

DEDANITE AND MINAEAN (SOUTH ARABIAN) INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE HISMA

by
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Introduction

During a survey of the Hisma region of Jordan in 1980, several Dedanite and Minaean inscriptions were discovered. Only a few other such graffiti were previously known from Jordan, so these new finds are an important addition to our existing corpus and our knowledge of the northern activities of the inhabitants of the ancient kingdoms of Dedan (modern al-ʿUlā) in the Hijaz and Maʿīn in South Arabia.

These new inscriptions were found in the area northeast of Wadi Ram, the famous oasis where several other South Arabian inscriptions were discovered almost half a century ago (G. Ryckmans 1934). Two of the new texts are from a cave named Abu al-Dbaʿ located on the southern side of Jebel ʿAtra just 4 km. east of the modern village of Disa (K737, 3149 III, 478815) and may be classified as Dedanite. The other is a Minaean graffito discovered in the Khrum al-Ghuzlān, about 15 km. southeast of Disa (3149 III, 582739). (Fig. 1) These texts are clearly foreign to this region, where the indigenous pre-Islamic inscriptions are normally in Nabataean Aramaic and Thamudic Arabic. As the photographs of nos. 1 and 2 make clear, these inscriptions have suffered greatly in the process of time and at the hands of subsequent generations. The proposed readings that follow are primarily based on the copies made at the time of recording. As the following discussion will indicate, several alternative readings are clearly possible, although the word dividers in nos. 1 and 2 are of great help.

The difficulties of the texts were mitigated by the generous and helpful advice of Professors A. F. L. Beeston, W.W. Müller, J. Ryckmans and F. V. Winnett, who greatly facilitated my entry into the field of pre-Islamic epigraphy.

Any mistakes or inaccuracies in the discussion that follows are no doubt the result of my stubborn resistance to their counsel. My thanks must also be expressed to Ms. Christine Leonard for the hand drawings of the inscriptions and Mr. O'Connor for several valuable suggestions that immensely improved this presentation of the material. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, and Mr. Khalid Abu Ghaniemah of his staff, for their gracious support and assistance. The archaeological research was made possible by a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship grant, made available through the American Schools of Oriental Research.

No. 1 (Abu al-Dbaʿ) (Fig. 2; pl. CXXI, 2)
['] *bgr wkn'l* 'Abgar (son of) *Wakan'il*
byt blwh dl wasm built his tomb, *Dall*.

The name 'Abgar appears in Nabataean Aramaic (CIS II, 698), but is better known in Safaitic (where it is found 91 times) and Syriac (as a dynastic name for the kings of Edessa). *Wakan'il* is new, but the element *wkn* is probably from the root "to be firm, or strong" attested in the Sabaean cognate name 'Awkan, and in Arabic *tawakkana* glossed as *tamakkana* in the Qamus; the form is derived from the Arabic verb *kana*, "to be." This reading is preferred to taking *w(kn'l)* as "and," as another individual would present problems with the singular pronoun that follows.

The verb *byt* (Ar. *bata*) appears in Minaean (WR Min. 10) and Safaitic (CIS V, 28 and SIJ 139), and in the contracted form *bt* in Thamudic (BIT, p. 512). In these contexts, it is usually rendered "to spend the night" or "to pitch a tent," but here must have the meaning of "to make,

