

Evolution of the *Hā'il* Thamudic Inscriptions

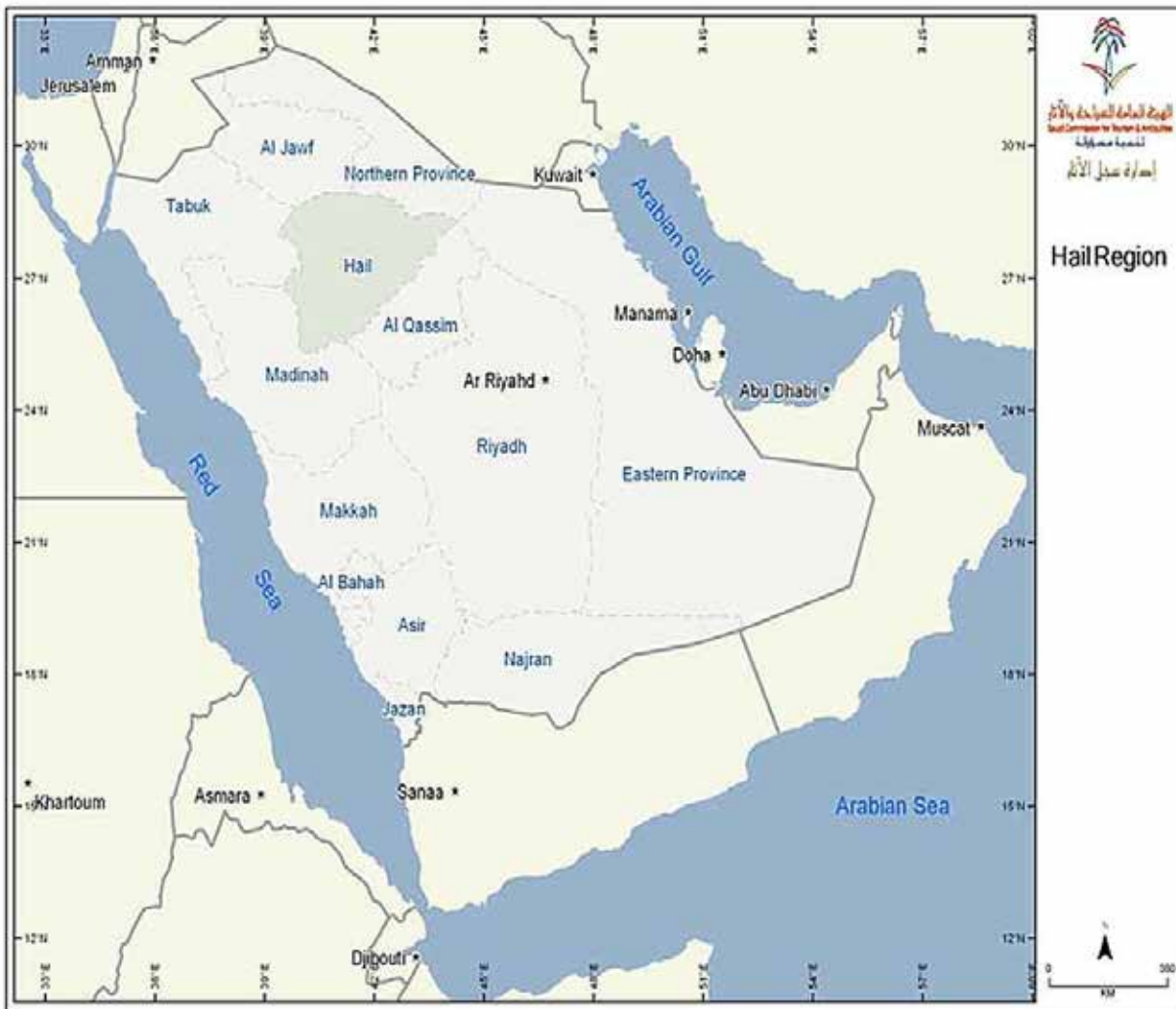
تطور النقوش الثمودية بحائل

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ملخص

تقع منطقة حائل التي تتمتع بموقع استراتيجي شمال المملكة العربية السعودية، وكانت المنطقة في العصور السابقة للإسلام مفتاح الجنوب والشمال الشرقي وغرب شبه الجزيرة العربية، وعلى الرغم أنها تحتل موقعاً استراتيجياً وتمتلك عناصر بيئية مناسبة شجعت الناس على الاستقرار فيها قديماً وحديثاً، لما تمتلكه من عوامل جذب واضحة، إلا أننا لم نجد حتى الآن إلا تلك النقوش المكتوبة بالقلم الثمودي، العائد أغلبها (٨٥٤ نقشاً) إلى الفترة الثمودية المتوسطة. وتُعد المنطقة بحق من أغنى المناطق في شبه الجزيرة العربية، في الرسوم الصخرية، البشرية أو الحيوانية التي كانت إما معروفة لهم أو مستأنسة من قبل تلك القبائل العربية في حائل.

والهدف من هذه الدراسة إلقاء الضوء على بعض الجوانب الاجتماعية لسكان منطقة حائل في الفترة التاريخية بين القرن السادس/ الخامس حتى الثالث/ الثاني قبل الميلاد من خلال نقوشهم المعروفة حتى الآن والبالغة ٩٦٤ نقشاً، سُجلت من ٣٢ موقعاً. وقد قسمنا هذه المظاهر الاجتماعية من خلال النقوش المسجلة إلى الآتي: اجتماعية (١٢٥ نقشاً)، ودينية (١٤٦ نقشاً)، ونقوش الحزن (خمسة نقوش فقط)، ونقوش الاشتياق وبلغت (٧٢ نقشاً)، أما بقية النقوش فهي من الصنف المعروف بالنقوش التذكارية فجاء عددها (٦١٦ نقشاً).



Map showing the location of Ḥā'il

Ḥā'il region is enjoying a strategic location. It is located north of Saudi Arabia, and it was, in Ancient Times, the key to the south, northeast and west of the Arabian Peninsula. Although it occupies a strategic location and possesses the elements of an appropriate environment that has encouraged people to settle in it, in both Ancient and Modern Times, due to its attractive environment, but yet, strangely, we did not find inscriptions other than those of Thamudic writing. They are mainly inscriptions of the middle Thamudic period; while the inscriptions dating to the late Thamudic period are few.

Map showing the location of Ḥā'il

The question is why this boom in *Ḥā'il* was only in two different periods? The first was between the eighth and the seventh millennium BCE, where some of the rock art belonging to that period were found.¹ The second period represented by the Thamudic inscriptions; and why we could not find in *Ḥā'il* except native culture (local activity)? In the sense that the region lacked material evidence for the stability of non-Thamudian tribes, which later preferred to emigrate toward the north-west of the Arabian Peninsula.

In fact, it is difficult to provide a satisfactory answer to these and other questions in light of the apparent shortage of archaeological excavations.

However, we can say that, in the light of our current information, that the region of *Hā'il* is one of the few areas in the Ancient World that can be considered as isolated and self-developed. We can compare this isolation of that which is known in Ancient Egypt, specifically before the Hyksos invasion. The difference between these two is that in *Hā'il* the isolation was clear, while in Egypt it was relative, due to the commercial activities known between Egypt and its neighbors in Libya and Africa.

It is known that isolation often leads to backwardness and decline of the society, but in *Hā'il* it was contrary to the concept of isolation. We can say according to the latest studies that the isolation of *Hā'il* people (the Thamudian tribes) did not lead to underdevelopment or stop the development of society, or slow it; but it could be stated that it was counterproductive.

