Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia

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At a workshop on ‘Civilisations de l’Arabie préislamique’ in Aix-en-Provence in February 1996, I was asked by the organizers to give a survey of the state of our knowledge of the languages and scripts of pre-Islamic Arabia and to propose a coherent set of definitions and terms for them, in an attempt to clarify the numerous misapprehensions and the somewhat chaotic nomenclature in the field. I purposely concentrated on the languages and scripts of the Arabian Peninsula north of Yemen, and only mentioned in passing those of Ancient South Arabia, since these were to be the subject of another paper. Unfortunately, four years after it took place, the proceedings of this workshop remain unpublished. In the meantime, the contents of my paper have circulated widely and I, and others, are finding it increasingly frustrating having to refer to it as ‘forthcoming’. I am therefore most grateful to the editor of AAE for allowing a considerably revised version of my paper to be published here. It should be seen as an essential preliminary ground-clearing for my detailed discussion of the Ancient North Arabian languages and scripts which will appear early in 2001 in The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World’s Ancient Languages (ed. R.D. Woodard, Cambridge University Press) and my book Old Arabic and its legacy in the later language. Texts, linguistic features, scripts and letter-orders, which is in preparation.

Terminology

The epigraphy of pre-Islamic Arabia is littered with labels which were misnomers even when they were first applied (eg. ‘Safaitic’, ‘Thamudic’) or have become so as research has progressed (eg. ‘Minaic’). I shall preface this paper with an attempt to present a more coherent taxonomy, taking account of what we now know, and do not know, of the linguistic situation at various periods in pre-Islamic Arabia.

When suggesting new terms (1) I have tried, as far as possible, to follow systematically the use of the ending -ic (Sabaic, etc.) for languages and scripts, and -aean/i an or -ite for peoples and cultures (Sa-baean, Qatabanian, Liyyanite, etc.). The two cases in which this is not possible are the terms ‘North Arabian’ and ‘South Arabian’, where the -ian ending is necessary to distinguish these groups of languages and scripts from Arabic. The use by some scholars of the terms ‘North and South Arabic’ for ‘North and South Arabian’ is therefore to be regretted, particularly since others use the term ‘North Arabic’ to refer not to Safaitic, Thamudic, etc., but to what is normally called ‘Arabic’ (2). In the case of ‘South Arabic’ the term is particularly misleading since neither the Ancient nor the Modern South Arabian languages are in any sense ‘Arabic’ (3).
i) Ancient North Arabian [ANA] (nordarabique ancien, Altnordarabisch) [pre-Islamic $h$- ($hn$-) and apparently ‘zero’ dialects]

Oasis North Arabian [ONA]
- Taymanitic [formerly ‘Thamudic A’/‘Taymanite’]
- Dadanitic [formerly ‘Dedanite’ and ‘Lihyanite’]
- Dumaitic [formerly ‘Jawfian’]
- ‘Dispersed ONA’ [texts in the ONA scripts from Mesopotamia (formerly called ‘Chaldaean’) and other places, which cannot be classified as Taymanitic, Dadanitic or Dumaitic]

Safaitic
- Hismaic [formerly ‘Thamudic E’; also erroneously called ‘Tabuki Thamudic’ or ‘South Safaitic’]
- Thamudic B, C, D, ‘Southern Thamudic’
- Hasaitic [?]

ii) Arabic

Old Arabic (vieil arabe, Altarabisch) [pre-Islamic $l$- dialects]
- ‘Pure’ Old Arabic texts [wholly in Old Arabic but written in the Sabaic, Nabataean, early Arabic or Greek scripts]
- ‘Mixed’ texts: Safaeo-Arabic, [Sabaean-Arabic], Dadano-Arabic, Nabataeo-Arabic, Aramaeo-Arabic [texts written in the Safaitic, [Sabaic], Dadanitic, Nabataean, or other Aramaic languages and scripts but with Old Arabic features]

Middle Arabic
- Classical Arabic
- Modern Standard Arabic
- Spoken Arabic Dialects

[Appendix: Undifferentiated North Arabian]
1) ‘Pure Undifferentiated North Arabian’ texts [can be in any script, but are clearly North Arabian in language although they cannot be assigned either to Old Arabic or to a particular ANA dialect]
2) ‘Undifferentiated North Arabian Mixed’ texts eg. Sabaeo-North-Arabian [formerly ‘pseudo-sabean’: texts written in the Sabaic (etc.) languages and scripts but including North Arabian features which cannot be assigned either to Old Arabic or to a particular ANA dialect]

Fig. 1.
Suggested terminology for languages and scripts: I. North Arabian (nordarabique, Nordarabisch).

Languages (4)
The ancient and modern languages of the Arabian Peninsula fall into two quite distinct linguistic groups: North Arabian and South Arabian. While they share some features which mark them off from most other Semitic languages, there are many more which distinguish them from one another and it is now realized that their relationship is not particularly close.

I. ‘North Arabian’ (‘nordarabique’, ‘Nordarabisch’) (5) The term at present in general use is a sensible neutral label covering:

i) ‘Ancient North Arabian’ [ANA] (‘nordarabique ancien’, ‘Altnordarabisch’) (6) which comprises the pre-Islamic $h$- ($hn$-) and apparently ‘zero’ (7) dialects:
  - Taymanitic
  - Dadanitic
  - Dumaitic
  - Dispersed ONA (8)

- Safaitic
- Hismaic (9)
- Thamudic B, C, D, and ‘Southern Thamudic’
  and possibly
- Hasaitic.
At present, we know too little about the linguistic features of this group to make any further subdivision.

ii) Arabic

in all its forms and at all stages of its development. The earliest of these stages is:

‘Old Arabic’ (‘vieil arabe’ (10), ‘Altarabisch’ (11)). Just as ‘Old English’, ‘Old French’, etc. refer to the earliest surviving stages of these languages, Old Arabic refers to the pre-Islamic dialects of which traces remain in a handful of texts and in names (see below).

In the Islamic period we have evidence of other varieties of Arabic of which the principal are:

- Middle Arabic
- Classical Arabic
- Modern Standard Arabic
- Spoken Arabic Dialects

Appendix to the North Arabian group

There are a number of texts from the pre-Islamic period which are wholly or partially in a North Arabian language but which cannot be classed either as Old Arabic or as ANA because they contain only features which are common to both. I have labelled these ‘Undifferentiated’ North Arabian, until such time as they can be classified more precisely. See the discussion below.

II. ‘South Arabian’ (‘sudarabique’, ‘Südarabisch’) (12)

A clear, neutral, geographical term to indicate both the ancient and modern non-Arabic Semitic languages of the region covered by modern Yemen and Oman. Within this overall grouping, two sub-groups can be distinguished:

i) Ancient South Arabian [ASA]

(‘sudarabique ancien’ ‘Altsüdarabisch’)

is perhaps a safer term than either ‘Epigraphic South Arabian’, which describes a language group by the materials on which it is written, or ‘Old South Arabian’ which implies (incorrectly) that it is the direct ancestor of Modern South Arabian (13). This collective label covers two subdivisions.


- Sabaic
- Madābic (15)
- Qatabanic
- Hadramitic (16)

b) The non-Ṣayhadic languages, ie. the other ancient languages of southern Arabia, of which so far we have only rare glimpses. Among these is the spoken language of the Himyarites, who used Sabaic in their inscriptions. At present, this is known only from reports by writers of the Islamic period, but is possibly the language of the hymn to the sun-goddess at Ṭaniya (17). The languages of two other texts (18) which are at present incomprehensible seem also to fall under this heading, as would probably ‘Native Minaic’, the language spoken by the Mineans (as opposed to the Madhabic which they wrote), if an example were to be found. It is possible that the dipinti recently discovered in Dhofar (19) should be included as well, but they have yet to be deciphered.

ii) Modern South Arabian [MSA]

(‘sudarabique moderne’, ‘Neusüdarabisch’) is the common collective term for

- Baṭḥarī,
- Hārsūsī,
- Hobyōt
- Jibbālī,
- Mehri
- Suqūṭrī (Socotri)

the unwritten, non-Arabic Semitic languages spoken today, or in the recent past,
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i) Ancient South Arabian [ASA] (sudarabique ancien, Altsüdarabisch)
   Sayhadic
   Sabaic
   Madhabic [formerly called ‘Minaean’/‘Minaic’. The written language used by the Minaeans and apparently inherited from their predecessors in the region of Wādī Madāb, in the Yemeni Jawf].
   Qatabanic
   Hadramitic
   Non-Sayhadic
   Himyaritic [the native language of the Himyarites, of which a handful of possible examples remain]
   Other non-Sayhadic texts (ZI 11?, Ja 2353?)
   ? ‘Native Minaic’ [this should be restricted to any evidence that may appear for the language the Minaeans spoke]
   ?? The language of the Dhofar dipinti [at present undeciphered]

ii) Modern South Arabian [MSA] (sudarabique moderne, Neusüdarabisch)
   Baṭhari
   Harsūṣī
   Hobyôt
   Jibbālī
   Mehrī
   Socotrī

Fig. 2.
Suggested terminology for languages and scripts: II. South Arabian (sudarabique, Südarábiesch).

in Oman, southeastern Yemen and Socotra.

Although the terms ‘North Arabian’ and ‘South Arabian’ are both drawn from geography, the groups they describe are defined by very different criteria. ‘North Arabian’ describes a group of dialects (possibly languages?) which appear remarkably homogeneous linguistically. For each of these, its phonemic repertoire, morphology and (as far as we can tell) syntax, find closer parallels within the group than with any language outside it.

By contrast, the term ‘South Arabian’ is based more on geographical than linguistic criteria. While there appear to be fairly close internal relationships within the Modern South Arabian group, it is questionable to what extent all the languages within the Ancient South Arabian Sayhadic group really belong together on linguistic grounds. Indeed, future discoveries may prompt a drastic regrouping and relabelling of all the Ancient South Arabian languages. Equally, there seems to be no question of any lineal ‘descent’, at least from the Sayhadic languages to the Modern South Arabian tongues (20). Thus, ‘South Arabian’ is a geographical term which at present covers three quite distinct types of language group, each defined by different criteria. ‘Sayhadic’ represents the official, written, languages of the ancient South Arabian kingdoms, a grouping based as much on the fact that they are all relatively well documented, as on linguistic features. ‘Non-Sayhadic’ is simply a Restklassenbildung for any language indigenous to ancient South Arabia, which cannot be defined as Sayhadic; while MSA is the only one of the three to be defined by linguistic criteria.

To some extent, the contrast between North Arabian and South Arabian reflects the extent of our knowledge of the two. The linguistic data available for Ancient North Arabian is relatively sparse and it is possible that if we had as much material for it as we do for Ancient South Arabian we might dis-
cover that the group was a good deal less homogeneous than it appears.

Scripts
The Arabian alphabetic tradition (21)
The Arabian and the North-West Semitic alphabetic traditions are the two great alphabetic writing systems of the Ancient Near East. It is generally assumed that they stemmed from a common source in the north and separated some time in the second millennium BC. Each has its own traditional alphabetic order (the North-West Semitic $^b^g^d$ (22) and the Arabian $^h^l^h^m$ (23)) and both have been found at Ugarit (24). This in itself, of course, is only evidence that both letter orders were in use before the beginning of the twelfth century BC. It seems likely that the $^h^l^h^m$ was not native to Ugarit, where the local alphabetic order ($^b^g^h^d$) is amply attested, the inference being that it was in use elsewhere. The only region where it seems to have been in normal use is Ancient South Arabia, although the evidence is from a much later period. It is true that at sites in the Yemeni Jawf, fragmentary inscriptions in the South Arabian alphabet have been found in levels dated by Carbon 14 to between the ninth and thirteenth centuries BC (25) but, while the juxtaposition of these unrelated fragments of evidence raises intriguing possibilities, there is as yet no firm basis for dating the origins of the Arabian alphabetic tradition.

The individual scripts within the Arabian group are as follows:

I. The North Arabian scripts
   - Taymanitic
   - Dadanitic
   - Dumaitic
   - Dispersed Oasis North Arabian
   - Safaitic
   - Hismaic

‘Thamudic’, ie. a number of different scripts which have not yet been fully identified and distinguished, represented in some 11,000 graffiti scattered throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

II. The South Arabian scripts
Monumental South Arabian of which there are relatively minor variations in the
   - Sabaic
   - Madhabic
   - Qataanic
   - Hadramitic inscriptions; the
   - Hasaitic script (developed from the Sabaic) (26); the
   - zabur or ‘minuscule’ scripts (27); and possibly the script(s) of the
   - Dhofar dipinti and inscriptions.

III. The Ethiopic syllabary (or vocalized alphabet)
   the only form of the Arabian alphabetic tradition still in use today.

New nomenclature for languages and scripts
The different North Arabian alphabets were related to each other and to the South Arabian alphabets in ways that are not yet fully understood. Among the North Arabian scripts there are a number of subcategories that urgently need redefinition. Because the majority of ANA inscriptions are short, very often consisting solely of names, genealogies of varying lengths and introductory particles, it is often impossible to identify the language of the text (28). It is therefore customary, faute de mieux, to apply the name of the script to the language in which (it is assumed) the text was written, unless there is evidence to the contrary (29). This is most unsatisfactory but at present unavoidable. The discussion which follows is therefore primarily concerned with the taxonomy of the North Arabian scripts (for which we have ample evidence). The nomenclature of the languages
(on which we have much less data) will inevitably follow that of the scripts in which they are habitually expressed, except where there is evidence to the contrary.

There is an increasing recognition that the distinction between the ‘Dedanite’ and ‘Lihyānite’ scripts is artificial and that they represent the same script at different stages of development. Moreover, the chronological limits of these different stages do not necessarily coincide with the kingdoms of Dadan (see note 1) and Lihyān, after which they are named. However, if we abandon the term ‘Dedanite’ it would still be anachronistic to talk of ‘Lihyān’ before the kingdom of Lihyān. It would seem to be more sensible to name the script (at all stages of its development) after the oasis in which it developed, rather than after a specific kingdom. I would therefore suggest that, from now on, the labels ‘Lihyān’ and ‘Dedanite’ be abandoned and the script and language throughout their history be referred to as ‘Dadanitic’. It would then be possible to distinguish different phases within the development of the script (‘early’, ‘middle’, ‘late’, etc.) without tying them to political events, the dating of which is anyway uncertain.

Similarly, I would refer to the scripts which developed in the oases of Taymā’ and Dūmā (modern al-Jawf) as ‘Taymanitic’ (30) and ‘Dumaitic’ (31) respectively. These terms would also refer to the dialects normally expressed by these alphabets.

The scripts of the Early Dananitic, Taymanitic and Dumaitic texts, together with those of the so-called ‘Chaldaean’ inscriptions (of which more below) are very close in form, and it is often difficult to assign a short text to one or other type (see Fig. 3). It therefore seems to me useful to think in terms of an ‘Oasis North Arabian’ [ONA] script, which was employed, with small local variations in letter-form and orthographic practice, in the three major oasis-towns of North Arabia: Dadan, Taymā’ and Dūmā, and probably also among the Arab communities settled in Babylonia and elsewhere (32). I would suggest that Oasis North Arabian be subdivided into Dananitic, Taymanitic, etc. only when there is clear evidence to justify this (33).

A new name is also urgently needed for the so-called ‘Chaldaean’ inscriptions, the brief texts in the ONA script, on seals, pottery, bricks, etc. which have been found in various parts of Mesopotamia and elsewhere (34). They are clearly in no sense ‘Chaldaean’ (35) and Burrows’ description of the script as ‘Old Arabic’ is equally misleading (36). While it is likely, although in most cases unprovable, that at least some of these texts are to be associated with the Arab communities settled in Babylonia, others appear to be connected with Syria and Transjordan (37), and yet others seem to be from Arabia itself (38). They therefore do not form a homogeneous group. I would suggest that this be reflected in a descriptive term such as ‘dispersed Oasis North Arabian inscriptions’, failing a more concise and elegant title.

The name ‘Thamūdic’ was the invention of western scholars even though there is virtually no evidence to connect any of the texts gathered under this rubric with the ancient tribe of Thamūd (39). However, the label is far too well established to be changed and its very inappropriateness, when recognized, serves to emphasize the artificiality of the category. For ‘Thamudic’ is no more than a Restklassenbildung (a term I owe to E. A. Knauf, ZDPV 97, 1981; 189, n. 7), a sort of undetermined’ pigeon-hole into which one can put everything which does not fit into one of the better-defined categories. In a field such as Ancient North Arabian, in which so much of the evidence is uncertain and so much work still needs to be done, this serves a useful purpose.

However, while this is, or should be,
NB There are no chronological implications in the order in which the scripts are arranged. The numbers above the letters in the 'Dispersed ONA' line refer to the photographs of these inscriptions on plates in Sass, *Studia Alphabetica*: 1991.

Fig. 3.
Letter-forms in the Ancient North Arabian alphabets.
well known to those working in the field, it is necessary to warn those less familiar with the subject who may be misled into assuming that the items brought together under this rubric can in some way be treated as a whole. If scholars in other fields are misled or bewildered it is largely the fault of epigraphists such as Jamme and van den Branden who, against all the evidence, insist on ‘l’unité de l’alphabet thamoudéen’ and, in the case of van den Branden, on a connection with the tribe of Thamûd (40).

In an exhaustive study (41), Geraldine King has recently identified the distinguishing characteristics of the script which Winnett labelled ‘Thamudic E’, thus enabling us to remove it from the Thamudic’ Restklassenbildung. This script, and the dialect normally expressed in it, therefore require a new name (42). The surveys conducted by Geraldine King and others in the Hismâ (43) desert of southern Jordan, where to date at least 5000 texts have been recorded, suggest that this region of Jordan and northwest Saudi Arabia holds the major concentration of these inscriptions, although naturally smaller numbers are scattered over a much wider area. In a recent article, Geraldine King and I have therefore suggested that the script and dialect of these texts should be called ‘Hwismâic’ (44).

‘Like Thamudic’, the term Safaitic is a misnomer, although for different reasons. It refers to the mainly barren area of extinct volcanoes and unbroken lava flows, south-east of Damascus and northeast of Jabal al-‘Arab (45), which is known as the Şafâ. It was near the eastern edge of this region that the first Safaitic inscriptions were discovered. The name is thus a purely modern label which bears no relation to what the authors of these tens of thousands of texts called themselves or the script they used (if indeed it had a name). Unfortunately, although these inscriptions are spread over a huge area of desert in southern Syria, northeastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia, the one place where they have never been found is in the Şafâ itself. However, the misnomer is far too well established to be changed, although the fact that it is a purely conventional term needs constantly to be borne in mind in the face of such artificial conceptions as ‘Safaitic tribes’ or a ‘Safaitic name’ (46).

The term Hasaitic (47) refers to inscriptions – almost entirely funerary – found principally in northeast Arabia at the sites of Thäj, Qatîf, etc. but occasionally further afield (48). Because of the small number of inscriptions so far published and the repetitive character of their content, little is known of the linguistic features of Hasaitic.

It is generally held that the Hasaitic inscriptions are written either in the monumental South Arabian alphabet (albeit with occasional unusual letter-forms) or in one closely derived from it (49). However, a very different theory has recently been advanced which claims that

‘Comme on trouve des textes en écriture һәsәәenne dans le sud de l’Iraq à partir du VIIIe siècle avant l’ère chrétienne, il semble vraisemblable que la région du Golfe a emprunté son écriture directement à la source, probablement dans la région Syrie-Palestine ... plutôt qu’en Arabie du sud.’ (50)

Unfortunately, this theory is based on several misconceptions. Firstly, the only Hasaitic text so far discovered in Mesopotamia is CIH 699, which Loftus found in situ in an underground tomb at the foot of a mound where ‘Seleucid tablets occurred’ (51). The chamber had already been robbed and no dating evidence for either the tomb or the inscription is known.

