LANGUAGES, SCRIPTS AND THEIR USES IN ANCIENT NORTH ARABIA

Papers from the Special Session of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held on 5 August 2017

edited by
M.C.A. Macdonald

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Guidelines for Authors

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1. Arabic

ء	ʾ		ج	j		ذ	dh (dh)	ش	sh (sh)	ظ	ẓ	ق	q	ن	n
ب	b		ح	ḥ		ر	r	ص	ṣ	ع	ʿ	ك	k	ه	h
ت	t		خ	kh (kh)		ز	z	ض	ḍ	غ	gh (gh)	ل	l	و	w
ث	th (th)		د	d		س	s	ط	ṭ	ف	f	م	m	ي	y
Vowels			a i u ā ī ū			Diphthongs			aw	ay					

The underlined variants can be used to avoid any ambiguity, e.g. *lam yushir* vs. *lam yushir*.
Initial *hamzah* is omitted.
Alif maqṣūrah is transliterated as *ā*.
The *lām* of the article is not assimilated before the 'sun letters', thus the form should be *al-shams* not *ash-shams*.
The *hamzat al-waṣl* of the article should be shown after vowels except after the preposition *li-*, as in the Arabic script, e.g. *wa-ʾl-wazīr*, *fī ʾl-bayt*, but *li-l-wazīr*.
Tāʾ marbūṭah (ة) should be rendered *-ah*, except in a construct: e.g. *birkah*, *zakāh*, and *birkat al-sibāḥah*, *zakāt al-fiṭr*.

2. Persian, Urdu, and Ottoman Turkish

Please transliterate these languages using the system set out for Arabic above with the additional letters transliterated according to the system in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-islamica/system-of-transliteration-of-arabic-and-persian-characters-transliteration) except that *ž* is used instead of *zh*. There is a useful table to convert Ottoman Turkish to modern Turkish characters on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Turkish_language.

3. Ancient North and South Arabian consonants

ʾ	b	t	ṯ	g	ḥ	ḫ	d	ḏ	r	z	s¹	s²	s³	ṣ
ḍ	ṭ	ẓ	ʿ	ġ	f	q	k	l	m	n	h	w	y	

4. Other Semitic languages

Please use the transliteration systems outlined in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (BASOR) 262 (1986), p. 3. (www.jstor.org/stable/i258780).

Introduction

Michael C.A. Macdonald

Most of the papers published in this volume were presented at a Special Session of the fifty-first Seminar for Arabian Studies held at the British Museum on 5 August 2017. Its subject was 'Languages, scripts, and their uses in ancient North Arabia' and it was held to celebrate the completion in the previous March of Phase 2 of the 'Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia' (OCIANA).

This was a project funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council and based at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford. Its aim was to create a freely accessible online database of all the inscriptions from ancient Arabia north of Yemen, with up-to-date readings and translations, *apparatus criticus*, commentaries where necessary, as well as all available accurate information on provenance and context and, whenever possible, good photographs. In Phase 2 all the Safaitic, Hismaic, Dadanitic, Taymanitic, and Hasaitic inscriptions known at the time were entered (some 40,000), though inevitably more have been found since and will be added in Phase 3 when the so-called 'Thamudic' inscriptions and other corpora will also be entered. The database is accessible online and each corpus (Safaitic, Dadanitic, etc.) can be downloaded as a pdf at http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/index.php.

A list of the papers presented at the Special Session can be found at the end of this volume. In most cases, the paper published here is a more complete and detailed version of the one given at the Seminar. Three of the authors — Laïla Nehmé, Chiara della Puppa, and Sulayman Al-Theeb — decided not to submit their papers for publication. While I obviously regret this, I entirely understand the reasons why each of them came to this decision. In addition, Ahmad Al-Jallad decided to submit a different paper, and Christian Robin contributed a note to Alessia Prioletta's rather than his full paper.

The first paper in this volume was not given at the Special Session but was written by me some years ago and, though not published, was distributed widely in manuscript. This volume seemed an ideal place to present an updated version of it and — using editor's privilege! — I have therefore included it.

After the final paper of the Special Session Laïla Nehmé and Ahmad Al-Jallad presented me with a *Festschrift* which they had edited to celebrate my seventieth birthday (Nehmé & Al-Jallad 2018). It contains thirty-two fascinating articles on a wide range of subjects dear to my heart. The thought-provoking new material, analyses, and discussions will ensure that my old age will be anything but restful! I am extremely grateful to all those who contributed to it and especially to my very dear friends and colleagues Laïla Nehmé and Ahmad Al-Jallad, who had the idea of the *Festschrift* in the first place and who took on the enormous task of editing the volume.

