered the vestiges of Edomite and would almost certainly have found one or more dialects of Aramaic. By the first century AD, at the latest, they were certainly in close touch with people speaking and writing the Ancient North Arabian dialect Hismaic (fig. 21) in the sand desert of southern Jordan and northwest Arabia, of which Wadi Ram is a part. They were also in contact with speakers of Old Arabic, and the Nabatean kings would certainly have had some subjects for whom this was their first language, though, as will be seen below, it is at present impossible to know whether this was true of the majority.

In the Hauran, they would have come into contact with Greek, with Aramaic, and with Safaitic, another Ancient North Arabian language, spoken and written by the nomads in the deserts which stretch away to the east and the southeast (see fig. 22). In northwest Arabia, they would have encountered Old Arabic and several dialects of Ancient North Arabian. Aramaic was also written there, but it is not certain
languages, scripts, and the uses of writing among the nabataeans

In the south Arabian languages of the Sabaeans and the Ma'inans, the script in Nabataean and Nabataean/Sa'thite inscription, as well as these in the Nabataean/Sa'thite language. The more common combination is Nabataean/Aramaic and Greek. In this polyglot environment, many Nabataeans must have been capable of speaking and writing several languages and it is not surprising that we find occasional bilingual texts. The most common combination is Nabataean/Aramaic and Greek.

Levant and the Levantines would also have come into contact with the south Arabian languages of the Sabaeans and the Ma'inans.

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but throughout the Achaemenid empire, the written language and script maintained an extraordinary homogeneity, no doubt under the influence of the imperial chancellery.

However, with the conquests of Alexander the Great at the end of the fourth century BC, Greek became the new official language, and, without the unifying force of the Achaemenid chancellery, the local spoken Aramaic dialects began to intrude more and more into the written language.

It is often said that "the Nabataeans" used Aramaic simply as a literary language and spoke a dialect of Old Arabic in daily life, but this idea is based on several false assumptions. For a start, one has to decide whom exactly one means by "the Nabataeans" in this context. It is unwise to generalize about the population of a kingdom spread over a wide and polyglot area. The Nabataean kings would almost certainly have had some subjects who spoke Old Arabic or dialects of Ancient North Arabian, particularly in northwest Arabia and probably in the Negev. Equally, elsewhere in the kingdom there were people who wrote, and almost certainly spoke, Greek or Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and there seems no reason to suppose that among all these languages there were not also people who spoke the Nabataean dialect of Aramaic.

In the past, it has usually been assumed that most of the personal names found in Nabataean inscriptions are linguistically Arabic. The real and supposed Arabic etymologies of these names have then been used as an argument that the "native language" of the Nabataeans must have been Arabic. But, of course, the etymological language of a personal name does not mean that its bearer speaks that language. For instance, etymologically, the names Sarah and Alexander are respectively Hebrew and Macedonian Greek, but it would be absurd to assume that these are the native languages of everyone called Sarah and Alexander today. Personal names can "travel" and, within a particular community, names very often come from several different linguistic traditions. This is especially true of mixed and cosmopolitan societies heavily involved in trade, such as that of the Nabataeans, or of areas on trade-routes such as the Sinai. Thus, while it is possible, even likely, that some Nabataeans with "Arabic names" spoke Old Arabic, we cannot deduce this simply from their names. This is well illustrated in the few Nabataean graffiti in the Sinai that contain more than just names and stock phrases. In these, the language is clearly Aramaic, despite the fact that the authors of these texts and their relations have names that are etymologically Arabic.

When one removes the personal names from the equation, the visible Arabic influence on the Nabataean language is seen to be extraordinarily small. There are remarkably few loan-words which can definitely be said to come from Arabic and all but two of these are found exclusively in texts from northwest Arabia. This is exactly where one would expect to find external Arabic influence. These words appear with Aramaic grammatical endings and there is little evidence of Arabic influence on the morphology of words or on syntax, which are the clearest indications of a writer thinking in one language while writing another.

