



Special Session: ‘Languages, scripts and their uses in ancient North Arabia’

Paper Abstracts

The Proto-South Semitic Script: A reconstruction of its glyphs and phonemic repertoire

Ahmad Al-Jallad (Leiden University)

According to majority scholarly opinion, the original alphabet was probably invented in Egypt in the second millennium BC and, sometime after this, split into two branches: the Phoenico-Aramaic branch and the South Semitic branch. The latter was used in Ancient Arabia and the southern Levant. The oldest datable documents (early first millennium BC) come from South Arabia and are composed in the Ancient South Arabian script. Central and north Arabia are home to a variety of scripts belonging to the South Semitic family, conventionally termed ‘Ancient North Arabian’, but most of these texts are not datable. At first, scholars assumed that the Ancient North Arabian alphabets descended from Ancient South Arabian but recent research suggests that the two ‘branches’ developed in a parallel fashion from a common Proto-South Semitic script. This talk will attempt a reconstruction of the Proto-South Semitic script by separating the glyphs that all of the South Semitic scripts have in common from those that exhibit variation. We find that the glyphs that exhibit the greatest variation in form belong to shared phonemic categories, such as voiced interdental (d), the emphatic lateral fricative (ḏ), the velar fricatives (ħ and ġ) and the emphatic interdental (ẓ). This distribution suggests that the original South Semitic script was designed for a language that underwent many of the sound changes that would characterize later north-west Semitic languages. After establishing the original repertoire, we will then discuss the various strategies used by the daughter scripts to develop glyphs for phonemes not represented by the proto-script, including an explanation for the peculiar redistribution of glyphs found in Himaic.

Between place and inscription: A new understanding of the Safaitic inscriptions

Ali Al-Manaser (University of Oxford)

The first objective of this paper is to determine whether there is a relationship between the locations where we find the inscriptions and the interpretation and translations of the inscriptions themselves. Specifically, I will discuss possible meanings of the verbs *byt* ‘he spent the night’, *bny* ‘he built’ and *qnt* ‘he feared’.

The second aim of this paper is to focus on the development of the shape of those cairns ('*rgm*') which include Safaitic inscriptions, on the basis of the results of the OCIANA Badia Epigraphic Survey that began in 2015 and of the different names given to these cairns in Jordanian Bedouin dialect.

Keywords: Safaitic inscriptions, Bedouin dialect, ancient North Arabia, OCIANA, cairn

The development and the evolution of Hail Thamudic inscriptions

Solaiman Abd Al-Theeb (King Saud University)

This paper will discuss the development and the evolution of the Ḥā'il Thamudic inscriptions and compare them with those found in other areas, along with the theories put forward by Winnett about the Thamudic script. Winnett suggested two different divisions of the Thamudic script in the region. I will present a different view about all types of Thamudic script. It is my understanding that the current divisions do not accurately reflect the nature of these inscriptions and I will outline an alternative means of dividing them. This paper will also shed light on the contents of the inscriptions of the Ḥā'il region, which reflect the nature of the local society. Finally, I will discuss the form and the development of the letter in these scripts.

Keywords: Thamudic inscriptions, Winnett, Ḥā'il, ancient North Arabia, Saudi Arabia

The identity of the Ancient North Arabian *Madabite* language based on a new epigraphical evidence from *Wādī al-Thamad* - Central Jordan: an appraisal

Hani Hayajneh (Yarmouk University)

This paper will investigate a hitherto unpublished Ancient North Arabia(n) (ANA) inscription documented from Madaba region in central Jordan. It was found during the surveys of the *Wādī al-Thamad* Project in northern Moab (TT-5-WT Site WT-48) under the direction of Professor M. Daveau. The text (21 lines) is written in a Himaic-like script type (Thamudic E (?)) on a horizontal shelf of bedrock near spillway in a curve of the *Wādī al-Thamad*, which flows southwest into the *Wādī Mūğib*. Other inscriptions of similar type and various lengths were found on building stones or bedrock in the skirts of Uraynibah (Areenba) West and Khirbet al-Mudayna (published in Graf and Zwittler, and al-Khraysheh). These and the text treated here encompass a compilation of invocations that constitute an essential structure which has never been encountered before in ANA epigraphy. A decipherment of the inscription based on fresh photos made through photogrammetry techniques will be given. In comparison to the two mentioned published texts, a treatment of the structure, morphological forms, particles, lexemes and personal names in the light of Arabian and other Semitic languages is envisaged to establish a new discourse concerning the linguistic identity of the Arabian epigraphy of Madaba region.