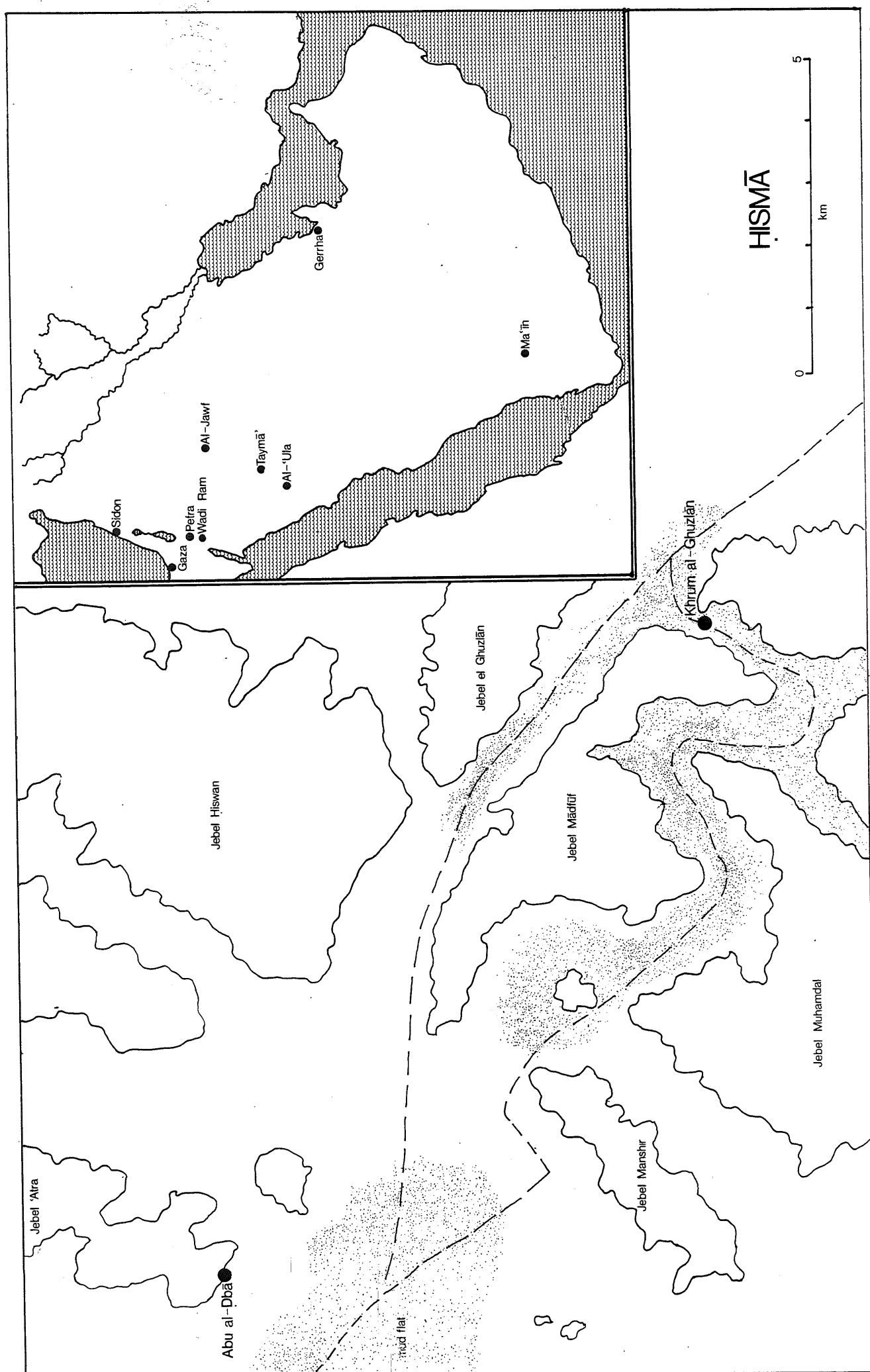
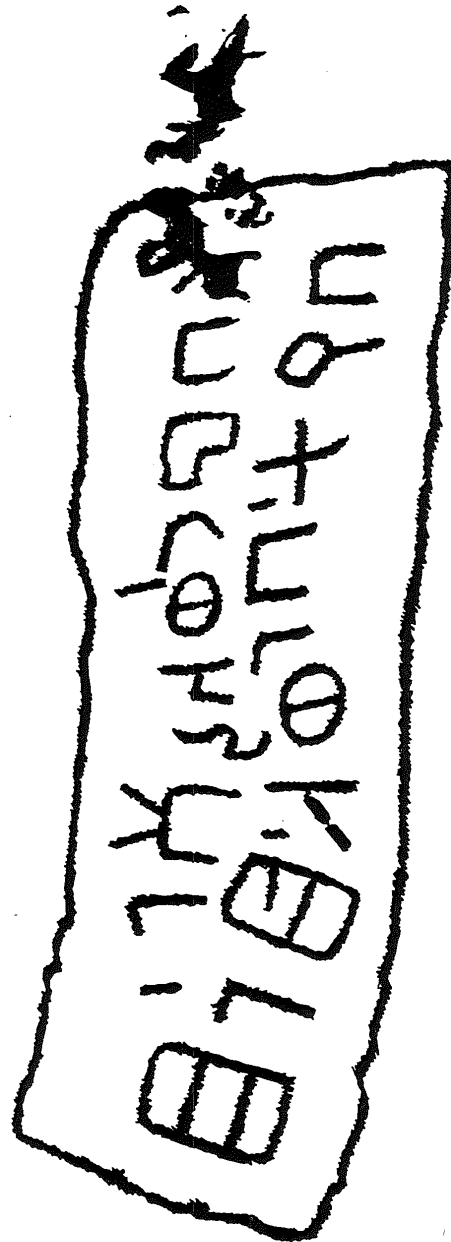