Secondly, the only North Arabian inscriptions found in Mesopotamia which may date to the eighth century BC are some of the Dispersed Oasis North Arabian texts. However, the Dispersed ONA
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inscriptions do not form a coherent corpus representing one script which could be considered native to this region. They are a random assortment of small finds from a very wide area, which display a considerable range of letter-forms and clearly represent a number of different varieties of theONA scripts. This suggests that they represent imports rather than the products of a native form of literacy (52). It is for this reason that I have suggested calling them ‘Dispersed Oasis North Arabian’, a label which I hope emphasizes their heterogeneous character and the fact that they are unlikely to be indigenous to the places where they have been found.

Thirdly, the script of the Hasaitic inscriptions is clearly very different from that of any of the Dispersed ONA texts, as can be seen by comparing the relevant rows in Figure 3, and there is nothing to indicate that the former developed from the latter (53). Moreover, if it had, one would need to explain how this supposed independent development produced a script (ie. Hasaitic) which was identical, in all but the tiniest details, to the monumental South Arabian alphabet.

The dating of the Hasaitic inscriptions is at present uncertain. Pirenne made a tentative comparison of the script of one Hasaitic text (Ry 687) (54) with elements of her ‘Stade D2’ and ‘Stade E’, for which she offered rough dates of c.280 BC and 150–100 BC respectively, and more confidently assigned another, fragmentary and much damaged text (Ry 688) (55), to her ‘Stade C’, dating it to 350–300 BC (56). However, Pirenne’s dating was based on the ‘short’ South Arabian chronology, which archaeological finds in recent years have shown to be untenable (57). Furthermore, Pirenne herself admitted that ‘cette graphie du Golfe Persique ne s’intègre pas exactement à l’évolution de l’écriture sud-arabe; elle est spécifique...,’ (58) the implication of which is surely that it may be misleading to try to date it by fitting it into a South Arabian palaeographical schema (59).

Thus, at present we unfortunately have no direct evidence for either the origin or the dating (60) of the Hasaitic script. In the absence of such evidence, I can only suggest that the Hasaitic monumental script is so similar to the monumental South Arabian that it is highly unlikely that they could represent parallel developments from an early period. It seems far more probable that, at a date unknown, the South Arabian script began to be used for monumental inscriptions in the northeast of the Peninsula, possibly for reasons of prestige. Once this had begun, this alphabet ceased to be ‘South Arabian’ because it was being used at too great a distance from Southern Arabia for it to maintain the same evolutionary course as the true ‘South Arabian script’. Instead it became ‘the Hasaitic script’ in the sense that it began its own palaeographical development. Alas, the tiny number of inscriptions so far known and the lack of direct external dating evidence makes any true palaeographical analysis impossible at present, and we must await the discovery of much more evidence before this, or any other, hypothesis can be tested.

Old Arabic seems to have remained a purely spoken language until the late fifth/early sixth centuries AD (61) which means, of course, that no specific script was associated with it before that period. Thus, on the rare occasions when it was written, the script associated with the local language of prestige was used: South Arabian in the southern half of the Peninsula; Dadanitic in Dadan; Nabataean at Hegrā, ʿEn ʿAvdat in the Negev, and at al-Namāra; a form of eastern Aramaic at Mleiha (Malayha) on the Oman Peninsula; Greek in an ecclesiastical context in Syria (62); and early Arabic (63), again mainly in Syria. Some aspects
of the significance of this will be discussed below. Here I would only explain some distinctions which recent studies have revealed and which require some refinements of terminology.

The documentary evidence for Old Arabic is of two kinds, see Figure 1: (64)
(a) Texts in ‘Pure’ Old Arabic are those expressed wholly in the pre-Islamic ‘l’-dialect(s), although written in a variety of scripts, as outlined above.

(b) ‘Mixed’ Old Arabic texts are those expressed in the language normally associated with the script (e.g., Safaitic, Dadanitic, Aramaic, etc.) but which include some linguistic features identifiable as Old Arabic. In order to distinguish these from the ‘pure’ Old Arabic texts, I would suggest that these be called

*Safaeo-Arabic* (65)
*[Sabaeo-Arabic]* (66)
*Dadano-Arabic*
*Nabataeo-Arabic*
*Aramaeo-Arabic* (67).

I would only apply such a label to a text if the intrusive elements can clearly be identified as Old Arabic as distinct from ANA or ASA. For the diagnostic criteria available at present, see below.

Given the paucity of material, the inadequacies of the scripts used and the apparently close similarities between the two sub-groups of North Arabian, there will inevitably be a number of cases where it is impossible to decide whether the intrusive elements in a particular document are Old Arabic or ANA. To avoid classifying these incorrectly and thus creating confusion in the future when the characteristics of the two groups are described, it is useful to have a *Restklassenbildung*, or ‘pending’ category into which such texts can be placed until such time as their language can be identified more exactly. I suggest, therefore, that these texts be called ‘Undifferentiated North Arabian’. Within this class, subdivisions can be made to reflect the script and basic language of each text. Thus those Sabaic inscriptions from Haram which include intrusive elements from an undifferentiated North Arabian language (see below), I would call *Sabaeo-North-Arabian*, within the category of ‘Undifferentiated North Arabian’ (see Fig. 1).

**Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia**

At the outset it is important to distinguish between languages and scripts, especially since, as mentioned above, the same labels (‘Sabaic’, ‘Safaitic’, etc.) are usually applied to both. Any script can, of course, be used to express any language (more or less efficiently) and there is no inevitable or indissoluble link between a particular tongue and the written form in which it is habitually expressed. The fact that certain writing systems have become associated with particular languages is no more than convention and, more often than not, the script adopted is ill-suited to the phonological requirements of the language it is used to express. Indeed, phonology seems seldom to have been considered, when writing systems which had been developed to express one language (with varying degrees of competence) were employed to express another. One need only think of Akkadian written in a syllabary which had evolved to express Sumerian, or the Old Aramaic phonemic repertoire squeezed into an alphabet designed for that of Phoenician.

The fact that the same script may be used to write several different languages has far-reaching effects on our perception and classification of the ancient documents we study. To take just one example: scripts associated with languages of political or cultural prestige, or which have become the medium of international correspondence,
are liable to be used to express other, more local, languages. We are not particularly surprised, therefore, when we find a Hasaitic text in the South Arabian script, or an Old Arabic one in the Nabataean. But what of the names in a graffito in the South Arabian script, where there is no visible grammatical context to indicate the language; or a seal with a single name in the Aramaic script? Failing any internal indicators, such names have traditionally been assigned to the language usually associated with the script: they become ‘South Arabian’ or ‘Aramaic’ names (68). Then, all too often, we use linguistic or onomastic features to define the boundaries between communities. At best, these are extremely inexact indicators—after all, most of us have at some time written in languages other than our mother tongue and if, by chance, such a document was the only one to survive, future historians might, for instance, class me as French on the basis of a letter I had written in that language.

Similarly, we need to be extremely circumspect in the way we use onomastic material. Synchronically, a name represents the person who bears it; it does not ‘mean’ anything else (69). Of course, like all words, names have etymologies. But in the vast majority of cases those who give and those who bear them are unaware of, and unconcerned with their original signification. For, in most cases, the nugget of linguistic information a name contains is a fossil, and there is no way of relating it to a particular stage of the language in question or to a particular society using that stage. We therefore have no way of knowing whether the linguistic features of a name can give us accurate information about the language used by its bearer. Relatively few names at any one time are coined within the community which uses them, most are considerably older, and in many cases were ‘borrowed’ from another culture. Given that a man or woman’s name is the most intimate of personal identifiers, the personal choice of the name-giver must almost always have been paramount, and even in societies where practices such as patronymy are the norm, the unexpected is always possible. We therefore need to be very clear about what exactly we mean when we speak of a ‘North Arabian’ or a ‘South Arabian’ or a ‘Nabataean’ name, and we should avoid the temptation to use names of any sort as evidence for the language, let alone the ‘ethnicity’ of those who bear them (70).

In what follows, I shall divide Arabia very roughly by a northwest-southeast line and refer to the western two-thirds of the Peninsula as ‘western Arabia’ and to the eastern one-third as ‘eastern Arabia’ (see Fig. 4).

On present evidence, eastern Arabia (both at its northern and southern ends) appears to have had a development which is rather different from that of the cultures further west. This apparent difference may in part be due to an imbalance in the amount and type of research which has so far been devoted to the two sides of the Peninsula. The study of the ancient history of both the northwest and southwest is still dominated by epigraphy, and the results of the archaeological work of the last twenty-five years are only now beginning to change and fill out the traditional picture. By contrast, our understanding of eastern Arabia is due entirely to archaeological work and, with the exception of Dhofar, this side of the Peninsula has produced only a handful of inscriptions, containing very little information (71).

Thus for pre-Islamic western Arabia (especially the southwest) we have a great deal of information about those aspects of life which are the stuff of monumental inscriptions: social and political systems, land and water rights, religious practice, etc., whereas in the east, we are almost en-
tirely ignorant of these. Similarly, the archaeological exploration of the Gulf coast and Oman has provided information about chronology, city plans, diet, burial practices and much else, which is only slowly becoming available in the west of the Peninsula. Nevertheless, even accepting this, there are clear differences between the two regions, and these are worth exploring.

To the epigraphist, the most striking contrast between them is in the use of the art of writing. In northwest Arabia there was
a multiplicity of different native scripts, in addition to the imported Aramaic, Greek and South Arabian alphabets. From at least the mid-first millennium BC, forms of the Oasis North Arabian script appear to have been in use in the major oases of Dūmā, Taymā and Dadan and, from a period not much later, the nomads seem also to have used a number of different alphabets (72).

The question of the development and the interrelationships of the different Arabian scripts is still very uncertain, but it seems possible that most, if not all, of these North Arabian alphabets developed in parallel to the South Arabian scripts and not from them.

By contrast, the only native script to develop on the eastern side of the Peninsula was that of Dhofar. Apart from this, on present knowledge at least, writing in eastern Arabia appears to have been fundamentally derivative. However, I should emphasize that the amount of material so far discovered is derisory. A few dozen texts in cuneiform have been found at the northern end of the Gulf (73), and a scattering of Greek texts and fragments in the same region (74). The script of the Hasaitic inscriptions clearly derives directly from South Arabian monumental, although in individual texts there are occasional rather odd variations in the forms of certain letters (75). The few Aramaic texts from the Gulf are, with one major exception, short texts, fragments or coin legends. They display a variety of forms of the script in both the lapidary and cursive traditions and some texts – notably the coin legends but also others – contain letter-shapes apparently derived from both (76). Indeed, in some texts the scripts seem to have developed in unusual directions and, for instance, in the one long inscription the signs for ð, r, k and ñ are identical, as are those for l and m (77). Although certain of its individual features can be compared with those of Hatran and Parthian (Arsacid), this particular form of the Aramaic script is not known from elsewhere. It is therefore possible that it represents a local development, of which as yet we have only two examples (78). However, the total number of Aramaic texts from the Gulf area is so tiny and their geographical and chronological range apparently so wide that it would be dangerous to draw any conclusions at present.

In the south, the contrast between west and east is slightly different. In Yemen a number of individual settled, literate cultures grew up and yet there appears to have been the most extraordinary degree of uniformity in the appearance of the monumental script (79). Since the palaeographical work of Jacqueline Pirenne, it has been assumed that this developed at a more or less uniform rate throughout the region and even in outlying areas (80). The differences between one inscription and another in the form of the monumental script are therefore generally attributed to chronological developments, rather than regional variations. At the same time, there are two other types of the South Arabian script: the adapted ‘majuscule’ of the graffiti and some of the inscribed sticks mentioned below, and the zabūr, or ‘minuscule’ script, used on the majority of the inscribed sticks which have been appearing in northern Yemen, in their hundreds, since 1970 (81). In both cases these are groups of scripts for, in contrast to the monumental writing, there is no uniformity here and, particularly in the case of the zabūr, there is a plethora of different script forms. Nor was literacy confined to the settled population, for in the deserts of southern Saudi Arabia there are thousands of graffiti in the South Arabian (82) and ‘Southern Thamudic’ (83) scripts, some of which may well have been written by nomads, like the Safaitic and ‘Thamudic’ graffiti of the north.
Thus, there is at present a very clear contrast between eastern Arabia, where writing seems hardly to have taken root, and the western two-thirds of the Peninsula where it seems to have been endemic. This said, however, there are also clear distinctions between the northwest and the southwest in languages, scripts, the types of document available and relations with other societies. In what follows, I shall be concentrating on what we know of the linguistic situation in north and central Arabia in the first millennia BC and AD. I shall not deal with the languages of ancient South Arabia, except when they impinge on those of the north (84).

Ancient North Arabian

The hn-dialects
In northwestern Arabia a multiplicity of dialects developed within the group I have called Ancient North Arabian, which uses $h$- as the definite article. The earliest occurrence of this article is in the name of the goddess $hn$-$lt$ in the Aramaic dedications on silver bowls found at her shrine at Tell al-Mashṭîta, in the Nile delta. These have been dated to the late fifth century BC (85). One of the dedicators was Qaynu bar Gešem, king of Qēdār, and it has recently been suggested that this is evidence that this tribe could have spoken a $h$-/hn-dialect (86). However, this is to stretch the evidence too far. The other dedications found at the shrine are also to $hn$-$lt$. Of the two others which name the dedicator, one is made by a man with an Egyptian name and a North Arabian patronym (87), while in the other both names are Semiticized Egyptian (88). It seems clear, therefore, that the goddess of this shrine was worshipped as $hn$-$lt$, regardless of how this epithet would be realized in the languages of individual pilgrims, or the Aramaic of the dedications. This epithet cannot therefore be used as evidence for the language spoken by the tribe of Qēdār or any other of the dedicants.

Similarly, this example should warn us that the epithet $\alpha\lambda\lambda\lambda\lambda\lambda\alpha$ mentioned by Herodotus (89) is not necessarily evidence for the dialect of his Arab informants (who were probably living in eastern Egypt or Sinai). In ancient Near-Eastern religions epithets rapidly became names and, once this had happened, the form of the name was fixed. All we can say is that in eastern Egypt in the fifth century BC both the $h$- and the $l$-dialects were represented in the epithet ‘the goddess’ (90), but with no certainty as to who was speaking these dialects at the time, or where they originated.

Dadanitic

The one dialect of Ancient North Arabian in which it is certain that $hn$- was used was Dadanitic. The normal Dadanitic article is $h$- but before /$\alpha$/ (91) and /$\epsilon$/ (92) it is $hn$-. It has been suggested that $hn$- is a survival of the original article in all members of this group, but that in the other dialects it was reduced to $h$- (93). It is impossible to prove or disprove this theory, but if this were so, one would expect the odd irregularity of usage in Dadanitic and sporadic survivals in other dialects. In fact, however, there is only one possible instance in Dadanitic of $hn$- before a phoneme which is not a pharyngal or a glottal (94), and no certain examples (except in names) in the other dialects. So this feature could just as well, or perhaps more likely, be a euphonic development within Dadanitic, as a survival from an earlier period.

A Safaitic inscription, by an author who gives his nisba as $hn$-hwly (95), provides an interesting footnote to this discussion. It is clear from many other Safaitic texts that the Hwol came from outside the normal migration areas of the tribes east of the Hawrān whose members wrote these graffiti,
and it is likely that the Hwlt should be identified with the Avalitae, whom Pliny associates with the oases of Dūmā and Ḥegrā (96), the latter at least being very much within the Dadanitic hn- dialect area. Unfortunately, the statement in the text – w nfr mn rm ‘and he escaped from the Romans’ – is too brief to identify its language.

Outside Dadanitic – ie. principally at Tell al-Mashūṭa and in the Hasaitic inscriptions – the evidence for the article hn- comes entirely from names, all but two of which are compounded with hn-lt (97) and, as noted above, these are not evidence for the linguistic features of the texts in which they occur. This is particularly clear in the case of the name hn-mlt, found in a Safaitic text from northern Saudi Arabia (98), since there is ample evidence that the article in Safaitic is h- before all sounds, not hn-.

The h- and possible ‘zero’ dialects

Hasaitic (?)

It is important to reiterate that the etymologies of personal names are not evidence for the language of their bearers, since Hasaitic has been classed with the hn- dialects simply because of the presence of the article hn- in theophoric names in the texts. Other than in names, there is as yet only one possible instance of the article in Hasaitic, and here it is the South Arabian suffixed -n (99). So limited is the material yet discovered that we have no other contexts in which the definite article might be expected (100). It is therefore far from certain what form it took in Hasaitic. It is even possible that it did not use a definite article at all, or else employed one, such as a vocalic affix as in Aramaic, which did not show up in the purely consonantal South Arabian script.

Despite its script, Hasaitic is classed as Ancient North Arabian rather than Ancient South Arabian because it uses the typically ANA expression d3l and, with the one exception just quoted, lacks any characteristic- cally ASA features. This classification is probably correct, but it is as well to be aware that it is, and can only be, based on the tiny amount of non-onomastic material available.

Oasis North Arabian

The report, in Akkadian, by the eighth-century BC governor of Suhu on the middle Euphrates, concerning a raid he carried out on a caravan of the people of Tayma² and Saba², is by now well known. This is our earliest evidence for the involvement of the Sabaeans and Taymanites in the caravan trade (101). However, there may be another reference to Tayma³, this time in a hiero- glyphic Luwian document also of the eighth century, which is by a certain Yariris, a palace official who seems to have become regent of Carchemish during the minority of its king. In this inscription, Yariris boasts that he knew twelve languages and at least four scripts (102). The latter were, ‘the script of the City’ (ie. his own hieroglyphic Luwian), and those of Sura and Assyria and finally the Taymani script. Sura has been identified as Tyre and its script, therefore, as Phoenician (103). Rather more tentatively, it has been suggested that ta-i-ma-ni-ti refers to the script of Tayma³’ (104). Like the other items in the list, this is an adjectival form (105), and this could explain the -n-. Such an interpretation is very attractive, not least because it provides a schematic map of the trading relationships of Carchemish at this period: with Phoenicia to the west, Assyria to the east and Tayma³ and Saba³ to the south (106).

If this identification is correct, it provides the earliest historical reference to a North Arabian script. It does not seem to me necessary to assume that the South Ar-
abian script is meant here (107). The governor of Suḫu was quite capable of distinguishing between Taymanites and SabaeanS and there is no reason to suppose that Yariris would have said Taymanitic if he had meant Sabaic. If Sass is correct in dating to the eighth century BC some of the seals with Oasis North Arabian inscriptions found in Mesopotamia, this would fit very well with this reference.

Although I am unconvinced by many of Sass’s arguments, unless one takes the extreme position that all the inscriptions on the seals are later additions, his dating is probably more or less correct in some cases. I would therefore suggest that we could take as a working hypothesis the existence of the Oasis North Arabian script, in one or more forms, by the eighth century BC. The way in which this was adapted to express the different dialects of the region is only just beginning to be worked out.

