

A THAMUDIC E TEXT FROM MĀDABĀ

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Introduction*

An inscription was found in the western part of the Mādabā Archaeological Park (متنزه مادبا الأثري), a project of the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) under the directorship of Pierre Bikai. It was not found in a stratified layer, but in modern debris above the mouth of a Roman-Byzantine cistern in the area where G. Schumacher (1895) located a temple on his map of Mādabā. Remains of a Roman temple were found ca. 100m to the east (Piccirillo and Denton 1996: 30).

The text is carved on the flat side of a piece of hard white limestone (flint) measuring 23 x 21cm (Fig. 1). It is executed in clear and standardized letters varying in size from 1 to 2cm, indicating execution by a professional. It consists of ca. 227 letters, of which 211 are complete and clear, 11 are partly preserved, and 5 were chipped off of the periphery, but can be filled in. The text is written in 11 horizontal lines. It begins from left to right, but when a line ends, the next line starts at the side where the prior one ended, a type of writing called a “plow-line” or *boustrophedon*. The text contains new information about religion, new names, as well as traditional Arab names. It also opens a window to the better understanding of the grammatical structure of the dialect, particularly in the use of verbs. The date of the text is uncertain, but it may well come from a period before the sixth century AD, by which time Christians dominated Mādabā (no less than 13 churches have been uncovered in the old city so far) and the goddess 'Allāt (mentioned three times in the text) would no longer have been worshipped under that name.

The inscription is among the longest of its kind found to date; its importance, however, may be that it was found in Mādabā. Many Thamudic E inscriptions have been documented in various parts of Jordan, including Wādī Ramm (وادي رم) and Wādī al-Judayid (وادي الجديد) (King 1988), and the area of Bāyir (باير) (al-Khraysheh 1994: 109-114). A very long text was found near Mādabā (at Uraynibah

أرينبه, to be published by M. Daviau), and there are assemblages at al-Yādūda (اليادودة) (LaBianca 1992), Wādī ath-Thamad (وادي التمد) (M. Daviau, personal communication), as well as at al-Jiza (الجزية) and Saḥāb (سحاب) (King 1990: 603-605). The total number of Thamudic E inscriptions that have been found between al-Muwaqar (الموقر) near 'Ammān and al-Azraq (الأزرق) to the east exceeds 200 (al-Khraysheh 2000: 59-70). As northern Jordan is an area where Safaitic inscriptions dominate, such numbers of Thamudic inscriptions in the north were unexpected.

Transliteration

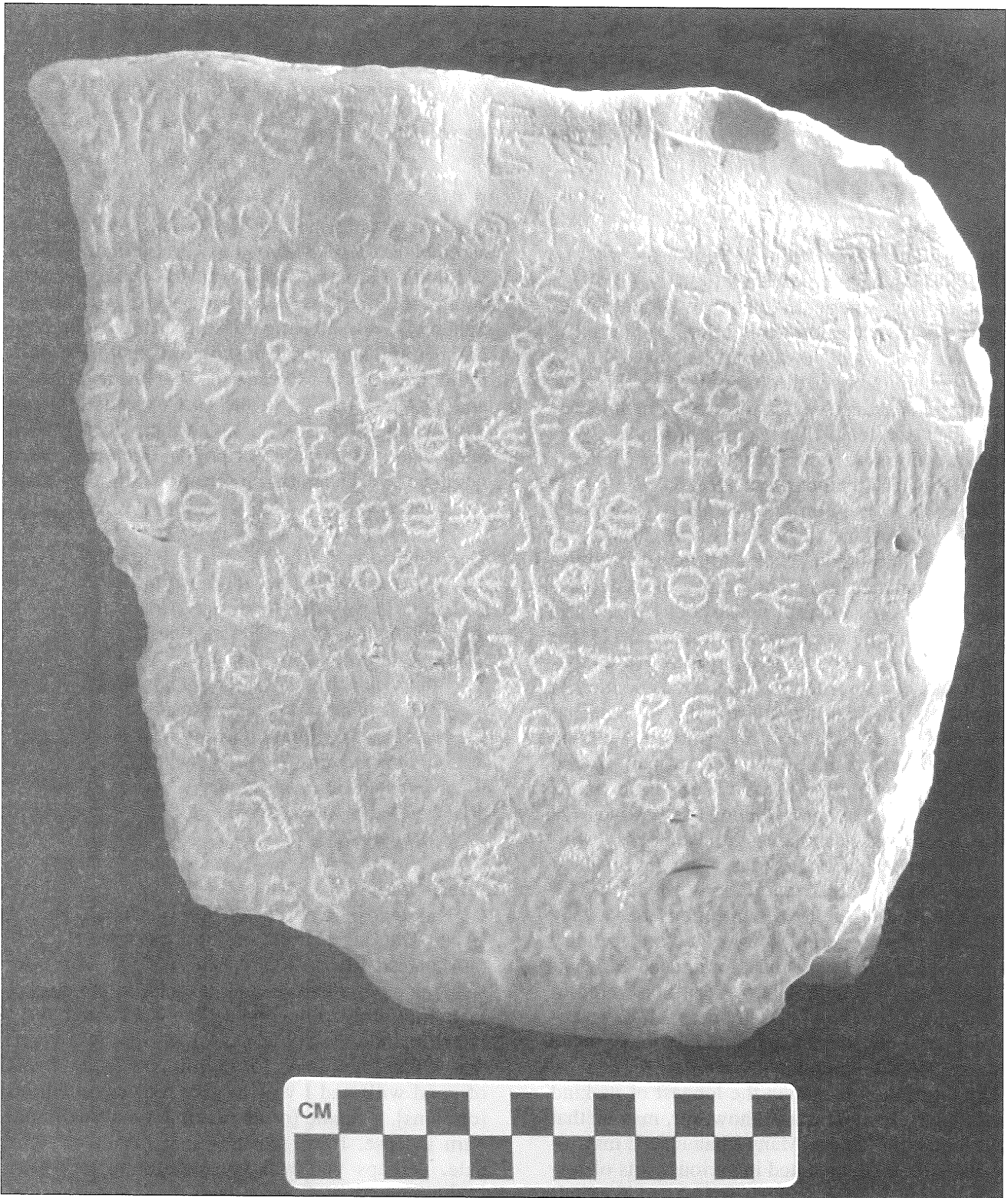
- 1 [l]flhn bn ḥnn bn 'tm dh'ln (t/y) w s
- 2 qm h' lh ṣ'b fḏr' w t'ny w tsh(h)
- 3 (d) lhb kll m f'l w ndhr 'rb' (') sl't
- 4 mnrt w 'fnt w ythlb ṣhry w
- 5 [']llk trhm 'ly w dhkrt lt 'shy'n kllh(m)
- 6 [b]dr w hbdn w 'slh w 'qrb w bn ...
- 7 w hblh w 'wdhlh w zd w bn ḥrb w
- 8 (w)dn w mlk bn s' dlh w 'thl w wshk(t)
- 9 w bd w wyl w wsm w dhkrt
- 10 lt mn yl'nn w l'nt lt mn y(kh)
- 11 (bl) wq'n dh

