

it convenient to take Sabeian as the base of our description. Accordingly, linguistic phenomena quoted below without any special mark belong to Sabeian monumental texts. Otherwise they are marked as Min., Qat., Hadr. or minuscule.

Where sources of quotations are indicated, they are given according to the abbreviations in Beeston et al. 1982.

Phonology

Consonants

Since we deal here with dead languages without oral tradition, it is practically impossible to reconstruct the phonetic value of Sayhadic graphemes. Accordingly, we shall content ourselves with a conventional table of Sayhadic consonants based on their Semitic correspondences:

	b		w m
f			
t	d	ṭ	n l r
θ	ḏ	ṯ	
s ³	z	š	
s ²		ḏ	
			y
s ¹			
k	g	ḡ	
x	γ		
ḥ	ʿ		
h	ʾ		

One of the most acute problems of Sayhadic phonology is that of non-emphatic unvoiced sibilants, transcribed here as s¹, s² and s³. Traditional Sabeology was deeply influenced by Arabic studies and believed that Sayhadic was especially close to Classical Arabic. Accordingly, these graphemes received the phonetic value observed in the corresponding Arabic cognates. Thus, s¹lm 'peace' was transcribed as *slm* because of Arabic *sala:m*- and s²ʿb 'tribe, commune' as šʿb because of Arabic šaʿb-. Since Arabic has no third unvoiced sibilant, s³ was conventionally transcribed š; most scholars thought it to have had a phonetic value close to š (our s²), but even a lateralized articulation was sometimes proposed.

Nowadays, most scholars think that there is no special relationship between Sayhadic and North Arabian dialects. At the same time, the system described above obviously contradicts the data of those languages which do have three unvoiced sibilants, namely Hebrew and Modern South Arabian (MSA):

Sayhadic	Hebrew	MSA
s ¹	š	š
s ²	š	š
s ³	s	s

Examples: Sayh. *dbš* 'honey' ~ Heb. *dabaš*, Jibba:li *debš*; Sayh. s²bʿ 'abundant, abundantly' ~ Heb., Mehri *šbʿ* 'to be satiated'; Sayh. s³r 'to be bound with an obligation' ~ Hebrew *ʾsr* 'to tie', Jibba:li *ʾsr* 'to hobble an animal'. Though some sporadic exceptions should not be neglected (see, e.g., Sayh. s¹y 'to do, make', which is obviously to be compared with Hebrew *ʾšh*), in the great majority of cases these correspondences are valid, and this is the notation that we shall follow in our chapter.

Vowels

Since the South Arabian system of writing is purely consonantal, we cannot draw any direct information about Sayhadic vowels. The existence of an *u* (most likely long) may be proved by Sabeian variant spellings of the pl. 3 pronominal suffix -*hmw*/*hm* (see p. 224). It is likely that beside the six vowels typical for many of Old Semitic languages (*a, i, u, a:, i:, u:*), there existed also *e:* and *o:* resulting from the contraction of -*ay* and -*aw*-. It may be evidenced by such pairs of variant spellings (belonging to the same period and often even to the same text) as *byn/bn* 'between' or *θwr/θr* 'bull', in which the latter represent the historical spelling of the actual [**be:n* (< **bayn*-), *θo:r*- (< **θawr*-)].

Peculiar Phonetic Phenomena

Sabeian *h* corresponds to s¹ of other Sayhadic languages in the prefix of the causative verbal theme and in pronominal morphemes of the 3rd person (-*hw* versus -*s¹w* etc.).

A comparatively frequent merger of θ and š is attested, e.g. *ḡš* 'summer season' beside (the etymologically correct) *ḡyḡ*; *ḡlm* 'statue' versus *šlm* etc. (However, it may be explained partly by a mere confusion of letters for š and θ.) In minuscule documents etymological θ is reflected as ḏ, e.g. *ḏbyr* 'young she-camel > sack made of its hide' (~ monumental *ḡbyr*), *mḡḏr* 'a measure of capacity' (~ monumental *mḡḡr*). It seems that minuscule script had no letter for θ at all.

s³ is often reflected as s¹ in late Sabeian, e.g. *ms¹nd* 'inscription' instead of *ms³nd*, s¹n 'up to, next to, by' instead of s³n etc. This process is also attested for the Haramic dialect of middle Sabeian (e.g. *ʾks¹w* 'clothes' vs. standard Sabeian *ks³wy* 'clothing').

n is sporadically assimilated to the following consonant, e.g. *yḡrn* (beside *ynḡrn*) – impf. from *nḡr* 'to atone'; *mḡḡ* (beside *mndḡ*) 'tutelary deity', *ʾfs¹* (beside *ʾnfs¹*) – broken plural of *nfs¹* 'soul'.