It would appear that the Taymanitic script had signs for all three unvoiced non-emphatic sibilants, represented by s₁, s² and s³ (see Figs. 3 and 5). It seems probable that this s³ sign originally had a form similar to Monumental South Arabian s³, for a shape very close to the latter is found on a Taymanitic seal inscription (RES 2688) (108). What appears to have happened is that the distinction between the phonemes represented by s³ and s¹ was retained longer in Taymā than in other places (109). Developed forms of the s³ sign appear in at least two other Taymanitic inscriptions (110), but in none of the other North Arabian scripts.

Similarly, it would appear that in its earliest form, the ONA script had no sign for /d/ (see Fig. 3). In Taymanitic, which in this case again appears to be very conservative, the z sign was also used for /d/, while the d signs in early and late Dadanitic look very much as if they are adaptations of the z sign. At Dūmā, on the other hand, a different solution was found. The inherited z sign, with the horizontal bar set diagonally, was used for /z/, and a sign resembling the South Arabian d was employed for /d/ (in the verb *wd) (111). At the same time a sign similar to the South Arabian d was used for /d/ in the N.Div. rḏw (112). This interchange of the d and ḏ signs is paralleled in Safaitic and Thamudic B which also employ a sign identical to the monumental South Arabian ḏ for their /d/.

On the other hand, in Hismaic, an identical sign was used for /t/, the common t sign being used for /g/. No explanation has yet been found for this bizarre feature. There are many other examples and a thorough study of the relationships between signs and the sounds they represent in the different forms of the Arabian alphabetic tradition is long overdue.

Thamudic

In the last sixty years, the study of ‘Thamudic’ has progressed considerably, and thanks to the work of F.V. Winnett and Geraldine King, it is now possible to remove from the Restklassenbildung two groups of inscriptions, and to make a very rough preliminary subdivision of some of the rest. Of the two groups which can be removed one is Winnett’s ‘Thamudic A’ which is now recognized as ‘Taymanitic’ and has been discussed above. The other is his ‘Thamudic E’ which I have suggested should be renamed Hismaic (113). Geraldine King has made a detailed analysis of this dialect and script (114) which, it is hoped, will be published before long, and so I shall add only the few brief remarks below. The distinctive features of language, orthography, style and content of both Taymanitic and Hismaic are now fairly well known and each constitutes a clearly defined type. Of course, the categories are not hermetically sealed and there are texts which could be either Taymanitic or early
Dadanitic, and others which could be His-maic or Safaitic, or which show a mixture of the features of both groups. However, this is to be expected.

What is left as ‘Thamudic’ is a mass of over 11,000, mainly short, texts scattered over the whole of the western part of the Peninsula from Syria to Yemen (inclusive). Approximately 2,000 of these were copied and published by early scholars and travellers in northwest Arabia and were rather roughly divided by Winnett in 1937 into three sub-groups, Thamudic B, C and D (115). In 1970 he revised the division and the labels, calling Thamudic B ‘Najdi’ and combining C and D under the heading ‘Hi-jazi’ (116). However, this only led to confusion and his original classification has generally been retained (117). Of these groups, by far the largest is Thamudic B and it is almost certain that future work will show that this should be subdivided. Similarly, on the basis of different signs for $r$ and $n$, Geraldine King has suggested that Thamudic C should be subdivided (118).

Most of the texts are known only in hand-copies of uncertain accuracy and this combined with their brevity makes them extremely difficult to interpret. In addition, the values of certain signs in Thamudic B, C and D are still in doubt. An interesting feature of Thamudic D, which is the script of the Thamudic counterpart of the Raqoṣ inscription (119) and which can therefore be dated to AD 267, is the apparently archaic forms of many of its letters (see Fig. 3). This is particularly clear in the case of $\sigma$, $b$, $z$, $\varsigma$, $\varsigma$ and $n$. This should serve as a warning to those who propose palaeographical developments between one script and another. For had we not had the Raqoṣ text with its date, Thamudic D would have been classed as one of the earliest of the North Arabian scripts.

The vast majority of the known Thamudic inscriptions (some 9,000) were discovered by the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition mainly in the southwestern part of Saudi Arabia. As might be expected, these display many features which are very different from the ‘Thamudic’ inscriptions of the north and they do not fit easily into the existing sub-groups. They are called ‘Thamudic’ simply because they are considered to be North Arabian but cannot be classified as Oasis North Arabian, Hismaic, Safaitic or Hasaitic. They are termed ‘Southern Thamudic’ to distinguish them from the existing rough subdivisions B, C and D. Jacques Ryckmans described some of their features in his article ‘Aspects nouveaux du problème thamoudéen’ (120) which, in my opinion, even after half a century, remains the best available description of Thamudic as a category. We must await the full analysis of these texts before we can know how many more sub-groups are represented in the collection and whether any of these can be removed from the Thamudic ‘pending file’ and given labels of their own.

Hismaic

Some years ago, E. A. Knauf tried to show that the script and dialect which Winnett called ‘Thamudic E’ should be classed as a sub-group of Safaitic which he suggested renaming ‘South Safaitic’ (121). However, as Geraldine King has shown, the script, orthography, content and some linguistic features of these texts differ markedly from those of Safaitic and the attempt to subsume them under the ‘Safaitic’ rubric blurs important distinctions, bringing confusion rather than clarification (122). For instance, no fewer than six signs have identical shapes, but completely different values, in the two alphabets (Fig. 3). Thus the sign representing $g$ in Hismaic is used for $t$ in Safaitic, the sign for $t$ in Hismaic is $h$ in Safaitic, and so on (123). It will thus be clear that, although geographically, and perhaps chronologically, these scripts are
close neighbours, the palaeographical relationship between the two is fairly distant.

Similarly, although the two dialects were almost certainly mutually comprehensible, there are significant differences in usage. To take just one example, whereas Safaitic uses h- for both the definite article and the, much rarer, nearer demonstrative ('this'), Hismaic uses h- before nouns so infrequently that Geraldine King has suggested that when it is used it may have had a specifically demonstrative force. In most cases where one would expect the article, and where in Safaitic it would be present, there is no visible mark of definition in Hismaic. This suggests that Hismaic either had no definite article (as in Syriac) or else employed a vocalic affix (like the Aramaic emphatic ending) which would not have been represented in the purely consonantal script. In this regard it may be significant that affiliation to a social group is never expressed by the *nisba* in Hismaic (124).

It is for this reason that I have tentatively described Hismaic as neither a h- / hm- nor an *l*- dialect, but as an apparently ‘zero’ dialect, as far as the definite article is concerned. As noted above, Hasaitic may also be of this type, but as yet there is too little evidence to tell.

**Safaitic**

Much progress has been made in the study of Safaitic in the last twenty years and it is hoped that this will accelerate in the near future. It is the dialect of Ancient North Arabian about which we know most and yet the very nature of the texts puts a severe limit on the amount and type of information we can glean from them.

The texts were written largely by nomads who migrated across southern Syria, western Iraq, northeastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia probably between the first century BC and the fourth century AD. Some 20,000 inscriptions are known at present and there are tens of thousands more awaiting discovery. They thus represent a very dense concentration of evidence for a particular Ancient North Arabian script and dialect over a considerable area at the northern end of the Peninsula. The extent of the material available, and in particular the huge onomasticon, can sometimes distort comparisons with other dialects which are less well represented (125).
I have published elsewhere (126) a lengthy survey of the content of these inscriptions and I will not repeat that discussion here. Instead, I would like to draw attention to a few interesting, but unconnected, details which may help to place the dialect in its linguistic context.

Like the other North Arabian languages, Safaitic had two unvoiced non-emphatic sibilants, represented by the letters $s^1$ and $s^2$ (see Fig. 5). It is clear from the loan-words, or rather ‘loan-names’, found in Safaitic that these letters did not have the same phonetic values as their etymological equivalents in standard Arabic, represented by the letters $\text{sǐn}$ and $\text{sˇı¯n}$ respectively. It is for this reason that I now use the phonetically neutral notation for these letters, $s^1$ and $s^2$ (borrowed from Ancient South Arabian), rather than the traditional $s$ and $s\acute{}$ which imply the pronunciation [s] and [ʃ] respectively.

In his brilliant studies of ‘Arabian Sibilants’, Professor Beeston showed that in Ancient North Arabian and in Arabic up to at least the eighth century AD, the two unvoiced non-emphatic sibilants, represented by $s^1$ and $s^2$, and in Arabic by the letters $\text{sǐn}$ and $\text{sˇı¯n}$, were pronounced respectively [ʃ] and [c¸] and that there was no ‘pure’ [s] (127). This explains why the Aramaic divine name Bacal-sˇamı¯n was spelt in Safaitic with $s^1$ (thus $bcls^1mn$) not $s^2$. It is interesting to compare this loan form with the calque (i.e. loan translation) $b^rls^1my$, also spelt with $s^1$, which is found in a few Safaitic texts (128). If $s^1$ and $s^2$ in Safaitic had had the values of their equivalents $\text{sǐn}$ and $\text{sˇı¯n}$ in standard Arabic, one would have expected the loan form from Aramaic Baťal-šamīn to be spelt with $s^2$ and the calque $b^rls^1my$ to be spelt with $s^1$, since we know that the word for heaven was $s^1my$ (cf. Ar. samaţ) in Safaitic. The fact that both are spelt with $s^1$ suggests that this was pronounced [ʃ].

It follows from this that, if the name of the deity which we pronounce (anachronistically) ‘Đūshărā’, had been pronounced with a [ʃ] in Nabataean, it would have been spelt in Safaitic with $s^1$, and this we never find. Instead, it is always spelt with $s^2$ and probably had a pronunciation approximating to the ich-laut [c], which Sibawayhi describes for $\text{ʃ} (\text{šin})$, the reflex of $s^2$, in eighth-century Arabic (129). As I explain below, we know that this name came to Safaitic via Aramaic because it is generally spelt with a d rather than the etymological ș. We must therefore conclude that in the Nabataean Aramaic of the Ḥawrān, at least, the phonemes /ʃ/ and /c¸/, which were represented by the same letter (š) in the Aramaic alphabet, were still pronounced differently. This maintenance of the distinct pronunciation of the phoneme /ʃ/ marks out Nabataean Aramaic from most of the other Middle Aramaic dialects which underwent the sound-shift [s]⇒[s]. Simplistic dismissals of this as ‘Arabic colouring’ (130) mask the really interesting questions which it raises (131).

In Safaitic and Hismaic, the lack of [s] obviously caused problems in the transliteration of Latin and Greek names and titles containing $S$ or $Σ$. There are a few cases where $s^1$ has been used (‘qlds$^1$=Claudius, tts$^1$=Titus) but the more usual expedient seems to have been to use the emphatic s ($qs^r$=καλίσσαρ, $grfs^w$=ϣΑγρίππας $hrds^w$= Ῥωδίς积极推动, $flfs^w$=Φύλιππος $grmnqs$=Germanicus, etc.). It is almost certainly for this reason that $s$ was put in the place of semkath in the Hismaic ABC found at Khirbat al-Samrā ($) (132).

Nabataean (133)

For many years it has been widely held that the Nabataeans wrote in Aramaic but spoke Arabic. This view is based on the presence of Arabic loan-words in the Nabataean inscriptions and on the claim that the
vast majority of the names in Nabataean inscriptions are ‘Arabic’ (134). However, if one excepts the Namāra inscription, which is in Old Arabic, and JSNab 17, which is in Nabataeo-Arabic (see below), only a small number of Arabic loan-words can be identified in the Nabataean inscriptions. I have counted a maximum of twenty-eight, six of which could also be Aramaic (135). Moreover, with two exceptions (136), these words occur only in the texts from Hegrā or Rawwāfa: exactly where some Old Arabic and Ancient North Arabian influence is to be expected. If these loans provide evidence of an ‘Arabic substrate’ in Nabataean Aramaic, it is therefore only in the language used in North Arabia from the first century AD onwards, not in the Nabataean of Petra or the other parts of the kingdom. It cannot therefore be used as evidence that Arabic was the spoken language of ‘the Nabataeans’ in general. This demonstrates the danger of treating as a homogeneous corpus all the inscriptions which we label ‘Nabataean’.

Turning to the onomastic evidence, it is first necessary to distinguish what we mean by ‘Nabataean’ names. Generally, this is taken to mean all names found in Nabataean inscriptions unless there is a particular reason for attributing them to another group (eg. ‘Greek’ or ‘Jewish’ names). However, we use the term ‘Nabataean’ for texts in a number of local varieties of the Aramaic script from the Ḥawrān to Arabia, Sinai and Egypt, and while it may sometimes be helpful to use the label in this flexible way, we should not allow it to mislead us into assuming that the authors of all these texts belonged to a single homogeneous group, the ‘Nabataeans’.

Names which are clearly of Arabic form, eg. those containing the definite article ʾl, or the word ʾbn ‘son’ (as opposed to Aramaic br), or the ʾṯʾal nominal form, occur very largely in Sinai. But the script of these texts from Sinai has its own characteristics and internal development, which is distinct from that of the Nabataean heartland around Petra. It is therefore misleading to refer to them as ‘Nabataean’ and to use them as evidence for ‘the Nabataeans’. It would be wiser to return to the practice of earlier scholars and refer to them as ‘Sinaitic’.

Moreover, while the vast majority of these texts consist simply of names accompanied by ʾšlm, dkyr, bryk, b-tb, etc. (137) the language of the few statements which do occur is always Aramaic, not Arabic. It seems to me probable that someone writing a graffito would express himself in his language of normal use, rather than a literary tongue (138), and therefore the case for spoken Arabic even in Sinai seems to me unproven. Certainly, the widespread use of names which are linguistically Arabic is no evidence for the spoken language at the time the texts were carved. Names have an extraordinary record of survival and it is usually impossible to guess at the reasons for using, retaining, or discarding them in any particular society at any particular period.

Just as my name ‘Michael’ has been preserved through the survival of two religions, so the popularity of certain names in Sinai, or among the Nabataeans, could in some cases have been connected with the worship of deities who were also venerated by speakers of Old Arabic. Unfortunately, however, we do not know which of these cults, if any, were ancestral among the Nabataeans and which were later introductions. It is usually assumed that the Nabataeans came from Arabia, but I know of no argument for this origin that will stand scrutiny (139). In the earliest reference to the Nabataeans, when they were nomadic, they were already in southern Transjordan, which remained their heartland throughout their history and I know of no clear evidence that they came from anywhere else. Given their geographical position and their involve-
voked Dushara as $d^2s^r$ had read his name in an Aramaic text, without ever hearing it from a North Arabian speaker. This is obviously preposterous. However, the only alternative is that they received the cult from Aramaic speakers.

It is, of course, likely that they came into contact with the cult of Dushara in the Hawrān, rather than at Petra, and it is generally assumed, though there is virtually no evidence one way or the other, that the spoken language of the Hawrān was Aramaic (145). But the cult of Dushara was a vital and distinctive element of Nabataean communal identity. Other deities in Syria had important cult centres (eg. Ba‘alshamin at Sr‘) but were also worshipped elsewhere (eg. Ba‘alshamin at Palmyra). Dushara was one of the very few to be uniquely associated with a particular people or state. It therefore seems likely that Nabataeans, from the heartland, would have been involved in his cult even in the Hawrān, indeed one might expect them to have dominated it. If these were speakers of Old Arabic there would have been no point in their communicating with the nomads in Aramaic, since Old Arabic and Safaitic would have been mutually intelligible. In this case, the name Dushara would have come into Safaitic with an initial /d/ and a final, consonantal /y/. Instead, it was borrowed in its Aramaic form with an initial /d/ and (presumably) a final vowel, and this suggests that those Nabataeans from whom the cult was adopted spoke a dialect of Aramaic. Needless to say, this is very far from being conclusive. It is intended simply as a small contribution to a continuing debate.

**Old Arabic**

**Diagnostic features**

As I have said, Herodotus’ statement that the Arabs worshipped a goddess named
$\text{A}$\text{lila}$^\prime$, tells us that this form of the Arabic definite article was in use by the fifth century BC but, of course, gives us no other information about the dialect. So we cannot assume that this is a direct ancestor of the Old Arabic attested in later texts (146). However, there is a handful of inscriptions dating from the late first century BC onwards which are either expressed in, or display features of, Old Arabic and which have been found right across the Peninsula, in central, north and eastern Arabia, Syria and the Negev.

However, since Old Arabic appears to have been normally an unwritten language its features are not at all well defined. The most obvious characteristic is, of course, the use of the definite article $\text{l-}$. But, even here it is necessary to be cautious. As I remarked earlier, the presence of $\text{l-}$ in a name does not mean that the text in which that name occurs is in Old Arabic. The inscription from Qaryat al-Faw, a photograph of which was published by Wafik Ghoneim and which was discussed by Manfred Kropp at the 1991 Seminar for Arabian Studies (147), was included in a recent list of the earliest inscriptions in the Arabic language, as the first attestation of the definite article $\text{l-}$ (148). However, the only clear example of $\text{l-}$ in this text is in the name of an ethnic group the $\text{(a¯)l-}$ $\text{hwnkt}$ which one would expect to retain the article in its native form, whatever the language of the text (but see below under Dadano-Arabic). A second instance of the article has been assumed in this text in the phrase $\text{l-lt}$ which Robin interpreted as *$\text{li-l-}$ $\text{la¯t}$, ‘for Al-la¯t’. However, we know from the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions that one of the most popular deities in North Arabia was Lt, who is distinguished in both theophoric names and in invocations from $\text{2lt}$ (*$\text{ilat}$?/$\text{Allat}$?) (149) – there are sometimes prayers to both in the same text (150) – and from the epithet (h)-$\text{2lt}$ (*‘the goddess’) (151). It is therefore unsafe to assume that the article $\text{l-}$ has been assimilated in this phrase, since $\text{llt}$ could as easily represent *$\text{li-l-}$ $\text{lāt}$.

One characteristic of Old Arabic, which has not so far been recognized, is that the 3rd. person masc. sg. of the suffix conjugation (‘perfect’) of verbs tertiae y/w ended in/-ā/ in Old Arabic, as in the later stages of the language, thus *$\text{banā}$ ‘he built’ (152). This is in contrast to the ANA treatment of this class of verbs, in which the final radical retained its consonant value, thus $\text{bny}$ (presumably representing *$\text{banaya}$). This provides us with another important distinction between Old Arabic and ANA and one which is visible not only in scripts such as Dadanitic and Aramaic which use matres lectionis for final vowels, but also in those which do not. In the latter, the pronunciation *$\text{banā}$ is expressed simply as $\text{bn}$, as in the inscription of $\text{i}gl$ bn Hfcm (see below), as opposed to the regular ANA $\text{bny}$.

Another distinctive mark of Old Arabic is the feminine singular relative pronoun, $\text{2lt}$ (cf. Classical Arabic *$\text{allatī}$), which occurs in JSLih 384, see below. This is not found in ANA, which uses $\text{dl}$ (eg. in Safaitic and Hismaic) or $\text{d}$ (eg. in Hasaitic).

Other features of Old Arabic distinguish it from the Sayhadic languages, but are shared with Ancient North Arabian. Thus it has two, rather than three, unvoiced non-emphatic sibilants, although the notation of these in scripts which have signs for three is sometimes unpredictable. This is a feature which Old Arabic shares with all but the oldest stages of Ancient North Arabian. The causative stem of the verb is $\text{f c1}$ rather than $\text{hf c1}$ or $\text{s1f c1}$ and it uses the preposition $\text{mn}$ rather than $\text{bn}$ ‘from’.

Until recently, it was thought that the use of the negative particle $\text{lam}$ plus the prefix conjugation (the ‘jussive’ in Classical Arabic) was a distinctive feature which could be used to identify Old Arabic (153). How-
ever, this construction has recently been found in a Safaitic inscription from northeastern Jordan (154), the language of which, in other respects, could be either Safaitic or Old Arabic (155).

