era. The character resembles the Sabæan, but perhaps re­presents an earlier stage of graphical development. These inscriptions have been called “Thamudic,” because they were found in the country of the Thamud ; but this desig­nation is scarcely a suitable one, because during the period when the power of the Thamúd was at its height, and when the buildings mentioned in the Koran were hewn in the rocks, the language of this country was Nabatæan (see above). Unfortunately the inscriptions hitherto discovered are all short @@1 and for the most part fragmentary, and con­sequently furnish but little material to the student of lan­guages. But there can be no doubt that they are written in an Arabic dialect. The treatment of the dentals, among other things, is a sufficient proof of this. At least in one point they bear a striking resemblance to Hebrew : they have the article *ha* (not *hal,* as we might expect). It is possible that the tribes living on Arabian soil which are regarded in the Old Testament as nearly related to Israel, that is, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites, and even the Edomites, may have spoken dialects occupying a middle position between Arabic and Hebrew. They are perhaps traces of some such intermediate link that have been pre­served to us in these inscriptions.

The numerous inscriptions scattered over the north-west of Arabia, especially over the wild and rocky district of Safá, near Damascus, probably date from a later period. They are written in peculiar characters, which, it would seem, are likewise related to those used by the Sabæans. They are all of them short and indistinct, scratched hurriedly and irregularly upon unhewn stone. What we at present understand of them—they consist almost entirely of proper names—is owing in nearly every case to the ingenuity of Halévy. @@2 In matters of detail, however, much still remains uncertain. To decipher them with absolute certainty will no doubt always be impossible on account of their careless execution. These inscriptions are probably the work of Arab emigrants from the south.

The Arabs who inhabited the Nabatæan kingdom wrote in Aramaic, but, as has been remarked above, their native language, Arabic, often shows through the foreign disguise. We are thus able to satisfy ourselves that these Arabs, who lived a little before and a little after Christ, spoke a dialect closely resembling the later classical Arabic. The nomi­native of the so-called “ triptote ” nouns has, as in classical Arabic, the termination *u ∙,* the genitive has *i* (the accusa­tive therefore probably ended in *a*), but without the addi­tion of *n.* Generally speaking, those proper names which in classical Arabic are “ diptotes ” are here devoid of any inflexional termination. The *u* of the nominative appears also in Arabic proper names belonging to more northern districts, as, for example, Palmyra and Edessa. All these Arabs were probably of the same race. It is possible that the two oldest known specimens of distinctively Arabic writing—namely, the Arabic portion of the trilingual in­scription of Zabad, south-east of Haleb (Aleppo), written in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic, and dating from 512 or 513 **A.D., @@3** and that of the bilingual inscription of Harran, south of Damascus, @@4 written in Greek and Arabic, of 568 —represent nothing but a somewhat more modern form of this dialect. In both these inscriptions proper names take in the genitive the termination *u*, which shows that the meaning of such inflexions was no longer felt. These two inscriptions, especially that of Zabad, which is badly

@@@1 The decipherment of these inscriptions was begun by Halévy, who followed the drawings of Doughty. The subject is now being further investigated by D. H. Miiller of Vienna from Euting’s copies.

@@@2 " Essai sur les Inscriptions du Safa," from the *Journal Asiatique* (Paris, 1882).

@@@3 Sachau, *Monatsbericht der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften,* 10th February 1881, and *Z.D.M.G.,* xxxvi. 345 *sq.*

@@@4 Le Bas and Waddington, No. 2464, and *Z.D.M.G.,* xxxviii. 530.

written, have not yet been satisfactorily interpreted in all their details.

During the whole period of the preponderance of Aramaic this language exercised a great influence upon the vocabu­lary of the Arabs. The more carefully we investigate the more clearly does it appear that numerous Arabic words, used for ideas or objects which presuppose a certain degree of civilization, are borrowed from the Aramæans. Hence the civilizing influence of their northern neighbours must have been very strongly felt by the Arabs, and contributed in no small measure to prepare them for playing so import­ant a part in the history of the world.

In the 6th century the inhabitants of the greater part of Arabia proper spoke everywhere essentially the same language, which, as being by far the most important of all Arabic dialects, is known simply as the Arabic language. Arabic poetry, at that time cultivated throughout the whole of central and northern Arabia as far as the lower Euphrates and even beyond it, employed one language only. The extant Arabic poems belonging to the heathen period were not indeed written down till much later, and meanwhile underwent considerable alterations @@5 ; but the absolute regularity of the metre and rhyme is a sufficient proof that on the whole these poems all obeyed the same laws of language. It is indeed highly probable that the rhapsodists and the grammarians have effaced many slight dialectical peculiarities ; in a great number of passages, for example, the poets may have used, in accordance with the fashion of their respective tribes, some other case than that prescribed by the grammarians, and a thing of this kind may afterwards have been altered, unless it happened to occur in rhyme ; but such alterations cannot have extended very far. A dialect that diverged in any great measure from the Arabic of the grammarians could not possibly have been made to fit into the metres. Moreover, the Arabic philologists recognize the existence of various small distinctions between the dialects of individual tribes and of their poets, and the traditions of the more ancient schools of Koran readers exhibit very many dialectical *nuances.* It might indeed be conjectured that for the majority of the Arabs the language of poetry was an artificial one,— the speech of certain tribes having been adopted by all the rest as a *dialectus poetica.* And this might be possible in the case of wandering minstrels whose art gained them their livelihood, such as Nábigha and A'shá. But, when we find that the Bedouin goat-herds, for instance, in the mountainous district near Mecca composed poems in this very same language upon their insignificant feuds and per­sonal quarrels, that in it the proud chiefs of the Taghli- bites and the Bekrites addressed defiant verses to the king of Híra (on the Euphrates), that a Christian inhabitant of Híra, Adí b. Zaid, used this language in his serious poems, —when we reflect that, as far as the Arabic poetry of the heathen period extends, there is nowhere a trace of any important linguistic difference, it would surely be a para­dox to assume that all these Arabs, who for the most part were quite illiterate and yet extremely jealous of the honour of their tribes, could have taken the trouble to clothe their ideas and feelings in a foreign, or even a perfectly arti­ficial, language. The Arabic philologists also invariably regarded the language of the poets as being that of the Arabs in general. Even at the end of the 2d century after Mohammed the Bedouins of Arabia proper, with the exception of a few outlying districts, were considered as being in possession of this pure Arabic. The most learned grammarians were in the habit of appealing to any unedu­cated man who happened to have just arrived with his camels from the desert, though he did not know by heart twenty verses of the Koran, and had no conception of theo-

@@@5 Comp. the article Mo'allaḳát.