Sayhadic θ is often reflected as s³ in Hadramitic texts (especially from Wadi Ḥaḍramawt itself), e.g. *s²ls³* 'three' (~ Sab. *s²lθ*).

Some cases of Hadramitic θ corresponding to Sayhadic s³ are also attested (e.g. *mḡnd* 'inscription' vs. Sayh. *ms³nd* or *kḡ* 'to command' versus Qat. *ks³*).

Metathesis is a comparatively frequent phenomenon in Sayhadic, e.g. variant forms *ʾwld/ʾlwd* and *ʾwyn/ʾywn*, both broken plurals from *wld* 'child' and *wyn* 'vineyard' respectively. See further *ḡlmt/ḡmlt* 'kind of insects', Min. *s²m¹/s²ml* 'northwards' etc.

An interesting phenomenon is the so-called "parasitic" *h*, i.e. non-etymological glide *h* appearing in a number of morphemes (mainly affixes and particles). In Minean it is typical of the affixes of external plural (masculine and feminine), e.g. *ymhn* 'days' (pl. m. abs. < *ywm* (*ym*) 'day'), '*hrhn* < '*hr* 'noble', '*nθht-n* (pl. f. determined < '*nθt* 'woman'), '*šbht-y* 'reparations' (pl. f. const. < '*šbt*) etc.; it is often found at the end of nouns in singular and broken plural in *status constructus* (see p. 227). Though it remains uncertain under what conditions this *h* appears, it is thought that it was caused by a peculiar character of the stress (possibly even pitch). As for the examples attested outside of Minean, see *bh* 'to enter' (cf. Semitic *bw* 'to come, to enter'); *mhn* (beside *mn*) 'who, which' (relative), which may be compared with Arabic dialectal *mi:n* etc.

Morphology

Pronouns

Personal Pronouns (Independent)

Independent personal pronouns of the 1st person are only doubtfully attested in the texts (sg. 1 '*n* in *bnhw* '*n*, *bnhw* '*n* 'I am his son, I am his son' [G1 1782]; *br-k-h* '*n* 'it was myself who built it' [J2353,3]; pl. 1 (?) in *s'trw ḏn ms'ndn* '*n* '*brh* 'we, Abraha, wrote this inscription' [C541,3-4]).

Forms of the 2nd person are extremely rare in monumental inscriptions (perhaps '*t* in *Rhmn rhmk mr* '*t* 'O Raḥmān! You are merciful; you are the lord' [Ry508,11]), but they are frequent in minuscule documents. Forms attested in published texts are as follows: sg. m. '*nt* (variant '*t*): *w-ʿt sʿxln l-Frʿn nkt-hw* 'and you, take care about *Frʿn*, his she-camel' [A-40-4,3-5]; pl. m. '*ntmw*; *w-ʿntmw f-l ts't'ddnn l-hmw* 'and you (pl.), you should verify the calculations for them' [YM11732,3].

Forms of the 3rd person are identical with the nominative forms of remote deictics: *w-tʿwltw b-wfym hw* '*w-kl sʿwʿ-hmw* 'and they returned in safety, he (himself) and all their companions' [J631,13-14]; *w-hmw f-nθrw mwʿd* '*grn* 'as for them, they remembered the promise of the Najranites' [J577,10].

A number of 2nd person pronominal enclitics are attested in minuscule documents: sg. -*k*, pl. -*kmw* (see below; -*k* also in monumental Qatabanian [J 367; 2439,1] '*bd-k* 'your /sg./ servant', '*ḏn-k* 'your /sg./ authority').

The suffix -*n* in a number of theophoric names may be regarded as the object enclitic of 1st person singular, e.g. *Ḥm-n-nsʿr*, which probably means 'Protect-me-Nasr' (imv. sg.) or pf. sg. 3m. from *hmy* 'to protect' + -*n*, see p. 235).

Attached to nouns, enclitic pronouns denote possession '*xt-hn* 'their (f.) sisters', minuscule *br-k* 'your (sg.) house' etc. Attached to verbal forms, enclitic pronouns denote the direct object (*mrʿ-hmw* 'he has saved them', Min. *l-ysʿfd-sʿ tθft* 'let the judgment bind him' [R4728,1]), but they are also widely used for the indirect object: *šbḥ-hw šbḥm* 'he offered him [i.e. the god] a sacrifice' [e.g. C461,2], *xmr-*

Table 12.1 Attested forms of pronominal enclitics

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Sab. m.	-hw, -h	-hmy	-hmw, -hm
f.	-h, -hw		-hn
Min. m.	-sʿ, -sʿw	-sʿmn	-sʿm
f.	-sʿ		-sʿn
Qat. m.	-sʿ, -sʿww	-sʿmy	-sʿm
f.	-sʿ, -sʿyw		
Hadr. m.	-sʿ, -sʿww	-sʿmn, -sʿmyn, -sʿmy	-sʿm
f.	-θ (-sʿ), -θyw (-sʿyw)	-sʿmy	

hmw ḏnm 'he [a deity] granted them rain' [J563,11-12].