Even in Arabia, we have only one example of a text apparently composed by an Arabic-speaker with only a limited grasp of Aramaic. It is a funerary inscription at Hegra and was carved in 267 AD, i.e., 162 years after the end of the Nabataean kingdom. It contains a mixture of Aramaic and Arabic words, misplaced endings, Arabic syntax, and stock Aramaic expressions. A comparison of this with true Nabataean texts from Arabia and elsewhere in the cultural area shows just how consistent is the Aramaic of the latter.

On the other hand, we need to remember that the texts of monumental inscriptions were almost certainly composed by professional scribes, while Nabataean "signatures" and graffiti consist mainly of names and stock expressions. So the available evidence is unlikely to tell us what language a person who wrote or commissioned a Nabataean inscription spoke in any part of the cultural area, at any period.

Nabataean-Aramaic continued to be used as a written language long after the kingdom was replaced by the Roman Province of Arabia, in 106 AD; it simply became dissociated from a political entity. Certainly in the Hauran, but possibly also in the Nabataean heartland of southern Jordan and the Negev, Greek may already have been well established by the time it became the official language of administration in the new Province of Arabia.

However, as time passes, we begin to glimpse another language being used in the same area. The first tiny fragments of hard evidence for the use of Old Arabic in the former Nabataean cultural area begin to appear. In the Negev, there is the inscription from En'Avdat with its two lines of Arabic verse written in the Nabataean script, while at al-Namarah, east of the Hauran, an epitaph, composed in Old Arabic written in the Nabataean script (fig. 37), was set up to commemorate a certain Imru'-I-qays, who called himself "king of all the Arabs." In the late fourth century, the Palestinian monk Epiphanius (d. 403 AD) recorded that the people of Petra used Arabic in the liturgical worship of Dushara; and, by the early sixth century, the Greek papyri recently found in a church in Petra show that many of the fields and orchards in the vicinity of the city and even some buildings in Petra itself had Arabic names. Frustratingly, however, we know so little about the demography of the region at this period, that it is impossible to say whether this was a recent or a long-standing situation.

Ironically, it is in Arabia that the Nabataean-Aramaic language seems to have been preserved for longest. For, while Greek became the official language in the heartland of the former kingdom, it seems not to have penetrated to any great extent into its southernmost extension. Here, the Ancient North Arabian languages used by the settled populations (Taymanitic and Dadanitic) ceased to be written and seem to have disappeared well before the early second century AD, no doubt leaving Old Arabic as the predominant spoken language and Nabataean-Aramaic as the only local written language of prestige.

Thus, sixty years after the Annexation, in the late 166s AD, a small temple in the Classical style was erected at a remote spot in northwest Arabia, called Rawwāfah. The temple was for the worship of the local god 'Ib, venerated by the Arab tribe of Thamīd, some of whom may have been formed into an auxiliary unit of the Roman army. A classical temple to the local god was a symbol of the inclusion of the tribe in the Roman cultural and political sphere. Around the outside of the building was carved a long dedication (nominally by the members of this unit) to the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, in Greek for the Roman side and in Nabataean as the local written language (fig. 38.7). It is not known whether the tribesmen of Thamīd, in whose name and for whose benefit the inscriptions were set up, were able to read either language.

A century later, at Hegra, the funerary inscription described above was composed in a mixture of Nabataean-Aramaic and Old Arabic. Down the right side of the text, a brief summary was inscribed in the Thamudic D script, and so this one inscription brings together three languages and two scripts. Yet almost a century later than this, in 356 AD, again in Hegra, an inscription was carved in perfect Nabataean-Aramaic to commemorate the wife of the ruler (ny3) of the city (fig. 38.8). This is the latest dated inscription in the Nabataean-Aramaic language to have been discovered so far, and is more than two centuries later than anything further north, where the Nabataean script seems already to have been appropriated to express the Old Arabic language.