Translation

This text [is by] Falhan, son of Ḥunna, son of 'Atam Dhu'lan [Ta(y)? or from the tribe Na(t/j)?] (as suggested by al-Khraysheh 2000: 59-70). I am sick [or have a sickness as if death is coming]. I raise [my soul] to the god Ṣa'b and I submit and I kneel [or bow down] and acknowledge to give all that which I am doing [or to him god Ṣa'b all acts of good will] and I vow to give four commodities [or coins], a candle [or an oil lamp on a stand] and burn incense. I am sweating and my color turns pale. Perhaps you will be merciful to me. May 'Allāt remember all our people, Badr and Habadan and 'Iṣlah and 'Aqrab and son of [... and] Waha-ballah and 'Awadhallah and Zayd and son of Ḥarb and 'Adan and Malik, son of Sa'dallah, and 'Athal

* An early version of the article, co-authored by Fawwaz al-Khraysheh and Pierre M. Bikai, was published in Arabic (“An Arabic Inscription in Thamudic Characters from Jordan”, *Adumatu* 2 [July 2000]: 59-70). By an error of the editors of *Adumatu*, the name of Pierre M. Bikai was omitted.

The article here contains additional material developed by Pierre Bikai. Many of the English definitions of individual words were developed with the use of Wehr 1976. I thank Patricia M. Bikai and Thomas A. Dailey for their editing of the manuscript.



1. The inscription (photo by Pierre M. Bikai).

[or 'Athyl] and Washikat and Bud [or 'Abd] and Wayil and Wasam [or Wasim] and I mention 'Allāt about those who curse us and may 'Allāt curse [those] who destroy our text. This is what I have in my mind.

The Text in Relation to Classical Arabic

This script is usually called Thamudic E, Hismaic, or Tabukian (see King 1990: 11-14; Macdonald 2000: 44-45). Van Den Branden (1956: vi) suggested that it was “proto-Arab”. Macdonald (1998:

184) stated that “‘Thamudic’ is simply a ‘pending file’ for texts which have yet to be properly classified and on which an enormous amount of work still needs to be done”. Our text could more correctly be called “pre-classical Arabic” or a North-Arabian dialect from eastern Jordan, as it is very close to classical Arabic in the way it is written and pronounced and in its grammatical usage. As we shall see, this large text provides evidence that the people who produced the inscription spoke in a dialect of the Arabic language that preceded the classical Arabic of the Qur’ān but was related to it. Almost every area in the Arab world has a different dialect of Arabic; for example, in the area of Lebanon, there are at least three dialects. These dialects differ from classical Arabic mainly in pronunciation and in the use of vowels. For example, the verb “come” in the central coastal area, is “ta’a” in the north is “t’w” in the south “t’i” (in Palestine, it is “ta’āl”). Variant pronunciations of many letters can be found in a short distance from each other, and it was the same in antiquity.

No one can question the influence of the Qur’ān and the expansion of Islam on the Arabic language.

“... Arabic hitherto spoken in Arabia proper and its immediate neighbourhood, went with the Muslim armies to the farthest ends of the far-flung empire. Life in camp and on expedition brought men of different tribes into close contact and the vicinity of the tribal quarters (khiṭaṭ) in the great cities soon led to a levelling of their dialects ... All narratives referring to Arabic and bedouin life (e.g., the amthāl al-‘Arab, ayyām al-‘Arab, but also the maghāzī and sīra) preserved to some extent the uncouth originality and artless naiveté of the old language. In the literature of ḥadīth (traditions) and fiqh (jurisprudence) the social and economic changes left their marks on the vocabulary, phraseology, and even morphology” (*EL*, s. v. ‘Arabiyya).

