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Review

NORBERT NEBES, *Der Tatenbericht des Yitā^oamar Watar bin Yakrubmalik
aus Širwāḥ (Jemen)*

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NORBERT NEBES, *Der Tatenbericht des Yīṭa^ʿamar Watar bin Yakrubmalik aus Ṣirwāḥ (Jemen)*, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, 7 (Tübingen–Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2016). 148 pp., 5 maps, 27 plates, 1 CD-Rom. Price: €25.00. ISBN: 978-3-8030-2203-5.

During the 2005 expedition, the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut working in Yemen, directed by Iris Gerlach, made a major discovery at the site of Ṣirwāḥ. A seven meter-long limestone block, weighing about seven tons, was found lying on the surface of the courtyard of the Almaqah temple and, once turned over, a long boustrophedon inscription consisting of seven lines and 328 words appeared. It was given the inventory number Ṣirwāḥ 2005-50. Originally, it was directly in front of and facing the well-known RES 3945, which was still in its initial position when Eduard Glaser copied it at the end of the nineteenth century. RES 3945—and RES 3946 on the rear face of the same stone—are still among the most important epigraphic records for the history of ancient South Arabia, as they contain the deeds of one of the most influential Sabaean sovereigns, the *Mukarrib* Karib^ʿil Watar bin Dhamar^ʿalī, who has long been at the centre of the debate concerning the so-called ‘Assyrian synchronism’. The identification of this Karib^ʿil Watar with the ‘Karibilu king of Saba’, mentioned in a text of Sennacherib (c.685 BCE), is now widely accepted, as is the ‘Long Chronology’, after a lengthy and difficult debate. This scenario is, in fact, also consistent with the results of the archaeological investigations, which have helped to confirm that a complex political structure was already present in ancient South Arabia certainly around the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, and even earlier according to the latest archaeological analyses. The other datum pertaining to the Assyrian synchronism, which is the mention of ‘Ita^ʿamar the Sabaean’ at the time of Sargon II (c.715 BCE), is more difficult to collocate. It has been generally connected with another Sabaean *mukarrib*, Yīṭa^ʿamar Bayān bin Sumuhū^ʿalī who, according to South Arabian inscriptions may have been one of the immediate predecessors of Karib^ʿil Watar—although the thirty-year span between these two sovereigns could, in fact, be too long. Ṣirwāḥ 2005-50 stimulates a revision of this datum, because the subject of this annalistic inscription is a certain Yīṭa^ʿamar Watar bin Yakrubmalik, a *mukarrib* who was found cited only two years before this discovery on an inscribed bronze altar acquired by the Louvre (AO 31929) with the same

complete onomastic formula.¹ Whether this person is to be identified with others found on archaic inscriptions where a certain *Yiṭa*^{amar} is cited with a shorter onomastic formula (e.g. Eponyms List, CIH 924, Muḥāfazat Marib 23, DAI-Jabal Balaq al-Qiblī 1) has subsequently been reconsidered. Despite great improvements over the second half of the last century, our knowledge of ancient South Arabian dynastic successions is still very limited; furthermore many difficulties remain due to the high frequency of homonyms in royal onomastics. For this reason, the identification of this *Yiṭa*^{amar} Watar bin Yakrubmalik with the *Ita*^{amar} of the Assyrians is still a working hypothesis, albeit a good one, since a sovereign who had such political influence (which is precisely the information found in this new text) is also very likely to have been known at an international level, as was the case of Karib^{il} Watar roughly one generation later. This is the identification proposed by Norbert Nebes who, in the present volume, offers a comprehensive edition and detailed investigation of all the numerous aspects raised by this text.²

After the transcription, translation, and a meticulous philological commentary (Chapter 1), a general analysis of the structure, composition, and linguistic peculiarities of the inscription is presented (Chapter 2). The different thematic portions of the text are also highlighted, followed by an introductory linguistic comparison with the documents of Karib^{il} Watar from the same area. Here some interesting points emerge, especially the absence in the text of *Yiṭa*^{amar} of the ‘consecutive’ use of the imperfect form *w-yf^l*, which, on the contrary, was one of the most interesting linguistic features in the inscription of Karib^{il}—incidentally a more complex text from various points of view.³ In Chapter 3 the palaeographic analysis concerns a few diagnostic signs, for instance the character H and especially the sign S³ (Š according to the German

¹ A. Caubet, I. Gajda, and F. Demange, ‘Deux autels en bronze provenant de l’Arabie méridionale’, *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (2003), 1219–1242.