SCRIPT
The surviving inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca in the Nabataean script must represent only a tiny and random selection of what once was written. Moreover, the circumstances in which each text was produced may well have influenced how it was written in ways that we can rarely even guess at. It is therefore risky to draw detailed palaeographical conclusions from the differences between one text and another, particularly when they are on different surfaces (stone, papyrus, plaster, potsherd, etc.). Here, I shall simply suggest some of the processes by which the different ways of writing Nabataean, as represented in the surviving documents, could have developed.

Even as nomads, the Nabataeans were clearly entrepreneurs, and would probably have needed written documents in their business activities. Given that shortly after the Macedonian conquest they were already famous for the wealth they had accumulated from this trade, their involvement must certainly have begun under the Achaemenid empire when Aramaic would have been the natural, indeed the only realistic, choice. The form of the script they adopted was presumably that used in southern Jordan. The earliest reference to writing in connection with the Nabataeans occurs at the end of the fourth century, when they were in that area and still nomadic. The Greek historian Hieronymus of Cardia, who took part in the events, says that after Antigonus the One-eyed, one of Alexander's successors, had sent an army to attack them, the Nabataeans wrote him "a letter in Syrian characters," a phrase which can only refer to the Aramaic script.

The form of the Aramaic alphabet used by the Nabataeans is distinctive but seems to belong to a continuum of local
developments which stretch from the Hauran, through Transjordan and the Negev (figs. 38.2, 38.3) to the Sinai, Egypt, and northwest Arabia. In all these regions individual versions of the Aramaic letter-forms probably grew up in the centuries following the end of the Achaemenid empire, though alas very few documents have survived.

In the Aramaic scripts used under the Achaemenid empire (fig. 38.1) each letter was written separately. This was true both of texts carved in stone and of those written in ink.\(^1\) Yet, even in the earliest Nabataean inscriptions at Petra (e.g., figs. 18, 38.4), some of the letters are joined by ligatures.\(^2\) There are relatively few of these in the earliest texts but as time goes on they steadily increase and they occur equally in inscribed formal texts and in the carved signatures of individuals.\(^3\)

Ligatures normally develop when one is writing in ink, to save the writer having to lift the pen between each letter.\(^4\) They have no practical use on stone, require more work from the mason, and reduce the clarity of the text for the reader. Thus their presence in the earliest Nabataean inscriptions at Petra, and their increasing use in later texts, suggest that this form of the Aramaic script originally developed for writing in ink and that it continued to be employed in this way parallel with its use in inscriptions.

We are fortunate in having some Nabataean texts on papyrus, and these, like the monumental inscriptions, are official documents written by professional scribes (e.g., figs. 24, 38.15). The script in these, and in the dipinti from Ramm (e.g., figs. 23, 38.14), is recognizably the same as that of the monumental inscriptions of Petra and Hegra, but more compressed. This compression allows more text to be fitted into each line and is easy to achieve when writing in ink, but it often results in the distortion of letter shapes and so is another factor in the development of the script. It is, however, much more difficult to compress the text when carving on stone—even the relatively soft sandstone of Petra or Hegra—and it is anyway usually unnecessary and undesirable in a public inscription.\(^5\)

Thus, the Aramaic script of Petra, which was then carried to other regions of the Nabataean cultural area, must have been used primarily for writing in ink and it was in this medium that it developed and changed. When transferred to stone, at least for monumental inscriptions, a somewhat more “calligraphic” version was used, in which greater care was taken in shaping and spacing the letters, with the occasional inclusion of archaisms for aesthetic purposes or for emphasis.\(^6\) There were not, therefore, two separate Nabataean scripts—a lapidary and a cursive—but a single script, whose development, through writing in ink, can be traced only

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38. Script table showing some varieties of the Nabataean and Hauran Aramaic scripts. Note this table is not intended to suggest a linear development of the script.

An asterisk above a letter in the table indicates that this form is found at the end of a word in this text. In some cases, this is a special “final form” of the letter, in others it is identical to the forms in other positions, and in yet other cases, there are too few examples in the text to be sure. Those forms not marked with an asterisk are given in initial or medial positions.

