

Appendix A: The Thamudic Inscriptions

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A stone with Thamudic inscriptions was found in the cemetery area. It is not clear whether this stone has anything to do with the cemetery. The stone was discovered after it was moved out of its original position by bulldozing. It is no more than a guess that the stone had once been a covering slab in one of the graves. Because of the history of discovery of the stone, no conclusions regarding the relative chronology of its inscriptions, whether preceding the cemetery or left after people ceased to use it, are possible.

We may assume that the text was damaged when the stone was bulldozed. At the lower edge, part of the surface seems to have disappeared; therefore, the end of inscription A might be missing. This, however, is not very likely, as we shall see; if something like this ever happened, it must have happened long ago. R. L. Gordon inspected the original and communicated concerning this: "all the breaks are earlier than the inscription . . . This is shown by the patina of the stone, which is found even in the incisions of the inscription." Therefore, I assume that no part of the text is missing. At the upper edge of the stone, however, we have indications for a second author. As far as the main text is concerned, it derives from one author, but consists of two inscriptions. It is difficult to state from which site inscribing was started. It seems that the longer inscription (B) had to take account of the shorter one (A) and was forced to turn in a right angle. Therefore, B may be secondary. Both inscriptions are "Thamudic" according to their script and arrangement; both are written *boustrophedon*.

Inscription A

ltm^o'bdt wdkrt lt bln

"For *tm^o'bdt*, and may Lāt remember *bln*."

There are some doubts concerning identification and interpretation of the first signs. The fifth sign, read *b*, differs decisively from the other signs with that value in these inscriptions, which are rounder and shorter. Alternatively we may read *z* or *s*, but their forms do not match the shape of the questionable sign more exactly. Reading *s* or *z* would not help us to interpret the name or word, but raise more obstacles to interpretation.

Another problem is the sixth letter. Paleographically, there is no doubt that it is a *d*, but we may assume that it is a mistake for *d*. Inscriptions do contain mistakes (Winnett and Harding 1978: 16f), and *d* for *ḍ* is already attested in inscriptions which belong to the same sub-group of Thamudic as the inscriptions which concern us here (Littmann 1949: 173-175; Knauf 1983: 588 § 2.3.2). *'bd* occurs frequently in Ancient Arabian personal names.

Word division is unclear at the beginning of the inscription. The translation is based upon the assumption that the author, firstly, introduces himself by means of the preposition *l-*; numerous Thamudic and Safaitic inscriptions testify to this. A verb that may follow is marked by the copula *w-*; cf., e. g., Ph 369d with the same verb (van den Branden 1956: 139). The name *tym^o'bdt* is already attested, (Harding 1971: 137; 141).

Alternatively, we may consider a reading *lt m^o'bdt*. The name of the goddess *lt* would have been placed at the beginning of the text, then. *lt* stands for *'allāt/'ilāt*, cf. for this goddess e. g. Winnett and Reed (1970: 78) and Höfner (1970: 262ff). An epithet *m^o'bdt* "adored, venerated one" is conceivable, but not yet attested. Therefore, this interpretation of the beginning of inscription A is to be excluded. It is worth noticing, however, that *lt* is repeated to the left of the first letter, incised by means of an instrument that was split and produced double lines. It is impossible to say whether these two signs belong to inscription A or B, if to

either of them; therefore, I assume that the scribe started to write with an inappropriate instrument, stopped, and started again to the right side of the two first letters, and completed his inscription.

Reading and interpretation of the last name are based upon the assumption that the text turns back, and *l* is put to the side of *b*. In both inscriptions, the dot denotes the letter *n*. A larger, nearly cruciform dot is used as a sentence-divider. For references to the name *bln*, cf. Harding (1971: 117).

Inscription B

wḏkrt lt kl lḡy' n w'bdḡn whḡḡn knw s'dn wḏkrt lt b xx lḡn.

“And may Lāt remember all (men of) *lḡy'* and *'bdḡ* and *whḡḡ*. They have been helpers. And may Lāt remember *blsn* (?)”

The text is written boustrophedon, starts next to inscription A at an angle of 90° and returns to its starting point. From that point it continues parallel to inscription A. Approximately where A starts, B changes its direction again and turns downward. It seems that B was here avoiding some signs written by the split instrument, that must have been written before and were not incorporated into the text of B. There is a relatively wide gap before *knw*, but I do not think that a new inscription starts; *knw* makes perfect sense if connected with the preceding words. *wḏkrt*: A number of texts start with this formula, e. g. Jsa 670 (van den Branden 1950: 454); Isa 728 (ibid.: 466f); Harding (1952: Nr. 170; 481; 489). Most texts, however, do not. *kl*: The indefinite pronoun “all, whole” usually appears in this form in Thamudic (van den Branden 1950: 37); according to Winnett and Reed (1970: 77 Nr. 13; Harding 1971: 196), however, it could have the form *kl* as well. This has to be taken into consideration when we discuss the following word or name.

The following words are to be taken as plurals because of the ending *-n*. They are connected by *w-* and put parallel to each other. It is not easy to interpret them. Since filiations are absent, we may think of tribal names. These tribes, however, are not attested anywhere else.

If the reading *lḡy' n* holds true, Safaitic *lḡ(')m*, *lḡy* etc. (Harding 1971: 511) cannot be pertinent, since *'* would remain unexplained. Assuming that the first *l-* does not belong to the name, E. A. Knauf (pers. com.) suggests a *fai'al*-formation from the root *ḡ'n*, cf. the Safaitic personal name *ḡ'n* (Harding 1971: 163). In this case, *-n* cannot be a plural marker.

'bdḡn offers no difficulty with the reading. If one interprets *'bd* as “servant”, *-ḡ* remains unexplained. One may assume a hypochothic form of *'bdḡd* (Harding 1971: 398). The form *ḡn* or *ḡnn* is attested in Safaitic only (Harding 1971: 168f) and would contradict, again, the interpretation of the *-n* as a plural sign.

whḡḡ is well attested as a personal name, but only in Safaitic. It is a tribal name in Minaean, however (Harding 1971: 193). This lends support to our assumption that all three names were tribal names.

A space after *whḡḡn* may mark a paragraph; after this, the inscription continues with *knw* “they were”, which requires a plural subject. This is provided by a form of *s'd* “to help”, which I suggest should be interpreted as the plural active participle of the first conjugation. I do not know any Thamudic parallel for the *kāna fā'il* construction, but the phrase is correct Arabic. The verb *s'd* “to help” is well attested in Thamudic, mostly in the imperative (van den Branden 1950: 516; Winnett and Reed 1970: 80).

After this, the *wḏkrt*-formula occurs again, and a name has to be surmised for the end of the inscription. The next to the last letter is difficult to interpret. To read it as an *s* poses a problem, if we compare this *s* with the other examples of this letter in the inscription. We may compare Safaitic names like *bls* and *blsnt* (Harding 1971: 116). The possibility, however, cannot be excluded that the stone suffered some damage at its upper edge. Or, the signs *m* (?) and *ḡ* (?) which were incised with the split instrument, may have damaged the text in the case that they were incised later. I think, however, that it is more likely that they belong to inscription A and are older than inscription B.

Inscription C

At some distance from the main texts, inscription C is to be found at the left edge of the stone. This inscription consists of two letters only: *lt*, that is the name of the goddess (A)lāt.