Finally, I would like to thank the British Foundation for the Study of Arabia, the Seminar for Arabian Studies, the Khalili Research Centre University of Oxford, and the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust, for their generous grants without which the Special Session and this volume would not have been possible.

* * *

By now it is widely known that between at least the mid-first millennium BC and the fourth (?) century AD, literacy was widespread among the populations of North Arabia. A surprisingly large number of different scripts was used to express several languages and dialects, many of which are very imperfectly known.[1] The majority of the scripts belonged to the 'South Semitic script family' which also includes Ancient South Arabian (ASA) and the scripts used by some of the Ethiopic languages such as Gəˤəz and Amharic. In antiquity, the South Semitic script family was used only in Arabia and its immediate environs, but within this area large numbers of people, both settled and nomadic, used the scripts derived from it to carve graffiti.[2]

Until recently the term 'Ancient North Arabian' (ANA), which in fact describes a number of related scripts, was extended to describe the *languages* which

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[1] This is particularly true of those found in the Thamudic B, C, and D inscriptions, which are generally very short, and also of the newly deciphered Himaitic texts, on which see Prioletta (this volume).

[2] See e.g. Macdonald 2010 for an overview, as well as the individual papers in this volume.

they expressed and which were also assumed to be related (e.g. Macdonald 2004). In the past five years, however, Ahmad Al-Jallad and Fokelien Kootstra have effectively shown that this is not so. Thanks to their work we now know that the language of the Safaitic inscriptions is predominantly Old Arabic (Al-Jallad 2015: 10–14), while that of the Taymanitic inscriptions is more closely related to the North-West Semitic languages than to Arabic (Kootstra 2016: 104–107). Kootstra's continuing work on Dadanitic may well show that it belongs to neither group, but we must wait for the completion of her PhD thesis for more information on this.

In addition to those writing in ANA scripts, Dadan (modern al-ʿUlā) hosted a trading (?) colony of Minaeans. Kootstra's paper in this volume is the first step in a process of minute and careful analysis, which reveals previously unrecognized links between the scribal practices of the Minaean and the Dadanite communities — something which might be expected but has so far never been demonstrated. It should be read together with Irene Rossi's careful analysis of the differences between the language and orthography of these 'Marginal Minaic' inscriptions and those from the Minaean homeland (2014: 113–115).

Staying in Dadan, I hope that my contribution to this volume will dispel some long-established misconceptions about the palaeography of the Dadanitic inscriptions and provide a more secure basis for their study, even if this means accepting that there are things that we do not — and in some cases cannot — know.

Two papers reveal new Ancient North Arabian scripts. Jérôme Norris's excellent study of the graffiti in an area near Dūmat al-Jandal (al-Jawf) has not only increased the number of 'Dumaitic' inscriptions from three to twenty-three but has identified and analysed a large number of texts in other, previously unrecognized, ANA scripts. His paper presents a fascinating picture of this relatively small area where — either simultaneously or consecutively — individuals using a number of different script traditions lived, or passed through, leaving their mark.

Alessia Prioletta's paper reports on Christian Robin's decipherment of the graffiti in the area of Ḥimā, near Najrān (southern Saudi Arabia) and describes in detail these 'Himaitic' inscriptions which were previously known as 'Southern Thamudic'.[3] Although they had been

known since 1951 and the script had been recognized as ANA it had not been completely deciphered and had therefore been placed in the 'Thamudic pending file' (Macdonald 2000: 44). This paper, along with Norris's, has enormously extended our knowledge of the Ancient North Arabian scripts in both the north and south of the Peninsula.

Two other papers, by Ali Al-Manaser and Hani Hayajneh, deal with graffiti in the better-known ANA scripts of the desert, Safaitic and Hismaic respectively. This is also a field in which many new discoveries are being made, thanks to massive new surveys recording thousands of previously unknown inscriptions,[4] and minute analyses of the texts such as those by Ahmad Al-Jallad (2014; 2015; 2016; Al-Jallad & Jaworska, forthcoming) and Chiara della Puppa. It is a pity that the latter's paper could not be published in this volume (it forms part of her doctoral thesis) since it impressed many of the participants at the Special Session and is cited in several of the papers here. Ahmad Al-Jallad, in a change of subject from his paper at the Session, has recognized the first occurrence in a Safaitic inscription of the Arabic verb *laysa* and has contributed a detailed and very interesting study on its origins.

