

## Thamudic Definition

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THAMUDIC, a modern misnomer applied to all those texts in Ancient North Arabian scripts which have not yet been classified more precisely as Taymanitic, Dedanitic (previously "Dedanite" and "Liḥyanite", see under LIḤYAN), Hasaitic, Hismaic, or Ṣafaitic [q.v.]. It is therefore a Restklassenbildung, or "undetermined" category, and does not refer to a particular script or dialect. The name is purely conventional and there is no evidence that the inscriptions were in any way connected with the tribe of Ṭhamūd [q.v.].

Writing was endemic in pre-Islamic Arabia, both among the sedentaries and especially among the nomads, who covered the rocks of the desert with their informal inscriptions and drawings. From possibly as early as the 8th century B.C. to at least the mid-3rd century A.D., numerous North Arabian alphabets were in use throughout the peninsula, though, at present, inscriptions are relatively rare on the Gulf coast. Texts in the various "Thamudic" scripts have been found as far north as the Syrian Ḥawrān, as far south as the Ramlat al-Sabʿatayn in central Yemen, and from western ʿIrāq to upper Egypt.

J.R. Wellsted (*Travels in Arabia*, London 1838, ii. 189) and T.G. Carless (*JBBRAS*, ii [1845], 273-5, pl. xxii) copied some Thamudic inscriptions on a rock near Wadjh in 1831, and G.A. Wallin transcribed a few more in Wādī ʿl-ʿUwaynid, north of Tabūk, in 1848 (*J.R.Geog.S.*, xx [1850], 311-13). In 1858 J.G. Wetzstein also copied a handful of Thamudic (e.g., *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, v, 3558-9, 3575), together with many Ṣafaitic inscriptions in southern Syria, though these remained unpublished until 1929. It was only after C.M. Doughty, C. Huber and J. Euting had recorded large numbers of Thamudic texts in northern Arabia in the 1870s and 1880s that [437] a partial decipherment was possible (see J. Halévy, in *Revue sémitique*, ix [1901], 316-55, and E. Littmann, *Zur Entzifferung der thamudenischen Inschriften*, Berlin 1904). A few years later, A. Jaussen and M.-R. Savignac published more reliable copies of some 760 inscriptions, again from northwest Arabia (*Mission*, i, ii). In 1936 and 1950-1, H.St.J.B. Philby copied 2,000 Thamudic texts in southern and northern Arabia, but he took no photographs and his copies are so careless that they are worse than useless. In 1951, G. and J. Ryckmans, on the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition to central and south-western Saudi Arabia, recorded 9,000 graffiti which could not be classified as South Arabian, Dedanitic, Hasaitic or Ṣafaitic and were therefore labeled "Thamudic", thus vastly increasing the range of script-types and different dialectal and onomastic features covered by this rubric (see below, "Southern Thamudic"). In 1952 G.L. Harding published over 500 inscriptions from southern Jordan and in the 1980s thousands more were recorded in the same area (see below, Hismaic).

The study of Thamudic has been characterized by two different approaches. The first, espoused by H. Grimme (*Die Lösung des Sinaischriftproblems*, Münster 1926) and A. van den Branden (e.g. in *St. Isl.*, vi [1957], 5-27), ignored the fact that the category was a modern creation and assumed that there was a single "Thamudic" script, explaining differences in letter-forms and ductus as the result of chronological, and isolated geographical, developments. However, their arguments were based on comparisons of single letter-forms extracted from undated texts known only from hand-copies of dubious accuracy, and have failed to convince. In 1950, Van den Branden published a collected edition of the 2,000 Thamudic inscriptions then known (*Les inscriptions thamoudéennes*), and in 1956 a further 2,000 copied by Philby (*Les textes thamoudéens de Philby*). However, the intractability of the material, the poor quality of most of the copies, and severe faults in the editor's methodology, mean that little reliance can be placed on the readings or interpretations in these works.

A second approach was initiated by F.V. Winnett in 1937 (*Winnett, A study*). He accepted the miscellaneous nature of the category and recognised that, before the texts could be interpreted, they had to be sorted into groups on the basis of the type of script employed, and then the values of the signs within each group established. Winnett's systematic analysis identified five such groups, to which he gave the neutral labels A, B, C, D, and E, and established the values of most of the letter-forms within each. Although numerous problems remained, Winnett's study laid the foundations for all later work on the subject.

