What is Ancient North Arabian?[1]

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1 Introduction

The biggest barrier to understanding the linguistic diversity of pre-Islamic Arabia has traditionally been the dearth of sources. Scholars had only the fragmentary accounts of medieval Muslim scholars to rely upon. These presented the Arabian Peninsula as more or less linguistically homogenous – Arabic was spoken across its vast territory, with the exception of the southwestern corner where Ḥimyaritic still held sway. And even the few surviving remarks about Ḥimyaritic made it seem like an exotic Arabic dialect rather than an independent language.[2] While the Arabic grammarians recorded a significant degree of dialectal variation in the Arabic of their time, their accounts gave little reason to suspect that Arabic was not the language of Arabia's tribespeople since time immemorial.

The exploration of the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent parts of the southern Levant beginning in the 19th century remedied the problem of sources. Tens of thousands of inscriptions in varieties of the South Semitic script, spanning the entire Peninsula, provided a new vista from which to study Arabia's once pre-history. Medieval references to Ḥimyaritic had accustomed scholars to viewing ancient Yemen as linguistically distinct from the rest of the Peninsula. The epigraphic evidenced corroborated this, but rather than attesting a single, ancient Ḥimyaritic language, Ancient South Arabia was home to at least four distinct languages, spanning from the early first millennium BCE until the 6th century CE.[3] None of these languages could be considered Arabic in any sense,

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1 Editorial signs for inscriptions are: [restored letter]; {damaged letter}; / word divider; // line break; the glottal stop (hamza) is represented as ʔ in phonological and phonetic transcription and as ʾ when transcribing the glyphs of an inscriptions; the same goes for the pharyngeal fricative ʕayn, ʕ and ʿ, respectively.

2 For an excellent discussion on the relationship between the medieval Ḥimyaritic and the epigraphic record of the pre-Islamic kingdom of Ḥimyar, see Stein (2008). The classic reference for the features of Medieval Ḥimyaritic is Rabin (1951); for a more recent discussion, see Robin (2007).

3 On the chronology of Ancient South Arabian, see Stein (2013), Drewes et al. (2013).

and none matched the "Ḥimyariyyah" of medieval Islamic sources. The exact relationship between the Ancient South Arabian languages continues to be debated by specialists as does their position, as a whole or individually, within the Semitic family.[4]

The problems of classifying Ancient South Arabian, however, are not the subject of the present essay; it is the more fragmentary inscriptions and shadowy languages of Central and North Arabian that concern us. Unlike Ancient South Arabia, where the epigraphic languages are preserved in monumental inscriptions, the inscriptions of Central and North Arabia are usually classified as graffiti; in fact, only those texts composed at the oasis of Dadān in the Ḥigāz appear to have been commissioned by their nominal authors.[5]

The inscriptions of Central and North Arabia differ from South Arabia in another important respect: while a single script was used across Ancient South Arabia to write various languages, Central and North Arabia attest a stunning variety of alphabets, the exact number of which remains unknown. The informal and laconic nature of these texts has posed considerable problems for the classification of their scripts and has made linguistic diagnosis sometimes impossible. The first successful attempt at classification was that of Winnett (1937), which divided the scripts of Central and North Arabia into categories of "Thamudic"[6] A through E, to which were added "Liḥyanite" (= Dadanitic) and Safaitic, forming seven script groupings. Winnett, however, did not embark on a linguistic classification and it is clear that he regarded the language behind all of these alphabets as more or less homogenous.

In a seminal paper, M.C.A. Macdonald (2000) established the conventional terminology for the scripts and languages of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam used today. For North and Central Arabia, Macdonald distinguished the following categories of the South Semitic script, based on whether they were employed at an oasis or by nomads (see Map 1 on page 36), and two linguistic groupings, Ancient North Arabian and Arabic.[7]

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4   For the classic discussion, see Avanzini (2009). For balanced discussions on the linguistic classification of Ancient South Arabian within Semitic, see Huehnergard 1995; Huehnergard and Rubin 2011; Rubin 200.

5   On this phenomenon, see Macdonald (2010; 2015).

6   The term "Thamudic" is entirely conventional; there is no demonstrable link between the historical tribe of Thamūd and all of the inscriptions placed under this label, although a few texts can be connected to members of this tribe.

7   The South Semitic script is a conventional term for the family of alphabets used in Arabia before the rise of Islam, ranging from 27 to 29 glyphs. See also Macdonald (2010) for a good introduction to their history and Sass (1991) on their possible development.

Ancient North Arabian		
Oasis North Arabian	Taymanitic (formerly Thamudic A)	Oasis of Taymāʾ, North Arabia
	Dadanitic (formerly Dadanite and Lihyanite)	Oasis of Dadān, northern Ḥigāz
	Dumaitic	Oasis of Dūmah, North Arabia
	Dispersed North Arabian	Texts from Mesopotamia and other places not classifiable as one of the above scripts
Desert North Arabian	Safaitic	Syro-Jordanian basalt desert, northern Saudi Arabia, isolated finds elsewhere
	Hismaic (formerly Thamudic E)	Southern Jordan, northern Saudi Arabia
	Thamudic B	North and Central Arabia
	Thamudic C	North and Central Arabia
	Thamudic D	North and Northwest Arabia
	Southern Thamudic	Southwest Arabia
Arabic		
Old Arabic	Pre-Islamic ʾl-dialects attested in various scripts	Attested in various places, but concentrated in North Arabia and southern Levant

This classification was based primarily on script type[8] and a single linguistic isogloss, the phonetic realization of the definite article. Since 2000, our understanding of the epigraphy of Arabia has increased dramatically and the discovery of tens of thousands of new inscriptions has helped fill in the gaps in the grammar and lexicon of these languages. We are therefore now in a better position to re-assess the linguistic landscape of pre-Islamic North and Central Arabia, especially in terms of genetic classification. The main goal of this essay is to determine if the scripts classified by Macdonald (2000) as Ancient North Arabian also form a linguistic unity, and whether they, in part or whole, descend from Proto-Arabic or are distinct from it.

2 What is Arabic?

Since Beeston (1981), scholars have generally divided the ancient languages of Central and North Arabia into two categories: Arabic and Ancient North Arabian. Arabic was largely defined by the language of the Qurʾān and the norms of Classical Arabic while the linguistic category Ancient North Arabian hinged on a single isogloss – the definite article *h*-. Macdonald (2000) softened the distinction between the two groupings, referring instead to Arabic and Ancient North Arabian as two separate, but perhaps mutually intelligible, "dialect bundles".[9] In 2009, Macdonald added two more features to distinguish Arabic and Ancient North Arabian dialects:[10]

1) The feminine singular relative pronoun is *ʾlt* (= ʾallatī);
2) The consonantal realization of root medial and final *w* and *y*:
    Safaitic *rʿy* vs. Classical Arabic *raʿā*;
    Safaitic *s¹yr* vs. Classical Arabic *sāra*.

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8 Note, however, that the inter-relationships between the Ancient North Arabian scripts remain poorly understood and it has yet to be proven that they constitute a single unit against Ancient South Arabian. At present, Ancient North Arabian is a negative definition, meaning simply the non-Ancient South Arabian South Semitic scripts.

9 This point is made even clearer in Macdonald (2009: 318, n.198) where he argues against Gawlikowski (2006: 46), stating that *ʾl* and *h(n)*- dialects were in no sense separate languages. This point is rarely recognized in the secondary literature, and Ancient North Arabian is often treated as a single entity, entirely distinct from Arabic.

10 Macdonald (2009: 312–313) states clearly that these criteria do not form a solid basis for the identification of the language of any inscription as Arabic, but at the time, the interpretation of the texts permitted little more.

From this definition, it is clear that the Arabic to which Macdonald refers is in fact "Classical Arabic", as the features listed are by no means characteristic of all forms of Arabic or even reconstructible to Proto-Arabic. Two of these features, the relative pronoun *ʔallatī* and the definite article *ʔal*, would moreover exclude many modern dialects of Arabic from the definition of Arabic. E. A. Knauf (2010: 207) advanced an opposite opinion:

> ""Ancient North Arabian" genetically is Arabic… Diachronically and genetically, we are talking about two stages in the development of a single language. "Ancient North Arabian" is "Proto-Old Arabic", just as (vulgar) Latin is proto-French and French (extremely corrupted) is Late Latin."

His argument for this classification is based on three features:

1) The merger of s^1 (Proto-Semitic [s], Hebrew *šin*) and s^3 (Proto-Semitic [ˈs], Hebrew *sāmek*);
2) A pre-positive, rather than post-positive, definite article;
3) Broken plurals.

The fact that both classifications have summoned overlapping linguistic features to support opposite conclusions underscores an issue that has been intuited rather than scientifically defined in the epigraphic literature – the linguistic definition of Arabic.[11] Linguistic classification is dependent upon the identification of shared morphological *innovations*, that is, developments in grammar that are shared by a group of languages against other members of the larger family to which they all belong. These features alone can imply descent from an exclusive shared ancestor, in our case, a Proto-Arabic.[12]

The modern dialects of Arabic, Classical Arabic, and the language of the Qurʾanic Consonantal Text (QCT)[13] share a large number of features to justify assuming that they descend from a common ancestor to the exclusion of other Semitic languages. Huehnergard (2017) established a list of innovations prov-

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11 This question has recently been asked by Retsö in his learned contribution to the Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics (2013). For a critique of his approach, see Huehnergard (2017, n.19, n.83).
12 For an excellent introduction to this methodology as applied to Arabic, see Huehnergard 2017: 1–14.
13 For a definition of the QCT as separate from Classical Arabic, see Van Putten (2017: 47–48).

ing this genetic relationship, a list that I have expanded in a recent publication (2018a).

Turning back to Knauf's list of features, I find his argument that Ancient North Arabian, as a whole, is the ancestor of Old Arabic difficult to justify on methodological grounds. The presence of broken plurals cannot be used for classification, as it is most likely a Proto-Semitic retention rather than a shared innovation. Moreover, this pluralization strategy is found in Arabic, Ethio-Semitic, Modern South Arabian, and Ancient South Arabian.[14] While Knauf regards the phonetic realization of the definite article as trivial, he argues its pre-positive position is an indicator of genetic descent. Huehnergard (2017), whom I follow, does not admit the definite article into the list of innovations characterizing Arabic; the article is certainly an innovation from the Proto-Semitic perspective (Huehnergard and Rubin 2011: 269–70), and is likely a contact feature that spread throughout Central Semitic sometime in the late 2nd millennium BCE. As such, it is a most unsuitable feature for linguistic diagnosis.[15] The single Proto-Arabic innovation on this list is the merger of s^1 and s^3 (Huehnergard 2017: 19), yet as a sound change, it is a very weak feature and certainly cannot be used to argue for the claim that all of the epigraphy of Ancient North Arabia is Proto-Arabic. As sound changes go, $s^1 > s^3$ could easily be an areal feature of Central and Northern Arabia, just as $p > f$ seems to have been as well.[16] Moreover, as we shall see, this sound change does not encompass all of the epigraphic groups of Ancient North Arabia, as Taymanitic seems to have undergone a different development (Kootstra 2016: 74–79, and below).