Fig. 1 Map of the Hisma Region



5 cm

Fig. 2

build" (cf. LP 595 with comments), as it is followed by *blwh* "his tomb" (see Beeston, *et al.*, 1982: 29, and Biella, 1982: 43 for the cognate Sabaeen fem. noun *blwt*, "funerary monument" and cf. the rare Safaitic *bly*, "tomb" in WH 163, 165 and 166). The noun *byt* is well attested in funerary contexts; see the Late Aramaic (Nabataean and Palmyrene) expression *byt 'lm* "grave" (cf. Heb. Eccl. 12.5 and Punic CIS i, 124/1), a term now also known from the Deir 'Alla plaster inscriptions of the eighth/seventh centuries B.C. (Hoftijzer and van der Kooij, 1976: comb. ii, 6 *byt 'lmn*; cf. Levine, 1981: 202). The absence of any of the familiar Lihyanite words for "tomb" (e.g., *kfr*, *khf*, *gbr*, or *mtbr*) also reflects the peculiarity of the language in this graffito. It may then be proposed that the phrase *byt blw* has the idiomatic meaning of "to construct a tomb."

Dāl (from Ar. "to wander, err") appears as a personal name in Safaitic (CIS V. 3066). Here it may be the name of the individual who constructed the tomb or, as Professor A. F. L. Beeston suggests to me, the name of the tomb itself, in which case the phrase should be rendered "The house of his monument is (called) *Dāl*" (cf. JS Lih. 306). The final mark to the left of *dl* appears to be another *d*, but *dld* would be a strange reading; later hands also have altered this sign, which is best understood as a *wasm*, and not to be taken as part of the name *dall*.

It should be observed that personal names beginning with *dl* appear to be restricted to South Arabic and Safaitic, providing some support for W. W. Müller's suggestion that (b) *lwh* could be understood as either a place name (*lwh*) or associated with the Aramaic verb *lwa*, *lwi*, *lawwi* ("to accompany," or "to join"), i.e., as *b-lw-h*, "in his company." The sense of the inscription would then be "Abgar and Kann(a)'il. He (Abgar?) has spent the night in his (Kanna'il?) company (or cave) when he was lost (understanding *dl* as a verb)." The inscription is located on the eastern side of the entrance to a cave, (pl. CXXI, 1), directly opposite the following inscription (no. 2). Such a rock formation would be ideal for a burial or a

camping site.

No. 2 (Abu al-Ḍba') (Fig. 3 Pl. CXXII, 1).

'bslm wb'lhy
wnk wbr'n whd
wmk's ḥwyn mtr
//// wd ymn

'Absalim and Ba'lhayy
and Nāk and Bar'ān and Hadd
and Muka'is. Show us rain,
O Wadd! Good fortune.

The inscription begins in boustrophedon fashion, but the third line is retrograde, destroying the pattern.

The name 'Absalim is known in Lihyanite (JS nos. 21 and 144 = BID nos. 15 and 63), Nabataean (JS no. 313), and Thamudic (MNM no. 1); cf. Heb. 'absalom (II Sam. 3.3). Ba'lhayy ("The Lord lives") is new in the pre-Islamic inscriptions. Nāk is known in Safaitic (SIJ 771). Bar'ān is new, but probably derived from Ar. *bara'a*, "to surpass." Hadd is known from Safaitic (16 times) and Thamudic (only in TIJ 351). Muka'is is new, but the name *mk'* is known in Nabataean (CIS 478; Cantineau II, 114, observes that the name by unfinished; cf. Muka'il in Thamudic). It could be derived from Ar. *Ka'asa*, "to subdue, to humiliate" or an otherwise unattested byform *k's*; cf. *kis*, "to be greedy."

What these six individuals express appears to be a petition to Wadd, the South Arabian Moon-god. For *ḥwyn*, see Aramaic *ḥwy* and Syriac *ḥawwi*, "to show." Beeston suggests that there may be metathesis of the *w* and *y* and that the verb *ḥywn* is derived from Ar. *ḥyy*, "to live," and here a II form, to be rendered "vivify us," which would give excellent vocative sense. If *-n* is an object pronoun, the inscription provides one of the few non-3rd person pronouns in the North Arabian corpus. As for *wd*, the *d* is not certain (cf. the *d* in *hd* in line 2), but the petition seems to require a deity and the clear preceding *w* and the following word divider make likely the reading *Wadd*. A