As explained in the section on nomenclature, before the sixth century AD, no one script was associated exclusively with Old Arabic and, on the rare occasions on which it was written, a number of different alphabets was used. The reasons for this will be discussed below, but the result is that, while there are relatively few inscriptions which are linguistically more or less ‘pure’ Old Arabic, there are several others which display a mixture of Old Arabic features and those of the language normally associated with the script in which the text is written: in particular Safaitic, Dadanitic, Nabataean or other Aramaic.

Texts in ‘pure’ Old Arabic

The earliest document which is indisputably in Old Arabic is the inscription of cgl bn Hf’m, written in the Sabaic script, which was found at Qaryat al-Faw (156) and may date from the end of the first century BC (157).

This text uses the article $l-$ (158), the *banā, rather than *banaya, form of the 3 m. sg. of the suffix stem of verbs tertiae w/7 (159), the $f$cl form of the causative stem, and the preposition mn rather than bn (160). On the other hand, it has certain Sabaic features such as the form of the 3 m. sg. enclitic pronoun -haw which alternates with -h (161) and the sporadic attachment of -m to the end of words, possibly attempting to imitate Sabaic mimation without understanding its purpose (162).

W. W. Müller (163) has recognized that JSLih 384 should also be classed as Old Arabic rather than Dadanitic, since it contains the Arabic relative pronoun *allatī in the form $?l$. The text also contains an example of the *banā rather than *banaya form of the 3 m. sg. of the suffix stem of verbs tertiae w/7. Dadanitic is the only ANA script in which matres lectionis are employed (164) and the letter -h is used to represent final /ā/ (165). Thus *banā appears in this text as bnḥ (166), as opposed to Dadanitic (and other ANA) bny, (ie. *banaya) (167).

The other documents which can be said to be in more or less ‘pure’ Old Arabic are the Namāra inscription (AD 328) (168), lines 4–5 of the ṢEn Ḥvdāt inscription (169) (of uncertain date) (170), both in the Nabataean script; and the inscriptions of Umm al-Jimāl (of uncertain date), Zebed (AD 512), Jabal Usayṣ (AD 528), and Harrān (AD 568) all of which are in what is recognizably the Arabic script (171).

In addition, there are two leaves of parchment from a Psalter found in the genizah of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus. They bear part of the Septuagint text of Psalm 78 (LXX, 77) with an Arabic gloss in Greek transliteration, set out in parallel columns. Following a detailed study of this text I am convinced that it is pre-Islamic (172). This is the most valuable text in Old Arabic so far discovered since the Greek transliteration seems to have been made with great care and consistency from an oral source, and thus is uncomplicated by the orthographic conventions of another script. It also, of course, provides the vowels and has the additional advantage that there can be no doubt as to the meaning.

Old Arabic ‘Mixed’ texts

As described in the section on nomenclature, the Old Arabic ‘mixed’ texts can be subdivided into Safaeo-Arabic, Dadano-Arabic, etc. These are texts written in the Safaitic (Dadanitic, etc.) scripts, and which are predominantly in the language normally associated with that script (ie. in Safaitic, Dadanitic, etc.), but which also
contain elements which can be attributed to Old Arabic.

[**Sabaeo-Arabic**]

At present, there are no clear examples of texts in the Sabaic script and language which contain elements clearly attributable to Old Arabic rather than ANA (173). However, when all the inscriptions from Qaryat al-Faw are published it is very probable that some will be found to fall into this category.

**Safaeo-Arabic**

There are a handful of Safaitic inscriptions which appear to contain the definite article $l$. The clearest of these is C 2446 which is known only from a hand-copy (Dn 68c). This reads

\[ l \text{ $S^{1}c$ } dn \text{ Mr$^{o}$ bn Nr w-wgm 'll} \text{ Nh Nh qlt}<..>-h \text{ ' (N)bty mbr}' n'\text{m} w-dl f-h- \text{l t w-mm w-ll dtm w-gd-}[^{c}] (w) d w-gd-df t'\text{r m-d} \text{ s1lf w-wlh kbr s1hr 'l Nh hhb-h l-2bd} \text{ (174).}

'By $S^{1}c$ son of Mr$^{o}$ son of Nr and he mourned for his brother Nr (whom) the Nabataean killed during the attack (175) on the flocks of $w-d$ and $\text{Df}$ (176). And so, O Lt $m'\text{nn}$ (177) and goddess of $\text{Dt}$ (178) and Gd-$w-d$ and Gd-$\text{Df}$ (179) [grant the opportunity of] revenge on him who did this thing (180). And he mourned greatly $s1hr$ (181) for his brother, his beloved, for ever'.

On Dunand’s copy, the first letter of (n)bty is the same length as the previous l, as opposed to the very short ns in the rest of the text, so the reading is not entirely secure. However, regardless of whether the nisba is Nbty or Lbty, it seems probable that the letters $l$ represent the Arabic article, rather than the word $l$ (cf. Ar. $l$) meaning ‘social group’, since in Safaitic this is always followed by the name itself ($l$ rm ‘the people of Rome, the Romans’, $l$ df ‘the tribe of Daif’, etc.) and never by the nisba (rm, dfy). Moreover, in Safaitic, the ‘Nabataeans’ are always called simply nbt, rather than *$l$ nbt. If therefore, as seems likely, $l$ in this context is the Arabic article, this text contains a record of what I have called the ‘northern Old Arabic isogloss’ (182) in which the /l/ of the article is not assimilated, even before the sounds called by the grammarians of Classical Arabic al-huruf al-šamsiya or ‘sun letters’.

However, other features of the text are characteristic of Safaitic, such as the vocative particle $h$- and the assimilation of the $n$ in the preposition $mn$. I would therefore place C 2446 among the ‘mixed texts’ as an example of ‘Safaeo-Arabic’.

Another possible text of this type is WH 589 which contains the statement $s2r<..>q l-l-mdbr ‘and he migrated to the inner desert’. The two ls are clear on the photograph, but it is quite possible that they are the result of dittography on the part of the author, who had just written, and then crossed out, a second $s2$ between the r and the q of $s2rq$. In Safaitic, the word mdbr is never used with the article (183), but it is possible that it was referred to as *$l$-mdbr in Old Arabic, cf. the place-name Rh$bt$ which also does not take the article in Safaitic, but appears as al-Ruh$bt$ in later Arabic (184).

There are also several Safaitic inscriptions in which the definite article appears as $s- $ rather than $h$. Given that in the Safaitic script the two letters are distinguished only by a short side-stroke (see Fig. 3), I restrict myself to those for which photographs are available and where it is difficult to suggest another explanation (other than an error by the author). Thus SIJ 37 has $s1lm w-f$yt $m-bzs1$ $s1snt ‘security and deliverance from misfortune this year’ (185), and KRS 125, an unpublished inscription from northeastern Jordan, has $wr
l-m -muted 2-s-fr ‘blindness to whoever scratches out the writing’ (186). In both cases, if my analysis is correct, these would be records of what I have called the ‘central Old Arabic isogloss’ in which the /l/ of the article is assimilated before a sibilant (187).

However, all these inscriptions display features typical of Safaitic, as well as possible examples of the Old Arabic definite article and it is for this reason that I have placed them among the ‘mixed’ texts, as Safaeo-Arabic.

**Dadano-Arabic**

The Dadano-Arabic texts (JSLih 71 and 276) and the Nabataeo-Arabic inscription (JSNab 17) were found in the very centre of an Ancient North Arabian (ie. h- dialect) area. The two former were found at Dadan and the latter at Hegrā, c.25 km to the north. In JSLih 71 and in JSNab 17 we find the name of the town in its Arabic form (‘)l-hwr. This contrasts with the forms Hgr (in Nabataean, possibly hgr in Safaitic (188) and the form behind Pliny’s transcription Haegra (189).

JSLih 71 is an honorific inscription written in the late Dadanitic script. The name and genealogy take up the first two lines and are linguistically indeterminate, in that they could be either ANA or Old Arabic, although the mater lectionis -h-, representing the final -ā in the first name, is a distinctive mark of Dadanitic orthography (190). Line 3 gives the tribal affiliation of the man honoured in the form d 2l hn-ḥnkt. As noted above, we cannot tell as yet whether the expression d 2l was used in Old Arabic or whether it is a distinguishing mark of ANA, therefore, at present this must also be treated as linguistically indeterminate. However, the situation is further complicated by the fact that, although the expression d 2l is typical of other ANA dialects (Safaitic, Hismaic, Thamudic B and Hasaitic), it has not yet been found in Dadanitic where, on the relatively rare occasions when affiliation to a social group is expressed, it is usually marked simply by d + the group name (191). As a final twist, however, the name of the honorand’s social group is given as hn-ḥnkt, ie. with the distinctive Dadanitic definite article, even though the same name is found elsewhere in the form 2l-ḥnkt, with the Old Arabic definite article 2l- (192).

It is customary to link these examples with various South Arabian texts in which the nisba ḥnwkt, ḥnwkt, and ḥnwkt are found (193). However, this does not seem to me possible. The form of the tribal name, ḥnwkt, as attested in North Arabian, would produce the nisba * ḥnwky in the masc. sg., * ḥnwkt in the fem. sg. and presumably * ḥnwkyn in the pl. and this would surely be the same in Ancient South Arabian. I cannot therefore agree with Robin (and some earlier scholars) that the forms ḥnwkt (194), ḥnwkt (195), and ḥnwkt (196) are respectively the masc. and fem. sg. and the pl. nisbas from the clan/tribal name ḥnwkt (197).

It is now generally accepted that lines 4–10 of JSLih 71 are in Old Arabic and it is certainly true that the definite article 2l- occurs at least twice in this section of the text. However, although Professor Beeston’s interpretation of this part of the inscription as ‘near-classical Arabic’ (198) was of great importance in drawing attention to its true language, I have difficulties both with individual details of his reading and, more importantly, with the fact that (like all the interpretations before it) it did not take account of the fact that the ends of lines 4–9 are missing. I am preparing a new reading of the text which I hope to publish in the near future. Here I will merely describe some of its Old Arabic features.

The article 2l- occurs at least twice
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(199), once in b-l-hgr (ie. ‘in al-Ḥīr’), and once, following the demonstrative particle h- (also found in Ancient North Arabian and, as a preposed ha-, in early Arabic poetry) in the phrase h-l-mfl in line 8. Failure to recognize the demonstrative here has led some writers to assume that hl- represents another, otherwise unattested, form of the definite article: thus presupposing the use of three different forms in the same text.

The implications of JSLih 71 are intriguing. The inscription was set up in a town which was a centre of the Ancient North Arabian (h-) dialect, Dadanitic, and is written in the Dadanitic script. Yet the only part of the text which is linguistically Dadanitic is the definite article in the name of the honorand’s social group (hn-ḥnwkt), even though this is introduced by the non-Dadanitic ANA expression d lh. The rest of the text is in Old Arabic. Why should this be? If the honorand, or the dedicator, was a speaker of Old Arabic, as might be suggested by the use of this language in the body of the text, why was the Dadanitic article used with his social group, particularly since the group’s name occurs elsewhere as l-ḥnwkt? Whatever the explanation, this text is a dramatic example of the close co-existence of ANA and Old Arabic in this area.

A second Dadano-Arabic inscription is JSLih 276. This reads

zdlh / bn / {k}{l}b / d- cmarc / f-r cgr / dgtb / crr / / fr d
‘Zdlh son of {Kl}b of the lineage of cmarc.
And so, may Dgtb defile the destroyer of this writing.’

The reading d-sfr dh is clear (200) and there can be no doubt that the s was intentional since (in contrast to their Safaitic equivalents) the letters s and h have entirely different forms in the Dadanitic script. The expression finds an exact parallel, but this time with the Dadanitic article, in HE 1:

f-crr / dgtb / crr / h-sfr/dh.

The protective formula is typically Dadanitic and for this reason I have classed JSLih 276 as Dadano-Arabic, rather than pure Old Arabic. The treatment of the Old Arabic article in this text is identical to that in the ‘gl bn Hf’m inscription, ie. the assimilation of the /l/ before a following sibilant, and this makes it a record of the ‘central Old Arabic’ isogloss (201).

Nabataean-Arabic

If we except the ‘En ‘Avdat inscription, in which Aramaic and Arabic are not mixed but are used in different sections, the only Nabataean-Arabic text so far identified is JSNab 17, at Ḥegrâ/Madâ’în Ṣâlih, which is composed in a mixture of Nabataean Aramaic and Old Arabic and written in the Nabataean script (202). The interpretation of parts of the text are still disputed, but it is clear that some elements are in Aramaic (eg. br, bdt, the date) and others in Old Arabic, and yet others could be in either (eg. w-l’m mny lm2 mn yšr2, where, apart from the divine name, the rest could be either Nabataean Aramaic or Old Arabic). As in JSLih 71, the article l- occurs twice, once in the place name l-hgrw (line 4) and once before a common noun l-qbrw (line 7).

The presence of these Old Arabic linguistic features in the Dadanitic and Nabataean Aramaic milieu suggests a degree of multilingualism in these North Arabian oases which parallels that at Qaryat al-Faw, and possibly at Nağrân (203). In each of these places there was a dominant written language, respectively Dadanitic, Nabataean Aramaic or Sabaic, but these mixed texts suggest that speakers of Old Arabic were also present, although, in the north at
least, we have no way of knowing whether or not they were residents.

**Aramaeo-Arabic**

Finally, there is an Aramaeo-Arabic inscription, from Mleiha (Mulayha) in the U.A.E., which suggests that Old Arabic was also in use in eastern Arabia, at least in the second century AD (204). The text is composed in a rather barbarous Aramaic but contains a number of Old Arabic features including the use of the article \( \text{l-} \) and the preposition \( \text{fı¯} \) ‘in’, where Aramaic and Ancient North Arabian use \( \text{b-} \) (205). It may also be significant that the deities invoked are \( \text{Manāt} \), here spelt \( \text{mnt} \) (ie. presumably with a long \(/\text{ã}/ \) which would not be represented in a medial position), rather than \( \text{mnwtw} \) as in Nabataean (206), and possibly \( \text{Khīl} \), the eponymous deity of \( \text{Qryt dt Khīl} \) (ie. Qaryat al-Faw) (207). There are so few written documents from eastern Arabia that it is impossible to be sure what languages were spoken there at any time in the pre-Islamic period. However, this text from Mleiha provides a tiny fragment of evidence to suggest that Old Arabic may have been one of the vernaculars.

**Undifferentiated North Arabian**

In addition to the texts discussed above, there are a number of others which are clearly in a North Arabian language but which cannot be exactly classified within that grouping. In some cases it is not even possible to decide whether they are in Old Arabic or in ANA. But for the majority it is possible to exclude Old Arabic without being able to assign them to a particular ANA dialect.

Since most of the latter group come from Qaryat al-Faw it is quite possible that they represent the dialect of ANA spoken in the city at one or more periods. However, the number of published inscriptions from Faw is, at present, so small that it seems safer to refrain from classifying this as a separate dialect until the full epigraphy of the site is published, after which the linguistic situation there should become a great deal clearer. I have therefore left these texts in the ‘Undifferentiated’ Restklassenbildung for the present.

On Figure 1, I have divided the ‘Undifferentiated North Arabian’ documents, into two sub-groups: (1) ‘Pure Undifferentiated North Arabian texts’ and (2) ‘Undifferentiated North Arabian Mixed texts’ (see the explanations on Fig. 1 and the discussion below).

**‘Pure’ Undifferentiated North Arabian texts**

There are five such inscriptions from Qaryat al-Faw, and possibly two from Najran. These are:

(i) \( \text{Ja 2122} \) (208) which is to all intents and purposes an ANA text. While much of the vocabulary could, of course, also be Ancient South Arabian, the \( \text{f cl} \) Form, \( \text{h w dt} \), must be North Arabian. In this context, the spelling \( \text{bny} \) (ie. \( *\text{banaya} \)) as opposed to \( *\text{bn} \) (209) (ie. \( *\text{banā} \)) for the verb ‘to build’, suggests that the language is in a dialect of ANA rather than Old Arabic (see the discussion of JSLih 348 under ‘Pure’ Old Arabic texts, above).

(ii) The tomb inscription of \( \text{M mwyt bn Rbṭ} \) (210). With the exception of the Ancient South Arabian form of the \( \text{nisba, qltny}^{\text{a}} \), the language of this text is ‘pure’ North Arabian. Given this, I would classify it as ANA rather than Old Arabic on the basis of the form \( \text{bny} \). Kropp’s conclusion that, if the clan name at the end of line 3 is restored as \( \text{h nkt} \), then at least four letters must be lacking at the end of each line, is not necessarily correct (211). The name is clearly incomplete, but (regardless of whether or not the name was \( \text{h nkt} \)) it is far more likely...
that the inscription continued onto a fourth line, now lost (212). The text runs perfectly from the existing end of line 1 to the beginning of line 2, as it does from lines 2 to 3. The chances of this happening by coincidence must be extremely remote.

(iii) Ansary, Qaryat al-Fau: 147, no. 6 is also ANA for similar reasons, even though here the 3rd person masc. sg. enclitic pronoun alternates between -h and -hw. As already explained, the divine name $\ell$-$\ell$-$\ell$wr, while itself linguistically Old Arabic, cannot, of course, be used to identify the language of the text.

(iv) Ansary, Qaryat al-Fau: 143/2, which reads $\ell$bn $\ell$sqn $\ell$ntn; and possibly

(v) Ja 2142 (213) which is very fragmentary.

Similarly, two texts from Naqrân which contain the phrases $\ell$-$\ell$hl and $\ell$-$\ell$hl respectively, should probably also be classed as 'Pure Undifferentiated North Arabian'. These are (vi) Mü 2 (214)

(vii) Ja 859 (215).

Undifferentiated North Arabian Mixed texts
These are texts which are basically in the language normally associated with the script in which they are written, but which contain North Arabian features which are not sufficiently diagnostic to identify them clearly as Old Arabic or ANA. All those known at present are in the Sabaic language and script and I suggest they be termed Sabaeo-North-Arabian.

Sabaeo-North-Arabian
The first of these is CIH 450, a stela of unknown provenance with a nine-line inscription. It begins $\ell$-$\ell$w-qbr (like many Hasaitic texts) and it contains the phrases $\ell$-$\ell$hl and $\ell$-$\ell$hl marking affiliation to a social group (216), which are characteristic of ANA. On the other hand, its vocabulary is entirely Sabaic rather than North Arabian, including the Sabaic preposition bn ‘from’ (line 8) and mimation on the first two proper names.

Similarly, the Ghoneim inscription (217), which I have discussed above, is expressed in the conventional phraseology of a Sabaic dedicatory text. It contains the phrase $\ell$-$\ell$ and, once again is by a member of the $\ell$-$\ell$nnkt, but again this cannot help identify the language of the text. The verb ‘to build’ appears in the form bny which would seem to exclude its being Old Arabic (218). But it is likely that here bny is simply the Ancient South Arabian word rather than the ANA form.

The remaining texts in this category come from the area of Haram, in the north of the Yemeni Jawf. In his detailed study of the inscriptions from this area, Christian Robin has identified eleven of the twenty texts in the Sabaic script of the Amrîte period as being couched in ‘une variété d’arabe avec un habillage morphologique inspiré du sabéen’ (219), and has proposed naming this mixed language ‘pseudo-sabéen’. However, this is surely to overstate the case. The non-Sabaic features in these texts are as follows: (1) the preposition mn ‘from’ rather than Sabaic bn (in five texts) (220); (2) a conjunction hn ‘because’ (in eight texts); (3) the negative particle lm followed by the prefix conjugation (in four texts); (4) the use of $s^1$ for $s^3$ (in two texts); (5) the use of $s^3$ for $l$ (in one text); and (6) the omission of $\ell$ (in one text), and $h$ and $c$ (in two texts) (221).