The vertical positions of the letters relative to other letters in the same line reflect their arrangement within the text.

Where space permits, all the significantly different forms of each letter in each text are shown, to illustrate the lack of consistency in letter shapes even within monumental inscriptions.

**Key to the script table:**

1. Imperial Aramaic: The Tayma Stela of 5th/4th century BC (OIS ii, 113, Musée du Louvre A.0. 1505).

2. A pre-Nabataean local script of the Negev used on stone in an inscription from Elusa in the Negev, 3rd/2nd century BC (?) (Cowley 1914-1915).

3. A pre-Nabataean local script of the Negev c. 100 BC (?) used for a text written in ink on a pebble (Navéh 1979).

4. The earliest inscription so far found in Petra c. 96/95 BC. See fig. 18. Note that the form of k marked with a “?” is often read as a, though k seems the more likely reading.

5. The Turkmaniyah inscription in Petra, c. mid-first century AD. See fig. 17.

6. The earliest dated inscription from the façade of a tomb at Hegra, Arabia. 1st century AD. See fig. 27.

7. The Nabataean part of the bilingual inscription at Rawwah, Arabia (between 167 and 169 AD). (See Milik 1971). Note the cross-stroke on the stem of the r to distinguish it from d (see Macdonald 1995, 96, n. 15).

8. The latest text in the Nabataean script. An epigraph from Hegra dated to 357 AD. (Stiehl 1970). Note the diacritical dot over the d to distinguish it from r, even though the two letters by now have distinct forms.

9. The second inscription from Tell el-Shuaqfiyah, Egypt, 34 BC (Jones et al. 1968, Pl. 24). Note that the usual forms of medial alif and medial p marked with “?” occur in a place name which has been tentatively read as Drni “Daphne.”

10. The local Aramaic script of the Hauran in an inscription from S’l dated to year 308 of the Seleucid era = 5 BC (Uttmann 1904, 90ff, no. 2).

11. The local Aramaic script of the Hauran in an inscription from Si’l dated to year 258 of Rabbel II [= 95 AD]. See fig. 36. There is one example of k in final position in this text but its form is not sufficiently clear on the photographs available to me for it to be included in the table.

12. The inscription on a hexagonal altar at Dimis, southern Syria, dated to 405 of the Seleucid era and 24 of Rabbel II [= 94 AD]. See fig. 35. The script is very close to that of Petra.

13. The epigraph in Old Arabic written in the Nabataean script at al-Namarah, east of the Hauran and dated to 326 AD. See fig. 37.

14. A text painted on plaster at Ramm. See fig. 23.

15. Nabataean script used by a professional scribe, 97/98 AD. P. Yadin 3 recto (Yadin et al. 2002, Pl. 24).

16. Nabataean script used by a literate layman, 130 AD. P. Yadin 22, see fig. 25. Note that the s is marked with a “?” because the only (possible) example in the text is damaged.

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\(^1\) Macdonald

\(^2\) Macdonald

\(^3\) Macdonald

\(^4\) Macdonald

\(^5\) Macdonald

\(^6\) Macdonald
imperfectly through the occasional "snap-shots" of various stages of its evolution provided by the inscriptions.

The form of the script used by literate people who were not scribes was much less conservative, and developed letter-forms and ligatures which reflect a preference for ease and speed of writing over clarity.\(^{129}\) The shapes of many letters became drastically different from those used by the scribes and masons, and a number of letters became indistinguishable from each other. Examples of this sort of handwriting can be seen on figs. 25–26, 31, 36, 38.10, 38.11. Several letters have shapes which, though recognizably similar to their Nabataean counterparts are distinct from them, e.g., the squarish or triangular aleph (figs. 38.10, 38.11), a mem usually closed on the left side in all positions (figs. 38.10, 38.11), and in some texts the he with an open base even in final position (fig. 38.10), etc.