Our aim in this article is to shed light on some of the social aspects of the *Hā'il* inhabitants, in the historical period between the 6th/5th – 3rd/2nd centuries BCE from their inscriptions², which reach 964 from 32 sites, as follows:

No.	Site	No. Ins
1	ṭawālal-nfūd	23
2	al-Serrā	20
3	ṣabḥah	4
4	Qabā	30
5	Wadi Buaib	26
6	Roumatein	31
7	Tef Mesar	1
8	Calāhah	14
9	al-Serr	21
10	Grondah	4
11	Qasr Mārid	4
12	ḥisu Cali	2
13	El-Clailieh	2
14	al-Jalf	20
15	Jaiāyyn	46
16	Yāṭab	52
17	Malwiyahah	9
18	(الجدية) al-Jaldiyāhah	40
19	Jabal ʿUm samnān	340

No.	Site	No. Ins
20	Jabal fi ʿUm samnān	9
21	ṭawāl	25
22	Jūbah	121
23	Malwiyah	165
24	Assifn	6
25	Aṣṣaduq	6
26	d Jabal QāC	9
27	Twarin	23
28	ḍliyaC sālmh	40
29	Jabal šwiyāḥṭ	40
30	al-ḥwiyāṭ	11
31	Jabal al-ḡwūth	24
32	Jabal Cnazh	40

Following our study of these inscriptions, we were able to divide them into five categories according to their subject, as follows:

Type	Social	Religion	Grieving	Longing	Memorial
Nos.	125	146	5	72	616

The Thamudic inscriptions have been divided by the researchers into different groups. Winnett divided them into five groups: A, B, C, D, E; but he subsequently divided them into four groups: Taymanite, Najdi, Hījāzi, Tabuki, on the basis of three factors: the difference in letter shape, the difference in vocabulary and words, finally the difference in the inscription direction. However, I believe it is preferable to divide them into three groups: first, early Thamudic: this type consists of the Taymanite and Najdi Thamudic (A+B). It was used during the period between the tenth century until the sixth century BCE. The second, the Middle Thamudic, consists of the Hījāzi Thamudic (C+D), which could be the transitional period, is dated between the fifth century BCE to the third century CE (after CE only in Hījāz). Third, the late Thamudic, this type includes Tabuki Thamudic (E), which began at the end of the first century BCE or first century CE up to the end of the fourth century CE. Thus, we classify the *Hā'il* Thamudic inscriptions as follows:

The period	Early Thamudic	Middle Thamudic	Late Tamudic

Nos.	13	854	97
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We conclude from our study of *Hā'il* inscriptions, the following remarks:

1. *Hā'il* region is considered from the point of both, the Thamudic inscriptions, and the rock art one of the richest regions in Arabia. For example, the number of inscriptions in 'Jubah' site, according to the latest archaeological survey is five-thousand-four-hundred-and-thirty-one Thamudic inscriptions. Jubah is a remarkable art museum in terms of human and animal rock arts.
2. The Thamudic tribes were widely spread in *Hā'il* area in the early historical stages especially in Middle Thamudic stage, represented by 604 inscriptions. For head period of six or five centuries, then they were forced by political and cultural factors to trend north, mainly to the north-west of Arabia, where they became close to the cultural centers in the Levant.

Tribal Names

No.	Tribe	Times	No.	Tribe	Times
1	ṣ b ḥ	1	2	ṣ ṣ m t	1
3	l b	1	4	ḥ r m	1
5	ḍ ᵊ b t	1	6	r m	1
7	m m t	1	8	w d ᵊ l	1
9	b d n	1	10	l h b	1
11	q ḥ r	1			

3. *Hā'il* was an important center of trade routes, linking eastern and central Arabian Peninsula with the north; heading to prosperity of the trade routes, and this was during the Thamudic period (between the fifth and first century BCE). Starting from the first century BCE, commercial routes began to take another curve; as al-Jauf area became the main distributor of trade routes during the Nabataean era (first century BCE).
4. The Thamudic inscriptions in *Hā'il* added to our knowledge three sites used by the Thamudians.