Keywords: Ancient North Arabian, Old Arabic, Semitic inscriptions, *Wādī al-Thamad*, Madaba, Central Jordan

Literacy in Literate Societies: the scribe in Nabataean and other Aramaic Contexts

John Healey (University of Manchester)

Evidence is not very extensive, but the approach of this paper is to examine the implicit role of scribes in drawing up legal documents such as those found in the Babatha archive and lying in the background of the

Hegra tomb inscriptions (which appear to be summaries of archived documents). This material has clear affinity with the Jewish Aramaic Babatha documents, with some slight evidence from Palmyra and more substantial evidence in Syriac. All of these can be exploited to build a fuller picture of the scribal culture of the region. This will be framed by the issues of 'Literacy in Oral Societies' and 'Literacy in Literate Societies'. In the latter, scribes might be among the relatively few literates.

Keywords: scribes, law, Aramaic, Nabataean, Syriac.

Scribal Practices in contact: the case of Dadan

Fokelien Kootstra (Leiden University)

Dadanitic is the name of the script used to carve inscriptions in and around ancient Dadan - modern-day Al-'Ulā. The Dadanitic script and orthography contain several unique features: it is the only Ancient North Arabian (ANA) script used to carve monumental inscriptions in relief; inscriptions written in this style are the only ANA variety in which word dividers are used consistently (Macdonald 2008: 186); and Dadanitic is the only ANA script that uses *matres lectiones* (Macdonald 2008: 105). While these features are unique to ANA writing practices, they are common in Ancient South Arabian inscriptions (Macdonald 2015: 15; Robin 2015: 99). A corpus of Minaean inscriptions found in Dadan attests to the presence of a Minaean trading post at the oasis (Winnett, 1979: 117). There are several inscriptions that demonstrate contact between Minaeans and the Dadanitic writing habit (e.g. JSLih 49 and Abū 'I-Ḥasan 2005). This paper intends to investigate the possible influence of Minaic scribal practices on the Dadanitic orthography. It will compare orthographic devices used in Dadanitic and Minaic inscriptions found at Dadan. If Minaic indeed influenced Dadanitic scribal practices one would expect to find similar orthographic devices to be employed in both languages, such as the usage of the same *matres lectiones*.

A better understanding of the relation between the Dadanitic and Minaic scribal practices at Dadan may give new insights into the development of the Dadanitic script and orthography.

Keywords: Epigraphy, Orthography, scribal practice, Dadanitic, Minaic

The script of the Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions from north-west and south Arabia: a reexamination based on new evidence.

Laïla Nehmé (CNRS, UMR 8167, Orient & Méditerranée)

The number of graffiti and short inscriptions written in the Nabataeo-Arabic script, i.e. in the script identified as being transitional between Nabataean and Arabic, now reaches about one hundred items. The majority of these texts come from northwest Arabia, but twenty-five of them – written in three groups – were discovered in 2014 c.100 km north of Najrān by a Saudi-French expedition. These texts are the only evidence for the use of the Nabataeo-Arabic script in areas other than northwest Arabia and their significance is important. The number of available texts makes it possible to undertake a comparison of the scripts used in both regions in order to determine whether they are exactly similar – and therefore are likely to have the same origin – or whether there are differences. The degree of closeness to the Arabic script will also be examined for both the northern and southern groups of texts.