This list does not seem particularly impressive, either in the linguistic importance of the features themselves or the regularity of their occurrence, especially when it is remembered that the definite article is always expressed in these texts by Sabaic -n, never Arabic $\ell$- (or, indeed, ANA $h$-), and the
causative stem is always hf cl, as in Sabaic, never $f cl, as in North Arabian (222). All this suggests to me that, rather than being couched in ‘une variété d’arabe avec un habillement morphologique inspiré du sabéen’, the language of these texts is more likely to represent imperfect attempts to write correct Sabaic by non-native speakers (223).

Moreover, while these six features distinguish the language of these eleven texts from standard Sabaic, they do not necessarily all represent intrusions from the same language. Only half of them (nos. 1, 3 and 4) are characteristic of North Arabian, at least as it is known at present, although the use of lam plus the prefix conjugation makes it very likely that the four texts containing this expression have North Arabian affinities and all these also contain the particle hn (feature 2) (224). However, none of these texts contains any feature that is exclusive to Old Arabic or to ANA. At present, therefore, I would include these interesting inscriptions in the category of Undifferentiated North Arabian Mixed Texts, in the sub-category of Sabaeo-North-Arabian (225).

It will be clear from this that I cannot follow Robin in elevating what appear to me to be the irregular features of these Sabaeo-North-Arabian texts from Haram into a distinct, more or less artificial, language or dialect: ‘pseudo-sabéen qahtanite’ (226). However, if I have understood him correctly, I am even more puzzled by his explanation of the development and use of this supposed dialect:

‘Les Arabes proches du Yémen auraient donc utilisé le sabéen pour communiquer entre eux, mais l’auraient adapté pour en faciliter la maîtrise, réduisant le nombre des sifflantes à deux et introduisant subrepticement des mots et des formes propres à l’arabe. Il s’agirait donc d’une langue plutôt artificielle. ...'

‘Ce pseudo-sabéen pourrait donc être une première tentative de langue communication (ce que les spécialistes appeleraient une koinè ...) pour un certain nombre de tribus du sud-ouest de l’Arabie, entre le Hijaz et le Yémen: Qaḥṭān, Madḥhij, Āmīr, Āthtar et peut-être Kinda’ (227).

The ANA dialects and Old Arabic would certainly have been mutually comprehensible and what little evidence we have suggests that all the tribes he mentions (with the possible exception of Āmīr and Āthtar) spoke one or other of these North Arabian languages. It is therefore not clear to me why they should have needed to communicate with each other in a koinè based on, and largely consisting of, Sabaic – a language which Robin himself admits they would have had to learn – even when it was ‘modified’ with a handful of fairly minor North Arabian, and possibly other, elements.

Furthermore, I do not understand why among these tribes both at Faw and at Haram

‘il semblerait ... que les textes importants et soignés soient rédigés en pseudo-sabéen et que les autres le soient en noro-arabique. Il en résulterait que la langue locale [viz. a North Arabian language] s’employait pour les usages communs mais qu’une autre [viz. pseudo-sabéen’], dont le prestige devait être plus grand ou qui était mieux comprise en dehors de l’oasis, était préférée pour les actes les plus solennels’ (228).

In both Haram and Faw there are inscriptions in good Sabaic and, therefore, it is surely difficult to believe that this sort of ‘pidgin Sabaic’ would have been regarded as a language of prestige to be used intentionally ‘pour les actes les plus solennels’.
I would therefore suggest the following alternative explanation.

1) The texts from Haram and those from Qaryat al-Faw should be considered separately. The geographical positions, histories (as far as we can tell), social and cultural lives of the two towns appear to have been very different. Haram, even in the Amīrite period, was firmly within the Sabaean cultural sphere, even if the dominant part of the population may have hailed originally from northern nomad stock (229). Faw, on the other hand, was an entirely Central Arabian town, albeit an extremely cosmopolitan one. Certainly, there was strong Sabaean influence there – Saba was its most powerful neighbour – but it was only one element among many, and I do not get the impression that it was in any way ‘a South Arabian town’.

2) At Haram, the limited range and nature of the non-Sabaic elements in the Sabaeo-North-Arabian inscriptions suggest that they are clumsy attempts at writing correct Sabaic by people whose mother tongue was either a different language, or a dialect of Sabaic which contained elements from another language.

3) At Qaryat al-Faw, on the other hand, the situation is more complex. Here it seems very probable that at least two forms of North Arabian coexisted: Old Arabic and one or more, as yet undefined, dialects of ANA. There are a handful of texts in Old Arabic and ANA written in the Sabaic script, but we cannot know how widespread this practice was until the Faw inscriptions are fully published. However, there are also texts at Faw couched in the Sabaic language with only a few North Arabian intrusions and I would suggest that these, like the Sabaeo-North-Arabian inscriptions at Haram, are the products of North-Arabian speakers trying, not entirely successfully, to write correct Sabaic.

4) Too few inscriptions from Nağrān have been published to make any realistic judgement on the linguistic situation there, although given its geographical position one would obviously expect there to have been a mixture of North Arabian and Ancient South Arabian languages. We can only hope that more texts will appear in the near future.

The late Pre-Islamic period

As we have seen, there are remarkably few documents in Old Arabic, and until the sixth century AD there was no single script associated with it. This implies that, until the period immediately before the rise of Islam, it remained a vernacular in societies which were either non-literate or which wrote in other languages – Sabaic, Ancient North Arabian, Aramaic, Greek. We can only guess at the reasons for this and the reasons why, on occasions, Old Arabic was written. In the late first millennium BC and the early first millennium AD, it was presumably the vernacular of groups which were basically non-literate, perhaps primarily nomadic, which when they moved into situations where literacy was necessary – eg. contact with settled peoples – found writing systems associated with other languages already established. Those who wanted to write would therefore have had to learn the rudiments of the language associated with the script, or simply have had their texts written for them by scribes and masons. Only in very special circumstances would an individual have insisted on his text being expressed in the vernacular, and the problems that this caused the scribes and masons in adapting the orthographic conventions of one language to an unfamiliar tongue, can be seen both in the true and mixed Old Arabic texts and in the Undifferentiated-North-Arabian inscriptions. Since several of these texts in ANA and Old Arabic (or approximations
to it) are the monumental inscriptions of important people (the king of Qahtan, Imru’ l-Qays ‘king of all the Arabs’, etc.) it is possible that there was already a political implication in using the spoken tongue rather than what may, by then, have been regarded as a ‘foreign’ written language. However, until we have further evidence this can be no more than speculation.

It is interesting to compare the case of Old Arabic with that of those dialects of Ancient North Arabian used largely by nomads: Safaitic and Hismaic, to take the best documented. I have suggested elsewhere that the art of writing was acquired more or less accidentally by the nomads and served no useful purpose within their society, since the only readily available writing materials were rocks and boulders (230). In addition, since they used different scripts and different languages from the sedentaries around them, literacy was of no use to these nomads when they came in contact with settled society. Indeed, a handful of Greek graffiti by members of groups which also wrote in Safaitic, suggests that if they needed literacy in the settled lands then they had to learn the rudiments of Greek (231). In these societies, in the desert or on its fringes, the nearest equivalent to the self-conscious use of Old Arabic in monumental inscriptions, is in a burial cave in the desert of northeastern Jordan, near the important Roman fort of Dayr al-Kahf. Here, the construction of the tomb is recorded in a Nabataean inscription for ‘general consumption’, but the names of the dead are carefully inscribed on their sarcophagi in Safaitic, presumably the script and ‘language’ of the deceased (232).

If this explanation for the small number of Old Arabic texts in ‘borrowed’ scripts is correct, it may help to explain how Arabic came to be written in a derivative of the Aramaic alphabet, rather than in one of the, far more suitable, Arabian scripts. I am completely convinced that what we know as the ‘Arabic’ script was not developed or derived from either the Syriac or the Nabataean alphabets, in any conscious way. It is simply the Nabataean alphabet in its latest form (233).

It is generally accepted that the Arabic script originated in the region of northern Arabia, southern Syria and southern Iraq. In northern Arabia and southern Syria there had been a strong tradition of Ancient North Arabian (ie. $h$- dialects) written in forms of the Arabian script. However, these dialects and scripts were gradually displaced by Aramaic as the vehicle of prestige writing in the oases of northern Arabia. This probably happened first in Taymā³, which came under Mesopotamian influence from the sixth century BC onwards. It is noticeable that although brief Taymanitic inscriptions have been found in the sanctuary areas which have been excavated, the important religious texts are in Aramaic. The change took place much later in Dadan where there was a strong local political entity which survived the attentions of Nabonidus. It was only under Nabataean domination, when the political centre had been transferred to Hegrā (Maḍā‘in Ṣāliḥ), that Aramaic became the general medium for public pronouncements.

The nomads probably continued to use their own dialects and scripts, but these had no prestige and were completely irrelevant to those in the settled areas. The distribution in the north of the Peninsula of the pure and mixed Old Arabic texts suggests that speakers of an $l$- dialect were present throughout the areas where Aramaic had come to be the prestige script. It was therefore natural that when Old Arabic came to be written in these regions, the Aramaic script should be the chosen vehicle. Of course, the late Nabataean script, which was the one chosen, was completely inadequate for the expression of Arabic. Not only did it have only twenty-two letters to
represent the twenty-eight phonemes of Arabic, but this number was effectively reduced still further since one letter, semkath, was not used and the forms of several others had become indistinguishable (234). I would suggest that even if its grave inadequacies were considered, they were thought to be completely outweighed by its prestige.

In this context, the use of the Nabataean script to write the Old Arabic epitaph of Imru’ l-Qays, ‘king of all the Arabs’, is highly significant. The date is AD 328, more than two centuries after the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom, but during this period the script had clearly continued to be used and thus to develop. It seems a fair assumption that the inscription was couched in Old Arabic because this was the native language of Imru’ l-qays and those who composed his epitaph. If so, it is scarcely credible that they would have had it written in a script with which they were entirely unfamiliar or which was associated with a completely alien culture (235). It is usually assumed that the Imru’ l-Qays of the Namâra inscription was the second Lakhmid king, although the evidence is by no means clear-cut. If correct, this would suggest that by the fourth century AD the Lakhmid court (which Arab tradition makes one of the ‘birthplaces’ of the Arabic script) may already have been literate in Arabic, using the Nabataean alphabet to write it.

Of course, the use of a script to write a ‘new’ language (Arabic) does not preclude its continuing use to express the ‘original’ language (Aramaic). Thus, 160 years before the epitaph of Imru’ l-Qays, an army unit formed from a north Arabian tribe, Thamûd, declared its loyalty to the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in inscriptions in the prestige languages of Greek and Nabataean Aramaic, at Rawwâfa, in northwest Arabia (236). Thirty years after the death of Imru’ l-Qays another royal epitaph in almost perfect Aramaic in a late, if archaizing, Nabataean script, was set up in Madâ’in Śâlih (237). Thus the Namâra inscription is within a tradition in which Aramaic and the Nabataean script are the vehicles for prestige public monuments of Arab polities in northern Arabia, just as Sabaic and the Sabaic script were at Qaryat al-Faw.

The difference between the north and the south lay in the fact that, in the south, Sabaic, however imperfectly written, seems to have remained the official language of prestige documents until shortly before the rise of Islam, whereas in the north the coming of Christianity appears to have produced a shift in the use of written languages from the mid-fourth century onwards. In the Byzantine provinces Greek became the language of political statements and Greek and Syriac (and the other Christian Aramaic dialects) the languages of the church. Most public documents were therefore composed in one or other of these languages. It was only in exceptional circumstances, and to make a clear cultural point, that an Arabic version was added to the Syriac and/or Greek as at Zebed (AD 512) or Harran (AD 568).

However, in southern Iraq, the Lakhmid court was one of a number of self-consciously Arab and Arabic-speaking political entities which grew up in the northern part of the Peninsula in late antiquity. In these, although the language of the church would have been Syriac, the political and cultural language was Arabic, not Greek. Thus it seems likely that it was in this region that Arabic first came to be a regularly written language, displacing Aramaic as the language of prestige documents for reasons of politics and ethnic pride, but continuing to use the Aramaic script, although in a form which was not associated either with the church (238) or the Sasanian state. In this way, almost acci-
dentally, Arabic came to be written in a completely inadequate script, and in this form eventually displaced the much more suitable Ancient South Arabian alphabet which gradually fell into disuse along with the Sayhadic languages it expressed.

It should be emphasized that, at present, all this can be no more than a hypothesis based on the fragmentary evidence available and inferences drawn from it. We must hope that, in the near future, more data will appear which will reveal whether it is founded on rock or on sand (239).

SIGLA

AMJ  Hismaic inscriptions published, with no coherent numbering system, by W.J. Jobling in the preliminary reports of his ‘Aqaba-Ma‘an Survey. G.M.H. King has collected them and given them a continuous numeration under the siglum AMJ, in King GMH. Early North Arabian Thamudic E. A Preliminary description based on a new corpus of inscriptions from the Ḥismā desert of southern Jordan and published material. Ph.D. thesis submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990.


HSIM  Safaitic inscriptions in Har-
Table 1. Table of Old Arabic inscriptions and other documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure Old Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Igl bn Hf‘m</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>1st c. BC (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSLih 384</td>
<td>Dadanitic</td>
<td>Dadan</td>
<td>Pre-1st c. AD (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘En ‘Avdat lines 4–5</td>
<td>Nabataean</td>
<td>‘En ‘Avdat, Negev</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namārā Inscription</td>
<td>Nabataean</td>
<td>Al-Namārā, S. Syria</td>
<td>AD 328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umm al-Jimāl</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Umm al-Jimāl, Jordan</td>
<td>6th c. AD (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebed</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Zebed, N. Syria</td>
<td>AD 512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabal Usays</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>S. Syria</td>
<td>AD 528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrān</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Lejā, S. Syria</td>
<td>AD 568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalter fragment</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Syria ?</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Arabic Mixed Texts</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safaeo-Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 2446</td>
<td>Safaitic</td>
<td>Zalaf, S. Syria</td>
<td>1st c. BC–4th AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH 589</td>
<td>Safaitic</td>
<td>Burqu‘, NE Jordan</td>
<td>1st c. BC–4th AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIJ 37</td>
<td>Safaitic</td>
<td>Jaththm, NE Jordan</td>
<td>1st c. BC–4th AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRS 125</td>
<td>Safaitic</td>
<td>NE Jordan</td>
<td>1st c. BC–4th AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadano-Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSLih 71</td>
<td>Dadanitic</td>
<td>Dadan</td>
<td>Pre-1st c. AD (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSLih 276</td>
<td>Dadanitic</td>
<td>Dadan</td>
<td>pre-1st c. AD (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabataeo-Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNab 17</td>
<td>Nabataean</td>
<td>Hegrā</td>
<td>AD 267</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aramaeo-Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mleihā</td>
<td>East Arabian Aramaic</td>
<td>Mleihā</td>
<td>2nd century AD (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Undifferentiated North Arabian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja 2122</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>3rd–2nd c. BC (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M‘wyt bn Rb‘t</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>2nd c. BC (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansary, Fau: 147/6</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansary, Fau: 143/2</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja 2142</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mā 2</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Nagrān</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja 859</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Nagrān</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undifferentiated North Arabian Mixed Texts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabaeo-North-Arabian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIH 450</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghoneim</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Qaryat al-Faw</td>
<td>3rd–2nd c. BC (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 8</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>2nd c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 10</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>2nd c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 13</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>2nd c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 33</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>1st c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 34</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>1st c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 35</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>1st c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 36</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>1st c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 40</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>1st c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haram 56</td>
<td>Ancient South Arabian</td>
<td>Haram</td>
<td>1st c. BC–1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
M. C. A. MACDONALD

Taymanitic, Hismaic and Thamudic B, C and D inscriptions copied by C. Huber and published with the ‘HU’ numeration in van den Branden, *Les inscriptions thamoudéennes.*


South Arabian inscriptions published by A. Jamme.

Dadanitic (formerly Liyanite) inscriptions published by A. Jamme.


Hismaic inscriptions edited in King, *Early North Arabian Thamudic E.*


Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett FV. *Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan.* Toronto: University of Toronto Near and Middle East Series, 2: 1957.


Safaitic inscriptions in Winnett

WTay Taymanitic inscriptions published in Winnett & Reed, Ancient Records from North Arabia.


References

1. When first mentioning a term I shall use diacritical marks, when appropriate, to indicate pronunciation or etymology. However, in subsequent references I shall follow normal practice and omit these marks. In transliterations of texts I use the following editorial sigla: a letter between { } is a doubtful reading; a letter between [ ] is restored; <.> represents signs or marks which are considered extraneous to the text and which have been omitted from the reading; a letter between ( ) is an emendation when a text is known only from a hand-copy; and - - - mark a missing or unreadable passage, regardless of its length. One / represents a word-divider, two // the end of a line. Inseparable particles and enclitic pronouns are attached by a hyphen to the following or preceding word respectively. With the exception of Dadanitic, most North and South Arabian texts are written entirely without *matres lectionis*, I have therefore not vocalized names in the translations. Finally, Alexander Sima has pointed out to me that the ancient name of the oasis now called al-'Ula was almost certainly pronounced *Dadan* (thus *umda-da-nu* in the Nabonidus Stelae from Harran H2A and H2B, both i: 26, and the Septuagint’s rendering of Hebrew *dadan* by *Δαδάν*). The Hebrew transcription, *d’dán*, (from which English ‘Dedan’ derives) is the result of two sound shifts characteristic of Hebrew: /a/> /a/ in an accented syllable (Hebrew placing the accent on the final syllable) and the unaccented vocal in the preceding syllable being reduced to a schwa (cf. *m3lak-im*< “malak-im”). I therefore refer throughout this paper to *Dadan* and *Dadanitic* and only use the term ‘Dedane’ when referring to the name formerly given to some of the Dadanitic inscriptions. I am most grateful to Dr. Sima for this suggestion which I have quoted verbatim.

2. Thus, for instance, Nabilia Abbott’s book entitled *The Rise of the North Arabic script*... which deals with the development of the *Arabic* script, not the North Arabian alphabets and the (to me) bizarre classifications in Bergstrasser’s *Einführung in die semitischen Sprachen* (retained in the English translation of 1983) in which ‘North Arabic’ refers only to Arabic, and ‘South Arabic’ refers to Ge‘ez, Amharic, Tigre and Mehr! Reference to Ancient South Arabian in Bergstrasser’s book is confined to notes on Mehri.

3. In view of this confusion I would suggest that the terms ‘North Arabic’ and ‘South Arabic’ be abandoned altogether, since they are not even useful to describe the dialects of spoken Arabic found in the north and south of the Peninsula, for which the terms ‘northern/southern Arabic dialects’ are better used. In French too, Christian Robin has led a move away from the traditional terms ‘nord-arabe’ and ‘sud-arabe’ in favour of ‘nordarabique’ and ‘sudarabique’. Unfortunately, such a distinction is not possible in German where ‘arabisch’ is used for both ‘Arabian’ and ‘Arabic’. Nevertheless, a clear differentiation is still possible, see below.