Place names

Place names	s b n	b ḍ l t	B s l t
Time	1	1	1

5. These inscriptions showed that the community of *Hā'il* was no different from other contemporary societies, they indicate that the possession of animals was widely known especially those important in their daily lives, including those that are not domesticated, such as ᵊ s d, as well as the animals that are benefit in various different ways, such as w^c l which appear in a new form l ḥ t, meaning 'great ibex', benefited from its skin and meat. The most common animal mentioned in these inscriptions is the so-called 'vessel of the desert', the camel, which have many names, this undoubtedly indicates the understanding of the Thamudi and his knowledge of this specific animal. Finally, I should refer to the hedgehog, which was very useful in getting rid of snakes and scorpions.

The animals

No.	The animal	Times
1	ṭ w r 'Bull'	1
2	ᵊ s d 'Lion'	1
3	t q d 'Urchin'	1
4	w ^c l 'Ibex'	1
5	q h d 'Cattle'	1
6	ḥ g r t 'Mare'	1
7	ṭ l 'Cattle'	1
8	^c g l 'Bullock'	1
9	d q q t 'Cattle'	1
10	g m l 'Camel'	4
11	b k r t 'Camel'	6
12	b l 'Camel'	6
13	n q 'Camel'	1
14	q b ^c t 'Camel'	1
15	m k d 'Camel'	2
16	n q t 'Camel'	1
17	^c s 'Camel'	1
18	s q b 'Camel'	1
19	b ^c n w ṭ 'Camel'	1
20	m r ṭ 'Camel'	1
21	b n n 'Sheep'	1
22	l ḥ t 'Ibex'	1

The inscriptions of longing

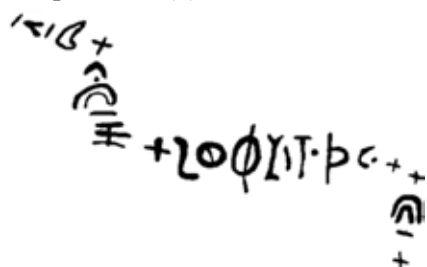
They include words such as t š w q ‘miss’, m t w q ‘longing, desire’. w d d, w d ‘loves’, c š q, ‘adore, in love with’.

These inscriptions indicate that their writers did not limit this type of inscription to their lovers or friends, but used them as well in different aspects of life which make them happier, such as having animals that offer them good income, such as ‘l q s’ who engraved acquiring a quiet and obedient camel; or ‘gmāl’ who wrote his wishes of having a specific type of dogs for hunting. Finally, I would like to draw the attention that the longing inscriptions are not oriented only between male to female, but between the same gender.

Verb	c š q	h b b	w d d	t w q	š w q	k f l
Times	1	5	27	1	35	1

The following are some examples:

- Inscription no. (1)



s l m t b n m l t t š w q ᵀ l z n d b n t t m l t

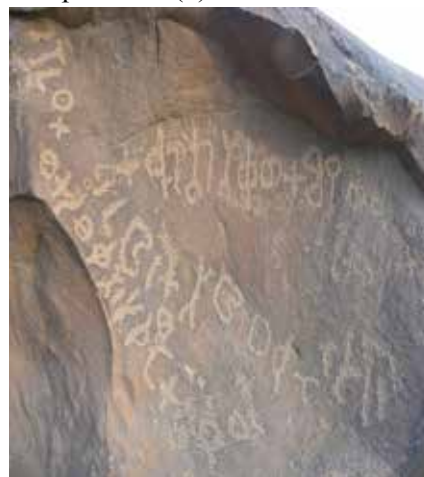
By slmt son of mlᵀ, (he) long for znd daughter of tmlt

- Inscription no. (2)³



c m c š q t m
c^m adore (in love with) tm

- Inscription no. (3)⁴



z l g t w t š w q ᵀ l h d b t b q c l
By zlgt, (he) long for hd daughter of bq^cl

- Inscription no. (4)⁵



m r c y w d d t m l k
Mr^cy love tmlk

- Inscription no. (5)⁶



c b d ᵀ l w d ᵀ l w t š w q w n d m f k t m
By c^{bd} of the tribe of wd^ᵀl, (he) longed and regretted so (he) conceal.