Our text reflects one dialect, perhaps that of a tribe from Mādabā. It will be translated in relation to classical Arabic because the text is Arabic written in an old style. In this we follow the Arabic saying that “the letters replace the tongue ... and we should translate with letters what the tongue speaks” (Ibn Manẓūr, s.v. the letter *hamzat*).

The Definite Article

In our text there is no use of the definite article “h” as is found in Hebrew, Safaitic, Lihyanite, and possibly in Thamudic (as suggested by King 1990: 78; al-Roussan 1992: 59; and Macdonald 1998:

179; 2000: 49); instead there is the use of the definite article “’l” , ’al, but in a contracted form (*al-mudghamāt*), which is pronounced but not written (thus we propose below the way this Arabic dialect was pronounced). For example, in our text, the name of the goddess is “’l” (lines 5 and 10). From the beginning of Arabic writing (ca. seventh century AD) until today, this is pronounced as ’Allāt. Furthermore, “whblh, ’wdhlh, and s’dlh” in lines 7 and 8 are pronounced *Wahab-’allah*, *’Awadh-’allah*, and *Sa’d-’allah*, respectively. Similarly, the name ‘bdlh ‘Abdu-’Allah appears in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 400); this is the same name as that of the Prophet Muḥammad’s father. Before Islam, it may have been written ‘bdlh but pronounced ‘abdu-’allah. Hence the definite article “’l” is present as much as it is in classical Arabic. The use of “bin” for son and “’l” as the definite article relates more to classical Arabic. Macdonald (1998: 179) states that there are:

... forms of language related to Arabic but distinct from it — which are identifiable by the use of the definite article h-, rather than ’l-, ... From the 5th century B.C. to the sixth century A.D., another North Arabian language, using the definite article ’l-, makes sporadic appearances ... This language has been called Old Arabic (on the model of Old English, Old French, etc.) since it appears to be an ancestor of the Arabic known from later periods. Until shortly before the rise of Islam, it appears always in scripts of other, more prestigious languages (Sabaic, Dedanitic, Aramaic, Greek) and the texts are often in a mixture of Old Arabic and the language normally with the script. (See also Macdonald 2000).

The Arabic names and toponyms in the Petra Papyri of the sixth century AD tend to have ’l as the definite article, even though they were written in Greek characters; e.g., there are phrases such as “*bayt al-akhbar*” and “*janat al-salam*” and, in Inv. 83 line 87, the name of Leontios, son of ‘Abdu’allah “λεοντιος, αβδαλλου” (personal observation); see also the Greek inscriptions from Umm al-Jimāl أم الجمال (Littmann, Magie and Stuart 1913: nos. 277 and 295). These show that the definite article existed and was stressed in Greek though it was not required in Old Arabic texts. The name Leontios son of Abdallah found in the Petra Papyri, is *Asad* son of ‘Abdu’allah in Arabic, a very common name in Thamudic and Safaitic and, an indication of Arab adaptation of Greek names. However, the opposite situation prevails in classical Arabic, with the sun letters we write “’l” but we do not pronounce the “’l”, as in ‘al-*shams* being read as (‘*ash-shams*).

The hamzat and the 'alif

In this text, *hamzat* or *'alif* never appears with “*lh*” (for example, “*lh*” in line 2 is read as *'allah*) and also *lt* (as *'allat*, three times in lines 5 and 10). In most Safaitic and southern Thamudic inscriptions, the *'alif* is omitted in writing, but pronounced at the beginning and after the second “*l*” of *'Allah* and *'Allāt*. In this text, the same omission occurs with the names *whblh* and *'wdhlh* in line 7, and *s'dlh* in line 8. Similarly, in the Qur'ān, in *'Allah* and *'Alraḥman*, the *'alif* is not added to the *lām* or the *mīm*, respectively, but it is pronounced. The same omission occurs in the word *'ism*: in *bism 'Allah*, the *hamzat* is not written. The question then is why the *hamzat* or the *'alif* appears in “*dh'ln*” (line 1), “*rb*” (line 3), “*shy'n*” (line 5), “*slh*” (line 6), and “*thl*” (line 8). What can be said in regard to this is that the *hamzat* appears when it is part of the root derivation of the word as a consonant, and the *'alif* is not added when used as a vowel or as a soft letter (*hamzat waṣl*). Hence the *'alif* is embodied in the next letter. It is pronounced according to the dialect but not written because the majority of the Arabs say that “the letters replace the tongue ... and we should translate with letters what the tongue speaks” (Ibn Manẓūr, s.v. the letter *hamzat*). In a similar way this practice still exists in classical Arabic to some extent.

The *hamzat* is omitted from the beginning of the verbs *sqm*, *tḍr'*, *t'ny*, *tshhd*, and *h'* (line 2) as if they were written in colloquial dialect, but all these verbs would have a *hamzat* if they were written in classical Arabic, and read as *'asqamu*, *'ataḍarra'u*, *wa 'ata'anny*, *wa 'ataṣhahhadu*, and also *'aha'u* at the beginning of line 2. In modern Arabic dialects, the same discrepancy between what is pronounced and what is written continues. For example, in Saudi Arabia, if one wants to say *wa 'ashkuru*, it is pronounced *washkur*; *'a'tiny* is *'ṭiny* in the Lebanese dialect, i.e., the *hamzat* is not pronounced nor should it be written if we want to write the letters that the tongue uses.