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5 cm

Fig. 3

temple of Wadd at Dedan is known from later inscriptions (Eut. 24) and an Early Lihyanite inscription mentions an offering by the priest of Wadd to the Lihyanite god Dhū-Ghābat (JS 49 = CLL 9), reflecting the harmonious relations that existed between the Dedanites and Minaeans (van den Branden, 1957: 16). The Syrian god Ba'alsamīn (CLL 12 = WLT 17), the North Arabian Lāt (CLL 104 in Dedanite script) and the Edomite Qōs are also attested in Dedan; for the latter deity see the personal names of 'bdqs (JS 143 and 363), gltqs (CLL 30, an early Lihyanite governor), and slmtqs (JS 117). The appearance of Wadd in a Dedanite inscription, though it is unique, is not without explanation in the cosmopolitan context of a commercial centre like Dedan. See also the personal names of 'rswd (BID 18, which appears to be in Dedanite), 'grwd (RES 3371 = M335, a Minaean graffito from Dedan) and zdwd and 'bdwd in Lihyanite (CLL 9.1 and 4).

The word *ymn* may be derived from Ar. *yumn*, "prosperity, good fortune, good luck" (Lane VIII, 3064); derivatives of the root in Arabic, as frequently elsewhere in the Semitic languages, have the sense of "right." The use of *ymn* as "good luck" is not found elsewhere in pre-Islamic texts to my knowledge. The only possibility I know of is in Safaitic (LP 1006). It is also rare as an element in personal names; cf. the Sabaean name of 'bd'ymn (Garbini 1973: 43-45) and the more frequent 'ymn (which occurs 18 times, but always as a second name). In pre-Islamic Arabian texts the expression normally used for "good fortune" in connection with prayers to deities is *s'd*; see especially the ca. sixth/fifth centuries B.C. Najdi Thamudic petitions to Nahy (BIT = Hu 207 and 271) and 'Attarsam (Winnett and Reed, 1973: nos. 137, 160, 161, and 203 ff). In Lihyanite, the standard blessing formula is *frdyhm w'hrthm ws'dhm*, "(for) their successes, and their posterity, and their good fortune" (Caskel, 1953: 76). However, the sense of *ymn* in this text may be compared with that in the funerary inscription of Kabir'il b. Mat'il, the only known king of Dedan where *Gadd* (Aram. "fortune") appears to

be summoned for a blessing of rain (JS Lih. 138 as interpreted by A. F. L. Beeston, *apud* Winnett and Reed, 1970: 115). The worship of such "fortune" deities was widespread in the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, but for North Arabia is best known from the Safaitic inscriptions.

No. 3 (Khurm al-Ghuzlan) (Fig. 4; pl. CXXII, 2)

Tfynm (or *Mnyft*) *Tifyānm* (or *Munayfit*)

There is no clear indication as to which direction this name should be read; the *m* and the *n* face in different directions, but it seems more likely that the former is the reversed letter (cf. Ryckmans, 1934: nos. 2-4) and that therefore the inscription should be read from ground level to the top of the stone. The name can then be understood as *tfyn(m)* with the mimation found frequently in Minaean or in imitation of Minaean usage. The name *Tfyn* was formerly known only in Sabaean (Ja 651/2; CIH 40/1 and 41/1). For the vocalization *Tifyān*, compare the name *Sifyān* (CIK II, 515). It perhaps is derived from Ar. *tafan*, "to follow, drive away."

It is also possible that the name is to be read from the top of the stone to the bottom and understood as *mnyft* (derived from Ar. *nft*, "to spit, utter, discharge"), perhaps to be vocalized on the pattern of Ibn al-Munaydir, the name of the astronomer from the village of San'a in Yemen mentioned in the famous (*Ṣifat Jazīrat al-'Arab* (Müller, 1968: 56, line 11) of al-Hamdānī (b. 280 A.H./A.D. 893). However, since this name is unattested elsewhere in the North or South pre-Islamic onomasticon, the reading of *tfynm* is more likely correct.

Historical Commentary

The language, content and provenance of these inscriptions are unusual and deserve some explanation. Since the texts are devoid of historical references, the date and circumstances must be established by paleographical



Fig. 4:

comparisons and extraneous materials. As a result, only a relative chronology can be provided.

The Dedanite Texts

The first two inscriptions have been designated as Dedanite, perhaps the first evidence in Jordan of the script associated with the ancient inhabitants of the oasis of al-ʿUlā in the Hijaz. This classification is based on the general affinity of the inscriptions with the paleography established for this script, which is distinguished from Lihyanite by the circular form of certain letters (like the *ṣ*, *ʿ*, *w* and *y*) and the general uprightness of the script (Caskel 1953: 23 and WLT 10). Of note are the peculiar Dedanite *g* in *'bgr* (no. 1) and the enclosed base of the *m* and the vertical *t* in *mtr* (no. 2), which stand in contrast to the form of these letters in Lihyanite. The rounded letters of the Dedanite script have been viewed as a product of Minaean influence (van den Branden, 1962: 28-29), an observation that now receives some additional support in the mention of Wadd in the Abu al-Dbaʿ inscriptions. Previously, this supposition was dependent on the personal name of *'rswd* in what was termed a “*minäisierende*” Lihyanite graffito (Caskel, 1953: 31), which can now be considered as Dedanite (as van den Branden at BID no. 18).