The social inscriptions

These are the inscriptions which reflect the image of the society at that time, such as:

- (1) Occupations practiced then.
- (2) Diseases that spread among them.
- (3) Different social customs: Marriage, divorce, possession, recreation, health, differences and dispute, finally sex. These are some examples which reflect the social activities:

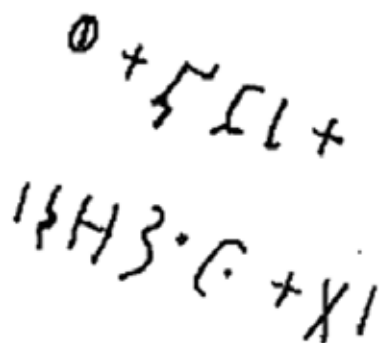
• Inscription no. (6)⁷



g f b^c t g d d

gf son of^ct the one who pick up palm tree

• Inscription no. (7)⁸



l š z f n b n t h l

w t k f l t

By šzfn daughter of h l, (she) became a priestess

• Inscription no. (8)⁹



l š h b g w b

By šhb the traveler

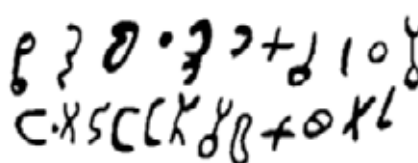
• Inscription no. (9)¹⁰



l^o s h m b n s l m d^o l š s m t w m y t t^o m h
w m y t^o b h w d r k f n g y^o l b n h l t h f w h
b l h g m l

By ^osh m son of slm of the šsmt tribe, his mother and his father died, and ^ol his cousin son became through after his illness (sickness) so he gave him a camel.

• Inscription no. (10)¹¹



l s l m b n h f r k b n^o s m t w h r s

^c l y t r b n m š t

By Slm son of hfrk son of^osmt, and (he) look out for ytr son of mšt

- Inscription no. (11)¹²

m d š^o l m s w ḥ b b q y n t

m d š^o l had intercourse (sex) and loved the slave girl

- Inscription no. (12)¹³

..... t s f ṣ d t q d

.... ts hunted an urchin (hedgehog)

- Inscription no. (13)¹⁴

l b l ḥ m r t t l l w s q^c

By blḥ (he) had three babies (then he) left (escaped/ran away)

- Inscription no. (14)¹⁵

l q b ṣ (b) q b l C m Ḍ ṣ f q t l y ṣ r ḥ

By qbṣ (son of) qblCm, he was afraid (panicked) then he killed yṣrḥ

- Inscription no. (15)¹⁶



^c l s d f b t ḥ l

w n k h b s t h

sdf has been fucked from back (therefore) he is sick with a spleen

sdf was sodomized, thus, he had spleen illness

- Inscription no. (16)¹⁷



l y b^o l ḥ g m l ḥ t

By yb^ol (he) hunted a large mountain goat

The grieving inscriptions

Inscriptions contain certain verbs, such as r n t 'scream, wailing', w g m 'sorrow', n^o ḥ 'wrilling', Ḍ s f 'sorry, regret' and q r ḥ 'melancholy, distress'.

We could say, in *Hā'il* Thamudic inscriptions, that the verb 'n^o ḥ' used by and for males while the verb 'r n t' by females; though they have the same meaning. Finally, we could conclude from the small number of grieving inscriptions, that the local community, during that time were a happy society, far from sadness. Therefore, due to the lack of grieving inscriptions, we say that the community in *Hā'il* was the happiest among other communities in Arabia. Strangely enough, their sadness and grieving is only associated with the loss of a loved one.