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14 While the system of broken plurals appears to be Proto-Semitic, Ratcliffe (1998) has argued that the system was expanded in the Semitic languages of Arabia and Ethiopia, and that this expansion was evidence for a South Semitic sub-grouping. Huehnergard and Rubin (2011: 272–73) make a convincing case that the broken plural system was in fact a retention from Proto-Semitic, while admitting possibility that the "expansion" of the system was an areal feature of Arabia. I personally do not find the "expansion" scenario convincing; even if one accepts it, it does not allow for the use of broken plurals for classification unless one isolates innovative patterns unique to Arabic and locates them in the epigraphic record. The great ambiguities in the scripts of Ancient Arabia, however, make such a possibly very unlikely, as one would not be able to prove that supposedly Arabic patterns are absent in the consonantal skeletons of the epigraphic languages.

15 The exception to this, I would argue, is the suffixed article which is integrated into the morphology of the language, with allomorphs based on number: Syriac *malkā* 'the king' vs. *malkayyā* 'the kings'; Sabaic *ṣlmn* 'the statue' vs. *ṣlmnhn* 'the statues'.

16 Huehnergard and Rubin (2011: 272) explain this as an areal feature but note that its existence in the earliest stages of Arabic is purely hypothetical and, in fact, there is good evidence to think that the reflex of this phoneme was still [pʰ] (Al-Jallad 2015a: 41–42; Al-Jallad 2017: 125–26).

Knauf's essay takes for granted that Ancient North Arabian is a linguistic unit. It is discussed as a whole as the linguistic antecedent to "Old Arabic" and "Classical Arabic". The approach of this essay will be different – we will begin with the linguistic isoglosses outlined by Huehnergard 2017 and modified by Al-Jallad (2018a) and ask: can the various corpora of Ancient North Arabian be classified linguistically and if so, do they belong to the same genetic category as Classical Arabic and the modern Arabic dialects?

The innovations characterizing Arabic are (Huehnergard 2017):[17]

1) the merger of s^1 and s^3;
2) the loss of the 1st person singular pronoun *ʔanāku*;[18]
3) the replacement of mimation with nunation;[19]
4) the levelling of the *-at* allomorph of the feminine ending to nouns terminating in *-t*; relics survive in words like *bint-* 'daughter' and *ʔuḫt-* 'sister';
5) the levelling of the *-na* ending of the 3rd feminine plural prefix conjugation to the suffix conjugation, producing *qatalna* from earlier *qatalā;[20]
6) the *mafʕūl* pattern as a paradigmatic passive participle of the G-stem;
7) the vowel melody *u-i* for the passive;
8) the preposition *fī* 'in', grammaticalized from the word 'mouth';
9) the replacement of the anaphoric demonstrative with demonstratives derived fro the proximal base;
10) the presence of nunation on nominal heads of indefinite asyndetic relative clauses;
11) feminine demonstratives with a *t*-onset.

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17 I have excluded Huehnergard's proposal that pharyngealization is Proto-Arabic as the ancient evidence is ambiguous and several modern dialects have glottalized reflexes of the emphatics. I also excluded the suggestion that the loss of the paradigmatic infinitive *qatāl* is a Proto-Arabic phenomenon, as the complex *maṣdar* system of Arabic seems to be original on the principle of archaic heterogeneity. Huehnergard suggests that *qad faʕala* is an Arabic innovation as well; I agree with this but I see it as part of a larger trend in pre-verbal aspect/tense marking.

18 Huehnergard mentions this as a minor feature, also shared with Aramaic.

19 The replacement of mimation with nunation may seem like a minor change at first, but it requires more than expansion or levelling. Mimation on singular nouns and broken plurals was a simple *m* following the case vowel, while nunation on duals and plurals was followed by a vowel, either *na* or *ni*. If the system was simply expanded to singulars, we would expect a replacement of *m* with *na* or *ni*. Rather, it is the consonant that was replaced, suggesting a more abstract change.

20 Huehnergard notes that this is a minor feature.

To these innovations, I would add:

12) the complex and asymmetrical system of negation, *mā*, *lā*, *lam*, and
    lan, with certain moods and conjugations of the verb;
13) pre-verbal tense and aspect marking, *qad faʕala, sawfa yafʕalu,* etc.;[21]
14) the use of *ʔan(na)* as a complementizer;
15) the independent object pronoun base *(ʔiy)yā*;
16) the use of the *a*-marked prefix conjugation (*yafʕala*) as a subjunctive.[22]

The following section will examine the features traditionally identified as diag-
nostic of Arabic in the literature, beginning with Macdonald (2009), and then
treating Mascitelli (2006) and Robin (2001).

Before moving on, I wish to be clear about the term Proto-Arabic, which
will be used with some frequency in this paper. Proto-Arabic has sometimes
been used to refer to the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions (Rabin 1951); this
is misleading. A proto-language is the ultimate ancestor of all later forms of
that language, and so Proto-Arabic would be the ultimate ancestor of not only
Classical Arabic but other ancient dialects and the modern spoken forms as
well (Huehnergard 2017).[23] The term Proto-Arabic only implies that its con-
stituent members form a linguistic unity, and does not make any claims about
what the speakers of these languages may have called their spoken language or
how they may have self-identified.

2.1 Traditional isoglosses of Arabic reconsidered

The relative pronoun ʾlt

This category can be expanded to include the entire relative pronoun series con-
sisting of an *ʔalla* + demonstrative element. Huehnergard (2017: 22–23) did
not include this feature as an isogloss of Arabic, as several dialects of Arabic
retain the older form comprising of simply *ḏV*. In the Classical Arabic sources,
this is found in the Yemeni dialects and in the dialect of Ṭayyiʔ, and it is wide-
spread in the modern dialects.[24] I have therefore argued that the *ʔalla*-forms

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21 While Modern Aramaic also employs pre-verbal TAM markers, I wonder if this is not
    due to contact with Arabic.
22 This was suggested by Huehnergard (2017: 14) but not placed on his primary list of
    innovations.
23 It is now well established that Classical Arabic, a literary language of Islamic civiliza-
    tion, is not the direct ancestor of any modern spoken forms of Arabic.
24 The *d*-relative pronoun is attested in the Maghreb and in Yemen (Behnstedt 2016: 74);

are an innovation of only a sub-section of the Arabic dialects (Al-Jallad 2015a: 13–14; forthcoming). If we take their first occurrence in the Dadanitic inscription JSLih 384 and in the QCT as indicative of their geographic origin, then it would seem that this feature emerged in the dialects of the Ḥigāz.[25] As such, the *ʔalla*-relative pronouns are a feature for the sub-classification of Arabic, but were certainly not a Proto-Arabic feature.

The reflex of weak roots

The reflex of III-y/w verbs: To this class belong verbs that terminate in a long /ā/ in Classical Arabic and many, but not all, modern dialects, e.g. *banā* 'he built', *daʕā* 'he invoked', etc. The collapse of this sequence was therefore considered an Arabic isogloss while their preservation was regarded as characteristic of Ancient North Arabian. Before investigating whether this distribution holds true, it must be first emphasized that the original forms of such verbs contained a triphthong and not a long vowel. The second issue is that this feature is not suitable for classification as it constitutes a simple and common sound change, the monophthongization of triphthongs, that took place independently in several different branches of Semitic (Huehnergard and Rubin 2011: 268–269; Al-Jallad 2014).

While Classical Arabic and most of the modern dialects of Arabic reduced the triphthongs of this verb class to a final /ā/, the situation in the QCT is more complicated. According to the recent and exhaustive study of Van Putten (2017), III-w and III-y roots had different reflexes, /ē/ and /ā/, respectively – this much is indicated in the orthography, بنى vs. دعا. The maintenance of this distinction implies that in the direct ancestor of the language of the QCT, the triphthongs /aya/ and /awa/ were kept apart, and collapsed independently.[26] This stage is in fact witnessed in the Graeco-Arabic inscription A1 (Al-Jallad and al-Manaser 2015), which attests both the *al*-article and the verb αθαοα [ʔatawa] 'he came', contra Classical Arabic *ʔatā*. These facts combined show that the collapse of the triphthongs to /ā/ cannot be attributed to the common

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on the *ḏū* of Ṭayyiʔ, see Rabin (1951: 204). Of course, the original form of the pronoun is preserved in the Classical Arabic relative-determinative, *ḏū* 'the one of'.

25 Today, the form *ʔallaḏī* is found primarily in Yemen (Behnstedt 2016: 74), but its ubiquity in Middle Arabic texts may suggest that it was more widespread in former times. The form *ʔilli* in the modern dialects has been argued to be a reduced form of *ʔallaḏī*, although there are other explanations. See Stokes' contribution to this volume.

26 Note that this situation must have obtained in the early Islamic period as one the Muʕāwiyah dam inscriptions attests the form *bny-h*, spelled unambiguously with dots under the *y*, for 'he built it', pointing towards [banaya-hu] or [banayoh], or something of the like; see Al-Jallad (2014, n. 33) and Miles (1948) for the inscription.

ancestor of all varieties of Arabic (Proto-Arabic), and therefore cannot be considered characteristic of Arabic, but of only some varieties of the language. The maintenance of the triphthong in a North Arabian inscription does not disqualify its status as "Arabic" nor can it act as a classificatory feature of a separate language family.

The reflex of II-w/y verbs: In Safaitic, medial-weak verbs are written with a glide, *myt* [mayeta] 'he died', *ṭwf* [ṭawopʰa] 'he returned'. Safaitic orthography does not employ *matres lectionis*, so the medial glide must represent a true consonant.[27] Since the hollow paradigm seems to have been tri-radical at the Proto-Semitic stage,[28] these spellings certainly reflect the archaic situation, directly antecedent to the apophonic situation encountered in Classical Arabic and the modern dialects.[29] As an archaism, they are not appropriate for classification. Moreover, it is unclear whether such forms are common to all Ancient North Arabian corpora, as we shall see below.