A precise date for the Dedanite corpus is difficult to assign, but a chronological setting during the Persian Achaemenid period is to be preferred (van den Branden, 1957; Altheim and Stiehl, 1964; Winnett and Reed, 1970: 114-17) to one in the Hellenistic era (Caskel, 1953: 101-2). A possible *terminus a quo* for the Dedanite script remains elusive; the proposal of a date in the eighth/seventh centuries B.C. (van den Branden, 1962: 29-41) can be regarded only as approximate. Several vague historical allusions to a “war of Dedan” in Taymanite inscriptions from Jabal Ghunayma (W Tay nos. 20-23) have been associated with the North Arabian campaigns of the Babylonian king Nabonidus in the sixth century B.C., when

Dedan appears to have been a flourishing caravan centre (Albright, 1953). The similarity of Dedanite and Taymanite scripts (Caskel, 1953: 22) makes this a reasonable suggestion and offers some chronological index for the inscriptions. Another chronological factor is evidence that Dedan later fell under Persian control. This is indicated by a reference in a Lihyanite inscription to ʿAbd the “governor of Dedan” in language characteristic of Achaemenid rule (JS Lih. 349, *'bd fhṭ ddn*). This text provides a rather loosely defined *terminus ad quem* for the Dedanite corpus in the late Persian period and a possible context for the Abu al-Dbaʿ cave inscriptions. The provenance of these newly discovered texts in the north of the Hisma is easily explained if the Hijaz was under Persian administration. The strange mixture of North Arabian names and South Arabian vocabulary in the Abu al-Dbaʿ inscriptions furthermore suggests the peninsular-wide orientation of the Hijaz oasis during this period.

The Minaean Graffito

The third inscription from the Hisma is engraved in monumental South Arabian style and may be considered Minaean for the reasons stated above. Only a handful of Minaean texts have been found this far north. In Jordan, the only other examples are the five graffiti at Wadi Ram previously alluded to (G. Ryckmans, 1934) and a bronze scarab with a Minaean inscription that was discovered in a ravine at Petra after a violent rain storm (B. M. 117812 = R 3927 = M 376). The more recently discovered Minaean text from al-Jauf (WMin 1) should be included in the small Minaean corpus from North Arabia. The only other known Minaean texts outside of the Arabian peninsula are from the Fayyum in Egypt (R 3427 = M 338), the island of Delos in the Aegean (R 3570 = ID 2320 = M 349), and perhaps Tell Jemmeh, about 10 km. south of Gaza (Van Beek, 1983: 19). These few texts cannot compare with the much larger collection of Minaean inscriptions that appear in the environs of al-ʿUlā in the

Hijaz (see Beeston 1972a for the most recent additions). Several other frequently cited examples also must be eliminated from consideration. The South Arabian letters on the large storage jar found in the excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh near Aqaba must be of a different nature. The script cannot be Minaean (contra G. Ryckmans 1939), but must either be Dedanite (Albright, 1953: 3 and van den Branden, 1962: 35) or, perhaps more likely, Sabaean (note the *h* is upside down for Dedanite; cf. Boneschi, 1961), if the reported seventh century B.C. stratigraphical context is correct. In addition, it appears that the South Arabian clay stamp found at Bethel, which has been mired in controversy, is clearly out of context and the initial suspicions about the stamp as a modern intrusion that were expressed appear to be justified (Cleveland, 1973). The new find from the Khurm al-Ghuzlān may now be added to the meagre, but significant corpus of non-peninsular Minaean inscriptions.

Although the chronology for the Minaean kingdom of South Arabia remains a vexed question, the basic horizon now is regarded to be late Persian and early Hellenistic. Indeed, there are substantial reasons for dating the majority of the northern Minaean texts to the early Hellenistic era. Such a date has been advanced on the basis of the paleography of the inscriptions (Pirenne, 1956: 212), but a problematic historical allusion in a Minaean text from Beraqish makes it impossible to limit the Minaean texts to the period after Alexander the Great. The troubling reference is to a "struggle between Media and Egypt" (RES3022/16, *mrd kwn byn mdy wmsr*). This event seems more likely to be the invasion of Egypt by Artaxerxes III Ochus in 343 B.C. than any of the struggles between the Ptolemies and Seleucids of the Hellenistic period, as the term "Mede" was the characteristic designation for the Achaemenid empire in North Arabia and the Levant (Graf, 1984). This date would push back the origins of the Minaean kingdom to at least the fifth century and the establishment of its merchant colony at Dedan to the late fourth century (Winnett

and Reed, 1970: 119). Since the Dedanite inscriptions from Abu al-Dḥa' suggest the influence of the South Arabians in the Hijaz during the Persian period, some additional support is now provided for a pre-Hellenistic date. These internal factors form the basis for assigning the northern Minaean texts to the late Persian/early Hellenistic period.