There are a variety of views about the *hamzat* as it is one of the most complicated letters. Ibn Manẓūr devotes a large section to explaining its forms, rules, and changes and dedicates several pages to explaining its function in the Arabic language. He reports that al-Azhary said, “... you should know that the *hamzat* has no spelling, it is written sometimes *'alif*, sometimes *yā'*, and sometimes *wāw*, and the soft *'alif* has no letter; it is part of a prolongation after a *fatha* (denoting initial long a) ... it has cases of softening, omitting, and replacing ...” (Ibn Manẓūr, vol. 1: 17-22).

To conclude, the *hamzat* in our text is not pro-

nounced where it would be pronounced in classical Arabic in some cases; this is due to the dialect that this text represents.

In this text, *t'any* (line 2) is in the reflexive first person singular in the imperfect jussive; the *y* endings in *shry* and *'ly* (lines 4 and 5) confirm that the writer is speaking in the first person. Thus, our text cannot be in the third person singular because, if it were, *lhb* in line 3 would take *y* after the *l* like the *y* in *ythlb* (line 4), *yl'nn*, and *ykhbl* (line 10), all third person singular. The pronoun should be first person singular (*'anā*), i.e., *'ata'anny* and *li'ahab* (*'anā*). However, in *ythlb*, *yl'nn*, and *ykhbl*, the *y* represents the third person singular (*huwa*) of the verbs *hbl* and *l'n*, and the same for *ykhbl* from *khbl*.

The y (yā')

The *y* does not show in *zd*, and may also be missing from *mnrt* and *wsm*, depending on how they are read. The *y* also does not appear when it is used as a vowel between two consonants. It appears in *t'ny* (line 1), *ythlb* (line 2), *shry* (line 4), *'ly* and *'shy'n* (line 5), *wyl* (line 9), and *yl'nn* and *ykhbl* (line 10). From those examples, it seems the *y* does appear in three cases:

- 1) when it is part of the stem of the word or used as a consonant as in *wyl* (*wāyil*) and *'shy'n* (*'ashya'una*), which is from the noun *shiya'* or the verb *shaya'a*;
- 2) when it is a tense indicator as in *ythlb* from the verb *halaba*; here the form is *tahallaba*, imperfect jussive. Similarly, *ykhbl* is the imperfect form of the verb *khabala*;
- 3) when it is a possessive suffix added to the noun as in *shry*, the first person singular possessive of *shr*. In *'ly*, it is the first person pronoun suffix added to the preposition “on”.

At-tashdīd

In this text, when there is intensification or *tashdīd* on a letter, the consonant is doubled, e.g., in line 1, *hnn* (*ḥunna*), *kll* (*kull*) in line 3, and *'llk* (*'allaka*) and *kllhm* (*kullahum*) in line 5. The question then arises as to why the *r*, *n*, and *h* are not doubled in *ftḍr'* (*fataḍarra'*), *w t'ny* (*wa ta'anny*), or *w tshhd* (*tashahhada*). These cases can be explained by the fact that there is no intensification in the original verb stems *ḍara'a*, *'ana*, and *shahida*. This is clear from other texts, the noun or verb *hjj*, *hajjaj*, or *hajja*, the *j* is doubled, as attested in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 177; King 1990: 490). See also the verb *khṭt* in Thamudic (King 1990: 683).

Commentary*Line 1*

[l]flhn: This type of text usually starts with a *l* (for). Here the *lām* is missing as the stone is chipped.

Falhan: A proper name on the pattern of *fa'lan*.

bn hnn: bin (son of) *Ḥunna*, a proper name that is well known in this period (not later than the sixth century AD). The *Ḥunna* tribe is mentioned by al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, the poet of the Lakhmid and Ghassanid kings, ca. AD 550 (*EI*, s.v. al-Nabigha). In one of his poems, he warns King al-Nu'mān ibn al-Ḥārith against attempting to invade *banī Ḥunna* territory in Wādī al-Qurā, *Banū Ḥunna bin Rabī'a bin Ḥaram bin Dīnna* are from 'Udhrat bin Sa'd *Huzaym* and are descended from the *Quḍā'a* tribe (al-Bakrī al-Andalusī: 43-44).

The word *hnn* could also be derived from the verb *ḥanna* (to long or yearn). The names Ḥannā for a male and, Ḥanni, Ḥannat, Ḥanān for a female are common in the Arab world, while Ḥunayn is a well-known classical Arabic name, e.g., Ḥunayn bin Ishāq, a physician of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who was born in Ḥyra (AD 809-73). Ḥanīna is the name of a number of villages, one of which is connected to Mādabā in Jordan. The name *hnn* is attested in Thamudic (Harding 1971: 206) and in Safaitic (Winnett and Harding 1978: 570; Winnett 1957: 156; see also King 1990: 495).

bn 'tm: son of 'Atam, an Arabic name from the verb *tamma*, 'atamma, to be or to become complete or accomplished. In the Arab world, this type of name is common when a family has had many children and they name what they hope will be the last one 'Atam. 'Atam is a name known in Thamudic, Safaitic, Sabaeen, and Qatabanian (Harding 1971: 19; Winnett and Harding 1978: 548; Winnett 1957: 137; see King 1990: 468).

dh'ln: *Dhu'lan*, proper name on the pattern of *fa'lan* meaning wolf or jackal (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *dh'l*). Arabs commonly name children after animals such as the lion, tiger, leopard, or wolf, usually after they have lost a child at an early age, in order to impart strength. *Dhu'lan* is a name attested in Sabaeen (Harding 1971: 247). The other possible reading here is "*dh'l*" (*dhu'al*), meaning "of the tribe (or family) of *N* ..., " with the "n" beginning another word. One reading of the two missing letters is *ty*, a word separate from the "n", taken to be the name of a tribe. In favor of the reading *ty* is the fact that in this text "t" is used for the feminine instead of "h" and the tribe of *Ṭay* is said to have used the feminine ending "t" rather than "h" used by all other Arabs (el-Farra', cited by Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *hā'*). The second possible reading of the

two damaged letters is *tj* which, added to the "n", would give the reading *dh'ln tj*, from the tribe of *Natij*, a name that is not attested; see al-Khraysheh 2000: 59-70.