Keywords: Arabia, Inscriptions, Nabataeo-Arabic, Arabic, Script

The Ancient North Arabian inscriptions from Dūmat al-Jandal area and their archaeological context (Saudi Arabia)

Jérôme Norris (Université de Lorraine), Guillaume Charloux (CNRS, UMR 8167 Orient & Méditerranée)

Since 2010, the joint Saudi-Italian-French archaeological project at Dūmat al-Jandal (north-west Arabia) has been involved in surveying a large number of archaeological and epigraphic sites in the al-Jawf province. This has led to the recording of hundreds of Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, including both published and unpublished texts. This paper offers a preliminary description of this epigraphic material, giving the number of inscriptions in each script, analysing their geographical distribution and using their content together with the archaeological data to provide a better understanding of the ancient occupation of the al-Jawf region. While the scientific literature frequently refers to ‘Dumaitic’ as being the local script of the oasis of Dūmah, it is interesting to note that the prominent category of texts which is represented in the area is that of the so-called ‘Mixed Safaitic-Hismaic’ inscriptions, texts which seem to have been produced by nomadic groups.

Keywords

Dūmat al-Jandal, Adumatu Ancient North Arabian, Thamudic, Safaitic, nomadic tribes

New research on the Thamudic graffiti from the region of Ḥimā (Najrān, Saudi Arabia)

Alessia Priolella (CNRS - UMR 8167 Orient & Méditerranée)

The region of Ḥimā includes a wide area located in the desert about 100 km north-east of Najrān. Being, in antiquity, on the route leading from ancient South Arabia towards the north of the Arabian Peninsula, the area constitutes an exceptional archaeological ensemble, covered with graffiti, rock drawings and funerary structures. The region was first explored in 1951 and 1952 by the Saudi-Belgian mission of Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens, which identified a local ‘southern’ variety of the Thamudic script, but whose results remained largely unpublished. A Japanese mission surveyed the area of Wādī Khushayba in the early 1990s and 2000’s, publishing the Arabic, Ancient South Arabian and Thamudic inscriptions and proposing a first decipherment of the Southern Thamudic alphabet. Since 2007, the Saudi-French mission has been conducting explorations and epigraphic surveys at Ḥimā, and has already exhaustively recorded the area of ‘An Jamāl and ‘An Halkān. In 2016, Ch. Robin together with M. Gorea completed the decipherment of the Southern Thamudic alphabet — which they proposed to label ‘Himaitic’ — and gave a preliminary overview of the main features of the texts. Through an analytical study of the material recorded by the Saudi-French mission, this paper will try to address some of the issues that are still open concerning the Southern Thamudic/Himaitic graffiti: palaeographic varieties, formulary and language, chronology, the relation of Himaitic with Ancient South Arabian and other varieties of the Thamudic scripts.

Keywords: Epigraphy, graffiti, Thamudic, southern Thamudic, Ḥimā region

On the ‘Safaitic square script’: a re-assessment of the evidence

Chiara Della Puppa (Leiden University)

This paper will review the different scholarly positions on the so-called ‘Safaitic square script’ and attempt to re-assess the main characteristics of this typology of inscriptions by analyzing both letter shapes and content. First, I will show that beside angular shapes, ‘square’ inscriptions can also exhibit further distinctive features, such as the use of the Hismaic δ , the S-shaped s^2 , and the δ with a hooked tail. Second, I will discuss some

linguistic and formulaic traits of this script variant which would seem to indicate a cultural affiliation to the Nabateans, such as the use of the 'l- article (HCH 194; KhNSJ 1), the dating of some inscriptions to the reign or death of Nabatean kings (KhNSJ 1; ISB 57), and what I would suggest represents a Safaitic calque of the Nabatean formula PN + šlm (AAEK 133; HaNSC 26). Since it appears that the authors of most inscriptions bearing these features are members of the lineage of 'mrt, I will also bring up the question of the nature of this social group and its possible connection with the 'l 'mrt of the Nabatean-Greek bilingual inscription from Madaba.