Minaean presence outside of Arabia Felix becomes especially clear, however, only in the third century B.C., when Greek sources provide some firmly based chronological data. The first Greek literary reference to the Minaeans is that of the Hellenistic author Eratosthenes (*apud* Strabo 16.4.4 [768]), whose information is probably derived from Ptolemy II's Arabian expedition of ca. 278/277 B.C. (Tarn, 1929: 16). From the same source, Eratosthenes probably gained his knowledge of the aromatic trade of the Minaeans and Gerrhaeans that was centered on an island near the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba (*apud* Strabo 16.3.18 [768]). In contrast, the earlier classical Greek sources reveal no knowledge of the Minaeans, although they are familiar with the aromatic trade of the East, which they designate as "Syrian" for the ports where the items were obtained (see *Surion aglaisma* in Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1312; *Surias libanōton* in Hermippus, *The Porters apud* Ath. 1.27 f = Edmonds FAC 63 [425 B.C.]; *Surias d'ōs libanou kapnos* in Euripides, *Bacch.* 144 [405 B.C.]; and *smurnēs ek Surias odmai [kai?] libanou te pnoai* in Anaxandrides, *Protesilaus apud* Ath. 4.131a/36 = Edmonds FAC 41 [ca. 372 B.C.]). Greek emporia like al-Mina on the Orontes in Syria were engaged in these transactions and no doubt furnished the basis of such designations. Such eastern associations make it unlikely that this terminology can be attributed to ignorance among the Greeks about the sources of these products.

There rather appears to have been general awareness that South Arabia was the actual source of these goods (see Müller, 1978 and Groom, 1981). For example, in the late fifth century B.C., Herodotus certainly was cognizant that frankincense and myrrh were the monopoly

of this distant region and that these items were transported to the Levant by the Phoenicians (Hdt. 3.107). His information about the Arabian peninsula also appears to be precise and accurate. The references to the cults of Orotalt and Alilat in his discussion of the religion of Arabia (3.8) are quite clearly allusions to Ruḏa and al-Lat (Teixidor, 1977: 69-70). In addition, recent discoveries of drawings of "fat-tailed sheep" in the rock art of central Arabia (Anati, 1968: pt. 1) have provided support for the reliability of his information about even Arabia's strange animal, life, (Hdt. 3.113). The absence of the Minaeans in these classical sources then suggests that they had not yet arisen as a major factor in the aromatics trade. On the other hand, by the early Roman principate, the Minaean commercial achievements are part of the past (Pliny, N.H. 12.30 and Ptolemy, *Geog.* 6.7.23). Minaean expansion into North Arabia can then be assigned to a date no earlier than the late fourth century B.C.

The impression provided by these literary sources is confirmed by documentary sources: it is only in the third century B.C. that Minaean involvement in the commerce of frankincense and myrrh can be extensively documented in the Greek sources. Among the most important of these sources are the Zenon papyri (for general discussion see Tcherikover, 1937 and Mittmann, 1970). In these administrative records of the Ptolemies (Bagnell, 1976), there are a number of references to the purchase of Minaean and Gerrhaean frankincense and myrrh in Syria and Palestine. These transactions begin in 261 B.C. (P. Cairo Zeno 59536/11-12, *libanou Minaiou ta(lanta) d kai Gerraiou ta(lanta) e smurnēs*; cf. 59011, II/15, and PSI VI, 628/5; cf. Agatharchides apud Photius 87 and Pliny N.H. 12.35.68) and include the memorandum of a purchase of such items from a Moabite named Malichos (P. Cairo Zeno 59009, frag. f in IV, p. 285). These papyri also indicate that Gaza was the most important centre for the aromatic trade during this period; some archaeological evidence supporting the prominence of this port under the

Ptolemies is provided by the Minaean inscription reading 'bm on a potsherd recently discovered in the late third/early second centuries B.C. granaries at Tell Jemmeh (Van Beek, 1983: 19). This name is known only from South Arabian texts, such as the Minaean inscriptions from Ma'in (R 2778 = M 33) and al'Ula (R 3835 = JS 191). Since Tell Jemmeh is located just 10 km. south of Gaza, the major Hellenistic commercial port, it seems likely that this find is to be connected with Minaeans engaged in aromatic traffic. Another indication of the general influence of the Minaeans in the Hellenistic Levant is reflected in the LXX rendering of Job 2.11; which transforms Zophar the Na'amathite into *Sōphar o Minaion basileus*.