Pronominal enclitics are extensively employed, with prepositions: *b-ʿm-hmw* 'with them', Min. *b-ʿbr-sʿmn* 'regarding them both'; minuscule *l-k* 'for you', '*brn-kmw* 'to you (pl.)'.

Relative Particles

Table 12.2 Attested forms of relative particles

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Sab. m.	ḏ-	ḏy-	ʿlw, ʿly, ʿlht, ʿl
f.	ḏt, t-	ḏty	ʿlt
Min. m.	ḏ-	ḏy-	ʿhl-, hl-, ḏl-
f.	ḏt	ḏtyn	
Qat. m.	ḏ(m)-, ḏw-	ḏw-, ḏn	ḏtw, ʿwltw, ʿl (?)
f.	ḏt(m)-		ḏtw
Hadr. m.	ḏ-		
f.	ḏt		

These particles are used to introduce relative clauses (see p. 239) and in periphrastic genitive constructions: *bkrtn ḏt ḏhbn* 'the bronze young she-camel' [C579,4-5]; '*mθln* '*ly ḏhbn* 'the bronze images' [J558,2]; *fnwt-hw ḏt tsʿ qyn-hw* 'his canal, which irrigates it [the palm grove]' [C657,3]. They may agree in gender and number with the antecedent, but *ḏ-* often becomes generalized: '*bdtm ḏ-kwnw byn xmsʿnhn* 'irregulars who were between the two armies' [J633,7-8], *šlmtn ... ḏ-sʿft mrʿhmw* 'the statuette ... which she promised to their lord' [J706,3-4].

Of interest are some nouns with *ḏ-* which are used without an antecedent like *ḏ-ʿḏr* 'distant relatives', *ḏ-gbʿn* 'document of property transfer', *ḏ-ʿmnt* 'person or thing under protection' (cf. Geʿez *za-manfas* 'spiritual', *za-lamʿ* 'leprous' etc).

Indefinite Pronouns

mn (*ḏ* ...) 'somebody', 'someone', *mhn* 'something', '*hnn* ('*hnm*) 'whatever, whenever, wherever': *w-mn-mw ysʿtr-hw* 'whoever destroys it ...' [R4091,1-3] (with enclitic -*mw*, see p. 237).

- 10 's²r/'s²rt.
 11 'h²d 's²r.
 12 θny 's²r etc.

Note that 's²r in these forms is invariable and does not depend on the gender of the enumerate (e.g. 'rb'-'s²r and 'rb'-'s²r).

Twenty is 's²ry, the rest of the decades are formed by adding -y to the respective form in the first decade (θlθy '30', xms'y '50') etc. In Minean forms endings in -hy are attested, thus 'rb'hy '40'; cf. also Hadr. ts'hy '90'. The order of elements in compound numerals (each preceded by w-) ascends from units to thousands (see examples below).

Forms with -t occur with masculine nouns, forms with zero ending with feminine ones (exceptions are 1, 2, 11 and 12). The noun counted, always in the plural (except for 1 and 2), appears after the numeral. As a rule, numerals up to 100 are in the construct state, the noun in the absolute with mimation: θlθt 'wrxm 'three months', θlθ 'brkm 'three rainy seasons' < brk (f.), Qat. fd 's²r 'nrlm 'eleven palm groves'; the noun without -m: Min. xms' 'mh 'five cubits' (sg. 'mt), Hadr. θmnwt 'fhd 'eight cheetahs'. If the noun is definite (rarely found) the numeral also has a -n: θlθt-n 'slm-n 'the three statues'. '100' is m't (pl. m', m'n, m't, m'nhn; Min. m't, m'h, Hadr. m'h, Qat. m't). '1,000' is 'lf (pl. 'lf). In most cases hundreds and thousands are in the absolute state with mimation, so that the numeral should not be regarded as the possessed, but rather as an apposition: xms' m'tm w-θlθt 'lfm 's'dm '3,500 men' [J665,29-30]. Note an opposite case (the hundred in the construct state) in xms' w-'s²ry wm't 'frs'm '125 horsemen' [J665,30-31].