In 1970, he revised his classification, using geographically-based names: *Nadjdi* (for former Thamudic B), *Ḥidjāzī* (for C and D) and *Tabūkī* (for E) (*Winnett and Reed, Ancient records*, 69-70, and pl. 1). However, these names are misleading since none of these groups is restricted to the region after which is was named, and the former alphabetic labels have generally been retained. Subsequently, it has been possible to identify "A" and "E" as separate scripts, thus removing them from the "Thamudic" category. The remaining types, and the 9,000 texts from south-west Arabia, await more detailed analysis.

### **Taymanitic** (formerly "**Thamudic A**")

Winnett's detailed (but largely unpublished) studies of his former "Thamudic A" convinced him that the features of its script and orthography were sufficiently clear for it to be removed from the "Thamudic" Restklassenbildung. Since virtually all the known texts in this script had been found in the vicinity of *Taymā'*, he named it *Taymanite* (now "Taymanitic"). Its principal features are: the introductory particle *lm*, *b* for *ibn* in genealogies, possibly a third non-emphatic unvoiced sibilant, /s<sup>3</sup>/ (see M.C.A. Macdonald, in *JSS*, xxxvi [1991], 11-35), the use of the same letter for /dh/ and /z/, an asterisk-like sign for /th/ and the common, but not invariable, use of word-dividers. Taymanitic is probably one of the earliest of the Oasis North Arabian alphabets and may be referred to as "the Taymani script" in an 8th century B.C. hieroglyphic Luwian text from Carchemish (see Macdonald, *Reflections*, and references there).

### **Hismaic** (formerly "**Thamudic E**" or "**Tabūkī Thamudic**")

G.M.H. King has shown that this is a distinct Ancient North Arabian script which can therefore be removed from the Thamudic category. Over 3,000 inscriptions of this type have been found in southern Jordan in the Ḥismā, the sand desert which stretches from Wādī Ramm into northwestern Saudi Arabia (editions by Harding (1952) and King, plus the largely unpublished collections of W.J. Jobling and D. Jacobson). Thus Hismaic is a more appropriate label than Winnett's "Tabūkī Thamudic" since, so far, only a few hundred of these texts have been found in the region of Tabūk. E.A. Knauf has also suggested calling them "South Ṣafaitic", but they are clearly distinct from Ṣafaitic and this label is misleading and should be avoided.

The most remarkable feature of the Hismaic script is the representation of the phonemes /g/ and /th/ by signs which in other South Semitic scripts have quite different values.

	ʃ	/g/ in Hismaic
	\	/th/ in Thamudic B, Ṣafaitic and South Arabian
	ʃ	/th/ in Hismaic
	{	/d/ in Thamudic B and Ṣafaitic
	\	/dh/ in South Arabian

The phoneme /d/ is represented by two concentric circles in Hismaic (as occasionally in Ṣafaitic, and possibly also in Thamudic D).

In contrast to Ṣafaitic, long genealogies are rare in the texts, many of which are declarations of love, sexual braggadocio, and accounts of hunting. However, as in Ṣafaitic, other texts are "artists' signatures" referring to adjacent drawings. Most inscriptions are introduced by the particle l followed by the author's name, but some, particularly the "artists' signatures", begin w N khṭṭ "And N is [the] inscriber". Relatively few social groups are mentioned, most of them only once. Affiliation to a social group is introduced by the phrase dh 'l, as in Ṣafaitic, though there is one example of mn 'l as in Nabataean. No example of the nisba has yet been identified.

There are frequent prayers to lt (especially in the form dhkrt lt N "may lt be mindful of N", also found in Nabataean texts from this area), Dushara (usually in the etymologically correct form, dhs<sup>2</sup>ry [see DHU 'L-SHARĀ]0 and ktby, all of whom were also worshipped by the Nabataeans in the same region. There are prayers to lh (also invoked in Ṣafaitic texts), who was not worshipped by the Nabataeans (at least under this name), but whose name occurs frequently in their theophoric names. A suffix particle -m is used with the names of the deities

It and lh at the beginning of certain prayers, suggesting a parallel with Arabic allāhumma.