Line 2

w sqm: *wa* is a connector between *flhn* and *sqm* (*saqam*, *suqam*, or *saqim*) meaning illness or thinness, and also as if death draws near. The verb is *saqima*; the first person singular is 'asqamu (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *sqm*). *Sqm* in our text is the verb *saqima* and, because of the dialect, it was pronounced *wa-sqam*, which in classical Arabic would be 'sqm 'asqamu (*infra*). The word *sqm* is common in Thamudic and Safaitic (Harding 1971: 322; Winnett and Harding 1978: 638; King 1990: 598).

h': From the verb *hawa'a*, as in *ha'a binafsihi ila al-ma'aly*, which can also be said in Arabic as: *rafa'aha wa samā bihā ilā al-ma'āly* (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *hw'*). *Hawa'a* and *rafa'a* both mean to lift or exalt. The *h'* in our text appears to be in the third person singular, but it is not; it should be read 'aha 'u, first person singular (*supra*: the *hamzat* was not written). In classical Arabic it would read "'aha 'u", I exalt or elevate my soul to God. The only reference located goes back to the beginning of Islam, reported in al-Iṣfahānī, "yā Banī Taym bin Murrāt, ha' Allāhī liyaqdhifanna banū Makhzumīn banātina bil 'azāimi wa taghfalūn," (al-Iṣfahānī Appendix: 205). This verb is not commonly used today, except possibly at the beginning of the ululations, sounding like *hawiha*. The word *h'* appears in Thamudic (King 1990: 556).

lh: 'Allah is God, the supreme and the only one for Muslims (for the background, see *EI*, Allah and, in particular, Ilah):

Additionally, 'Abd-'allah is similar to the formation 'Abd'il; they are two different names of the same god. Attested in Thamudic 'bdlh (King 1990: 687, 690; see Harding 1971: 907).

ṣ'b: *Ṣa'b*, difficult or hard; it is attested in Thamudic and Safaitic (King 1990: 518; Harding 1971: 372; Winnett and Harding 1978: 588; Winnett 1957: 175), and as *Ṣ'b'l* in Thamudic (Winnett and Harding 1978: 588). It is also the name of a god who is mentioned in two Nabataean inscriptions, one from Petra: "God *Ṣa'b* who is in the foundation of al-Khubtha" (*RES* 1434; Winnett and Reed 1970: 158); the second is from Madā'in Ṣāliḥ (Winnett and Reed 1970: 157-58). The "god *Ṣa'b*, the grandfather of the Nabataeans" is mentioned in a Palmyrian text (*CIS*: 3991; Winnett and Reed 1970: 158; see also al-

Khaysheh 2000: 59-70); The Arab historian Ibn Ḥazam al-Andalusī (1983: 491-494) lists the names of the gods and the Arab tribes associated with them. Pre-Islamic Arab tribes were sometimes affiliated with a god or goddess (e.g., 'Allāt with the *Thaqīf*, *supra*). *Ṣa'b* also was the name of a tribe that became extinct: (Ibn Ḥazam al-Andalusī 1983: 447). *Ṣa'b* can also be a name for an individual; e.g. *Ṣa'b-dhu al-Qarnayn* was credited with completing the Ma'rib Dam in Yemen (*El*, s.v. Marib).

ftdr': the *f* is a conjunction; *tḍr'* is the imperfect jussive of the verb *ḍara'a*, to be humble, submissive, to humiliate, to implore, beg, etc. In the Qur'ān (S. VII: 55), there is: "id'ū rabbakum taḍarru'an wa khifyatan," "call on your Lord with humility and in private"; in our text, *ftdr'* could be equal to *fa'ataḍarra'u* in classical Arabic (*infra*). It is attested in Thamudic as a name, *ḍr'* (Harding 1971: 382).

w t'ny: *t'iny* is the reflexive passive of the verb 'ana', to submit, be humbled, etc. In our text it means "to be humbled," "*wa 'anati al-wujūhu lil-ḥayyi al-qayūmi*," "all faces shall be humbled before (Him), the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal" (Qur'ān, S. XX: 111). The word also can refer to the rising (by a Muslim in prayer) of his hands, face and knees when kneeling and bowing down (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. 'n'). It is attested in Safaitic as a name, 'ny (Harding 1971: 445).

w tshhd: *tshhd* is the reflexive imperfect of the verb *shhd*; (*shahida*) to testify, bear witness, attest, etc. It is attested in proper names as *shhd* and *shhdt* in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 360).

There is a possible alternate reading for the beginning of line 2: *w sq m l'lh Ṣa'b* (*wa saqa ma lil'ilahi Ṣa'b*; see al-Khaysheh 2000: 59-70). This is not likely, however, because the text is in the first person singular, as demonstrated by *t'ny* (line 2), "I submit"; *ṣḥry* (line 4), "my *ṣahry*"; 'ly (line 5), "on me." If the verb were *saqa* in this case, it would be in the third person singular which would not fit the text.