The definite article

The most widely cited difference between Arabic and Ancient North Arabian is the definite article *ʔal* vs. *ha(n)*, respectively. And while the *h*-article is certainly not unique to Ancient North Arabian, as it is common to Canaanite as well, the *ʔal*-article is a feature claimed only to be found in Arabic. Yet, without considering other isoglosses, this reasoning is entirely circular.

First, it should be clear that the basic division of *ʔal* and *ha(n)* into two neat linguistic groups does not reflect the actual attested situation. In Safaitic, five article forms have so far been identified (Al-Jallad 2015a: 74–79):

- *ʔl*
- *ʔ*
- *h*
- *hn*

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27 Knauf (1991: 94) has advanced some arguments that *y* and *w* could stand for long /ā/, but these fail to convince, especially in light of Greek transcriptions.

28 For good arguments for this, see Bauer 1912; Voigt 1988; Suchard 2016; Huehnergard, however, suggests that the sound changes responsible for the collapse of the triphthongs in medial-weak verbs occurred at the Proto-Semitic stage (1995: 177, n.75).

29 While all dialects and Classical Arabic exhibit the forms *Cu/iCtV* and *CāCa*, some ancient forms attributed to the Ḥigāz exhibit an ē vowel in medial position, e.g. *ḫēfa*, *hēba*, *ṭēba* (Rabin 1951: 111), etc., suggest a different resolution of the original triphthong rather than sporadic raising of long ā. Rabin's explanation of these forms preserving a reflex of a fourth Proto-Semitic long vowel, *ē*, has not been accepted. On the phonology of Proto-Semitic, see Kogan 2011.

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Now, while *h*-article is certainly the most common, the ʾ-article is not rare. The ʾl- and *hn*- articles, however, occur far less frequently, the latter only a handful of times. One must remember that the Safaitic inscriptions are highly formulaic and that the distribution of article forms in the inscriptions may not reflect the exact situation in the spoken dialects. M.C.A. Macdonald brought to my attention two inscriptions authored by the same individual. In these, the writer identified himself as 'the bandit' (= *lṣt*)[30], but in one he used the *h*-article while in the other the ʾ-article.[31]

ShNGA 1: *l ḥmlt bn s¹lm ʾ-lṣt ḏ ʾl {d}{f}*
          'By Ḥmlt son of S¹lm, the bandit, of the lineage of Ḍfʾ'
AMSI 50: *l ḥmlt bn s¹lm h-lṣt*
          'By Ḥmlt son of S¹lm, the bandit'

The most obvious explanation for this is that both article forms existed in the dialect of this writer and that they were perhaps in variation. Indeed, if we imagine a situation where several competing article forms were available, but the *h*-was simply part of the register of writing, we might then explain the disproportionately high usage of *h*-.[32]

In the Thamudic B inscriptions, the *h*-form is virtually the only form found, but these are far less numerous than Safaitic and in most cases the *h* can be construed as a demonstrative. There is one attestation of the *h*-article in the Thamudic C inscriptions (see the discussion of Thamudic C below), but in a divine name and so this may not reflect the language of the texts themselves. To my knowledge, the definite article has not yet been attested in Thamudic D. Thamudic F exhibits a variety of article forms, but these are restricted to the onomasticon.

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30 Safaitic *lṣt* is most certainly a loanword from Greek, Aramaic *lesṭā,* Classical Arabic *liṣṣun,* ultimately from Greek ληστής.

31 While the ʾ and *h* can sometimes be close in shape in Safaitic, the ʾ distinguished by a single crossbar, these texts are written in the so-called square script, where both forms are rather distinct. This ʾ-article in this inscription could in theory be the ʾl-article, with the assimilation of the *l* to the following coronal.

32 While the Safaitic inscriptions certainly do not represent a formal writing tradition as such, with a regulated scribal language, their formulaic nature certainly allows for conventions of spelling and language to exist, even in this informal context. This much is suggested by the spelling of etymological *q as both *q* and ʾ in a single inscription (Al-Jallad 2015a: 53).

Of the Oasis North Arabian scripts, the *h*-article is found in Taymanitic while both *h(n)* and *ʾ(l)* are attested at Dadān, but the former is much more common.[33] No article is attested in the three inscriptions carved in the Dumaitic script.[34]

In Hismaic, the *h*-element seems to be purely a demonstrative. The language appears to lack any morphological means of definition.[35] This preserves the ancient Central,West, and Proto-Semitic situation, as both Ugaritic and Gəʕəz lack a definite article (Huehnergard and Rubin 2011: 269). The article-less situation is not restricted to Hismaic, as some Safaitic inscriptions lack the article as well. This is clearly the case in the inscription HshNSMI 5 (Al-Jallad 2015a: 251). The text contains two common expressions without the definite article, where in all other inscriptions the article is present, e.g. *ḫl dr* 'he camped in this region' compared to the normal expression *ḫl(l) h-dr* and even *ḫll ʾl-dr* (C 5137); and *lm yḫbl sfr* 'may the inscription not be effaced' compared to similar expressions such as *ʿwr ḏ yḫbl h-sfr* 'blind him who would efface the writing'.

In light of the foregone discussion, a better characterization of the Ancient North Arabian situation with regard to the article is this: the definite article still possesses a strong demonstrative force and several allomorphs are in use, but the *h*-article is the most common form. Archaic strands lacking a definite article are attested in the Hismaic and, rarely, in the Safaitic inscriptions. The *h*-article is found across Central and North Arabia, while the *ʾl*- and *ʾ*-articles are concentrated in the north and northwest, in the Ḥigāz (Dadanitic), the southern Levant (Nabataean),[36] and rarely in Safaitic (the Syro-Jordanian Ḥarrah), although scattered examples can be found in the south, such as at the oasis of Qaryat al-Fāw and in the Ḥimà region near Naǧrān.[37]

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33 In Dadanitic, the form with an *n* regularly appears before laryngeals, and only in one case before *qbr* 'grave', but the two words are on separate lines (JSLih 81; Winnett and Reed 1970: 124).

34 These are WTI 21–23 (Winnett and Reed 1970: 80).

35 This is clearly seen in inscriptions associated with rock art. For example, AMJ 67 reads *ʾm ḫṭṭ gml* 'ʾm carved (the) camel', clearly associated with the camel on the same panel. In Safaitic and Thamudic B, the same construction occurs almost always with the article, while in Hismaic, the *h* is rare and King, correctly in my mind, interprets it as a demonstrative (King 1990, §C.6). The clearest example is found in a bilingual Hismaic-Nabataean inscription published by Hayajneh (2009), in which the author of the text gives his name as *ʿbd ʾl ʾyb* in Nabataean, with the *ʾl*-article, and *ʿbd ʾyb*, in Hismaic, clearly showing that *h* was not the equivalent of Nabataean Arabic *ʾl*.

36 For example, the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription, JSNab 17 (Macdonald in Fiema et al. 2015), and personal names such as *ʿbd ʾlb ʿly* (Negev 1991, s.v.).

37 These examples will be discussed in more detail under §6.4 and §7.

2.2 The relationship between the *ʔal-* and *ha-*articles

Two main positions exist regarding the relationship between the *ʔal-*and *ha-*articles. The first sees them as deriving from two different morphemes. Rubin (2005: 75–76) argues that the *ʔal-*article is in fact the reflex of the plural demonstrative, which he reconstructs as *ʔulli*. This requires several ad-hoc changes, including the reduction of the geminate *l*, the loss of the first syllable and the introduction of a "prothetic" *ʔa-*. Ad-hoc sound changes are possible in a situation of grammaticalization, but the number required here certainly prevents a straight-forward reconstruction. Moreover, the demonstrative element *ʔulli*, or *ʔul*, does not belong to the same paradigm as the *han* particle (Hasselbach 2007: 20). It would indeed be strange if the plural demonstrative grammaticalized as an article but not the singular members of the same paradigm, i.e., demonstratives containing the element *ḏ-*. Since no Central Semitic language exhibits inflection for number or gender in the definite article (Pat-El 2009: 23–24), this strongly suggests that inflection was never a feature of this prefix, in turn undermining a connection with the demonstrative *ḏ-/ʔul-*series. Finally, the existence of the *hl-*article in Thamudic F (see below) precludes a derivation from the base *ʔul*, as the sound change *ʔ > h* is unknown in Arabic, while the reverse is common.

The second position derives *ʔal* from *han* (Tropper 2001), through perhaps an irregular, but not inexplicable, sound change of *n >l*. The main challenge to this is that presentatives with an *l* are attested in other Semitic languages, Akkadian *allû*; Ugaritic *hl,* the interrogative particle *hal* in Classical Arabic, and indeed the Thamudic F definite article *hl* (see also the discussion in Pat-El 2009, especially 40–42). This fact may suggest that both forms **han* and **hal* existed at an earlier stage; the *l* element is after all an established deictic suffix (Hasselbach 2007: 22). Since Safaitic shows that multiple article forms co-existed and were used in the writing of a single author, it is possible that this situation extends into the distant past, and that **hal* and **han* were used interchangeably as definite articles, at least in Arabia, until one form eventually dominated the other.

While it is impossible to prove which solution may have given rise to the *hal-*article, and its later form *ʔal*, we can, I think, with certainty rule out a source from the plural demonstrative base. Thus, Central Semitic article forms not only share their peculiar syntax but also derive collectively from a *hā* deictic particle with a suffixed *n* and *l*.