Among the names attested in this script there are a number of "basileophoric" compounds using the [438] names of Nabataean rulers (e.g. tm-ʿbdt = Taym-ʿUbādat, ʿbd-ḥrtht = ʿAbd-Ḥārithat, ʿbd-sḵlt = Abd-Shaḵīlat), which is hardly surprising given the geographical proximity of these texts to Petra. These names are at present the only dating evidence for these inscriptions.

### **Thamudic B**

Texts in this category are more numerous than in any other type of Thamudic, and though the largest concentrations have so far been found in Nadjd and the area between Madāʿin Ṣāliḥ and Taymāʿ, scattered examples have been recorded in Yemen, Egypt, the Negev, Jordan and Syria. The values of most of the signs are fairly securely established, except that for /z/. Names are introduced by the particles l and nm (a dialectal variant of the particle lm used in Taymanitic). The definite article and vocative particle are h (as in Ṣafaitic). The deities invoked in the inscriptions are lh, dthn, rḏw (all of whom are also found in Ṣafaitic), ʿtrs<sup>1</sup>lm, and nhy (possibly a dialectal variant of -lhy in Nabataean theophoric names, see J. Starcky, in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, vii, Paris 1966, col. 985). The last three correspond to the deities Ruldaiu, ʿAtarsamain, and Nuhai in the *Assyrian Annals* (see J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern texts*, <sup>3</sup>Princeton 1969, 291-2; and Ephʿal, *The ancient Arabs*, Leiden 1982, 118-23), whose images were carried off by the Assyrian king Sennacherib between 691 and 689 B.C., from their sanctuary at Dūma, modern al-Djawf [see DŪMAT AL-DJANDAL].

If, as seems likely, the chariot shown in a rock-drawing from the Tabūk region, with a caption in Thamudic B, represents an Assyrian or Babylonian vehicle, the inscription could date from any time between the invasions of Tiglath-Pileser III, ca. 733-2 B.C., to those of Nabonidus, ca. 552-42 B.C. (see Macdonald, *Hunting, raiding and fighting....*).

### **Thamudic C**

Relatively few texts in this script have been recorded so far, and most are known only from unreliable copies. A number of letters have not yet been satisfactorily identified, notably those for /dh/, /ṣ/, /ḏ/, /ṭ/ and /z/. Furthermore, the texts which Winnett (*A study*, 34-7, pl. V), placed in this category probably represent two different scripts. In one of these (C1), mainly from Khashm Ṣanaʿ north of Madāʿin Ṣāliḥ, /r/ is represented by a straight line and /n/ by a zig-zag, while, in the other (C2), mainly found at Aṣābiʿ and Djabal Djildiyya, east of Ḥāʿil, /r/ appears to be represented by a shallow curve and /n/ by a straight line. As in Hismaic and Thamudic D, a large number of texts are declarations of love.

### **Thamudic D**

There are still doubts about the form of /dh/, /z/, /ṣ/ and /z/ in this script and about the values of the line with a circle at either end and the grid. There is some evidence that the sign of two concentric circles represents /ḏ/, at least on some occasions. The letter /s<sup>2</sup>/ is a rayed circle, which is radically different from any of the signs representing the same phoneme in the other North Arabian scripts.

Many of the inscriptions begin with a formula usually interpreted as "zn (or dhn) N" "This is N" (see the discussion in Winnett and Reed, *Ancient records*, 108). In other contexts, however, the initial sign cannot be read as /z/ or /dh/, and is almost certainly /ʾ/ (see already Littmann, *Entzifferung*, 32-4). This suggests that the formula should be read "ʾn N" and translated as "I am N", a type of signature also found in Thamudic B and Hismaic.

There are still considerable difficulties in the interpretation of the longer texts in this script, but some appear to be declarations of love, *mhb* and *ʿs<sup>2</sup>k* being the most common words. A Thamudic D text (JS Tham 1) written vertically beside the Arabo-Nabataean inscription JS Nab 17 (dated to A.D. 267), repeats the name and patronym of the deceased.

#### "Southern Thamudic"

As expected, these texts are very different from those in the north and share some features of the script, morphology and onomastics with South Arabian. They are not yet published, but see the excellent survey of their content by J. Ryckmans (*Aspects nouveaux*).

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