Another interpretation could be: *w sqm l'l hṣ'b* (*wa saqamun l'ali haṣa'bin*), i.e., that the sickness was inflicted on the whole of the *Ṣa'b* tribe. This could fit grammatically. However, in line 5, (')*llk trḥm 'ly* denotes that the person is asking help for himself.

Line 3

lhb: *l'hb* in classical Arabic; the *l* denotes purpose and is best translated "to" with the infinitive; *l*, "affirmative, surely ... [*lamu jawabi al-qasami*], the *la* that corresponds to, or is the

complement of, an oath" (Wright 1988: vol. 1: 282).

hb: from the verb *whb* (*wahaba*), to give or donate; 'hb here is in the imperfect. The 'alif in our text has been dropped because of the dialect (*infra*). It is attested in Safaitic and Thamudic as a name, *hb*, *hb'l*, and *hbt* (Harding 1971: 606).

kll: in Arabic *kull*, "all," is a noun in Arabic (in English "all" is not). Attested in Thamudic (Harding 1971: 504) and in Safaitic (Winnett and Harding 1978: 644; King 1990: 599).

m: *mā* is the indefinite relative pronoun, meaning whatever or that which.

f'l: from the verb *fa'ala*, to do, but in our case it should be read 'af'al, "I do," because of the dialect (*infra*). Then "*mā 'af'al*," would be "whatever I am doing." Attested as a name in Thamudic and Safaitic (Harding 1971: 469).

w ndhr: *ndhr*, to vow, to consecrate, to dedicate, etc.; the word in classical Arabic is *nadhara*, while in modern colloquial Arabic is *nadara*. Attested in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 559, 585).

'rb': four. Attested in Safaitic (Winnett and Harding 1978: 629).

[?]: the reading is not clear at all but there is some sort of letter or sign visible; maybe it was meant to be an abbreviation for a number such as a sign (unattested). The hamzat (') can be part of *sl't* as it is in the plural.

sl't: commodity, commercial article, object of value, or anything for trade; it can also mean coin, as it appears in several Nabataean texts from *Madā'in Ṣāliḥ*: "... for the full price of a thousand Haretite sela's and to our lord King Haretat for the same amount ..."; "... will be liable to Tadhay (?) in the sum of a hundred Haretite sela's ..."; and "... shall be liable to our lord Haretat, King of the Nabataeans, lover of his people, in the sum of a thousand Haretite sela's" (al-Fassi 1997: 49-50); attested in Thamudic (King 1990: 598) (see Kraysheh 2000: 59-70).

An alternate reading for line 3 could be: *lh bkll mf'l wndhr 'rb' ('sl't (lahu bikulli ma fa'al)*.

In this case, the beginning is read as *lh*, "to him"; here the affirmative *l* is added to *huwa* "him," possibly meaning "to the god *Ṣa'ab*". Additionally *mf'l* (*maf'al* or *maf'ul*) could be "the good action" from the root *f'l*; see al-Khaysheh 2000.

Line 4

mnrt: "*al-manār* is a source of light and *al-manārat* is a candle ... Ibn Sayidihi said *al-*

manārat is the place where we put the lamp” (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *nwr*). Attested in Safaitic as a name (Harding 1971: 568).

ʿfnt: from *ʿafana*. The words *ʿathana* and *ʿafana* have the same meaning, to smoke or to ascend ... Jacob said the two words are interchangeable ... *Wa ʿaththantu thawbī bil-bakhūr taʿnīthan* (I smoked my dress with incense)” (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *ʿthn* and *ʿfn*). It is attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 426) and *ʿfn* occurs as a name (Winnett and Harding 1978: 595).

w *yḥlb*: *yḥlb* is the imperfect jussive of the verb *taḥallaba* in the stem pattern *tafaʿʿala*; it is from the root form *ḥalaba*, to milk, drip, trickle, leak, seep, etc. The verb can have very different meanings: “*Wa taḥallaba al-ʿaraqu wa ʿinḥalaba idḥ sāla*,” the sweat seeps, or “*wa ḥalaba al-qawmu*,” they got together, they helped them (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *ḥlb*). The name *ḥlb* is attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 197).

ṣḥry: from *ṣḥr*, “*aṣ-ṣuḥratu ḥumratun taḍribu ilā ghabarat; wa rajulun aṣḥar wa ʿimraʿatun ṣaḥrāʾ fī lawniha*”, *aṣ-ṣuḥratu*, a dusty red; a man is *aṣḥar* and a woman *ṣaḥrāʾ* in her color. It can also mean a yellowish color: “*aṣ-ṣaḥrāʾ* is the desert; *aṣḥara*, means also to appear, to go to the desert; *ṣuḥru* is a female name (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *ṣḥr*). The *yāʾ* at the end is a first person singular possessive (my *ṣḥr*).

Note that the line could be read: *[l] mnrt w ʿfnt w [l] munirat wa ʿafnat*, i.e., as two female names (al-Khraysheh 2000: 59-70).

Line 5

ʿllk: from *ʿl-lk*, meaning “perhaps (you?)”; *ʿalla* or *laʿalla* is the same, i.e., a particle that introduces clauses or verbal sentences with hopeful expectation. In our text, it means “may you”, directed to the god *Ṣaʿab* “god *Ṣaʿab*, may you ...”.

trḥm: the imperfect jussive of the verb *rḥm* (*raḥama*); *tarahḥama* is the second person masculine singular, meaning to have mercy. Ibn Manzūr (s.v. *rḥm*) says “*tarahama al-qawmu: raḥama baʿduhum baʿdan*”; here *tarahama* is the plural that could be used in addressing a deity. *Rḥm* as a name is attested in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 273; King 1990: 597).