These Greek literary and documentary sources correlate well with the information contained in the Minaean texts themselves. Of utmost importance in this regard are the so-called "Hierodulenlisten," found by J. Halévy on steles at the temple of Ma'in, the ancient capital of the Minaeans. These inscriptions record the offering or consecration of foreign women to the temple by Minaean merchants, evidently as part of the public building liturgy that they had not been able to provide because of their involvement in foreign trading ventures (J. Ryckmans, 1961). Along with the ancestry and clan of the dedicant, these texts also record the specific origins of the foreign women (Mlaker, 1943 = M 392-398). The places named include Sidon (*sydn*), 'Ammōn (*'mn*), Moab (*m'b*), Qedar (*gdr*), Meda'in Šālīh (*hgr*), Dedan (*ddn*), Liḥyan, Wadi al-Qurā, the oasis south of Dedan (*gryn*), Gaza (*gzt*), Egypt (*mšr*), and perhaps Greece (*ywnm*, with mimation), revealing the scope of Minaeana commercial activity in North Arabia and beyond. On the basis of paleography, these dedications have been assigned to the late third century by Albright (1953: 23 n. 12) or spread out from 290 to 180 B.C. by Pirenne (1956: 212 n. 4-5), which seems more likely. Some basis for this date can be found in the Minaean inscription on the Gizeh sarcophagus dated to the 22nd year of

Ptolemy that commemorates Zaid'il, son of 'Zid, of the clan of Zayrān, who had imported aromatics for the Egyptian temples (R 3427 = M 338). As J. Ryckmans (1961: 54) astutely observed, this merchant is probably identical with the *zyd'l bn 'bd dzyrun* who offered an Egyptian women in the Hierodulen texts (M392/C39). If the ruler referred to in the Gizeh text is Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282-246 B.C.), the date of the inscription would be 263/262 B.C., but the long-reigning Ptolemaic rulers make such synchronization only a possibility; Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-222 B.C.), Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204-180 B.C.), Ptolemy VI Philometor (180-145 B.C.), and Ptolemy VII Euergetes 145-116 B.C. provide equally suitable candidates for the ambiguous reference. Nevertheless, this text provides at least some basis for the chronological development of the Minaean script and the activities of the colonists in the Mediterranean region, especially in Egypt and Gaza (R 2771/3 = M 27).

In recent decades, the organization and institutions of this foreign commerce of the South Arabian kingdom have been substantially clarified (J. Ryckmans, 1957-58), particularly in reference to the Levant. Of greatest importance for our knowledge of these developments is the mercantile code of the Minaean colony at al-Ula, which indicates that the trading centre at Dedan was called the *Bayt Wadd* and the goods that were transported were considered the "property of Wadd" (*qnyh wd* in R 3695 = M 356 with the discussion of Beeston 1978). This close association of the Minaean national deity with the aromatic trade is reflected also in the formula "Wadd is father" that appears in Minaean inscriptions at the capital cities of the kingdoms of Qataban and Hadramaut, the main suppliers of frankincense and myrrh, and explains the expression "perfumes of Wadd" (*mṣyt wd*) that appears in the Beraqish texts (Doe, 1979). The trade itself appears to have been the monopoly of a number of prominent Minaean families, such as the Gebbanitaea mentioned by Pliny (Beeston, 1972b). The widespread activities of these international merchants were all intimately connected

with the capital at Ma'in and highly organized. In the case of the Minaean colony at Dedan, two officials called *kabirs* were the administrators for the settlement (Winnett and Reed, 1970: 117). Since Dedan is designated the Ma'in of Muṣran (see now Sayyed, 1982), the intimate relations of the settlers with their mother city and Ptolemaic administration appears pat, but similar connections may have existed with other Minaean merchants who were operating in the Levant. In this connection, it is attractive to connect the name of the modern village of Ma'an in southern Jordan with Minaean colonist activity, a notion that Jaussen and Savignac once entertained, especially because the southern suburbs of the settlement are called "Ma'an of Muṣran" (1909: 33-42). Unfortunately, they found no traces of the ancient period at the town, and its rapid growth in recent years may now conceal what did exist.