4. See Figs 1 and 2.

5. See Fig. 1.

6. W. W. Müller, following Caskel, used the term ‘Frühnordeutsch’ for these texts. However, he did so in the belief ‘daß die Sprache der thamudischen, lihyanischen, safaitischen und hasaitischen Inschriften eine Vorstufe des Altarabischen bildet’ (Müller WW. Das Altarabische und das klassische Arabisch. In: Fischer W, ed. Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie, 1. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1982: 17). More than a decade and a half later, I am not sure that he would maintain this view, and it is one with which I cannot agree. It is clear that in pre-Islamic Syria and Arabia there were two North Arabian dialect groups, one using *h-* (or possibly zero) as the definite article and one using *ʔ*. It is only the latter which is the direct ancestor of the Arabic known from the Islamic period, and it is this which I have called ‘Old Arabic’ and to which I would suggest the term ‘Altarabisch’ be restricted.
would therefore propose that the term ‘Frühnor-
darabisch’ be replaced by ‘Altnordarabisch’, which has the advantage of consistency with the well-established parallel term ‘Altsüdarabisch’, describing those Sayyadic and non-Sayyadic languages of ancient South Arabia known at present, none of which was the lineal ancestor of any of the Modern South Arabian tongues. It is also easily recognizable as the equivalent of the English and French terms, ‘Ancient North Arabian’ and ‘nordarabique ancien’.

7. See the discussion of Hismaic and Hasaitic below.

8. For all these terms, see below.

9. Formerly ‘Thamudic E’. See the discussion of this term below.

10. I owe this term to Christian Robin.

11. W. W. Müller used this term to cover both ANA and Old Arabic (Das Altarabische und das klassische Arabisch: 17–36), see note 6 above. However, I would suggest that the present, more restricted definition provides greater clarity, and that ‘Nordarabisch’ be used as the overall term for ANA (=Altnordarabisch), Old Arabic (=Altarabisch) and (Middle, Classical, Modern Standard and Spoken dialect-) Arabic (=Arabisch).

12. See Fig. 2.

13. On the analogy of Old English, Old French and Old Arabic. As noted above, there is no such close connection between the Sayyadic languages and Modern South Arabian. See, for instance, Porkhomovski V. Modern South Arabian Languages from a Semitic and Hamito-Semitic Perspective. PSAS 27: 1997: 219–223. We still know too little of the non-Sayyadic languages to decide whether they are ‘related’ in any lineal sense to Modern South Arabian.


15. That is, what was formerly called ‘Minaean’ or ‘Minaic’. It is the language of the pre-Minaean inscriptions in the area which was to become the kingdom of Ma‘in, and which the Minaeans (who probably spoke something quite different) appear to have adopted and used (more or less competently) as their written language. The term was first proposed by Christian Robin. For a fuller explanation see Robin C. L’Arabie antique de Karib’lil à Mahomet. Nouvelles données sur l’histoire des Arabes grâce aux inscriptions. Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée, 61: 1991: 98.

16. For a brief, clear and very useful discussion of these languages, see Robin, L’Arabie antique: 95–100.


18. That is, the latter part of ZI 11 and Ja 2353 (Jamme A. Miscellanées d’ancient (sic) arabe, 2. Washington, DC: [privately produced], 1971: 86), see Beeston AFL. Languages of Pre-Islamic Arabia. Arábica 28: 1981: 180–181 (where the page numbers in n. 6 should read 194–195); and Beeston, Apologia: 14 (where ZI II should read ZI 11).


20. This does not rule out the possibility of some links between some members of each group. See, for instance, the final paragraph of Frantsouzoff S. Regulation of Conjugal Relations in Ancient Raybūn. PSAS 27: 1997: 123.

21. This is a new term, which I owe to Christian Robin, for what is commonly called the ‘South Semitic script’. The term ‘Arabian’ is appropriate since this branch of the alphabet was, to all intents and purposes, confined to Arabia, apart from the one case of expansion into Ethiopia.

THE LINGUISTIC MAP OF PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

27. Represented by the private documents incised on sticks which have been appearing in their hundreds in northern Yemen since 1970. See Ryckmans et al. Textes du Yémen antique, especially 12–14, 31–33 and the works by J. Ryckmans cited in the bibliography there, pp. 18–19.

28. The linguistic material contained in a proper name does not, of course, identify the language of its bearer; only the linguistic context in which it occurs can do that. Even a graffito consisting solely of a single name would have had a linguistic context within the mind of the writer, but this, of course, is irretreivable.

29. Thus the language of a text in the Safaitic script is called ‘Safaitic’ unless there is evidence that it is in another language/dialect (see the examples quoted below under the hnr- dials and Safaeo-Arabic).


31. Called by Winnett ‘Jawfian’ (Winnett & Reed, Ancient Records: 69, 73, 80–81 (nos. 21–23), pls 1, 3, 12). So far only three texts in the Dumaic script have been published, but the forms of d, z and d show them to be distinct from texts which can be classified as Taymanitic or Dadaotic. See Fig. 3 and the more detailed discussion below.


33. For instance the distinctive Taymanitic b for bn in the ONA text on the Vienna seal 1247 (see Sass B. Studia Alphabetica. On the Origin and Early History of the Northwest Semitic, South Semitic and Greek Alphabets. Freiburg Schweiz: Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 102: 1991: Fig. 33) and in the text (s1mn // b hfn) on the seal impression in the École Biblique (Sass, Studia Alphabetica: 65–66, Fig. 41).

35. This name was given to them by W. F. Albright, on the basis of an extremely speculative argument in which he assumed that the Chaldeans brought the script to Babylonia ‘from an undetermined part of East Arabia, to which it had spread from ‘Omān’ [sicl. Dhofar’], (Albright WF, The Chaldaean Inscriptions in Proto-Arabic Script. BASOR 128: 1952: 44–45).

36. See Burrows E. A New Kind of Old Arabic Writing from Ur. JRAS 1927: 795–806.


38. Several unpublished seals in private collections are said to have come from Saudi Arabia. See Golding M. Artefacts from Later Pre-Islamic Occupation in Eastern Arabia. ATTLAL 8: 1984: 166, who illustrates one such seal with the legend klbm in South Arabian letters (pl. 135b).

39. One or more tribes called Thamūd are known from the Annals of the Assyrian King Sargon II (722–705 BC); from Classical sources (dating from between the second century BC and the fifth century AD); from the Qurʾān and from Islamic commentators and historians (seventh century AD onwards), with nothing in between. While it is perfectly possible that some members of a tribe or tribes called Thamūd used one or more of the scripts which have been placed in the ‘pending file’ we call ‘Thamūdic’, there is pitifully little evidence that they did so. In the approximately 11,000 ‘Thamūdic’ texts the name tmd occurs only four times (all in Thamūdic B), with another two possible cases (one each in Thamūdic B and Thamūdic D) where the reading is doubtful or can only be obtained by emending the copy. Moreover, it is perfectly possible that some, or all, of these occurrences tmd was not vocalized ‘Thamūd’ and/or did not refer to the tribe(s) of that name known to history. The four more or less secure occurrences are as follows: JSTTham 280 (‘ḥṣḏt ḥ-tmd(y) ʾḥṣḏt the Tmd(aean)’) and 300 (l bʾṭr h-tmd[y] ‘By Bʾṭr the Tmd(aean?)’), HU 172 (h ʾḥl tmd rlkṯ? ‘O god of Tmd . . .’), Doughty 51/2 (ʾḥl h-tmd nm h(l)ṣṯ ‘Lady of the Tmd. By H(l)ṣṯ?’). It will be seen that although the letters t-m-d are clear in each of these inscriptions the reading and/or interpretation of the whole text is in each case far from secure. Even more uncertain are the Thamūdic B text JSTTham 339 (ʾḥṣḏt ḥ-tmd[?]) and the Thamūdic D text HU 453 (ʾḥṣḏt ḥ-tmd[?]). Of course, there may be other reasons why the ethnic tmd is so rare in these texts and I repeat that this paucity of occurrences cannot be taken as proof that members of the Thamūd did not use these scripts. It shows only that, at present, we have very little evidence that they did. The name tmd also occurs twice in a dating formula in Ṣafaitic: sʾnt ḫrb ḡzʾm ʾḥ tmd ‘the year of the war [between] ḡzm and the ṣʾnt Tmd’ (WH 3792a) and sʾnt ḫrb ḡzʾm tmd (WH 3792c). In this case, an identification with a tribe called Thamūd known from outside sources is more plausible, though unprovable.


42. In the past, I have argued strongly for the retention of Winnett’s original label, ‘Thamūdic E’, as against his revised term ‘Tabuki Thamūdic’ and Knauf’s proposed ‘South Ṣafaitic’. The latter is entirely inappropriate since King’s study has shown that in script, linguistic features and content these inscriptions form a distinct group which is markedly different from Ṣafaitic. See the discussion below, plus Macdonald MCA. Ṣafaitic. In: EI, (new edition), 8. Leiden: Brill, 1995: 760–762, and Macdonald & King, Thamūdic: 437–438. I therefore regret my temporary adoption of Knauf’s nomenclature in Macdonald, ABCs; and in Macdonald MCA. Inscriptions, Ṣafaitic. In: Freedman DN, ed. The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 3. New York: Doubleday, 1992: 418–423 (submitted in 1988). My objection to the term ‘Tabuki Thamūdic’ was that it suggested that the main concentration of these texts was in the region of Tabuk, and that it was ‘the type of Thamūdic’ native to that area. Such a term runs perilously close to endorsing van den Branden’s discredited theory, which denies that ‘Thamūdic’ is an artificial Restklassenbildung and claims instead that there was only one ‘Thamūdic alpha.
bet’ with various geographical variations. I therefore argued that the neutral term ‘Thamudic’ which had no such implications was to be preferred, and it was under this label that Geraldine King analyzed the script and dialect. However, as a result of her study it would now be confusing to continue referring to the script and dialect as ‘Thamudic’, and for this reason a new name is required.

33. This spelling (ie. with alif maqṣūrah) is the one in the Official Standard Names Gazetteer for Jordan (Department of the Interior, Washington DC).


35. Formerly Jabal al-Duru¯z (le Djebel Druze) or Jabal Hawrân, Roman Auranitis.


37. These texts were first identified as representing a separate group by F.V. Winnett (A Himyaritic Inscription from the Persian Gulf Region. *BASOR* 102: 1946: 6). The name ‘Hasaean’ was originally suggested by R. le B. Bowen (*The Early Arabian Necropolis of Ain Jateen*. A Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Site on the Persian Gulf. New Haven, CT: BASOR Supplementary Studies, 7–9: 1950: 5, 25) and taken up by A. Jamme (*Sabaean and Hasaean Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia*. Rome: Studi semitici, 23: 1966: 66). However, W.W. Müller has called for them to be renamed ‘Hasaitic’ to preserve the -ic/aean distinction mentioned above (Das Altarabische und das klassische Arabisch: 26). There is no complete corpus of all the Hasaite texts known to date, but useful collections can be found in Potts DT. *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*. 2. Oxford: Clarendon 1990: 69–85, with a good discussion and abundant references but with only one figure (showing four facsimiles) and no photographs. However, there are generally excellent illustrations in Livingstone A. A Linguistic, Tribal and Onomastical Study of the Hasaean Inscriptions. *ATLAL* 8: 1984: pls 85–90, although unfortunately the text of this article has been rendered unusable by numerous printers’ errors.


40. Robin, L’Arabie antique: 136 and see the table on 137, contradicting his statement on pp. 118–119.


42. If a North Arabian script had been native to southern Mesopotamia – an area of obsessive literacy which has been explored by archaeologists for almost two centuries – one would expect far more texts to have been found and a far greater consistency in the scripts employed in them.

43. It would appear that Robin’s idea of a connection between the Hasaite and the Dispersed North Arabian scripts may derive ultimately from a misunderstanding of a remark by J. Ryckmans that the script of Ja 1049 (=Jamme, Sabaean and Hasaean Inscriptions: 6: Fig. 18), a rock graffito found near al-Hasâw, was in a script ‘proche de certains cachets trouvés en Mésopotamie’ (Ryckmans J. Review of Jamme, Sabaean and Hasaean Inscriptions. *BiOr* 26: 1969: 246). However, Ja 1049 is known only from a rough and incomplete hand-copy and the unusual letter-forms it contains must inevitably be suspect. Thus, for instance, the triangle which Garbini compared with letters in some Dispersed ONA texts (Garbini G. Le iscrizioni proto-arabe. *AION* 36 [N.S. 26]: 1976: 170–171) could well belong to a d of the normal South Arabian form the stem of which was missed by the copyist. Note also that the forms of ½2 are South Arabian rather than ONA, see Figure 3 here. Moreover, if Ja 1049 were in one of the Dispersed ONA scripts this would automatically exclude its being Hasaite, since the scripts of the Dispersed ONA texts are very clearly different from that of the known Hasaite texts (see Fig. 3).


46. Pierre J. Quoted in Altheim F & Stiehl R. *Die
57. For a discussion of the whole problem of South Arabian chronologies see de Maigret & Robin, Les fouilles italiennes de Yalah: 255–278; and for the archaeological evidence from C14 dating, ibid. 286–291. For a very clear and concise exposition of the problems and an argument for adopting a modified long chronology see Robin, L’Arabie antique: 49–51.


59. This may seem to contradict the view given above that the Hasaïtic texts are ‘written in the monumental South Arabian alphabet (albeit with occasional unusual letter-forms) or in one closely derived from it’, but see the hypothesis advanced below.

60. The site of Thāq, where a number of these texts were found, has been dated roughly to between the late fourth century BC and late first century AD (see Potts, The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity, 2: 44 and 203), but this provides only the most uncertain of evidence for dating the inscriptions.

61. For more detailed discussions see Macdonald MCA. The Form of the Definite Article in Classical Arabic. Some Light from the Jahiliya. JSS (forthcoming); and my forthcoming book, Old Arabic and its legacy in the later language. Texts, linguistic features, scripts and letter-orders.

62. In a Psalter fragment from a Damascus genizah, the Septuagint text of Psalm 78 (LXX, 77) and an Arabic gloss written in Greek letters, are arranged in parallel columns. The fragment was first published in Violet B. Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damascus. OLZ 4: 1901: col. 384–403, 425–441, 475–488 and I have recently restudied it in Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article, and Macdonald, Old Arabic, where I have argued that it dates to the pre-Islamic period.


64. For a list of all known Old Arabic texts see Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article.

65. This appears to me to be less ugly and more easily pronounced than ‘Saﬁtaiko-Arabic’!

66. Robin first suggested calling these ‘pseudo-Sa¬bēen’ but, as he recognized, this risks confusion with the ‘Pseudo-Sabaic’ texts of Abyssinia and he therefore proposed the label ‘qahṭānite’ (L’Arabie antique: 97). However, it is dangerous to name a language or a habit of writing after a historical political entity or social group, since this immediately implies a connection with, and limitation to, such an entity or group. It was for this reason that Robin proposed the new name ‘Madhabic’ to replace ‘Minaic’, and that I have suggested replacing ‘Dedanite’ and ‘Liyanite’ with ‘Dadanitic’. Furthermore, the name ‘qahṭānite’ does not immediately suggest the mixed nature of these texts and would artificially separate them from texts of the same sort in other scripts. However, as I explain below, no texts of this kind have yet been identified, although it is likely that when all the inscriptions from Qaryat al-Faw are published some will fall into this category. It is for this reason that I have placed the term between [ ].

67. That is, texts in Aramaic scripts and dialects other than Nabataean.


69. See Beeston AFL. On the Correspondence of Hebrew ś to ESA s. JSS 22: 1977: 51.


71. Even the several hundred inscriptions found in Dhofar by A.A.M. al-Shahri and G.M.H. King are unlikely to redress the balance. They are in
a previously unknown form of the Arabian script and have so far defied decipherment but, even when eventually they can be read, the short, informal nature of the texts suggests that they may not be particularly informative. For excellent colour illustrations see al-Shahristani, *Kayfa ibtadayna*: 61–145.

72. If, as seems likely, the drawing of a chariot with a caption in Thamudic B represents an Assyrian vehicle, this could date from any time from the invasions of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC) to those of Ashurbanipal (668–627 BC). See MacDonald MCA. Hunting, Fighting, and Raiding, The Horse in Pre-Islamic Arabia. In: Alexander DG, ed. *Furusiyoyo: The horse in the art of the Near East*, 1. Riyadh, 1996: 76–79 (and the corrigan). Note that on Illustration IIa in this work the right-hand section of the composition has been omitted. However, a reproduction of the complete drawing can be found on pp. 224–225 of the book.


75. For example, r with a hook at the top (Ja 1044/1, see the photograph on ATLAL 8: 1984: pl. 89A), d back-to-front (Ja 1044/2, *ibid.*), as a circle with a horizontal bar to the right or left (Ja 1048/1, 2, 3, see Jamme, *Sabaean and Hâsèean Inscriptions*: pl. XVII).


77. See Teixidor, *Inscription araméenne*: 696 and the discussion below.

78. In the same article, Teixidor published a small fragment of a bronze plaque with part of a text in the same script (pp. 705–706).

79. See the interesting paper by Alessandra Avanzini in the proceedings of the workshop on ‘Civilisations de l’Arabie préislamique’, Aix-en-Provence, 1996, when these are eventually published.

80. Thus, to take only one example, Christian Robin dates texts in the South Arabian script from Faw on the same palaeographical grounds as those from Yemen (L’Arabie antique: 114ff).


83. The Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens Expedition re-
corded some 9000 ‘Thamudic’ graffiti, see Ryckmans J. Aspects nouveaux du problème thamoudéen. Studia Islamica 5: 1956: 5–17; and below. Unfortunately, these have yet to be published.

84. For a discussion of the South Arabian languages see the paper by Avanzini mentioned in note 79.

85. This dating is arrived at partly on palaeographical grounds (Rabinowitz I. Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century B.C.E. from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt. JNES 15: 1956: 6, and n. 41) and partly by the quite arbitrary identification of Gšm (the patronym of one of the donors), with ‘Geshem the Arab’ mentioned in Nehemiah (2:19; 6:1 and cf. 6:2, 6). Gšm was, of course, a common name in southern Syria and northern Arabia in the pre-Islamic period and there is no external evidence to suggest that these two occurrences refer to the same person.


87. Rabinowitz, Aramaic Inscriptions: 2, 4–5. W. Kornfeld (Onomastica aramaica und das Alte Testament. Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 88: 1976: 109–112) argues that the name šḥ₂ may not be of Egyptian origin here on the grounds that the patronym (‘bd-h₁mra) is Semitic (he assumes it is ‘Qēdārite’, apparently because an entirely separate dedication at the shrine was made by a king of Qēdār). However, the possible North Arabian etymologies for šḥ₂ which he proposes, are not entirely satisfactory and there seems no reason why the name could not be Egyptian, in view of the purely Egyptian names of another dedicator (Rabinowitz I. Another Aramaic Record of the North-Arabian Goddess Han-ʾIlat. JNES 18: 1959: 154–155) and the geographical position of the shrine, near Egypt’s northeastern border, where one would expect just such an onomastic mingling of Egyptian and North Arabian. The countless examples of men and women with Greek or Latin names and Semitic patronyms (and vice versa) in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East should make us wary of the argument used by Kornfeld on this occasion.