Explaining the article as a contact feature in Proto-Arabic

The very existence of forms of Arabic written in the Hismaic and Safaitic scripts lacking the definite article strongly suggests that their common ancestor lacked a morphological means of marking definiteness. I would therefore suggest that the definite article entered these languages through contact with Northwest Semitic languages in the southern Levant. Evidence for such a contact situation is in fact attested in an Ancient North Arabian inscription published by Hayajneh, Ababneh, and Khraysheh in 2015. The text is in a difficult-to-classify North Arabian script but contains a prayer formula typical of Thamudic B and Safaitic. Following the edition, the prayer reads: *h mlkm w kms¹ w qws¹ bkm ʿwḏn ...* 'O Mlkm (= Malkom), Kms¹ (= Kemōš), and Qws¹ (= Qaws) we have placed under your protection …'.[38] The short inscription attests to cultural contacts between speakers of North Arabian languages and the Canaanite languages east of the Jordan. In addition to this, the inscription may be a bilingual, as the same stone bears a Canaanite text, which remains undeciphered. The published photographs of this component, like those of the Arabian inscription, are too poor to be of use for re-editing the text. Nevertheless, this cultural nexus would have produced a bilingual environment in which the definite article, as a morphological feature and perhaps the morpheme itself, could have spread to Arabian languages lacking it. If contact was responsible for the introduction of the definite article in Arabic and other North Arabian languages, then the earliest form would have been **ha(n),* with the assimilation of the *n* to the following consonant – and this is exactly what we encountered in the inscriptions. The introduction of the **h/ʔal-* article could be the result of a calque, imperfect borrowing, or have arisen from the functional overlap of **han* and **hal* in other contexts Accordingly, it may be a later, more restricted innovation. Indeed, our first clear attestations of **h/ʔal* come from the Nabataean period, centuries after the attestation of **ha(n)*.

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38 This is the reading of the first line; the second line is read by the edition as *h ʾsḥy m* *mḏwbt (oder mdwst)* and translates the entire texts as "O Mlkm und Kms und Qws, wir suchen bei euch den Schutz (für) die/diese Brunnen vor Leck (oder: Zerstörung, Verderben)". The spellings of Kms¹ and Qws¹ with the same sibilant, *s¹*, indicate that this language has merged *s¹* and *s³*. The second line is read from right to left, but I suspect that the text is boustrophedon. The published photographs are not of a high enough quality to undertake a re-editing of the text, however, and so I will withhold judgement of the reading and interpretation of the second line until new photographs are published. Fortunately, H. Hayajneh informs me that he is preparing the text for a new round of 3D photography and will publish a new edition soon.

A simple sound change produces the greatest diversity in the shape of the definite article, $h > ʔ$ #C_CC(v́) (Al-Jallad 2015b).[39] From an original *han* one gets *ʔan,* the *n* of which would regularly assimilate producing the ʾ-article – both forms are found frequently in Safaitic.[40] The *ʔal*-article derives in a straightforward way from *hal*. The fact that the sound change $h > ʔ$ #C_CC(v́) operates normally across North Arabia, affecting for example the C-stem verb (*ʔafʕala* rather than *hafʕala*) further supports the idea that the **ha(n)* article is a borrowed form, as it is not affected by this change.

Now, the assimilatory patterns of the *ʔal*-article require an explanation. It is important to emphasize that in most of the Old Arabic data, the coda of *ʔal* rarely exhibits assimilation; thus, there is no reason to assume that the assimilatory patterns of Classical Arabic held true for the *ʔal*-article across space and time.[41]As I have argued above, some varieties may have used several allomorphs of the article in free variation. Classical Arabic may have inherited both the **ʔan* and **ʔal* article variants and redistributed them along phonological lines: *ʔal* before dorsals and *ʔan* before coronals. The assimilation of the *n* in this context is not problematic, as even Classical Arabic experiences *n* assimilation with particles, e.g. *ʔan+ lā >ʔallā*.

Finally, contact between the languages of Arabia – not simply Northwest Semitic – and sociolinguistic factors arising from that, must have played an important role in the distribution of definite article forms in the pre-Islamic period. The ease at which definite article forms can be transferred across closely related languages undermines any attempt to use its particular phonetic shape – whether **ha(n)* or **ʔal* – to draw linguistic boundaries. An informative parallel is seen in Southwestern Arabian dialects of Arabic today. Traditionally, these dialects of Arabic used the *ʔan-* or *ʔam*-articles. Both forms are receding today at the expense of the spread of the *ʔal*-article.[42] The latter is no doubt considered prestigious because of its presence in the major urban dialects. The restricted distribution of the *ʔal*-article in pre-Islamic times speaks to the absence of prestige attached to dialects using that form, and to the absence of a

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39 That is, *h* shifts to *ʔ* in a closed word-initial syllable, possibly pre-tonic, while it remains *h* otherwise: so *hafʿala> ʾafʿala* but *huwa* remains *huwa*.

40 The article forms *ʔan* and *ʔa* with assimilation to all following consonants are attested in modern dialects of Southwest Arabia (Watson 2014: 150) and were known to the Classical Arabic Grammarians as well. The nasal article with *m* was said to be a characteristic of the Ṭayyiʾ dialect (Rabin 1951), and was widespread in South Arabia as well.

41 This is what Macdonald has called the "Northern Old Arabic isogloss" (2000: 51); See Al-Jallad (2017) for a full discussion of this feature in light of Greek transcriptions.

42 The *ʔam*-article, which for Classical Arabic grammarians was characteristic of "Ḥimyaritic" could derive from the *ʔan*-article. The /n/ could have assimilated to a following labial consonant, becoming /m/, and was thereafter generalized to all positions.

pan-Arabian linguistic order that would have caused the pre-Islamic dialects to converge in a single direction.

2.3 The isoglosses of Mascitelli and Robin

Mascitelli (2006: 19–20) and Robin (2001) provide a few more features regarded as diagnostic of Arabic. I will focus here on those that do not overlap with Huehnergard (2017).

1) *The ʔa-morpheme of the C-stem — ʔafʕal*: This feature was also proposed by Robin (2001). While it is true that the causative morpheme of Arabic is a glottal stop in the suffix conjugation, the sound change of *h >ʔ* in this environment is rather common and can hardly be used, on its own, to diagnose a language. The same sound change occurred in Gəʕəz and in the attested history of Aramaic. As we shall see below, the Dadanitic corpus has both *h-* and *ʔ-*morphemes, suggesting a diachronic development from the former to the latter in that language's history.

2) *The onomasticon*: Mascitelli considers certain personal names to be unique to Arabic, while acknowledging that these are also found in the North Arabian inscriptions. Personal names cannot be used to genetically classify languages.[43]

3) T-*morphemes of the suffix conjugation*: While Proto-Arabic certainly levelled the *t*-morpheme from the second person series to the first (*qataltu* rather than *qatalku*), this seems to have been an areal feature of all Central Semitic languages north of Yemen, common to Northwest Semitic as well (Huehnergard 2005: 168–169). The *k*-endings are an areal feature of southern Arabia, found not only in Ancient South Arabian, but all languages of this region regardless of their classification, e.g. Modern South Arabian, Gəʕəz, and even some modern Arabic dialects.[44]

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43 For an excellent presentation of this point, see Macdonald (1999).

44 The fact that *k*-endings do not occur outside of Yemen strongly suggests that they spread to Arabic once it moved into the region; all attestations of Arabic, both ancient and modern, outside of Yemen have *t*-suffixes. On the distribution of the modern *k*-dialects, see Behnstedt (2016, verbs) and on the ancient dialects, see Rabin (1951, chapter 5).

3. Why the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions should be classified as Arabic

With the linguistic definition of Arabic in hand, let us now turn to the dialects/ languages attested in the epigraphic record and attempt to classify them genealogically. I have already argued in several places (2014, 2015a, 2017, 2018a) that the dialects attested in the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions should be considered Arabic, in genealogical terms, and constitute a continuum of dialects including the Arabic of the Nabataeans. The following discussion will synthesize my opinions on the matter and make the case for this as clear as possible.

Putting aside the superficial shape of the definite article, Safaitic, and to a lesser degree Hismaic (on account of the laconic nature of inscriptions in that script), exhibit most of the innovations of Arabic.

The system of negation

Classical Arabic shows a unique system of negative adverbs tied to modality. The past tense is negated with *lam* and the short prefix conjugation (the jussive), the present tense with *lā* and the indicative (*yafʕalu*), and the future with *lan* and the subjunctive (*yafʕala*). In addition to this, the suffix conjugation is negated with *mā*.[45]

lam:	Classical Arabic	*lam yafʕal* 'he did not do'
	Safaitic:	*lm yʕd* 'he did not return'
		lm ygd 'he did not find'
mā	Classical Arabic:	*mā faʕala* 'he did not do'
	Safaitic:	*m mṭr* 'it did not rain'
		m nm 'he did not die'
		m hnʾ 'he was not happy '
lan	Classical Arabic:	*lan yafʕala* 'he will not do'
	Safaitic:	*lʾn yqtl* 'he will not be killed'

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45 All examples come from Al-Jallad (2015a: 155–156).

Mafʕūl *passive participle*

The productive passive participle of the G-stem (form I) in Classical Arabic is
mafʕūl, although *faʕīl* and *faʕūl* patterns exist. The same is true of Safaitic, for
example: *mqtl* [maqtūl] 'killed', *mḥrb* [maḥrūb] 'plundered', *msby* [masbeyy]
'captured'.[46]

The subjunctive yafʕala

Verbs terminating in an /a/ are found throughout Semitic, and the relationship
between them has yet to be explained. Nevertheless, it is only in Arabic, and
in Classical Arabic to be precise, that such verbs function as a marked sub-
junctive.[47] The ability to detect such forms is challenged by the orthography
of the ANA scripts, which does not indicate final vowels at all. Yet it is this
orthographic practice that allows us to demonstrate that some verbs terminate
in an /a/. Indicative prefix conjugation verbs of the III-y/w class end in a long
vowel that is not indicated orthographically, *ydʕ* [yadʕū] 'he reads' (Al-Jallad
and Jaworska, forthcoming, s.v). Thus, when the final radical is written, we
can be sure that it is followed by a vowel, and in these cases, the verb is in a
syntactic environment where Classical Arabic would require the subjunctive.

Hismaic   *f ygzy nḏr-h w yzd*
             'in order to fulfill his vow and do more';
             ygzy = [yagzeya][48]

Safaitic   *h lt qbll ʾhl slm f nngy*
             'O Lt, [grant] a safe reunion with family that I may be saved';
             nngy = [nangeya][49]

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46 See Al-Jallad (2015a: 117–123) for a discussion on the various reflexes of the participle.
47 While verbs terminating in an -*a* morpheme are attested in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew,
    and Amarna Canaanite, the relationship between these remains poorly understood and
    their syntax is quite different from Arabic. In Ugaritic and Hebrew, they function as
    cohortatives and there is no consensus on the function of this morpheme in Amarna
    Canaanite.
48 As Zwettler and Graf note, the indicative of this verb would have been *yagzī* and would
    have been spelled *ygz* in Hismaic orthography (Zwettler and Graf 2004: 64).
49 Again the significance of this spelling is brought into relief when we consider that the
    indicative prefix conjugation of *dʕy* 'to read, invoke' is spelled *ydʕ* (QZMJ 468) /yadʕū/
    or /yadʕī/.