The range of the trading pattern and nature of the activities reflected in the *Hierodulen* texts fit remarkably well into the context of the Zenon papyri. The traditional slave trade of the Levant was well known among the Greeks, as is reflected in the common name of *Suros* for slaves in the classical (ML 79/A37 and 47; Antiphanes, *The Chick* = Edmonds 168 = Ath. 3.108e) and Hellenistic periods (LSJ 1732). In addition, there was the old Eastern custom of sacred prostitution in which women were sold to foreigners, a practice that classical authors viewed with some distaste (Hdt. 1.199; Strabo 16.1.20; and Lucian, *De Syria Dea* 6). The Ptolemaic rulers attempted to regulate and restrict such commerce in the region (Liebesny, 1936 and Landau, 1966), but, if Zenon's activities as a high ranking official are typical, without much success; included in his memoranda are the records of a number of slave purchases in Syria-Palestine (P. Cairo Zen. 59003, 59015, 59018, 59076a and b, 59804, PSI 648). Furthermore, Syrian slaves appear quite frequently in the households and businesses of the Greek aristocracy in Egypt (P. Cairo Zen. 59011 and 59077) and it appears that Syrian villages were scattered throughout the country (59404,

59497). Private Syrian merchants appear to have facilitated this traffic and even served as agents for Apollonius (59006 and PSI 324-325), the financial minister for Ptolemy II, whose estates were administered by Zenon.

Although Zenon's agents encountered occasional difficulties with custom agents in attempts to export slaves (P. Cairo Zen. 59292), slave trading still appears to have been widespread and the officialdom either indifferent or corrupt. The tolerance of the Ptolemaic bureaucracy to the slave trade is illustrated by the report of one of Zenon's agents about the activities of two vagabond brigands named Drimulos and Dionysius (PSI 406). At Pegais they turned over a slave girl to the border guard after abusing her, sold in Ptolemais a slave girl they had purchased in Amman, made a similar transaction in Joppa for a priestess or temple prostitute (*hierea*), carried away another slave girl to the Hauran in southern Syria to sell for 150 drachmai, and purchased a fifth slave girl in Transjordan. The only difficulties that these two scalawags encountered was with the Nabataeans.

These Greek sources provide a vista from which to interpret the activities of Minaean merchants reflected in the *Hierodulenlisten* and the scattered Minaean graffiti outside Arabia Felix. Of the 74 foreign women mentioned in these texts, 27 are from Gaza, 8 from Egypt, and 9 from Dedan. Although in certain instances these women are of free status and the wives of the dedicants (e.g., M 392, B44-47, Hayū's Lihyanite *hrt* or wife), most of them were probably of a status similar to that of the slave girls Zenon and his agents sought from the same regions. The Minaean inscriptions in Palestine and North Arabia appear at the termini of the major caravan routes intersecting these trade centres: Tell Jemmeh (near Gaza) Petra, and Jauf at the entrance to the Wadi Sirhan (Bowersock, 1983: 154-59). Those from the Hisma are strung along the routes leading to these major commercial centres, either at the large oasis at Wadi Ram or, in the case of the new graffito at Khurm al-Ghuzlān, along the desert track

cutting SE from Quweira to Mudawwara. They probably are the product of Minaeans involved in the frankincense and myrrh trade, perhaps merchants like those of the *Hierodulenlisten* who returned to their homeland with women they had purchased at the various towns of Syria and Palestine where they conducted their transactions.

The last dateable piece of epigraphic evidence for Minaean activities in the Mediterranean region is the Greek-Minaean bilingual inscription found at Delos, which contains a dedication for an altar to Wadd and the other divinities at Ma'in (R 3570 = ID 2320 = M 349). This dedication must date after 166 B.C., when Delos was transformed into a free port by Rome, but before the Mithridatic wars of the early first century B.C. During this period, foreign immigration was drawn to the island, which became an important commercial centre under Athenian administration (Bruneau, 1970). Several Delian inscriptions from ca. 140/139 B.C. mentioning Gerrheans (ID 1439 ii, 1142 A82, 1449 A ii 28, and 1450) furnish an approximate date for the dedication.

The new graffito from Khurm al-Ghuzlān, as well as the other North Minaean texts, may be assigned a date in the period between the establishment of Ptolemaic rule in North Arabia and the Delian inscription. As archaeological activity continues to increase in Jordan, it may be anticipated that other such discoveries will be made to further attest to the international commerce and far-reaching activities of the little known and frequently neglected, but significant kingdoms of the Arabian peninsula. The Dedanite and Minaean wayfarers reflected in these graffiti from this arid region of the Hisma certainly point in that direction.

Abbreviations

The references to the occurrences of names and abbreviations for publications are derived from G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, Near and Middle East Series, vol. 8 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971). M = the

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