88. Rabinowitz, Another Aramaic Record: 154–155.

89. Herodotus 1.131; 3.8.

90. Robin suggests that the form Ἁλλαὰ ‘pourrait correspondre en principe à une graphie sémitique hal-llāt ou al-llāt’ (L’Arabie antique: 102). While, of course, this is theoretically possible, I am not aware of any evidence for a definite article ḥl- in Ancient North Arabian, although it appears to occur in a theophoric personal name (‘bd-h₁-zy) found in a graffito in South Arabian script in southwestern Saudi Arabia (Ryckmans, Aspects nouveaux: 11). The supposed examples of ḥl- in late Dadanitic (formerly ‘Liḥyanite’) are ‘ghosts’. JSLiH 158 is an unfinished attempt to write the alphabet in the Arabian ḥlīm order, which was restarted in the second line (see Müller, Das Altababische und das klassische Arabisch: 22). Note also that JSLiH 71, in which an article with -l- occurs in b-l-ḥgr and, following the proposed demonstrative adjective h- in h-l-nfl, is not Dadanitic but a Dadano-Arabic text (see below). A third ‘ghost’ is the supposed article ḥl- in the name of a Dadanite woman mentioned in the so-called ‘hierodulenlisten’ (see now the excellent edition by Bron F. Inventaire des inscriptions sudarabiques. Tome 3. Paris: Boccard/Rome: Herder, 1998: 106, no. Ma’nī 93 (Gl. 1270/16); and see p. 116, no. 28/1270). The name of the woman is written bml-h₂/zy and it has been suggested that ḥl here is an example of the definite article (cf. Ryckmans, Aspects nouveaux: 11, n. 1). However, the position of the word-divider clearly shows that the name is bml-h₂/zy which could be analyzed b-nhl-zṣy ‘with the forebearance/ gentleness of Ḻṣy’.

91. For instance, ḥn-ʾjkt ‘the priestess’, JSLiH 64/3, and many others. There are as yet no instances of the article before a word beginning with the glottal fricative /h/. (using the

92. For instance, ḥn-ʾnk ‘the foundation’, JSLiH 54/3. There are as yet no clear instances in Dadanitic of the definite article before a word beginning with the other pharyngal fricative /h/. Jamme read ḥn-ḥṣ in JSLiH 269/4 (see Jamme A. Miscellanées d’ancient arabe. 7. Washington, DC: privately produced), 1974: 117, but note that there is a misprint in his transliteration) and compared ḥṣ with ‘Ar. ḥusās ‘trace, vestige, mark’ (ibid.). However, I cannot find such a meaning in the lexica and a more natural reading is ḥ-nḥṣ. The context is a curse on anyone who might damage the ḥṣ or ṣḥṣ (using the same phraseology as in JSLiH 276 and HE 1, see below, which have šṣr in place of ḥṣ/ṣḥṣ). Thus a word meaning ‘writing’ or ‘inscription’ would be expected. It is possible that this text was engraved as a warning beside a bronze plaque with a funerary inscription, similar to the one found at Mleiha (see Teixidor, Inscription arménienne, and the discussion below) and that ḥ-nḥṣ refers to this. Only an examination of the rock-face will reveal whether there are signs that something was originally attached to the surface beside JSLiH 269.
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93. See, for instance, Müller, Das Altarabische und das klassische Arabisch: 18, 22, 24; and Müller WW. Some Remarks on the Safaitic Inscriptions. PSAS 10: 1980: 69.

94. JSLih 81/2–3 hn-//qbr. It should be noted that it is not clear from the published photograph whether the first three lines of JSLih 81 are really complete (see Jaussen A & Savignac M-R. Mission archéologique en Arabie, 2. Paris: Geuthner, 1914: pl. LXXV). The article hn- appears to be at the end of line 2 and qbr at the beginning of line 3. But the syntax of the text as recorded by Jaussen and Savignac is awkward and has not yet received a convincing interpretation. The ends of lines 4-6 appear to be missing (they are appreciably shorter than lines 1–3) and it is possible that lines 1–3 are also incomplete. If this is so, the definite article in line 2 would have referred to a noun no longer visible at the ‘end’ of that line, rather than to qbr. Only a re-investigation of the original will solve this problem. In all other cases the article is h- before words beginning with q (h- qbr in JSLih 79/2–3, h- qrt in JSLih 64/1, 366/2, JaL 85d/1=Jamme, Miscellanées 7: 73–74, pl. 19).

95. LP 87. See Macdonald, Nomads and the Hawrān: 308 for this reading.

96. NH 6.32.157 Acailitae (oppida Domata, Haegra).

97. Thus the epithet of the goddess hn-št at Tell el-Mashūţa and, in Hasaïtic, the names ʾmt-hn-št (LivH A.13/2 Pl.87A), ʾwl-hn-št (LivH O.15/2–3 Pl.85D), ʾws-hn-št (Ry 155/2–3, see Ryckmans G. Inscriptions sud-arabes. Quatrième série [Ry 155–202]. Le Muséon 50: 1937: 239–240) and ʾmr-hn-št (Ja 1043, see Jamme, Sabaean and Hascean Inscriptions: pl. XV). One of the exceptions is the name hn-šbd in Ja 1044/2 (ATLAL 8: 1984: pl. 89A). The article is h-šml, on which see below.


99. Wilkinson-Mulayha 1 (Robin, Documents de l’Arabie antique 3: 80) which A.F.L. Beeston read nfs w-qbr Dryt fty ʾmlk ʿgravestone and grave of Dhariyyat servant of the kings’. However, as Robin rightly points out, ʾmlk may be a personal name equivalent to the Arabic clan name al-Amlāk.

100. As in Hismaic (see below), affiliation to a social group is always marked by the phrase d-ʾl ‘who is of the lineage of’ and, so far at least, never by the nisba.


102. The text is damaged at the beginning of the list of scripts.

103. Lipinski E. De fenicische inscripties uit Karatepe. In: Veenhof KR, ed. Schrijvend Verleden. Documenten uit het oude Nabije Oosten vertaald en toegelicht. Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1983: 54; and Lipinski E. Phoenicians in Anatolia and Assyria. OLP 16: 1985: 82. Luwian having no exact equivalent to /š/; s was used as the nearest approximation. The late Jonas Greenfield suggested that the term ‘script of Tyre’ could have been used to cover Aramaic as well as Phoenician since the distinction between the two alphabets would not have been obvious at this period (Greenfield J. Of Scribes, Scripts and Languages. In: Baurain C, Bonnet C & Krings V, eds. Phoinikeia Grammata. Lire et écrire en Méditerranée. Actes du Colloque de Liège, 15–18 novembre 1989. Namur: Collection d’Études Classiques, 6: 1991: 179–180).


105. I am most grateful to Professor David Hawkins, who is publishing an edition of this text, for this information. He himself suggested that ta-i-mani-ti referred to the Aramaean tribe of Temān in northern Mesopotamia, but this was mainly because he felt that it would be inconceivable that Aramaic would not be among the scripts mentioned. However, as he points out, the beginning of the list is broken and we do not know what has been lost. Moreover, he agrees with Greenfield that Yariris is unlikely to have distinguished between the Phoenician and Aramaic scripts (pers. comm.). The gentilic form Taymān is attested as tymnyr in Nabataean texts from Hegra (H 1/2, 12/2) although this, of course, is from a very much later period (first century AD), see Healey JF. The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Madaʾin Salīh. Oxford: Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement, 1: 1993: 71.

106. I have explored these relationships in Macdo-
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107. Livingstone (incorrectly in my view) describes it as 'the old South Arabic script' (New light: 136). However, it is clear that he is confusing the terms 'South Arabic' and 'South Semitic' (ie. 'Arabian') and that he makes no distinction between the North Arabian and South Arabian scripts since on p. 137 he refers to the script of the seals found in Mesopotamia as 'South Arabian'.

108. The inscription on the Vienna seal 1247 (=RES 2688, see Sass, Studia Alphabetica: Fig. 33) must be Taymanitic because of the use of $d$ for $bn$ which is unique to this dialect. See Macdonald MCA. HU 501 and the use of $s^3$ in Taymanite. JSS 36: 1991: 20–21.


110. HU 501 and WTay 4, on which see Macdonald, HU 501: 12–20.

111. WTI 22.

112. WTI 21, 22 and 23.


114. King, Early North Arabian Thamudic E.

115. Winnett, A Study. Roschinski created a new category, 'F', which he claims stands 'in ihren Schriftformen zwischen D und E' and was contemporary with them (Roschinski HP. Sprachen, Schriften und Inschriften in Nordwest-arabien. In: Die Nabatäer. Erträge einer Ausstellung im Rheinischen Landesmuseum Bonn 24. Mai – 9. Juli 1978. Bonn: Kunst und Al tertum am Rhein, 106: 1981: 43, 45). However, he does not explain the basis for creating this new category and the only two examples of 'F' texts he gives (Roschinski, Sprachen, Schriften und Inschriften: 43: Abb. 3/24–25 = JSTham 98 and 97 respectively) are both Thamudic C. There thus seems no reason to retain this category.


117. It is clear from the work of Geraldine King that Thamudic C and D are distinct categories, although Winnett's identification of some letters needs to be refined (pers. comm.). The geographical names given by Winnett in 1970 to the types are also confusing, since they suggest a link between the script and a particular region which is not borne out by the distribution patterns. Thus Thamudic B texts are found all over western Arabia from Yemen (eg. Ph 212 a1, 2, 3; 212 d) to southern Syria (eg. C 3559, LP 273, 495), while C and D texts are by no means concentrated in the Hijaz. It therefore seems much safer to retain for these rough, provisional subdivisions, the neutral 'B', 'C', 'D', labels which do not carry any misleading overtones, until such time as a more refined classification is possible. It may be argued that the names 'Taymanitic' and 'Hismaic' for the two types which have been removed from Thamudic risk creating similar confusion. However, it is now clear that the major concentrations of these texts are in the areas after which they have been labelled, and the major distinctive features of each have been identified. Thus, while the labels may yet turn out to be misnomers, this is of less importance with well-defined groups than with texts which have yet to be clearly classified, and it is important to show by the label that they are no longer in the 'Thamudic' Restklassenbildung.


120. Ryckmans, Aspects nouveaux.

121. See, for instance, Knauf A. Südsafaitisch. ADAJ 27: 1983: 587–596.

122. See King, Early North Arabian Thamudic E: 12–13; Macdonald, Safaitic: 762 and references there; and Macdonald & King, Thamudic: 437.

123. The complete list is as follows: the signs which represent  $l$, $g$, $h$, $s^2$, $t$, $z$, in Hismaic are used for $d$, $t$, $d$, $n$ (or $l$), $h$, $z$ respectively in Safaitic.


125. See the remarks in Macdonald, Nomads and the Hawrân: 377–378.

126. Macdonald, Nomads and the Hawrân.


128. See for instance LP 258, 260, WH 2411.


131. Some of these will be discussed in Macdonald, *Old Arabic*.

132. See Macdonald, On the placing of §.

133. For the most recent survey of Nabataean and a detailed discussion of the points made here, see Macdonald MCA. Inscriptions, languages and scripts among the Nabateans. In: Markoe G, ed. *Splendors of the Caravan Kingdom*. Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Art Museum, 2001 (in press).


135. See also the interesting analysis by M. O’Connor (The Arabic Loanwords in Nabatean Aramaic. *JNES* 45: 1986: 213–229). The difference between the number of loans in his list (15) and in mine (22–28) results from the fact that O’Connor restricted himself to examining Cantineau’s list of loan-words (excluding JSNab 17) whereas I have tried to search all the Nabataean texts known to me. Moreover, I have included vocabulary from the Rawwâfa inscriptions which he discussed separately (O’Connor, *Arabic Loanwords*: 228–229).

136. The exceptions are *style* found at Petra (CIS ii 350/1 and RES 1432/1, 2) as well as at Hegrâ (CIS ii 213/3, 4); and ‘lineage’ which is found mainly in texts from the Hawrân (x 6), close to the Safaitic inscriptions in which it is the normal word for any social group, with one (possibly two) texts from North Arabia (ARNa Nab 130/2 and JSNab 180/47) and one from Madaba in northern Jordan (Milik JT. *Nouvelles inscriptions nabatéennes*. *Syria* 35: 1958: 244, no. 6/4).

137. The stylized or calligraphic way in which these conventional terms are often written, in contrast to the letter-forms of the rest of the text in which they occur, suggests that in many cases they may have been treated more as conventional ‘frames’ for a name than as transcriptions of conscious statements, cf. ‘R.I.P’ on modern tombstones, or ‘... was here’ in modern graffiti.

138. Some of Diem’s theories of the development of orthographic conventions within Nabataean depend heavily on the idea that writers of graffiti would etymologize the names and words they were writing and would choose to spell them not according to how they sounded but according to complicated rules of sound change between Arabic and Aramaic (e.g. Diem W. *Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie*. 2. Die Schreibung der Konsonanten. *Or* 49: 1980: 75–82, 87). Diem was forced to this bizarre hypothesis because his entire analysis is based on the anachronistic assumption that pre-Islamic Arabic had a phonemic repertoire identical to that of Modern Standard Arabic. See the detailed discussions in Macdonald, ABCs: 149–151; The Form of the Definite Article; and *Old Arabic*.


140. See King, *Early North Arabian Thamudic E*: 687. I have counted only those examples from southern Jordan (for the provenances of all the Hismaic texts see King, *Early North Arabian Thamudic E*: 603–607). There are only twenty-four invocations toLt/tLt (twenty-three to Lt and one to tLt) in the Hismaic inscriptions from the Wâdî Ramm region, as opposed to thirty-nine references to Dushara from the same area (thirty-one to d-sry four to d-sry; two to d-sry; two to d-sry).

141. I have added to the number of invocations to Lt a Hismaic text found by F. Zayadine and S. Farès-Drappeau in 1997 (and therefore not in King, *Early North Arabian Thamudic E*). It is on a stone built into one of the inner walls of the temple and is not strictly an invocation since it states that the author bny Lt, i.e. ‘built (or participated in the building of) the temple of Lt’, see Zayadine F & Farès-Drappeau S. *Two North-Arabian Inscriptions from the Temple of Lt at Wâdî Iram*. *ADAJ* 42: 1998: 255–258; and Farès-Drappeau S. Wâdî Iram: Un lieu du culte et de rassemblement des tribus arabes dans l’antiquité. Les premiers résultats de la mission épigraphique 1997. *Aram* 8: 1996: 269–283. Both these articles indulge in wild speculation as to the significance of this text and the authors ignore the fact that the inscription is not a monumental foundation text, but a simple graffiti on a stone placed in a position where it would not have been visible in antiquity. They are also apparently unaware that the word bny in ANA is regularly used for ‘participation in the building’ of structures (usually burial cairns) and...
that the most probable explanation of the text is that its author was one of the labourers employed in the construction of the temple. It is not impossible that he had a more important role, but nothing in the text suggests this. Finally, they base wide-ranging speculation (presented as fact) on the author’s affiliation to the ethnic group ‘Ad, which they identify without hesitation with the tribe of ‘Ad mentioned in the Qurʾān. While such a vocalization is perfectly possible, it is no more or less likely than ‘ād, ‘ayd, ‘ād, or ‘awd. What can be said, however, is that the presence of this text shows that at least some of the Hismaic inscriptions are likely to have been contemporary with the use of the temple, even though it does not remove the theoretical possibility that the majority of the Hismaic graffiti were written before the introduction of the worship of Lt/l to the area.

142. This preponderance of the spelling d-sֳ²ry shows that the deity was known principally in the North Arabian form, with some writers doubtful about whether the final sound was a long vowel (which would not appear in Hismaic orthography, hence d-sֳ²r) or a consonant (d-sֳ²ry), and only four examples showing Aramaic influence (with d for d), although it should be noted that even here half of the cases have the final consonantal y of the North Arabian form (thus d-sֳ²r) and half presumably have the final /a/ of the Aramaic form dwsr (thus d-sֳ²r). Occasional use of d for d is found in the Hismaic texts from this area, but never the reverse. An unpublished text from Wādī Ramm uses d for d consistently, thus d-lt for d-lt, and dkrt lt for dkrt lt. There is, of course, no way of discovering the reasons for this. Was the author of this last text an Aramaeophone, or merely attempting to imitate Aramaic phonology, perhaps because it gave his text a superior or other ‘accent’? Note that the supposed occurrence of d-tn for d-lt in the Hasaïtic text Ja 1044/3 (see Jamme, Sabaean and Hasaean Inscriptions: Fig. 18) is the result of a copyist’s error. The photograph (ATLAL 8: 1984: pl. 89A) shows d-lt at this point.

143. For an excellent discussion of the problems with this etymology, but written before the Hismaic examples were published, see Starcky J. Pétra et la Nabatène. In: Pirot L & Robert L, eds. Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible, 7: 1966: 986–987.

144. In eighty-six (or 78%) of the Safaitic references it appears as dֳ²r and in twenty-four (or 22%) as dֳ²ry. This suggests that it was most widely current in the pure Aramaic form but that in some cases there was uncertainty over the pronunciation of the initial consonant. I know of only three examples in Safaitic of the etymologically correct form, dֳ²ry.


146. The same is true of the supposed attestation of an ‘Arabic’ definite article which Livingstone has identified in the phrase ʿANŠÈ.ana qa-a-te a-di ANŠÈ.bak-[ka-rí-sí-na-]... ‘she-camels, together with their young’ (Annals of Tigliath-Pileser III (733 BC) 142, 178, 188, 189), see Livingstone A. An Early Attestation of the Arabic Definite Article. JSS 42: 1997: 259–261. There are considerable problems with this and I discuss it in Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article.


149. This occurs both where lt seems to represent a divine name (as in LP 709, quoted in the next note, and C 1658 in the sentence h-gmlt qṣyin ṭlt w-l-rd w ‘the two camels are dedicated to ʿlt and to Rdw’) and where it represents the common noun for ‘goddess’ in the name of a topical deity, eg. in Macdonald et al., Les inscriptions safaitiques de Syrie: 466, inscription F: ... f h ṭl h-nurṭ sʾlm ... ’... and so, O goddess of al-Namāra, [grant] security ...’ or C 97 ’... f ṭlt l<..<sʾlm w ṭlt sʾsʾ ʾnqʾ i l d yʾw ṭ sʾʃr ... and so, O ṭlt<..<[grant] security and O goddess of Usays [ie. Jabal Says, where the text was found] inflict ʾnqʾt an unknown evil] on whoever scratches out the writing.’

150. See, for instance LP 709 ... f ṭlt sʾlm w (ḥyrs) ṭrm f ṭlt sʾʾlm ’... and so, O ṭlt, [grant] security. And he was on the lookout for Romans, and so, ṭlt, [grant] security.’

151. The epithet h-ḥlt ‘the goddess’ (the exact equivalent in Safaitic of Arabic al-ḥlt) is found in an unpublished text from northeastern Jordan which reads l ṭrty w ‘wget b-h-ḥlt ‘By Zryt and he sought refuge in the goddess,’ and in such theophoric names as tm-h-ḥlt (C 263) and grm-h-ḥlt (C 1984).

152. The short vowel is, of course, a reconstruction.


154. It is hoped that this text will be published by its finder in the near future.
155. There is, of course, no reason why Old Arabic, which before the sixth century AD was a purely spoken language, should not have been written in the Safaitic script from time to time, and there are indeed some examples of this, see below and Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article.