Ordinals

The syntax of ordinals, which in most cases look like the corresponding cardinals (i.e. s²lθt-t, xms'/-t etc.; 'first' - kdm - is an exception), is in all respects identical to that of adjectives. However, they may precede the noun which they qualify (especially if it is in the absolute state), cf. θnym/θlθm ywmm 'second/third day' versus xms'n rb'n 'the fourth district' [C435,3-4], xrf Wdd'l... s'dθn 'the sixth year of [the eponym] Wdd'l' [NNAG11,11-12].

Fractions and Distributives

'Half' is probably attested as fkh in fkhm w-θlθ blm δ-rdym 'three and a half' blt coins of full weight' [G11361,2]. Other fractions are used extensively. Their form is shf from the consonantal root of the respective cardinal, e.g. rb' 'one-quarter', s'b' 'one-seventh' etc. (note Min. s²lwθ in 'd s²lwθ hgrn 'up to one-third of the city' (?) [R2774,2]). The plural of this pattern is 'shf; it seems that fractions may agree both as masculine and feminine: contrast 'ht 's²r 'one-tenth' [R4995,1] and (Qat.) s²lθt 'xms'm 'three fifths' [J343A,3-4]. Of interest is Sab. mxms't 'one-fifth (pl.)'. An interesting way of expressing fractions consists in using 'sb' 'finger', e.g. 'sb'm bn θmny 'sb' 'one finger from eight fingers', i.e. 'one-eighth' [C640,2].

Distributives are expressed by the repetition of the cardinals, e.g. (Qat.) 's²r 's²r xbstm m's'm l-tt tt ywmm 'ten coins of full value for each day' [R3854,6-7]. Note s²lθt-'δ 'for the third time' [e.g. C366] (cf. Arabic hi:na-'iḍin 'at that time').

Verb

Root

Consonantal roots may be classified into "sound" and "weak." Sound verbs have three permanent radicals though a few have four (Qat. fdld 'to expand, improve'). Weak verbs contain w or y as one of the radicals, namely lw/y, llw/y and Illw/y. Verbs ln and verbs with the second and third radicals identical also exhibit some special features.

Themes

Of course, neither šahḥafa nor ša:hafa themes can be distinguished in writing from the basic theme shf. The existence of at least one of them can easily be proved by many semantically contrasting pairs like yf' 'to raise up, to set up' - yf' 'go up, rise', xt' 'to commit a sin, an offense' - xt' 'to make amends for a sin'; kwn 'to be, to exist' - kwn 'to go to help'.

A theme shhf is attested in Minean: 'xrr 'to impose' (also 'xr); 'lly 'to raise, to lift', fnnw 'to send, to credit goods', frr' 'to lift', s'kky 'to irrigate fields', zwwr 'to wall something', impf. ymhhr- 'to make a payment'. This theme is sometimes compared with the Arabic theme II (kattaba, reconstructed also for Sayhadic, see above); according to this suggestion, the graphic doubling of the second radical may represent its phonetic gemination (as in Arabic). We know, however, that a theme kata:taba (kātatābā) is attested in Ethiopian (the so-called "frequentative"), but the scarcity of Minean examples prevents us from drawing definitive conclusions.

The basic meaning of the h-theme (s¹- in non-Sabean Sayhadic) is the causative: h-s'tr 'to commit to writing' - s'tr 'to write'; h-wrd 'to bring troops into the field' - wrd 'to go down; to fall upon the enemy', Qat. s¹-gzm 'to cause to decide' - gzm 'to decide'. If the simple theme denotes a state, the h-theme may have a resultative causative meaning: hlft 'to destroy' - tlf 'to be struck dead, to perish'; Min. s'mlk 'to make/proclaim a king' - Qat. mlk 'to rule, to be a king'.

Two t-themes are attested, namely s-t-hf and t-shf. Their primary significance is reflexive and passive, presumably for *šahḥafa and *šahḥafa respectively.

Reflexive: h-t-my 'to protect oneself' (- hmy 'to protect'); γ-t-s'l 'to wash oneself'; t-šn' 'to fortify oneself' (- šn' 'to fortify'); s¹-t-ky 'to quench one's thirst' (- s'ky 'to irrigate').

Passive: s²-t-rh 'to be saved' (- s²rh 'to deliver, to save'), t-'tm/'-t-im 'to be mustered' (- 'tm 'to bring together'); s¹-t-my 'to be named' (- s'my 'to name').

These themes often appear as medial: x-t-dm 'to get fields cultivated'; ts'ym 'to appoint somebody (direct object) for oneself' (- s'ym 'to appoint'), t-s'tr/s¹-t-fr 'to write an inscription (direct object) for oneself' (- s'tr 'to write'). Sometimes