The complementizer ʾn

Arabic alone among the Semitic languages makes use of the particle *ʾan(na)* as a complementizer:

Safaitic[50]   *sm ʿ ʾn myt flfṣ*
            'he heard that Philip had died'
            srt sm ʿ ʾn ʿm-h…
            'he served in the military having heard that his paternal grandfather…'

Nunation and the vocative form with m

The northern dialects of Old Arabic had lost final nasalization on singular nouns in the pre-historic period. Yet, forms with otiose *n* persist and these can be interpreted as vestiges of ancient nunation. A handful of examples are discussed in Al-Jallad (2015a: 69), but no system as such can be identified. In the QCT, and therefore in Classical Arabic, the divine name *ʾallāh* can take a special suffix when in the vocative: *ʾallāhumma*. The same peculiarity is found in Hismaic, where both the divine name *lh* (= (al)lāh) and *lt* (= (al)lāt) can take a final *m* in the vocative, e.g. *h lhm* = /hā-llāhumma/, *h ltm* = /hā-llātumma/ (King 1990: 63).

3ʳᵈ feminine plural of the suffix conjugation

The Proto-Semitic third person feminine plural of the suffix conjugation terminated in a long -*ā*, while Arabic levelled the prefix conjugation ending, -*na*, to the suffix, producing *faʕalna* (Huehnergard 2017). Feminine plurals are rare in the inscriptions, but one clear example has so far been attested in Safaitic, exhibiting the Arabic innovation: *w ṭrdn h-ḫl* (QZMJ 128) 'and the horses were driven together'. Nevertheless, Huehnergard explains that this is a very obvious analogy and therefore the feature should probably not be assigned too much weight.

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50 Al-Jallad (2015a: 165).

Prepositions, particles, and varia

The value of prepositions is difficult to assess when it comes to classification. Mascitelli (2006: 19), followed by Huehnergard (2017: 22), conclude that the locative preposition *fī* 'in' is restricted to Arabic, and this is attested in Safaitic. A number of other prepositions and particles unique to Arabic are found in Safaitic as well, most notably ʿ*nd* 'at',[51] and possibly *ḥt* = (QCT *ḥty*, CAr *ḥattā*) 'until'.[52] Safaitic also attests the independent pronominal base *y-* (= Classical Arabic *ʔiyyā*) (Al-Jallad 2015a: 95).[53] The form *ʔanāku* seems to have disappeared in Safaitic, but one must bear in mind that there are only a handful of cases requiring the 1st common singular independent pronoun (ibid.). In Hismaic, only the form *ʾn* is attested, 14 times in the OCIANA corpus.

   In addition to these, a unique Arabic development is attested in one Hismaic inscription that deserves remark. In many Arabic dialects, the imperative of the verb 'to give' has a quasi-suppletive form *hāt, hātī, hātū,* etc, a frozen form of the C-stem of √ʔtw 'to come'.[54] This feature is found in a rather clear context in a Hismaic inscription.[55] The combination of irregular developments required to produce this forms speaks against a parallel development.

T-*demonstratives*

Huehnergard (2017) has suggested the *t*-demonstrative as Proto-Arabic innovation and I have followed him in previous works (e.g. 2015a: 12). If he is correct, then this is another example of a Proto-Arabic innovation attested in Safaitic, e.g. *qbll m-t h-snt* 'may this year bring a reunion (with loved ones) (HAUI 198, Al-Jallad 2015a: 84); *t h-ḥṭṭ* 'this writing' (BS 870); *t l-wṣn* 'this (writing) is for Wṣn' (KRS 209). However, I am now inclined to follow Hueh-

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51 AAEK 173: ʿ*rf sfr ʾb-h* ʿ*nd h-rgm* 'he recognized the writing of his father at the cairn'.

52 This particle is attested once in an unformulaic context, so full confirmation of its existence must await future attestations; *ṣyd ḥt wqf* 'he hunted until exhaustion (lit. stopping)' (Al-Jallad 2015: 164).

53 AWS 218: *s¹ʿd-h rḍw nʿm w bḏ ḏr w yh brk* 'may Rḍw help him through divine favour because there is danger here and may he (Rḍw) bless him'.

54 See Al-Jallad (2017: 104, n.22) on this feature. The form exhibits two remarkable features, the preservation of the *h-* of the causative morpheme and the loss of the glottal stop: *haʔti >hāt*, instead of the expected *ʾʾt* in Hismaic.

55 The text was deciphered by King (KJC 46) with the first line re-edited by Al-Jallad (2017: 104, n.23) as: *w m ḫll ḍyr-h / ht* ʿ*św w rsl / sm*ʿ*t ḏśry w ktby* 'and whoever washes his wounds, give [an offering of] an evening meal and milk that Dusares and Kutbay may hear'.

nergard's other suggestion, namely, that the *t*-demonstratives are a "bizarre remnant from Afro-Asiatic".[56]

4. The classification of Dadanitic

Dadanitic is the term Macdonald gave to the script of the oasis of Dadān, in north-western Arabia, replacing earlier terms such as Dedanite and Lihyanite. The Dadanitic corpus is far smaller than the Safaitic one but it is the only corpus of Ancient North Arabian to have a true monumental tradition.[57] The PhD thesis (*in preparation*) of F. Kootstra argues convincingly that the oasis of Dadān was not monolingual and that the diversity of spoken languages at the oasis may have had an effect on the linguistic profile of the inscriptions. The main language of the Dadanitic inscriptions appears to be distinct from Arabic and exhibits features that cannot be otherwise reconstructed for Proto-Arabic. These are:

The causative

In addition to the ʔ-causative common to most of the Arabian languages north of Yemen, Dadanitic has *h*-causatives like Sabaic. This feature cannot be understood as the result of influence from the Minaean colony at Dadan (Rossi 2014), as Minaic has an *s*-causative. Like Aramaic, it would seem that Dadanitic experienced the shift of *h* to ʔ in the causative morpheme in the historical period (Gzella 2015: 34). The co-occurrence of both forms in the same formulaic context, however, suggests that the progressive ʔ-form had entered the scribal school as well (Kootstra, forthcoming). While some remnants of the *h*-causative can be identified in Arabic, most of which are loans, no productive *h*-morpheme is reconstructible for Proto-Arabic.

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56 A paper on the reconstruction of the Proto-Arabic demonstrative series is currently in preparation. The main reason for the shift of my opinion is that the *t*-onset cannot be plausibly derived from any other part of the grammar, all other feminine markers being suffixes. Moreover, the principle of archaic heterogeneity favors a demonstrative series *ḏ* (masculine), *t* (feminine), *ʾul* (plural), where subsequent *ḏ* feminine can be explained through leveling.

57 According to OCIANA, the number of Dadanitic texts is 1969 while Safaitic has 33164, and this does not include the tens of thousands of texts discovered since the publication of the database. For an overview of Dadanitic (nomenclature and grammatical features), see Macdonald (2000; 2004) and the forthcoming dissertation of F. Kootstra.

The anaphoric pronoun hʔ

Dadanitic retains the use of the 3rd person pronouns as anaphoric demonstratives, meaning it did not participate in the Arabic innovation of replacing these forms with distal demonstratives derived from the proximal base (Huehnergard 2017: 22).[58] Note also that the form of the pronoun is *hʾ* [huʔa], with a glottal stop, rather than *hw* [huwa]. Only the latter form is reconstructible for Arabic.

The feminine ending

Dadanitic does not seem to have levelled the *-at* allomorph of the feminine ending (Huehnergard 2017: 20), e.g. *qrt* 'settlement, village' /qarīt/ vs. Arabic *qaryatun,* which would appear in Dadanitic orthography as *qryt*.[59]

The form of the dual

Verb forms originally terminating in *-h* have previously been regarded as duals (Sima 1999; Macdonald 2004: 526). These contrast with the dual ending on pronominal suffixes, which is *-y, -hmy* 'both of them'. I suggest that this asymmetric situation should probably be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic, with languages like Sabaic levelling ending *-ay* to the verb while Classical Arabic levelled the *-ā* of the verb to the pronominal suffixes:

	Dadanitic	Classical Arabic	Sabaic
Verbal suffix	*-h* /ā/	/ā/	*y* /ay/
Pronominal suffix	*-y* /ay/	/ā/	*y* /ay/

In this case, Dadanitic preserves the Proto-Semitic situation and, as such, the feature cannot be used for classification.[60]

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58 For example, JSLih 78: *w ʾl-h hʾ* 'and the aforementioned is for him'.

59 This occurs in the inscription JSLih 64; a convincing interpretation of this difficult text is offered in Lundberg (2015: 134).

60 The Classical Arabic situation is not likely reconstructable for Proto-Arabic. Most of the Arabic dialects have lost this feature, and so it is unclear what forms they would have had in the verb or pronouns. Safaitic does not employ *matres lectionis,* and so it is unclear if the pronouns inflect for the dual. The verb, on the other hand, seems to attest a dual

The conjunction ʿdky

A minor feature. In all forms of Arabic, the Proto-Central Semitic subordinating conjunction *ʿad+kay* has been replaced by a new particle *ḥattay*, which, I have argued, is a combination of the nominal form 'border' *ḥadd* and the subordinator *tay/tā*.[61] Dadanitic retains the original conjunction.[62]

The numerals

Huehnergard (1995) identified the form of the tens terminating with the masculine external plural *-ūna, -īna* as a Central Semitic innovation. These forms are found in Dadanitic, e.g. *ʾrbʿn, s²rn,* etc. (Macdonald 2004: 522), distinguishing it from Ancient South Arabian, which has *-y*.
These features, I think, suggest that Dadanitic did not descend from Proto-Arabic but is rather a sister language. Whether Proto-Arabic and Dadanitic constitute a separate sub-grouping or whether their common ancestor is Proto-Central Semitic will have to await the discovery of more texts.

4.1 Arabic at Dadān

While Dadanitic proper may be excluded as a variety of Arabic, there was another Semitic language in the area that seems to have been a variety of Arabic, one which I have called Old Ḥigāzī (Al-Jallad 2015a: 13–14; forthcoming). The main isogloss of Old Ḥigāzī is the relative pronoun based on the portmanteau demonstrative *(h)alla+DEM*, e.g. CAr *ʔallaḏī*. JSLih 384 attests the feminine form *ʾlt* /ʔallatī/ (Müller 1982: 32–33; Macdonald 2008 and Macdonald in Fiema et al. 2015: 409). The feature, attested once, may suggest that speakers of Old Ḥigāzī used Dadanitic as a literary language, much like speakers of Nabataean Arabic commissioned their official inscriptions in Aramaic.