ʿly: a preposition meaning on, upon; the *yāʾ* is a first person singular pronoun suffix, so the phrase is “upon me”. However, there is a small possibility that *ʿly* could be read *ʿilly*; in this case, then, it should take two *l*’s following the rules (*supra*); when the *l* is not doubled, it should be read *ʿaly* with the ending not

stressed.

w *dhkrt*: *dhkrt* (from *dhkr*) is the simple perfect tense of *dhakara*, to remember, recall. The subject-marker, the *t* is feminine. It could be translated as “She may remember.” Attested in Thamudic (King 1990: 597, 684).

lt: the name of the goddess ʿAllāt. *Al-Lāt* is the:

“... name of one of the three most venerated deities of the pre-Islamic pantheon, the two others being Manat and al-ʿUzza ... The cult of al-Lat, the deity of the Thakif, descendants of the Thamud ... is attested over a vast area of the pre-Islamic Near East. She was at the same time the goddess of shepherds, from the Hijaz to Ṣafa, and that of caravan-travelers, from Mecca to Petra and to Palmyra. ... The Arabic form of her name dates back at least to the time of the Khuzaʿi ʿAmer b. Luḥayy, the reformer of the idolatrous cult in Mecca at the beginning of the 3rd century A.D., a period for which there is evidence of the cult of al-Lat in Nabataea, in Ṣafa and in Palmyra.

Al-Lat is seen at Ṭaʿif displaying the most primitive attributes of the Semitic Baʿla. Originally, she was represented by a white stone, in contrast to the black stone of Mecca; subsequently, she was associated with a sacred tree; then a sanctuary was erected for her, and this became a place of pilgrimage” (*EI*, s.v. al-Lat). Attested in Thamudic (King 1990: 687, 690).

ʿshyʿn: followers, party, sect, etc. “... *ash-shīʿatu atbaʿu ar-rajuli wa ʿanṣāruhu, wa jamʿuha shiyaʿun wa ʿashyāʿun jamʿu al-jamʿi*” (*ash-shīʿatu* are the followers of a man and his partisans; the plural is *shiyaʿun*, and *ʿashyāʿun* is the plural of the plural; Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *shyʿ*). The word *shyʿ* is attested in Thamudic (King 1990: 596), Lihyanite and Safaitic and as a name, *shyʿn*, in Himyarite and Safaitic (Harding 1971: 364).

kllh(m): *kll*, *kullun* is a noun in Arabic; with a definite plural noun or plural pronoun suffix, it corresponds to all, all of; the pronoun suffix “*hm*”, them, serves as a subject, emphasized after the plural *ʿshyʿn*. Attested in Thamudic (King 1990: 599).

Line 6

[b]dr: as a proper noun, it means the full moon; *Badr* can also be the name of a female or a male, *Bdr* is mentioned in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 97; Winnett and Harding 1978: 557). Among well-known contemporary Arab poets is Bader Shaker Assayyab.

hbdn: a proper name on the pattern of *faʿlan*, it is

still in use today by the Bedouin in Jordan (al-Khraysheh 2000). The name *hbd* appears in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 606).

'*šlh*: a proper name, meaning to repair or make peace. Attested in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 52; Winnett and Harding 1978: 552; King 1990: 473, 567).

'*qrb*: a proper name which means scorpion. The name is in use today by Arab tribes as a female name, while in our text and other related Safaitic and Thamudic inscriptions, it is used for a male (Harding 1971: 427; Winnett and Harding 1978: 595; King 1990: 527). An '*aqrabu Hannāt* from Banī Kanāna is mentioned by an Umayyad poet at the end of the seventh century (al-İşfahānī: vol. 16, 196).

bn: son of.

Line 7

whblh: (*wahaballah*) is a composite proper "theophoric name" composed of *whb* and *lh* (*wahaba-'allah*). The verb *wahaba* means to give, to donate, to grant, etc. Hence *wahab'allah* means the gift of Allah. *Whblh* is attested in Lihyanite, Safaitic, Thamudic, and, similarly, *whb'l* is attested in all related dialects (Harding 1971: 651-53; King 1990: 563).

'*wdhlh*: a composite proper name from '*awadhā*, to seek the protection (from or against), to take refuge (with or from). The translation of this name can be God is a refuge or a protector. The name '*wdhlh* is attested in Safaitic and Thamudic.

zd: *zayd* is a proper name from the verb *zāda*, to become greater, increase. This name *zayd*, and *yazīd*, *ziyād*, are very common names in the Arab world from pre-Islamic time to the present. Attested in Lihyanite, Safaitic, and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 296; King 1990: 506).

bn hrb: son of *ħarb*, a proper name meaning war; this name was known in pre-Islamic times and is still in use today. Attested in Safaitic and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 182; King 1990: 492).

Line 8

(*w*)*dn*: only part of a *wāw* is preserved; *waddan*, on the pattern of *fa'lan*, is from the verb *wadana*, to be wet. Attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 639). The second possibility is that it could be '*Addan* or '*Adan*, also attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 410).

mlk bin s'dlh: a composite name, *Malik* son of *Sa'dallah*. *Malik* means king and is also a com-

mon Arabic proper name from the verb *mala-ka*, to take possession, take over, acquire, reign, etc. This name is very common in Arab literature and history; it is attested in Lihyanite, Safaitic, and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 564-65; King 1990: 550).

s'dlh: a composite name of *Sa'd* and *Allah*. From *sa'ida*, to be happy, lucky; the name can be translated as the joy of God. *S'dlh* and *s'd'l* are known from Lihyanite, Safaitic, and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 318-19, 510).