The type of script used in any particular text was almost certainly the result, not of political considerations, but of the background of the particular scribe. Those brought up in the Hauran would have used the local script, regardless of whether they found themselves subjects of the Nabataean king,\(^{130}\) the Herodian rulers,\(^{131}\) the Romans, or others.\(^{132}\) Similarly, a scribe who came from Petra to the Hauran, and any pupils he may have trained there, would have used the Petra form of the script, or approximations to it.

A study of the inscriptions on pages 46 and 48 will illustrate this (see also 38.10–12). The inscription on figure 31 comes from an area outside Nabataean control. It is in the Hauran script and is dated by a regnal year of Philip the Tetrarch.

Contrast its script with those of 30 and 33, from within the Nabataean kingdom. These are dated respectively by regnal years of the Nabataean kings Malichus I (47 BC) and, a century later, Malichus II (57 AD), and the script of both is much closer to that of Petra inscriptions at these respective dates.

On the other hand, figs. 34–36 show three almost contemporary inscriptions, dated respectively to years 23, 24, and 25 of Rabbell II (93–95 AD). Text 34, whose script is very similar to that of Petra, comes from Imman which was almost certainly within the Nabataean kingdom. Here, although the letter shapes are similar to those of Petra (including the use of special final forms), the more or less uniform height of the letters suggests local influence. Contrast this with 36 (see also fig. 38.11), which also comes from within the Nabataean kingdom and is dated by a regnal year of a Nabataean king, but whose script is clearly the local Hauran Aramaic. Finally, 35 (see also fig. 38.12), whose script is indistinguishable from that of Petra and shows no local Hauran features, comes from Dmeir, some 40 km northeast of Damascus and apparently well outside the Nabataean kingdom. It is dated by both the Seleucid era and a regnal year of Rabbell II.

But perhaps the most telling comparison is between fig. 33 and 36 (see also fig. 38.11). Both texts are from the temple of Allat at Salkhad, which was within the Nabataean kingdom, and they were almost certainly commissioned by members of the same family. The inscription shown on fig. 33 is dated to year 17 of Malichus II (57 AD) and is written in a close
approximation to the Petra script. That on fig. 36 is dated forty years later, to year 25 of Rabbel II (95 AD) and is in the local Hauran script. Thus, even in that part of the Hauran that was under Nabataean control, both scripts were used by monument masons in the same town, for texts on the same temple, commissioned by members of the same family. Moreover, far from the Nabataean replacing the local form, it is the earlier text that is in Nabataean, and the later one—carved in the reign of Rabbel II and only a few kilometers from his capital at Bosra—that is in the Hauran script.

Thus, in the Hauran, the Petra script seems not to have "dominated" the local forms but to have co-existed with them. Indeed, there are texts which seem to show elements of both, such as that on fig. 32 (47 AD), where the letter-forms are close to those of Petra, but most of the letters are written separately, as in the Hauran scripts rather than joined as in the Petra-script of this period.\(^{137}\)

It will be clear from this that in the Hauran, as elsewhere, it is important not to regard script as a vehicle of political expression and that such terms as "national scripts"\(^{138}\) can therefore be misleading. We have already seen that the use of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic or Nabataean in the Jewish communities of the Dead Sea Valley was not dependent on the ethnic or religious community to which the user belonged, but more on the region from which they came (though the two might, of course, coincide). Equally, in the Hauran, the use of these only subtly different forms of the Aramaic alphabet must surely have been a matter of background and train-

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39. A fragment of a Greek-Nabataean bilingual inscription found at Jerash (Gerasa of the Decapolis), on the slopes below the the present museum. Both texts are too badly damaged to allow a coherent interpretation, but two kings, Aretas IV\(^7\) and Rabbel II\(^7\), are mentioned in the Nabataean section. If this is correct, it would place the inscription in the late first century AD. Department of Antiquities, Amman, Jordan.
ing, not of politics and ethnicity. Only very rarely was a script used to make a political point as, for example, when the Jewish leader Bar Kokhba replaced Aramaic with the revived ancient Hebrew script in his official documents.