The presence of speakers of Old Ḥigāzī may also explain the occasional use of the *ʔal*-article in Dadanitic, e.g. *ʾ-ẓll* 'the ẓll-ceremony' (AH 119, 138); *ʾl-ʾsd* 'the lion' (Al-Ḫuraymāt 4). Macdonald considered these examples of mixed Old Arabic texts (2000, 2008), and if JSLih 384 indicates that Old Ḥigāzī was spoken at the oasis at the same time as Dadanitic, then it is certain-

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ending *y* (Al-Jallad 2015a: 103), suggesting a similar innovation to Sabaic. If so, then the asymmetric paradigm of Dadanitic should also be reconstructed for Proto-Arabic.

61 See Al-Jallad (2014) and (2018b).

62 The particle is attested in JSLih 72: *mn mʿn h-gbl hn-ʾʿly ʿdky mʿd h-gbl hn-ʾs{f}l* 'from the assembly place of the upper border to the sanctuary of the lower border' (Lundberg 2015: 135).

ly possible that the *ʔal* is the result of substrate influence. However, considering the Safaitic situation and, indeed, that of Thamudic F (below), it is possible that variation in the shape of the definite article was something inherent to Dadanitic as well.

   Another feature typical of Classical Arabic and the QCT is the replacement of the infinitive as a verbal complement with a subordinated clause introduced by *ʾn*, cf. CAr *ʾan yafʕala* 'that he do'. This feature is attested only once in the North Arabian epigraphy, in a fragmentary Dadanitic inscription from al-ʿUlā.

AH 203   *1: hm ---- [ḏ]–*
          2: ġbt/ʾ{n}/yk{n}----
          3: l-h/{w}ld/f rḍy [-h] ----
          4: w ʾḫrt-h {ḏ}----
          '[PN made an offering to] Ḏġbt **that he may have offspring** so satisfy him and his progeny'

The text contains no other diagnostic features, so it is impossible to say if in the text was carved in Old Ḥigāzī, like JSLih 384, if the feature is simply substrate influence on Dadanitic, or if this is originally a Dadanitic feature that was taken over by the Arabic dialects of the Ḥigāz but nowhere else.

5. Taymanitic

Taymanitic refers to the North Arabian script and its associated language used at the oasis of Taymāʾ and surrounding areas. The corpus and the classification of its language was the subject of a comprehensive study by Kootstra (2016), in which special attention was given to its linguistic classification. Kootstra convincingly argues that Taymanitic should be excluded from the Arabic classification as it merges *s^3 and *$ṯ$ rather than *s^1. This merger belongs to a broader shift that collapses the interdentals and sibilants, merging *$ḏ$ and *z and *$ṯ$ and *$ṣ$ as well (2016: 105). Taymanitic also does not participate in the Proto-Arabic sound change of *iwa* to *iya*, spelling the verb *raḍiwa* as *rḍw* rather than *rḍy* (= /raḍiya/). A final development is the shift of *w* to *y* in word-initial position, attested clearly twice, e.g. *yrḫ* 'month' (ibid.),[63] which may suggest a closer affinity to Northwest Semitic. Confirmation of this hypothesis must await the discovery of longer and clearer texts.

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63 Proto-Semitic *warḫum*, Safaitic *wrḫ* (Al-Jallad 2015: 353), but Proto-Northwest Semitic *yarḫu*.

6. Thamudic

Before discussing the classification of the Thamudic inscriptions, we should make it absolutely clear that Thamudic does not refer to a single language or script, nor does it refer to a group of languages and scripts that have more in common with each other than the other groupings. Following Macdonald, it is simply a category for inscriptions that do not fall into one of the better understood classifications. The interrelationships between the different scripts remain poorly understood, as do their chronologies, and languages.[64] Today, four categories of Thamudic are distinguished, B, C, D, and F. These groupings are certainly too broad and will be revised in upcoming years as the texts are subjected to closer and more systematic studies. B, C, and D are what remain from Winnett's seminal 1937 study of the Thamudic inscriptions,[65] and the Franco-Saudi surveys of the Ḥimà region near Naǧrān have added a new member, F or Himaitic, to the group (Robin and Gorea 2016). The following discussion will offer some preliminary impressions of the linguistic affiliation of these texts and will certainly be subjected to modification as our knowledge improves.

6.1 Thamudic B[66]

The classification of Thamudic B at this point is impossible. The corpus contains primarily personal names and signatures associated with rock art; moreover, the scripts classified under this rubric are quite diverse and certainly form better defined sub-groupings.

The definite article, which is mostly used with a demonstrative force, is always *h-*. The first and second person suffix conjugations terminate in *t,* unlike the *k*'s of South Arabia.[67] One peculiar feature is the use of *nm* as a dative preposition, perhaps reflecting an original form *lm*, as in Taymanitic (Kootstra 2016: 101), with regressive assimilation, **lima > nima*. The imperative verb is often followed by an energic *n*, *ʾtm-n* 'restore to heath!' (Winnett 1987). Winnett has suggested the existence of the dative preposition *k-* but confirmation must await the discovery of clearer examples (Winnett, no date). Despite the fact that Thamudic B is the most widespread category, the limited linguistic

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64 For a good overview of Thamudic, see Macdonald (2000).

65 Originally Winnett also distinguished a Thamudic A and E, but these are today called by most Taymanitic and Hismaic, respectively.

66 On the identification of the letter shapes of Thamudic B, see Winnett (1937: 28–34) and the script chart in Macdonald (2000).

67 For example, the phrase *ʾn rfʾt* 'I am healed' (Eskoubi-B 175 in Hayajneh 2011: 770).

facts provided by the inscriptions prevent any judgement regarding its linguistic classification. In terms of content, Thamudic B overlaps with Safaitic and Hismaic in a few ways, namely, prayers of the structure *h* + divine name + *sʿd* 'help' + PN and the signing of rock art, something rarely encountered in other corpora.

6.2 Thamudic C[68]

The Thamudic C inscriptions are characterized by an introductory formula with *wdd*. The exact meaning of this word is not agreed upon by scholars (Tsafrir 1996). These texts can be subdivided into several categories, with two main branches C1 and C2, based on geography and the phonemic values of the glyphs (Al-Jallad 2016). Considering the brief nature of these texts, there is only a few things to say about their linguistic character.

The verb and pronouns

The first person possessive suffix pronoun is consonantal, *y*, at least when attached to a noun in the accusative case and the personal suffix of the first person suffix conjugation is a *t*, e.g. *ktmt sˡmy* = */katamtu simay(y)a/ 'I have concealed my name',[69] in contrast with the *k* endings of Ancient and Modern South Arabian. In a single inscription with an invocation to *dgn* (= Dagan(?)), an *s*-based 3ms pronoun is attested:

WRTH 80[70]   *h dgn l- yd h-ʾlht **mlt -sˡ***

    'O Dagan, may **his people** be in the company of the goddess/
    gods.'

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68 On the script type and contents, see Winnett (1937: 34–38). The corpus is spread from Northwest to Central Arabia and no chronological information has come to light, so any dating of this grouping is entirely conjectural.

69 There is no evidence for the use of *matres lectionis* in Thamudic C so the *y* in this inscription must be construed as consonantal. On this inscription, see Winnett and Reed (1970: 131–32, no. 74).

70 This inscription makes use of the bar with two circles on each end for the glyph *g*, the same value this glyph has in Hismaic. Most previous studies have regarded the divine name here as *dṯn*; however, a connection with *dgn* seems more plausible as the latter is a well-known deity. This issue will be taken up in a comprehensive article on the Thamudic C inscriptions, which is in preparation. My interpretation of the inscription differs entirely from the *editio princeps* and so I will provide a short commentary here. *l-yd* I take as /la-yad/ 'at the hand', cf. Aramaic *lyd* 'next to' (CAL) and perhaps related to the Arabic preposition *ladā* 'at'< *la-yadā. The term *mlt* should be equated with Arabic

This inscription also provides the single attestation of the definite article in Thamudic C, *h-ʾlht*. It is also possible that *h ʾlht* is a proper noun and so the definite article does not reflect the situation in the language of the Thamudic C inscriptions.

The main prepositions of this corpus are *l-* 'authorship, to, for, by' and possibly *k-* 'to, for' (JS 50; NTQT 83). The conjunction *f* is attested perhaps with a comitative meaning,[71] and *w* to connect two clauses.

Several personal names are attested with mimation: *rs¹qm* */risqum/ (NTJT 82); *ʾmnm* */ʔamanum/ (NTJT 93); *gmʿm* */gumʿum/ (NTJT 105); *ʾmtm* */ʔamatum/ (NTJT 115). If this is a feature of the language of these inscriptions rather than of their source, then this would disqualify Thamudic C as a form of Arabic.

Finally, two proximal demonstratives are attested, *zn* and *zt*, indicating the loss of the interdental *ḏ*.

Although short, the Thamudic C inscriptions exhibit an array of features that are completely alien to Arabic and likely reflect a distinct language. This fact is brought into relief when we consider texts such as the following, which has so far defied interpretation, suggesting that if longer texts were available, we would be dealing with a variety as distinct from Arabic as the non-Sabaic Ancient South Arabian languages.

Esk 204: *wdd f s¹w//t ʾl ʾs¹ s¹w ʾ//wdd*

6.3 Thamudic D

Thamudic D furnishes us with one dated inscription: JSTham 1 accompanies the famous Nabataean inscription JSNab 17, dated to 267 CE. As such it is the latest securely dated Ancient North Arabian inscription. But when it comes to linguistic classification, we can say nothing in any detail about the affiliation of these inscriptions. As far as I know, not even the definite article has been attested in this corpus. Two introductory particles are known, *zn* and *zt*, which could reflect proximal demonstratives and attest to the merger of *ḏ* and *z*. These

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millatun 'people, nation' perhaps related to the root √*mll* 'to speak', referring to co-linguals originally. The sense of 'to speak' is entirely lost in Classical Arabic, but Safaitic attests the term *mly* 'words' once, in reference to a Greek inscription (!) (Macdonald, Al Muʾazzin, and Nehmé 1996, MISSI 2; Al-Jallad 2015a: 327).