In addition to local scripts of the South Semitic script family, it is increasingly recognized that the Aramaic script was widely used in various forms and at different periods, in oases such as Taymāʾ and in the Gulf. Old Aramaic inscriptions have been found in Dadan[5] and on the Darb al-Bakra[6] while formal texts and graffiti in Imperial (Official) Aramaic have been found in and around Taymāʾ and in Bahrain and the Oman peninsula. Peter Stein has contributed an excellent study of the Aramaic used in these areas, why it came to be used, and its relationship with the local languages and scripts.

We now know that when the Lihyanites occupied Taymāʾ they used Imperial Aramaic rather than Dadanitic presumably because Aramaic was an 'international' language and was already in common use at Taymāʾ, not only for formal inscriptions but for tombstones carved by

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[3] Unfortunately, Christian Robin was unable to attend the Special Session and his paper was read on his behalf by Alessia Prioletta. Together they decided that, rather than submit for publication two papers on a very similar subject, Robin would add a note to Prioletta's paper.

[4] These are the Badia Surveys of 2015, 2017, and 2018 undertaken on the initiative of, and in 2017 and 2018 led by, Ali Al-Manaser, which are systematically recording inscriptions in the basalt desert (ḥarrah) of north-eastern Jordan. Approximately 10,000 inscriptions have been recorded so far, each with its precise GPS co-ordinates and they will be published in Phase 3 of OCIANA.

[5] These are as yet unpublished and I thank Prof. Sulayman Al-Dhiyīb (Al-Theeb) for showing me photographs of them.

[6] From the route between Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and Petra, discovered by Prof. Ali Al-Ghabbān and published in Macdonald (in press, a).

amateurs (rather than scribes) and for graffiti.[7] Indeed, in the environs of Taymāʾ, we have graffiti by two kings of Liḥyān in a local development of Imperial Aramaic.[8] Presumably, after the Achaemenid Empire ceased to maintain scribal schools in Arabia, a number of local derivatives of Imperial Aramaic developed, of which we have examples in Taymāʾ and in the Gulf (see Stein, this volume). Eventually, towards the end of the first century BC, the Nabataeans conquered north-west Arabia bringing with them their own local development of the script which replaced the local Arabian versions in the area. John Healey's study of scribes in 'literate societies' such as Nabataea is a very interesting exploration of societies in which reading and writing are essential to their functioning, but in which large numbers of the population may not be literate.

After a couple of centuries of Roman rule, and especially after the southern border of *Provincia Arabia* was moved much further north under Diocletian, north-west Arabia was more or less left to its own devices. Greek had not penetrated this area to anything like the same extent as it did in what is now Jordan and southern Syria. Arabic remained a purely spoken language and Aramaic remained the dominant written language and script. Gradually, the knowledge of the Aramaic language seems to have declined, apart from a few stock phrases, and it seems that the Nabataean script came to be used to write Arabic, particularly on portable materials (which, alas, have not survived). We know this because a script develops through its use in ink on portable materials, and therefore the changes in the script that we see in graffiti on stone are simply snapshots of a development which was continuing on papyrus, parchment, or potsherds.[9] This is how the Nabataean script developed into what *we* think of as the 'Arabic script'.[10] Laïla Nehmé concluded the Special Session with a fascinating paper on this subject,

which unfortunately she did not have time to prepare for publication here, but I look forward to its publication elsewhere in due course.

I hope that the reader will find in this volume a picture of the latest research on the languages, scripts, and their uses in ancient North Arabia. It has been a pleasure editing it and I have learned a great deal from all the papers. I would like to thank all the authors for their contributions, Helen Knox for her meticulous copy-editing, Rajka Makjanic for her page setting, and all at Archaeopress for producing such a beautiful volume.

<div style="text-align: right">

Michael C.A. Macdonald
Wolfson College
Oxford
30 April 2018.

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[7] See Macdonald (in press, b) and Macdonald & Al-Najem (in press).

[8] These are *šhrw* in Al-Theeb 2014: 34 and *Mšʿwdw* in Jaussen & Savignac 1909–1922, ii Nabataean 334, 335, 337 and a fourth text recently discovered by the Epigraphy and Landscape in the Hinterland of Taymāʾ project. For many years there has been uncertainty as to whether *Mšʿwdw* really was a king of Liḥyān, or simply a claimant or imposter, since no inscriptions dated to his reign had been found. This uncertainty has now been resolved with the discovery in Taymāʾ of a dedication in the local Aramaic script of the oasis dated to year three of 'Mšʿwdw king of Liḥyān' (TM.TAr.004, Taymāʾ Museum registration number 488, see Macdonald & Al-Najem, in press).

[9] See Macdonald 2010: 21; 2015: 13–14.

[10] On this process see the numerous works by L. Nehmé who has made a profound study of this development; e.g. Nehmé 2010; Avner, Nehmé, & Robin 2013; Nehmé 2017.

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