- Inscription no. (17)¹⁸

l t m w w g m ^c l ^c k d b n f y š w ^c l t m (w)
^c l q m l

By tm (he) was grieved on ^ckd son of fyš and
 on tm and on qml

- Inscription no. (18)¹⁹

l t l f q w w g m

l t l f q w w g m
 By tlfq, (he) was sorrow (grieved)

Religious inscriptions

They are the inscriptions containing prayers to their gods. We registered 146 inscriptions that included supplications to their pagan deities. Thus, this type is, in numbers, the second following the memorial type.

No.	god	Times	No.	god	Times
1	^o l t	5	2	^o l	2
3	r š	1	4	k h l	8
5	d t n	8	6	d t n y	1
7	n h y	16	8	r d	36
9	r d w	62	10	g m d	5
11	^c t r s m	2	12	^c t s m	1
13	^c t r s m n	1	14	š m s	1

The deities names in *Hā'il* inscriptions

These inscriptions dated back mostly to the Middle period, indicating that the degree of religiosity and bonding with the deities was in the Early and Middle periods, clearly in Late Thamudic period. The inscriptions include a number of topics and subjects, such as seeking marriage, or having a posterity or prying for livelihoods or assistance and help, some of them pray to his god or goddess for

healing of different kinds of diseases. The following inscriptions are examples of religious inscriptions:

- Inscription no. (19)²⁰



h d t n s ^c d ^o y m ^c l d d h s r
 O god dtñ assist ^oym in his happy love

- Inscription no. (20)²¹



h ^c t r s m w h b ^o h l l m m y k l
 w ^o n q š m n
 O (goddess) ^ctrsm give mmykl a wife
 I am qšmn

- Inscription no. (21)²²



h l t m n ^c g d d š r w ^o n t m ^c h t
 O (goddess) ^oll āt prevent evil from befalling
 gdd, I am tm^c (the) writer

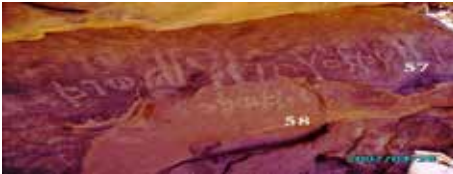
- Inscription no. (22)²³



h r ḏ w m r z ʾ
h b l y s y b

O (god) ḏw the generous, grant me wealth (money)

- Inscription no. (23)²⁴



h r ḏ w h b l š h m w l d
O (god) ḏw, grant šhm children

Memorial inscriptions

They are the majority of these inscriptions, which include one of these terms: w d d, w d 'Greetings, w d d f, w d f 'greeting to', or L: 'by, for', and some of them begin with a person's name.

Beginning	w d d	w d d f	w d	w d f
Number	70	4	11	70
Start	b 'by'	W 'conjunction'	l 'for, by'	l m 'by, from'
Number	13	5	273	32
Start	h 'definite article'	Personal name	Pro-noun	
Number	5	130	3	

- Inscription no. (24)²⁵



w d d^c m r
l m f l n t
Greeting of^cmr
By flnt

- Inscription no. (25)²⁶



w d d^ʾ s l
l m f l n t
Greeting of^ʾsl
By flnt

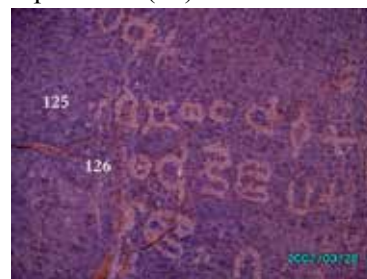
6. We registered seven-hundred-and-eighty-eight (788) personal names, which can be analyzed in the following manner: simple, compound, personal name consists of a god name. Some of them mentioned more than once, as follows:

Once	Two times	Three times	Four times	Five times	Six times
649	72	30	12	7	2

Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve
3	5	2	3	1	1

7. Due to two reasons, the geographical distribution, and its long-term continuity²⁷, the Thamudic developed a number of dialects based on its script forms. That was clear in the sound of certain characters, such as the shape of three points, often formed like a shape of a triangle, it is known (pronounced) as (ʿ), but we could say it could be read as well (h); specifically if this shape was at the beginning of the inscription. However, if this form is at the middle or the end of the inscription, it could be read in both ways (ʿ or ha). The following examples clarify this point:

- Inscription no. (26)²⁸



h r ḏ b k q t
O god (r ḏ) from you comes livelihood.