71 The *f* frequently occurs after *wdd*, overlapping with *b-*, and so it is reasonable to assume a similar function. While some have connected the *f* to the Arabic preposition *fī*, it is probably better to regard it as closer in function to the comitative *wāw* (*wāw al-māʿiyyah*), lit. *wdd f* PN would render 'greetings be with PN'.

alone suggest that the language is not ancestral to Arabic or closely related to Classical Arabic. The inscriptions sometimes contain expressions of love and longing, with the verb ʿs²q, meaning presumably 'to love', and a participle *mḥb* or *mḥbb*. These variant spellings suggest that it is a passive particle of the C-stem rather than a G-stem *mafʿūl* pattern; thus, *muḥabb* or *muḥbab*. A few longer texts exist in Thamudic D and these have so far defied interpretation.[72]

6.4 Thamudic F

Thamudic F is one of the terms suggested by Robin and Gorea (2016) for the non-South Arabian inscriptions of the site of Ḥimà, near Naǧrān.[73] These texts consist almost exclusively of names and the verb *wqr* 'to carve'. In some of the theophoric names, however, the definite article is attested in many shapes, *hl, ʾl, h, hn, h,* and *ʾ,* and the Ancient South Arabian suffix *-n*. While this says nothing about classification, it does provide yet another example of the extreme diversity of article forms attested across Arabia. Some of the personal names are also marked with mimation.

Prioletta (2018) suggests that there is evidence for the shift of *w* to *y* in word-initial position, citing the following by-forms *wqr = yqr* and *wdd = ydd*. The verb form *tqr* was identified as a Gt stem (ibid), equated with CAr *ittaqa-ra*, suggesting the infixation of the *t*.

7. The question of the "Northern" dialect of Sabaic

The Sabaic inscriptions from the Yemeni Jawf, called in the literature by various names, including Haramic, Amiritic, Sabaeo-North-Arabian, and simply the 'Northern Dialect' (Stein 2004: 228), are characterized by a number of

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72 Consider, for example, WTI 63, which Winnett and Reed read and translate as follows: *wznzʾ(g)wzfry|wḥmyztfʿlmrḥḥm* 'And Zʾg and Zfry have committed adultery. And this deed stinks worse than a stinking fart'. While this interpretation strains credulity, the syntax and etymological analysis are not convincing.

73 These texts have previously been labelled "southern Thamudic" (Macdonald 2000) and were preliminarily described by Ryckmans (1956). I have settled on the term Thamudic F rather than Himaitic because there remains a great deal of graphic variation in the script to sort out. Thamudic F, in the end, may encompass several scripts and so the label Thamudic seems appropriate for now.

features that have suggested to scholars an "Arabic" admixture. These are, following Stein:

1) The assimilation of *n* to a following consonant;
2) The use of the s³ glyph for etymological *t and s¹ for etymological *$s;$
3) The spelling of the preposition *ʿdy* as *ʿd*;
4) Inconsistent use of mimation;
5) The preposition *mn* rather than Sabaic *bn*;
6) The conjunction *b-hn* 'because';
7) The negative preterite formed with the use of *lm* and the short form of the prefix conjugation.

In addition to this list, we may add the person-number-gender suffixes on the 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ person of the suffix conjugation in *t* (cf. Arabic *katabtu, katabta, katabti*) rather than *k* (Sabaic, *fʿlk* 'I have done').

Macdonald (2000: 55) discusses these features in his usual thorough and balanced way. While such a list would suggest that these 'intrusions' are a regular part of the dialect, Macdonald emphasizes the rarity of these forms. From a corpus of twenty texts, the negative *lm* + prefix conjugation occurs in only four. The use of *s¹* for *s³* in only two texts, and the use of *s³* for *t in only one; these texts are in all other respects Sabaic. But more important than their rarity is the fact that none of these features, with the exception of *lm yfʿl*, points exclusively towards Arabic. All are characteristic of any non-South Arabian Semitic language. By assuming an Arabic source, one risks essentializing the languages of Arabia to two groups – Arabic and Ancient South Arabian. Macdonald (2000: 57) offers a compelling solution to the linguistic nature of these texts:

> "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."

The final possibility should be emphasized again. We should not necessarily assume a strong linguistic border separating Sabaic from the Arabian languages spoken to the north of it. Instead, it is likely that Arabia constituted a continuum of Central Semitic languages, for which we are afforded only glimpses by the epigraphic record. The Yemeni Jawf could have been a frontier area, where features typical of North Arabian languages, broadly defined, and Saba-

ic mixed, very similar to the dialects of the ʿAsīr today.[74] In other words, the Haram inscriptions may be a point on a dialect continuum between a language like Dadanitic, which has *h*-causatives, dual pronouns in *hmy*, the anaphoric use of the 3rd person pronoun *hʾ*, but a prefixed definite article, and Sabaic.

About 100km to the northeast at the oasis of Qaryat al-Fāw, we encounter another artefact attesting to this linguistic continuum.[75] While perfectly good Sabaic and Minaic texts come from the oasis, an epitaph in a language so far unique has been discovered, the so-called *rbbl bn hfˤm* grave inscription. Unlike the seemingly 'mixed' character of some of the Haram inscriptions, this text was composed in an entirely different language. Most scholars have regarded the inscription as an example of "Old Arabic" on account of the definite article *ʾl*.[76] In addition to all the arguments I have presented above for treating *ʾl* as the single isogloss defining whether a language is or is not Arabic, it is clear that *ʾl* was simply one of many article forms used in this region. Other features of this text mark it off from Arabic, including the productive use of mimation, yet according to a distribution distinct from Sabaic, a negative construction with *bn*, the conjunction *ˤdky*, and more.[77] This epitaph could attest a dialect that sat on this continuum of Central Semitic languages, a close relative of Proto-Arabic, yet not participating in some of the important isoglosses that define that group of languages, such as spread of nunation to singular nouns.

8. East Arabia

The linguistic situation of East Arabia is far less clear than that of the west. Like West Arabia, Aramaic was used widely as a literary language (Stein 2018). But in the Late Antique period, Syriac writers from the region refer to a non-Arabic

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74 For example, the Arabic dialect of Riğāl Almaˤ (Saudi Asir), the word for daughter is *brat*, similar to Modern South Arabian and Aramaic (Watson 2011a: 861)! Watson has produced a series of studies (Watson 2011b; Watson 2014; Watson et al. 2006) on the Arabic dialects of south-western Arabia. While these dialects exhibit a comparable mix of features, they do not represent a natural continuum from Arabic to the ancient languages of South Arabia. Instead, they likely resulted from a convergence between the later movement of Arabic into this region and early Semitic languages. Features like *bar* and *brat*, for example, are not typical of Sabaic, but can be found in Modern South Arabian, which is today spoken hundreds of miles away.

75 To date, the only resource on the excavations of this site and its inscriptions is al-Ansary (1982).

76 For example, Beeston 1981; Robin 2001; Macdonald 2008.

77 The genetic position of the language of this epitaph is discussed in detail in Al-Jallad (2014).

and non-Aramaic colloquial called *qaṭrayith*.[78] This language is only known from glosses in Syriac manuscripts – its lexicon appears to be distinct from Arabic (Kozah, forthcoming), as we know it, but little more can be said.[79]

The inscriptional evidence attests a local Arabian language in a script called Hasaitic by scholars. It is a close derivative of the Ancient South Arabian alphabet, but its language was considered a part of the North Arabian group because some of the personal names attested in the inscriptions contain the *hn* article, e.g. *ʾmt-hnʾlt* 'maiden of the goddess', *ʾws-hnʾlt* 'gift of the goddess' (Sima 2002: 189) and certain formulaic expressions.[80]

As Macdonald has so carefully argued in the past, theophoric elements in personal names cannot serve for the diagnosis of the language of the text within which they are couched. The relatively small corpus of formulaic grave inscriptions, however, offered little else to go on. A single feature, discussed by A. Sima (2002: 193–194), in a bilingual Hasaitic-Aramaic inscription from Thaj suggested that the article in Hasaitic was a post-positive glottal stop, *mlkʾ*, as in Aramaic.[81] With only one attestation, and the presence of an Aramaic component in the same inscription, this identification could be little more than a suggestion. The excavations at Mleiha in the Arabian Gulf, however, have brought to light several new texts in Hasaitic. A minuscule inscription carved on a silver plaque confirms that the article in Hasaitic was a suffixed *ʾ*, as the following phrase is entirely Hasaitic and no appeal to Aramaic can be made: *ṣlḫft-ʾ zʾt* 'this metal plaque' (Stein 2017).

The same inscription also gives the verb *hqnt* as the causative of *qny* 'to offer'. If this is a native feature, and not a borrowing from Sabaic, then it would

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78 Note that in Syriac literature from the 4th to 9th centuries, Qatar refers to the entire Northeast Arabia, including present-day Qatar, Bahrain, and parts of the UAE.

79 For a good overview of Qaṭrayith, see Contini (2003); Kozah (2014).

80 Macdonald (2008: 492–493) characterizes the Hasaitic script as basically the Ancient South Arabian one with some modifications. The language was included in the Ancient North Arabian category on account of expressions like *ḏ ʾl* 'of the lineage'. This of course is a non-linguistic criterion and is in any case absent so far in Thamudic C and D, and is extremely rare in Dadanitic and Thamudic B.

81 The inscription sits at a bottom of a well and is badly weathered. Lines four and five are partially legible and read following Sima *l(h)/snt/ʾḥdy/ʾtbl/mlkʾ/wdʾb* 'im Jahre eins von ʾtbl, dem König. Wadd-ʾAb.' Robin and Prioletta (2013) very cleverly argue that *ʾtbl* is the Characene king Attembelos, but do not explain the missing final *s* and must appeal to the ad-hoc writing of *mb* as simply *b*. The inscription has been re-discovered during the first season of the Saudi-Dutch-French Thaj Archaeological Project and it seems that Sima's reading of the first two letters as *ʾ* and *t* is rather difficult and certainly impossible to substantiate on the stone itself.

suggest that Hasaitic had *h*-causatives as well. The spellings *hqnt* instead of *hqnyt* further suggest that triphthongs had collapsed in certain environments.[82]

The inscription Thaj.Has 1 spells the sibilant of the common Arabian name *zayd* with the hashtag glyph #, which is the South Arabian alphabet signifies /ḏ/. This can only indicate that the voiced interdental and sibilant had merged to /z/, similar to Ḥaḍramitic, Thamudic C and D.