As one might expect, the graffiti of the Sinai are in a multitude of different handwritings, and yet, taken as a whole, there is a surprising homogeneity about the script (see fig. 16). Of course, there are some bizarre and exceptional letter-forms and there are plenty of examples of individuals playing with the inscriptions they wrote, adding decorative flourishes or drawing a line along the bottom of the text joining all (or most of) the letters.139 Yet, despite these oddities, in the vast majority of texts the forms of the individual letters and their relationships to each other are remarkably constant, given that some inscriptions were the work of travelers or pilgrims but most were probably written by the local nomads and cultivators.

It is instructive to compare the graffiti of the Sinai with the Safaitic graffiti in the desert east of the Hauran. The script of the latter is also remarkably homogeneous, despite the long period (approximately 400 years) over which they appear to have been written and the huge numbers of texts involved. They represent the different “handwritings” of innumerable individuals, but there seems to be relatively little development in the script. One possible reason for this is that it was used only for carving graffiti on rocks and not generally for writing in ink, where the very speed and flexibility of the medium produces change. With a script which is well adapted for use on stone and which is used for nothing else, there is no particular stimulus to alter the shapes of the letters or their relationship to each other. Thus, instead of a development of letter-forms in the Safaitic and Hismaic scripts and the Nabataean of the graffiti in the Sinai, we find the occasional playful additions, as described above. While interesting in themselves and not without significance, these should not be confused with palaeographical developments.

In the various oases of northwest Arabia, forms of the Aramaic script were in use from at least the fifth century BC, and there are inscriptions at Tayma (fig. 38.1), Dedan, and Hegra in approximations to Imperial Aramaic, and at Tayma in local developments of the script (cf., for example, the votive inscription from Tayma, Louvre A.O. 26599).140 However, with the Nabataean development of Hegra, the northwest Arabian Aramaic scripts seem to have been swamped by the Nabataean form. Eventually, the native Ancient North Arabian Dadanitic script disappeared (the Taymanitic had apparently long since died out), and Nabataean was left as the only “local” written language, hence its use at Rawwafah (fig. 38.7).

This dominance of the Nabataean script in Arabia continued until at least the mid-fourth century AD (fig. 38.8).141 But by this time, further north, it was already being used to write the Arabic language. The epitaph at al-Namarah for Innuru’l-qays “king of all the Arabs” (figs. 37, 38.13), is dated to 328 AD and although by no means the earliest example of Old Arabic written in a borrowed script, it is the first which seems to make a political statement associating the use of the Arabic language with a sense of being “Arab.”142

Unfortunately, there are no inscriptions in the Nabataean script dated later than the mid-fourth century AD, while the first inscriptions in what is recognizably the Arabic script do not appear until the early sixth century.143 So, while it is generally accepted that the Arabic script developed out of the Nabataean, we cannot follow the processes of this development in any detail. The fact that the Namarah epitaph and all the pre-Islamic inscriptions in the Arabic script have been found in Syria suggests that the development may have taken place there, rather than in Arabia, where the association of the Aramaic language with the Nabataean script seems to have lasted much longer.144 But this could equally well be an accident of discovery.

Although what has survived of the Nabataeans’ own writings is relatively meager, their legacy has been incalculable. In their heyday their alphabet was used more widely than any other of the late Aramaic scripts and it continued to be so long after the demise of their kingdom, eventually to be rivaled only by Syriac in the extent of its use. Centuries after the other achievements of the Nabataeans had been forgotten, a late form of their script was given new life when it was used as the vehicle for recording the Revelation of Islam and was spread with the Muslim conquests from the Atlantic to the Far East, becoming the script for a large number of different languages and developing new and often very beautiful forms.
The text in the document appears to be a continuation of the previous page, discussing historical and archaeological findings. The text is filled with specific mentions of dates, places, and names, typical of a scholarly or academic paper. Due to the nature of the content, it is difficult to transcribe accurately without losing context or coherence. However, the text seems to deal with historical discussions, possibly relating to ancient civilizations or historical events, given the references to dates and specific locations.
Bibliography