- Inscription no. (27)²⁹



h r ḏ b k m h r

l m ^c t q

O god (r ḏ) make māhr rich

By ^ctq

- Inscription no. (28)³⁰



h r ḏ w b k h n z t

l m ^c b d t

O god (rḏ) by you the magnanimous

By ^cbd t

- Inscription no. (29)³¹



w d f h d

l m š r k t

Greeting to hd

By šrkt

- Inscription no. (30)³²



w d f s h r

l m ^ᶜ s

Greeting to shr

By ^ᶜws

Notes

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1. For additional information see R. Adams, P. Parr, M. Ibrahim, A. al-Mughannum, 'Saudi Arabian Archaeological Reconnaissance 1976, Preliminary Report on the First Phase of the Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program', *Atlat* 1 (1977), 32-40; P. Parr *et al.*, 'Preliminary Report on the Second Phase of the Northern Province Survey 1397/1977', *Atlat* 2 (1978), 29-50; M. Khan *et al.*, 'Preliminary report on the third phase of rock art epigraphic survey of northern region of Saudi Arabia 1986/1408 AH', *Atlat* 11 (1988), 61-74; A. al-Saud *et al.*, 'Report on the Rock Art Survey of Jubbah', *Atlat* 18 (2005), 39-42; A. al-Saud, 'Rock art and Epigraphic Survey of Jubbah and Shuwaymis Northern Saudi Arabia (2003H/1426AH)', *Atlat* 19 (2006), 49-530.
 2. This group of inscriptions is part of a comprehensive and complete study of the Thamudic inscriptions in the region, which to this day has reached 964 inscriptions.
 3. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، نقوش ثمودية من المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ٩٠.
 4. F.V. Winnett and W.L. Reed, 'An Archaeological Epigraphical Survey of the Ha'il Area of Northern Saudi Arabia', *Berytus* 22 (1973), nos. 30, 31; سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، 'دراسات فريدريك وينيت لنقوش ثمودية من منطقة حائل: دراسة تحليلية، مجلة قراءات، العدد الأول (٢٠١٤م)، نق: ٥.
 5. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مدونة النقوش الثمودية في المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٧٧٦.
 6. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مدونة النقوش الثمودية في المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٧٨٥.
 7. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مجلة قراءات، العدد الأول، نق: ٣٣.
 8. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مجلة قراءات، العدد الأول، نق: ٤٥.
 9. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مدونة النقوش الثمودية في المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٨١٧.
 10. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مدونة النقوش الثمودية في المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٧٨٦.
 11. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، نقوش ثمودية من المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٢٣.
 12. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، نقوش ثمودية من المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٣١.
 13. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، نقوش ثمودية من المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٠٤.
 14. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، دراسة لنقوش ثمودية من جبة بحائل: المملكة العربية السعودية (الرياض، ٢٠٠٠)، نق: ٦٨.
 15. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، نقوش ثمودية من المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١١٦.
 16. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مدونة النقوش الثمودية في المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٧٩٠.
 17. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مدونة النقوش الثمودية في المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٧٩٥.
 18. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، دراسة لنقوش ثمودية من جبة بحائل: المملكة العربية السعودية، نق: ١٩.
 19. سليمان بن عبد الرحمن الذيب، مجلة قراءات، العدد الأول، نق: ٧٤.
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 27. If we are comparing the Thamudic with both Nabataean and Safaitic inscriptions, the first lasted only six-hundred (600) years; while the second lasted between 500-400 years. As for the Thamudic, it lasted more than 1500 years, at least between 1100/1000 BCE - 400 CE.
 28. عبد السلام بن محمد العبد الله، نقوش ثمودية من الحجر وجبل أم سمنان في منطقة حائل، نق: ١٢٥.
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