The most famous of these is the bilingual tomb inscription of ʿmd son of Gr, the *bqr*[83] of the king of ʿ*mn* (= Ṣumān) (Overlaet, Macdonald, and Stein 2016). The inscription furnishes a single isogloss that has been the subject of some debate. In addition to the word *bn* in the Hasaitic text, the author uses *br*. While the edition takes this as an Aramaicism, it is possible in light of the use of a similar form in the Modern South Arabian languages to consider this the result of substrate influence from a language similar to Modern South Arabian. The text also attests a dual relative pronoun *zy*, perhaps /zay/,[84] giving us the following paradigm for Hasaitic (ibid. 137):

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82 Stein (2017: 115) suggests that *hqnt* should be vocalized as *haqnēt*, reflecting the collapse of the triphthong to ē. While certainly possible, one cannot rule out *haqnat* or even *haqnit*/*haqnet*, as the vowel would likely have been reduced in a closed syllable. According to the most plausible reconstruction of the language of the QCT, we would have the pair *bny* /banē/ and *bnt* /banat/ (Van Putten 2017).

83 The meaning of this term is unclear; see the edition for a discussion.

84 The edition considers the possibility that *zy* is a plene spelling of the singular, which usually appears as *z*. However, given that *zy* occurs in a second inscription with a dual antecedent and never with inscriptions with a singular antecedent, this explanation seems most unlikely, as they concede (Overlaet, Macdonald, and Stein 2016: 137, n. 22).

Masculine Singular	*z* /zV/
Feminine Singular	*zʾt* /zāʔat/ or /zaʔt/
Dual	*zy* /zay/
Plural	*ʾlwt* /ʔVlawāt/

The numerals

The number twenty is attested once as *ʿs²rn* (Robin 1994, no. 1), exhibiting Huehnergard's Central Semitic innovation in the tens (1995).

The combination of these features makes Hasaitic quite unlikely to be descendent of Proto-Arabic and certainly rules out any genetic relationship with the dialects of Arabic spoken in the region today. It is impossible at this point to assess the relationship between Hasaitic and Qaṭrayith.

8.1 The Dhofār Inscriptions

The Dhofār region of Omān is home to a small, yet ever-growing, corpus of painted inscriptions in a South Semitic script, not identical to any of the better known Ancient North Arabian alphabets or the Ancient South Arabian alphabet of Yemen. These short texts, found almost exclusively in caves, have remained undeciphered.[85] It is possible, although impossible to prove at the moment, that the language of these texts is ancestral to the Modern South Arabian languages of the region, such as Mehri, which have so far not appeared in the epigraphic record.

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85 The texts discovered as of 1991 are catalogued in Al-Shahri and King (1991), but this edition contains only hand drawings. New technologies will hopefully improve their study (Le Quellec et al. 2018).

9. Conclusion

This essay has hoped to demonstrate three arguments:

1) Ancient North Arabian is not a well-defined linguistic family to the exclusion of Arabic.
2) Arabic cannot be defined by a single isogloss, the shape of the definite article. A more robust linguistic definition includes Safaitic, Hismaic, and some inscriptions in the Dadanitic script, at least, into the group of languages we must regard as Arabic.
3) Ancient Arabia comprises a linguistic continuum of Central Semitic languages, stretching from the southern Levant to northern Yemen, possibly including Sabaic. As argued by Stein and Kottsieper (2014), the Non-Sabaic Ancient South Arabian languages and the Modern South Arabian languages could reflect a more archaic stratum, pre-dating the southern expansion of Central Semitic.[86] The place of the languages attested in Thamudic awaits better documentation, but one can speculate, based on their impenetrable language, that they too reflect a pre-Central Semitic stratum.

From a geographic perspective, the isoglosses typical of Arabic are clustered at the northern end of this continuum, in the north-western Ḥigāz and southern Levant. While this may be in part due to the better documentation of the languages in this area, inscriptions from North Central Arabia, South Arabia, and East Arabia all reveal languages considerably distinct form Arabic and do not participate in several Proto-Arabic innovations. Thus, it would seem that the language which we would identify as Arabic emerged sometime in the second millennium in this region and then eventually spread across the Peninsula, replacing its sister languages on this continuum. The reasons for this are at present unclear. A preliminary classification of the languages of pre-Islamic North and Central Arabia is as follows (Figure 1). I have omitted Thamudic B because of the lack of information and the emerging picture that the scripts classified under this rubric are quite diverse and require a complete rethinking. The languages in the dotted circle were argued to be on a continuum between Sabaic, Dadanitic, and Arabic. The question marks next to Thamudic C and D indicate that their linguistic features do not allow for a more precise classification.

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86 I cannot, however, follow the suggestion of a special relationship between Sabaic and Aramaic.

*Figure 1: Classification of the languages of pre-Islamic North and Central Arabia*
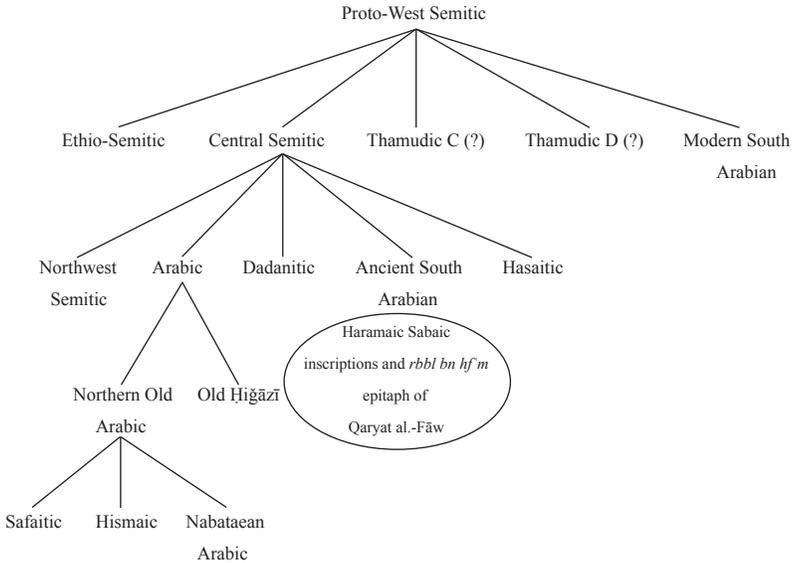
A linguistic definition of the languages of the Arabian Peninsula also allows us to re-consider a popular question in the literature: "why did Arabic not appear in the epigraphic record until so late"? This impression was in part the result of the very narrow definition of Arabic as Classical Arabic. The isoglosses associated with Arabic do in fact appear in the inscriptional record, and from this perspective Arabic is widely attested in the pre-Islamic period, across many scripts. It would therefore seem that the isoglosses of Classical Arabic, as defined by Macdonald at the beginning of this paper, perhaps have a shallow chronological origin and were extremely geographically restricted. Thus, the question would be akin to asking why English is not attested until the 18th century, while defining English as a language that collapsed plural distinction in the second person pronoun.

Despite the tens of thousands of inscriptions from across the Arabian Peninsula, Classical Arabic as such has not yet been attested. No inscription attests a fully functioning system of nunation, for example, and even when Classical Arabic forms such as *ʔallatī* are found, they co-occur with features that are rather distinct from the literary register of the Islamic period.[87]

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87 In JSLih 384, the 3fs verb is *bnh* /banah/, similar to some modern Yemeni dialects and

Map 1: Distribution of the languages and South Semitic scripts of pre-Islamic Arabia
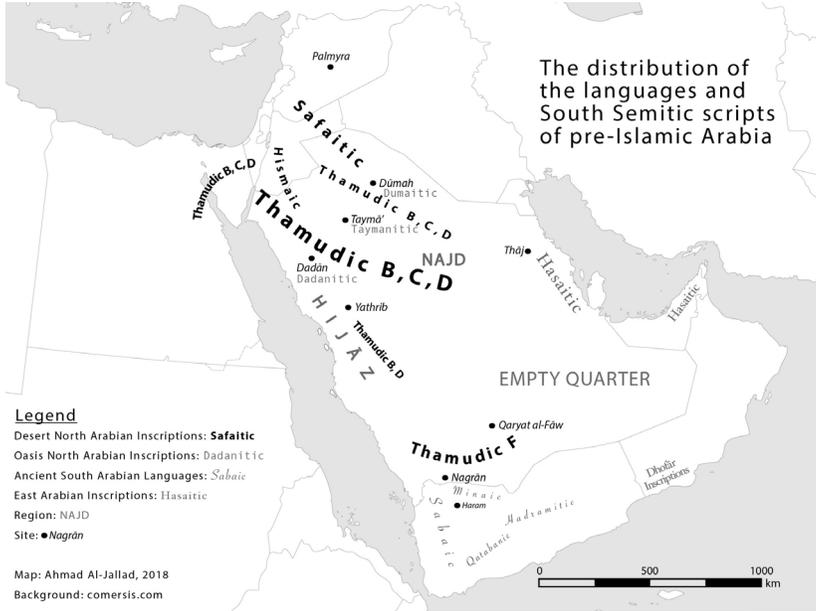
Sigla

AAEK:	Safaitic inscriptions in Al-Manaser 2008
AMSI:	Safaitic inscriptions in Al-Manaser 2016
AH	Dadanitic inscriptions in Abū l-Ḥasan 1997
Al-Ḥuraymāt	Dadanitic inscriptions on OCIANA
AMJ	Hismaic inscriptions in King 1990
BS	Safaitic inscriptions published on OCIANA from the 2015 Badia Survey
C	Safaitic inscriptions in Ryckmans 1950
HAUI	Unpublished inscriptions from the Mafraq Museum
JS	Thamudic inscriptions in Jaussen and Savignac 1909
JSLih	Dadanitic inscriptions in Jaussen and Savignac 1909

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distinct from the language of the QCT and Classical Arabic (Behnstedt 2016: 277).

KJA	Hismaic inscription in King 1990
KRS	Safaitic inscriptions published on OCIANA
NTJT	Thamudic inscriptions in Al-Theeb 2000a
NTQT	Thamudic inscriptions in Al-Theeb 2000b
NTST	Thamudic inscriptions in Al-Theeb 2000c
QZMJ	Unpublished Safaitic inscriptions to appear on OCIANA
ShNGA	Safaitic inscription in Shdeifat 2003
Thaj.Has	Unpublished Hasaitic inscription from Thaj, to appear in first season's report.
WRTH	Thamudic inscriptions in Winnett and Reed 1973
WTI	Thamudic inscriptions in Winnett and Reed 1970

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