156. See the excellent photograph in al-Ansary AT. Qaryat al-Fau. A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia. London: Croom Helm, 1982: 146, and the translation and commentary in Beeston AFL. Nemara and Faw. BSOAS 42: 1979: 1–2. In the period of its prosperity, Qaryat al-Faw must have been one of the most cosmopolitan centres in Arabia. Inscriptions in the Sa'baic, 'Thamudic', Pahlavi and Nabataean scripts have been found there and in the (Undifferentiated) North Arabian, Old Arabic, Pahlavi, Nabataean and Sabaic languages (see An-
sary, Qaryat al-Fau: 19–20, 28, 73–74, 87–91, 99, 106, 118–119, 123, 129–133, 137, 141–147, and  


158. See Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article for a detailed analysis of the treatment of the definite article in this text. The /$\text{aw}/$ is assimilated when it is preceded by an inseparable particle, leaving /l/, while the /$\text{ay}/$ is assimilated be-
fore sibilants leaving /$. There is no case in this text where the article is both preceded by a particle and followed by a sibilant. Robin assumes that /$\text{al}^h$/ in line 5 stands for ‘$\text{aw}<\text{Al}>\text{al}^h$/ (L’Arabie antique: 116). However, as just noted, the divine names /$\text{Lh}$ and /$\text{L}$ are known from Sa-
faitic where they stand beside the common nouns /$\text{al}^h$/ (eg. /$\text{b}l^s\text{m}$/ /$\text{lh}$ /$\text{sc}$/) /$\text{b}l^s\text{m}$/ god of St/ in CSNS 424) and /$\text{ll}$/ (see above), and the epi-
thesis /$\text{h}^l$/‘the god’, eg. WH 3923 as re-read in Macdonald MCA. Cursive Safaitic Inscriptions?

159. /$\text{bl}$ bn /$\text{Hf}$‘m line 1 where ‘$\text{ban}$ appears as the second of the three /$\text{bn}$ in the line (no vowels are represented in the Ancient South Arabian script). See Beeston’s excellent reading and commentary (Nemara and Faw: 1–2).

160. Robin interprets /$\text{bn}$ in line 8 as the South Ara-
bian preposition (L’Arabie antique: 116) and re-
marks on its curious co-existence with Old Arabic /$\text{mm}$ in line 6. However, Beeston’s explana-
tion of /$\text{bn}$ from Arabic /$\text{bayn}$ ‘in its primary sense of “separation, parting”’ [‘without’] (Nemara and Faw: 2) is surely preferable, both in the sense it gives and as an explanation of the presence of /$\text{bn}$ at this point in the text.

161. The two examples of the 3rd person pl. enclitic pronoun (lines 3 and 4) are also North Arabian /$\text{-hm}$ rather than Sabaic /$\text{-hma}$.

162. However, see Beeston, Nemara and Faw: 1, n. 1 for one possible explanation of this feature, and see below for another.

163. Müller, Das Altarabische und das klassische Arabisch: 32–33.

164. See Drewes AJ. The Phonemes of Liyhanite. In: Robin C, ed. Mélanges linguistiques offerts à Maxime Rodinson par ses élèves, ses collègues et ses amis. Paris: GLECS Supplément, 12: 1985: 165–173. Contra Drewes, only final /$\text{a}$/ and /$\text{a}$/ and the diphthong /$\text{ay}$/ in final position are consist-
tently expressed in this way (by /$\text{h}$, /$\text{aw}$ and /$\text{ay}$/ respectively). Final /$\text{a}$/ and medial vowels and diphthongs seem rarely, if ever, to have been represented. Drewes assumes that, because diphthongs in medial position are not repre-
sented in Dadanitic (in accordance with the normal practice in all the ANA scripts), the diphthongs /$\text{aw}$/ and /$\text{ay}$/ must have been monophthongized. This argumentum e silentio,
combined with a reconstruction of Dedanitic morphology which sometimes relies too heavily on analogy with that of Classical Arabic, leads him to conclude that in final position -w often represents /-o/ (</aaw>/) and -y almost always represents /-e/ (</aay>/). For a different view, see Macdonald MCA. Ancient North Arabian. In: Woodard RD, ed. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World’s Ancient Languages. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 (in press).

166. The fact that in JSLih 384 the subject of the verb bnh is a woman is, of course, not a problem since, as Jaussen and Savignac point out, a feminine subject preceded by a verb in the masculine is not unusual in Arabic (Mission 2: 533).
167. See, for example, in JSLih 45/1 and HE 84/1.
168. See the new transcription by A. Desreumaux and the new reading and translation in Bordreuil P, Desreumaux A, Robin C & Teixidor J. 205. Linteau inscrit: A.O. 4083. In: Calvet Y & Robin C, avec la collaboration de F. Briquel-Chatonnet et M. Pic, Arabie heureuse Arabie déserte. Les antiquités araboïdes du Musée du Louvre. Paris: Notes et documents des musées de France: 1997: 265–269. Here, as in the inscription of "gl bn Hf’m, there is a sprinkling of features taken over from the language normally associated with the script (ie. Nabataean Aramaic). In the Namara inscription these features are limited to the use of br for bn in the name of the deceased, and the attachment of a final -w to certain proper names. However, in contrast to the Nabataeo-Arabic text JSNab 17 and the late Nabataean text LP 41, the use of final -w in the Namara inscription accords perfectly with classical Nabataean orthographic practice.
169. A six-line text in the Nabataean script of which the first three lines and the last are in Nabataean and lines 4 and 5 in Old Arabic. For a recent interpretation and references to previous studies see Kropp M. A Puzzle of Old Arabic Tenses and Syntax: The Inscription of ‘En ‘Avdat. PSAS 24: 1994: 165–174, and see Macdonald, Old Arabic. Bellamy has suggested that these lines are in verse and cites Epiphanius’ statement that in the late fourth century the Nabataeans at Petra sang hymns to the virgin mother of Dushara ‘Arabiyah διαφλάκτω, ‘in the Arabic language’ (Bellamy JA. Arabic Verses from the First/Second Century: The Inscription of ‘En ‘Avdat. JSS 35: 1990: 79, n. 13). Kropp regards the lines as a magic charm which the reader was invited to recite and which had to be spoken in the Arabic language. Whatever the correct explanation, this text is another example of the coexistence of Old Arabic in close proximity to other languages.
170. Negev’s dating of the text is based entirely on speculation (Negev A, Naveh J & Shaked S. Obodas the God. IEJ 36: 1986: 60) and until more evidence is available the inscription should be regarded as ‘undated’.
171. The Jabal Ramm inscription appears to be written in something between the Nabataean and the Arabic script, but its interpretation is so uncertain that it is unsafe to try to classify its language. The only phrase which appears to be certain and which, curiously does not seem to have been recognized before, is b-tkm in the second line, which presumably represents bi-tam ‘in/at Iram’. This would be most appropriate given the provenance of the inscription. For a different interpretation of the text, plus references to the earlier treatment see Bellamy JA. Two Pre-Islamic Arabic Inscriptions Revised: Jabal Ramm and Umm al-Jimal. JAOS 108: 1988: 370–372. Bellamy’s interpretation of the letters brm as barim is unlikely since it assumes that the alif represents medial /a/, a feature which is entirely foreign to the orthography of both the Nabataean and the pre-Islamic Arabic scripts.
172. See Violet, Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment; Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article; and Macdonald, Old Arabic.
173. See below on the texts from Faw (Ghoneim, J. 2122, the tomb inscription of M’wt bn Rh’t, and Ansary, Qaryat al-Faw: 147/6) and those from Haram which do not meet this criterion and which I have therefore labelled ‘Undifferentiated North Arabian’.
174. None of the uncertainties marked on the transliteration are serious and they most probably represent mistakes by the抄本.
175. This translation is based on taking mbry as the masdar of bry, in the accusative of har. B’ry in Sa’afitic means ‘to do harm to, make an attack on’ with a direct object and this is one meaning of the equivalent verb in Classical Arabic (Lisdtn 14: 75a). Cf. C 320 s’nt b’ry ‘l ‘awr m’m ‘l ‘bd ‘the year the ‘l ‘awd attacked the flocks of the ‘l ‘bd’.
176. These are the two great tribal confederations of the harra, or basalt desert, east and southeast of the Hawrân, in the Roman period.
177. The word m’m is as yet unexplained.
178. For a discussion of Dty, see Macdonald et al., Les inscriptions safaïtiques de Syrie: 474–475.
179. These are tutelary deities of the two great confederations.
180. In Safaitic, the verb ‘$z'$lf almost always occurs in the context of a killing and a call for vengeance and, like its equivalent in Classical Arabic (see Lane 1408a-b), means ‘to do something (before the present time) which requires requital (either good or bad, at the present time)’. 

181. The meaning of $s^hfr$ here is not clear.

182. See Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article; and Macdonald, Old Arabic.

183. See, for example, $l$-$ys$rq $l$-$mdbr$ ‘in order to migrate to the inner desert’ (LP 180); or $w$ rd $h$-$d^n$ $l$-$mdbr$ ‘he urged [ie. walked behind] the sheep towards the inner desert’ (WH 582).


185. As opposed to Safaitic $h$-$s^n$t, in parallel contexts (eg. C 1629, 1851, etc.). As in C 2446, the assimilation of the $n$ of the preposition $mn$ is a feature of Safaitic, not Old Arabic.

186. As opposed to $h$-$s^f$r, which is very common in this context. However, note that the assimilation of the $n$ of the relative pronoun $mn$ is typical of Safaitic not Old Arabic. This text which was discovered by the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey is to be published by Dr. G.M.H. King, to whom I am most grateful for this information. On the survey and its discoveries see, in the meantime, King GMH. The Basalt Desert Rescue Survey and Some Preliminary Remarks on the Safaitic Inscriptions and Rock Drawings. PSAS 20: 1990: 55–78.

187. See Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article. Winnett and Harding translate $w$-$bny$ $rgm$ in WH 234 as ‘he built the cairn’ and cite this as an example of a definite article $^a$. However, it is more likely that $rgm$ is the plural of $rgn$ and the sentence means ‘and he built some cairns’. Winnett also finds a supposed $^a$ article in WAMS 11 which he reads $l$ yr $b$ $nh$ $gr$ $^q$-$mll$ ‘By Yr son of Nh is the camel’. But it is clear from the photograph that the text has been tampered with and that the supposed $^a$ was originally written as a $h$, the lower side stroke (which turned it into a $^q$) being added by a different hand.

188. HCH 193=HISIM 49218b (provenance unknown) ...


190. See Drewes, The Phonemes of Liyanite: 167–168; and the discussion above.

191. See for example JSLih 75/2, HE 2, Steihl R. Neue liyânische Inschriften aus al-$^\text{a}$-Udaib. 1. Mit einem Nachtrag M. Höffners. In: Altheim F & Steihl R, eds. Christentum am Roten Meer. 1. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971: 23 and 32, nos A18/2 and D5/3, respectively. The expression $^d$ $^l$ appears to occur in JSLih 226. However, this number covers two separate inscriptions. The first (consisting of line 1) is in the late Dadanitic script and appears to read $grms$-$ll$. The second (consisting of lines 2–3) is in the South Arabian script (note the forms of $^q$ and $d$) and clearly reads $^d$ $^l$-$bny$. Jaussen and Savignac treat the clan or family name as $^l$-$bny$, ie. with $^l$- representing the Arabic definite article, and this is possible. However, their comparison of this with the ethnicon $bny$ (ie. with the Sayhatic article -ni) in CIIH 287/7–8, is inappropriate since, in the latter text, $bn$-$y$ is a nisba form and this is the reason that it has the article (ie. $bn$-$y$-$^n$ ‘the Bn-ite’). In JSLih 226, on the other hand, $^l$ follows $d$ and so, if it is the definite article, it must be part of the name (as it is in the ‘tribal’ name which occurs in the forms $bn$-$^h$-$nktn$ and $^l$-$^h$-$nktn$). It is clear that the two parts of JSLih 226 do not belong together and it seems probable that at least lines 2–3 are part of a text the beginning of which is lost.

192. That is, in the Ghoneim inscription discussed earlier (see Kropp, The Inscription Ghoneim; and Robin, L’Arabie antique: 114–115) and in the Sabaeo-North-Arabian inscription of unknown provenance, CIIH 450/ 2–3 in relation to a woman: $dt$ / $^l$ / $^l$ / $^h$-$nktn$, and in lines 5–6 in relation to a man: $d$-$^l$ / $^l$ / $^l$-$^h$-$nktn$. The word division suggests that the (presumably Sabaeo-phone) engraver was unaware of the literal meaning of the ANA expression $^d$ $^l$ or of the significance of the Old Arabic article $^l$. Having correctly separated $dt$ and $^l$ in lines 2–3 he seems to have assumed that $^d$-$^l$ in line 5 was the masculine form of $dt$, and so treated it as a single word, and then repeated the pattern of two $^l$’s between this and $^h$-$nktn$. On the other hand, having incorrectly separated the definite article $^l$ from $^h$-$nktn$ in line 3, he correctly joined the two in line 6.


194. In Kâfir 10 (Robin, IIS. 1: 135); Kamna 11/2 (ibid. 181); RES 4133/6; and Ryckmans, Graffites sabéens: 560.


197. Note that there is no case of $^d$ $^l$-$^h$-$nktn$ which would be the true equivalent of $^d$ $^l$ $bn$-$^h$-$nktn$/$^d$ $^l$-$^l$-$^h$-$nktn$. 

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There is possibly a third example in line 4, where Beeston’s reading of the seventh letter as \( m \) seems to me impossible. The sign looks far more like a \( l \) and is preceded by a clear \( \hat{v} \). However, since what follows is partly destroyed, it remains uncertain whether or not this is another occurrence of the article.

See the photograph of the squeeze on Jaussen & Savignac, Mission, 2: pl. XCII, their copy on pl. CXXXV, and their description on p. 505.

See Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article.

There are a number of problems in this inscription which are still unresolved, and none of the treatments so far appears to me entirely satisfactory. However, it is clear that there are passages which cannot be read as Aramaic and whose lexical and grammatical features are very close to Classical Arabic. For an excellent photograph of the text and the most recent discussion and references see Healey & Smith, Jaussen-Savignac 17. A new edition and discussion will appear in Macdonald, Old Arabic.

There are a handful of cases where \( f \) meaning ‘in’ has been identified in Safaitic, but these are very rare and \( b \)- is the norm.

The name is also spelt \( Mnt \) in theophoric names in Ancient North Arabian. However, since medial vowels of any quality are rarely if ever represented in these scripts it is impossible to know how this was pronounced.

The reading \( kbl \) is uncertain since the word in the text is \( klh \) and the interpretation depends on assuming metathesis.


Unlike Dadanitic, South Arabian orthography does not employ \textit{matres lectionis}, hence \( bn \) rather than \( bnh \).

Ansary, \textit{Qaryat al-Fau}: 144 no. 2; see Robin, L’Arabie antique: 121.

Kropp, The Inscription Ghoneim: 59. Robin also assumes a loss of one or more letters at the end of each line in his transcription (L’Arabie antique: 121).

When a photograph is published it may be possible to verify this.


The name of the social group is \( 'l\)-\( hnk\)t (see note 192, above) but this, of course, cannot be used to identify the language of the text.

See Kropp, The Inscription Ghoneim; and Robin, L’Arabie antique: 114. A. Sima has pointed out to me that in this text the enclitic pronoun \( -h \) in \textit{mdqnt-h dt} refers to \( Lt \) (ie. ‘this her portico’) and thus is the regular Sabaic 3gg.f. enditic pronoun rather than a North Arabian feature. Similarly in CIH450, the only example of \( -h \) refers to \( nfs' \) which is feminine in Sabaic.

See the discussion of Old Arabic above and, in more detail, in Macdonald, Old Arabic.

Robin, \textit{IIS}. 1: 34.

However, in Haram 32 (which Robin includes in the list because of the omission of a medial \( -h \)), the Sabaic preposition \( bn \) (rather than North Arabian \( mn \)) occurs in line 5.

Robin, \textit{IIS}. 1: 33–34. He also mentions the word \( 'lhlt \) which he takes as the Arabic \( 'ilīhāh \) (‘gods’) pl. of \( īlūh \), assuming the use of \( h \) to represent medial \( /a/ \) (in two texts). However, the use of a \textit{mater lectionis} for medial \( /a/ \) would surely be extraordinary in any pre-Islamic Semitic alphabet.

See, for instance, \( hwfj \) in Haram 10/3, 8 and 13/10–11; \( hqjh \) in 32/1; \( hlt' \) in 33/3–4, etc. This is in contrast to the consistent use of the \( 'f-l \) form in the Sabaeo-Arabic texts from Faw.

In a different work (L’Arabie antique: 97), Robin himself seems to have reached a conclusion similar, though not identical, to this; see below.

In one of these (Haram 40) medial \( h \) is omitted twice and medial \( \hat{v} \) once (see Robin, \textit{IIS}:1: 34 and 110), although these could as well be errors as dialectal features.

Beeston had suggested that they were in a separate dialect which he termed ‘Harami’ (Beeston AFL. A Descriptive Grammar of Epigraphic South
However, as he himself noted, this invited confusion since there are other texts from Haram which are expressed in pure Sabaic or Madhabic. Moreover, I am doubtful whether the language of these texts itself represents a dialect, rather than contamination of standard Sabaic by elements of one or more other languages. Christian Robin has called the language of these texts ‘pseudo-sabéen’ (IIS: 1: 34) or ‘pseudo-sabéen qahtânite’ (L’Arabie antique: 97), but on this see below.

Robin, L’Arabie antique: 97. He includes under this rubric one, unpublished, inscription from Faw (that of Zaydwadd, ‘le seul exemple véritablement significatif’, L’Arabie antique: 120) and the tomb inscription of M’twyt bn Rb‘t (L’Arabie antique: 121). However, as stated above, I would class the latter inscription as ANA (although within the ‘undifferentiated’ category because we cannot yet assign it to a particular dialect). Robin also, tentatively, includes a text from Nağran, Ja 2147 (Jamme A. Liyane, Sabaean and Thamudic Inscriptions from Western Saudi Arabia (Pre-Islamic Arabic Documentation, I). RSO 45: 1970: 91–94) despite the fact that it ‘ne comporte aucun caractère linguistique qui le classe de manière évidente soit comme sabéen, soit comme pseudo-sabéen...’ (Robin, L’Arabie antique: 122 and cf. 97).


As suggested by Robin (IIS: 1: 59).

Macdonald, Nomads and the Hawrân: 382–388.

For examples and a brief discussion see Macdonald et al., Les inscriptions safaitiques de Syrie: 480–487.


See Macdonald, Old Arabic which will contain a detailed study of the origins of the Arabic script, with an edition of some previously unpublished inscriptions which display very clearly the transition from Nabataean.

The forms of b and t, g and k, z and r were indistinguishable in all positions, and the initial and medial forms of b, y, n and t were identical, as were those of f and q.

This situation is entirely different from that of the Rawwâfa inscriptions which seem to have been composed on behalf of the nominal dedicants at the instigation of the governor of the Roman Province of Arabia. For this interpretation of the inscriptions see Macdonald MCA. Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes, l’inscription de Rawwâfa et l’armée romaine. In: Lozachmeur H, ed. Présence arabe dans le Croissant fertile avant l’Hégire. Paris: ERC 1995: 98–101. The inscriptions are in Nabataean Aramaic and Greek, the ‘prestige languages’ of the indigenous population on the one hand and of the imperium on the other, and they have a symbolic rather than practical function. Indeed, it is questionable how many members of the tribe of Thamûd (the nominal dedicants) were literate in these scripts or even whether they would have understood the languages in which they were couched, if the texts had been read aloud.

For the interpretation of šrkt as an army unit see Macdonald, Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes: 98–100.


The Lakhmids were not always Christian, as the stories of their sacrifices to al-ʿUzza show, see Macdonald MCA & Nehmè L. Al-ʿUzza. EI, (new edition). Leiden: Brill (forthcoming).

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