Keywords: Ancient North Arabian, Safaitic script, Hismaic, Nabatean, 'mrt.

Who wrote the South Arabian and Thamudic inscriptions of Ḥimā (southern Saudi Arabia)?

Christian Julien Robin

On a déjà repéré, dans la région de Ḥimā (Arabie séoudite du sud-ouest) des dizaines de milliers de textes rupestres d'époque pré-islamique. Ils sont rédigés dans deux écritures, la sudarabique et la thamoudéenne F (ou ḥimā'ite). La distribution de ces deux types de graffites montre que les graffites ḥimā'ites ont été gravés par des gens qui résident dans la région tandis que les sudarabiques l'ont été par des gens qui circulent. Les graffites sudarabiques sont donc souvent mis en relation avec le commerce à longue distance entre le Yémen et les pays du Proche-Orient. Ils auraient été gravés par des caravaniers yéménites.

L'exposé se propose de présenter les moyens dont on dispose pour identifier l'origine des auteurs de graffites. Ce sont tout d'abord, en plus de l'écriture, l'onomastique, la structure du nom, les divinités relevées dans les théophores, l'orthographe (présence ou non de la mīmation, réduction ou non des diphtongues) la phonétique (absence des lettres z et s³, absence d'assimilation du nūn) et la langue (article défini). Une deuxième approche consiste à repérer les données textuelles sur l'origine des auteurs d'inscription, notamment les nisba comme « ḥaḍramawtique, Qatabānite ou Sabéen ». On peut enfin s'appuyer sur la distribution chronologique des graffites dont la date peut être plus ou moins précisément cernée par la paléographie. La conclusion est que les auteurs de graffites sudarabiques appartiennent, dans leur très grande majorité, à une population identique ou très semblable à celle des graffites ḥimā'ites. L'hypothèse la plus vraisemblable est qu'ils sont issus des villes les plus proches, Naḡrān (auj. Naḡrān) et Qaryat (auj. Qaryat al-Fa'w).

The role of Aramaic on the Arabian Peninsula in the second half of the first millennium BC

Peter Stein (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena)

Epigraphic records from Ancient Arabia comprise not only inscriptions and manuscripts in the genuine languages and scripts from the region, but also texts in Aramaic. Only recently, certain places such as Taymā' in the north and Mleiha in the far east of the Peninsula could be determined as outstanding representatives for the use of the Aramaic language and script during the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods. The evidence from these sites raises a couple of questions, which will be addressed in the paper: When was Aramaic writing established there, and why actually at those places? Which interferences can be made out between Aramaic and the local languages and scripts in each of those regions? And what is the relationship between the foreign and local languages in terms of their use for administrative, social, and religious purposes?

Keywords: Arabian Peninsula, Achaemenid–Hellenistic period, Aramaic, Taymā', Mleiha

“Safaitic *'ly* and the Morphology of the Plural Demonstrative Pronoun in Arabic”

Phillip W. Stokes (The University of Texas at Austin)

This paper presents two unpublished Safaitic inscriptions recently discovered (May 2015) at the site of Marabb Aš-Šurafāt (north-eastern Jordan) in which the first attestations yet discovered of a plural proximal demonstrative pronoun occur. The form in both inscriptions is *'ly*, and it occurs in both prenominal and post-nominal position. I will discuss this form from a comparative perspective, focusing especially on cognates attested in the canon of Classical Arabic, such as *hā'ulā'i* and *'al-'ulā*. Specifically, I will argue that the morphology of the pronoun in these Safaitic inscriptions helps to establish what is probably the proto-Arabic form, and from that form we can further contextualize the developments attested in Classical Arabic. I will also connect the Safaitic and Classical Arabic forms to the relative pronoun *illī* (with variants *əllī* and *allī*) attested throughout the modern Arabic dialects. Ultimately, I hope not only to contribute a more nuanced explanation of the development of the Arabic plural demonstratives, but also to present a case study that affirms the integral role of the Safaitic inscriptions to reconstructing Arabic linguistic history.