

Two Old South Arabian Inscriptions: Early and Late

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Over the years, Professor Abdel Moneim A.H. Sayed and I have shared our interests in the mysterious ancient cultures and civilizations on both sides of the Red Sea: in Punt, in the Horn of Africa (broadly speaking), whence the resourceful ancient Egyptians obtained all across precious goods by trade with its people, notably aromatics, rare timbers and gold through the centuries; and in Ancient South Arabia, with its astonishing civilizations based on the Kingdoms of Saba, Ma'in, Qataban and Hadramaut and lesser entities, with their pioneering irrigation-agriculture and fabled trade, again in the aromatics so eagerly sought by other peoples in the Near East and around the East Mediterranean across many centuries.

Through the course of recent years, my interest in Ancient Arabia has brought me into contact not only with many interesting people of the present day, but also with quite a series of ancient inscriptions from all these ancient Kingdoms. So, it is a very special pleasure here to share with my good friend Prof. Abdel Moneim (and all our readers) two texts from ancient proto-Ma'in and from Qataban, both previously unpublished.

Figure (1), a Libation-table from ancient Haram, in the later Kingdom of Ma'in. This piece (UPC 117 in my reference files) is a rectangular (possibly alabaster) libation-table, height 19 cm (7.5"), length 38.9 cm (15.3"), width *c.* 28 cm (*c.* 11.25"). The rear is rough and without decoration; hence, in its original setting, this piece was positioned against a wall. A bull-head so heavily stylized as to be almost an abstract sculpture project from the upper front. Flanking this, and along

both sides, the upper two-thirds of its vertical surface bears a décor of four incised horizontal strips over a row of rectangular denticles, all placed in turn above three additional strips and a second row of such denticles. On each side, a pair of vertical incised lines cuts these panels into three equal lots (two equal lots flank the front head). All round the right side, front and left side, from right to left, runs a well-engraved text along the bottom third of the block, which reads thus:

(Right) 'b - w k l / b n / 'b - 'n s / s³ (Front) l ' / ' t
t r / b ' s n / y <h?> r (Left) 'b / b - y w m / S m h - ' m r.

(Right) "Ab-wakil, the son of Ab-anas, dedi- (Front) cated (this item) to 'Athtar Ba'san (= the Brave (?)), (when) he <made> an (Left) agreement/contract, in the time of Sumhu-amir."

The deity to whom this monument is dedicated was based in the city (and city-State) of Haram, in the later land and Kingdom of Ma'in, lying north of Saba (Sheba) in Yemen, and is invoked on numerous monuments found at Haram (now the ruins of Kharibat Hamdan/Al-Ali). In 8th to 6th centuries BCE, it had its own line of local kings, *c.* 750–600 BCE, then in the 3rd/2nd centuries, also becoming part of Ma'in until its eclipse and absorption into Saba. The dateline indicates that Sumhu-amir was a king; but he is not a ruler previously known for either Haram or Ma'in (although the two elements Sumhu and amir are known in both local and Minean royal names, but not in conjunction as here). The script is very regular, angular and plain (no serifs; *n* has proper rectangular