'*thl*: '*Athal* or '*Athyl* meaning high-born, deep-rooted, of noble origin; it is from the verb '*athala* to consolidate, strengthen, "*Uthyal* is a place near al-Madīna, and '*athal* is the tamarisk tree ... '*Uthal* the name of a mountain, and after it the male name '*Uthalan* was given, and '*Uthalah* is a name" (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. '*thl*). This name is attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 21).

wshk(t): *Washik* and *washuka*, to be quick or hurry; *washk*, speed, swiftness; and *washik*, eminent, forthcoming. *Wshkt* is a proper feminine name. *Washikat* was the slave girl of Budal of the Khalīfat al-Amīn ca. AD 813. Another *Washikat* was the mother of Abī Muslim al-Kharasānī (al-İşfahānī: vol. 3: 150; vol. 17: 82). It is also attested in Thamudic and Safaitic (Harding 1971: 643; King 1990: 562).

Line 9

bd: *Bud*, a proper male name. The derivation of this name cannot be from the verb *badda*, to distribute, disperse, nor from *budd*, a way out, escape, nor *bada'a*, to begin, start, etc. Rather it is the name of the "idol of worship" (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. *bdd*); that is why the name never changed to *bd'allah*; rather, it is attested as *bd* in Thamudic (King 1990: 477), and in Safaitic and Thamudic as *bd'l* (Harding 1971: 96-97).

wyl: *Wayl* is the original form of *Wā'il*; the *hamzat* in it is called "the imported *hamzat* after the consonant '*alif* ..." (Ibn Manzūr, s.v. the letter *al-hamzat*). *Wā'il* is a derivation of the verb *wa'ala*, to seek refuge, to seek shelter or safety. *Wā'il* is a very common name in Arabic. It is attested in Lihyanite, Safaitic, and Thamudic (Harding 1971: 632; King 1990: 563.).

wsm: *Wasīm* means handsome, graceful, pretty, or good-looking; it can be a proper name for a male, and one of God's titles: *wasīmun qasīmun*. It is derived from the verb *wasama*, to brand, to stamp, or mark. Attested in Safaitic (Harding 1971: 642), and as *wsm'l* (King 1990: 562).

dhkrt: See above.

Line 10

lt: See above

mn: *man* is the indefinite relative pronoun, meaning whoever, he who, those who, the one(s) who (King 1990: 685).

yl'nn: *yal'ananna*, from *la'ana* (with one *n*) to curse or damn in the jussive form; the “*n*” at the end means us. Another reading could be *mn yushayi'ūnana*, but we do not have the *y* after the *sh* as in *'shy'n* (line 5). *Mn yl'nn* should not be read “*yushayi'ūnana*” (al-Khraysheh 2000: 59-70); rather it should be read as “*yal'anan*, or *yal'ananna*”, and the translation would be “may 'Allāt remember whoever curses us (as he forgives them)”.

l'nt: curse, with the *t* to indicate the third person feminine singular (King 1990: 68).

lt: See above.

mn: See above.

Line 11

ykhbl: *Yakhbulu*, from the verb *khabala*, to confound, confuse, or complicate, in the imperfect *khbl*; it is attested as a name in Lihyanite and Safaitic (Harding 1971: 214; King 1990: 683).

wq'n: From the verb *waqqa'a*; *at-tawwaqu'* means what is in the mind or thought. The *tawqī'* of a writer is to make clear what is his intention (Ibn Manẓūr, *s.v.* *wq'*). In this text it should be read as *'uwaqi'n*, I sign to approve what the text refers to (*supra*); attested in Thamudic (King 1990: 686).

dh: *dha* means this (demonstrative pronoun); here the *'alif* does not appear at the end because it is a soft *'alif* (*supra*); (King 1990: 683).

Conclusion

This text is a prayer, dedicated to the god *Ṣa'b*, who was called for healing from an illness, and to the great goddess *'Allāt*, who was asked to protect (remember) the clan (followers). This type of prayer is still being practiced today, for example, by the Eastern Churches. Before the end of the service, the priest raises his hands and recites a remembrance of the fathers, i.e., the saints, and he then lists a large number of names including the patriarch, the bishop, the head of the monastery, and he ends by asking remembrance of the inhabitants of the town, the sick, the hungry, etc. The list is much longer than the one in our text (which is not Christian), but the two are similar. This text also indicates that a vow was taken with it to the temple or the shrine, where it was installed. Finally the di-

lect reflects a tribal form of pronunciation for which there remain analogies among the Arabic-speaking tribes of the desert.

Proposed reading of the text in the ancient dialect:
lifalhan bin ḥunna bin 'atam dhu'lan ṭy
wsqam ha' lah ṣa'b fatḍara' wt'ini wtshahhad
lahab kull maf'al wndhur 'arba' [' ?] sil'at
manarat w'afnat wyṭhileb ṣahry
'allak taraham 'ly wdhakarit' allat ashyyu'na kull-
hum
bader wḥabdan w'islah w'aqrab wbin ...-
wahballah w'awadhallah wzayd wbin harb w
wudan wmalik bin sa'dallah w'athal wwashikat
wbud wwayel wwasam wdhakaret
lat man yal'anana wla' Janet lat man ykhbul waq-
qa'n dha

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