² Some general preliminary comments appeared soon after the discovery. See N. Nebes, ‘Ita^{amar} der Sabäer: zur Datierung der Monumentalinschrift des *Yiṭa*^{amar} Watar’, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 18 (2007), 25–33; and also ‘Der Tatenbericht eines sabäischen Mukarribs als Widmungsinschrift—Die Monumentalinschrift des *Yiṭa*^{amar} Watar aus Širwāḥ’, in B. Janowski and D. Schwemer, eds, *Grab-, Sarg-, Bau- und Votivinschriften*, Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Neue Folge, 6 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 362–367.

³ This feature, of course, led to some comparative analyses. Cf. e.g. Y. Grunfest, ‘The Consecutive Imperfect in Semitic Epigraphy’, in Y. Avishur, ed., *Michael. Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies In Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer* (Tel Aviv–Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 1999), 171–180.

system of transliteration), which is of an archaic shape in comparison with the already ‘normalized’ form used in the Karib³il inscription. This is one of the main pieces of evidence supporting the anteriority of *Ṣirwāḥ* 2005-50 to RES 3945/3946. The absolute dating issue is at the centre of Chapter 4, which begins with a brief discussion of the archaeological data and the chronological hints spanning the period between the texts of *Yiṭa³amar* and Karib³il. However, the central point remains the connection of these two kings with those attested in the ‘Assyrian synchronism’, this being the only precise external clue around which it is possible to reconstruct the dynastic succession of the period, given that the internal documents are still too fragmentary and difficult to relate to each other—although new internal synchronisms from the al-Ġawf area have greatly improved our understanding of the regional political panorama during the second quarter of the first millennium BCE (cf. e.g. YM 2009, Kamna 32).

The internal historical setting revealed by the new inscription is amply analysed in Chapter 5 and represents another important advance in our knowledge. We understand, in fact, that Sabaeen strategic alliances changed considerably between the two *mukarribs*, a fact consistent with the progressive extension of Sabaeen influence over South Arabian territory, also from the perspective of its growing control over the caravan routes. It seems that *Yiṭa³amar* intervened in a more restricted area in comparison to that covered by the campaigns of Karib³il Watar. In particular, *Yiṭa³amar* was on the side of the autonomous city of Nashshān against the attempt by Kaminahū to annex it (a situation already anticipated by the above mentioned text AO 31929), whereas in RES 3945 we witness the rage of Karib³il after the betrayal of Nashshān itself. Apart from the al-Ġawf area, the interventions of *Yiṭa³amar* were also concentrated in the region south-west of Ma³rib, especially the southern highlands and Qatabān, which were still divided into a multitude of small local communities (cf. e.g. ‘the king of Tamna³’ and ‘the king of Radmān’). These actions were in support of Awsān, thus in a totally different situation to that faced by Karib³il some time later, when Awsān was the enemy and Qatabān the ally to defend.

The volume also comprises the edition of a few other archaic texts found in the same area, as well as some new inscriptions from the Ma³rib oasis (Ġabal Balaq al-Qiblī and Wādī al-Ġufayna)—together with AO 31929 and CIH 924, these can be added to the dossier relating to *Yiṭa³amar*. A new reading of RES 3946, improved by further additions, is also provided. An appendix by Iris Gerlach and Mike Schnelle closes the volume and deals with a more detailed analysis of the archaeological context of the Almaqah temple in *Ṣirwāḥ*. The volume also contains a comprehensive general word list and an onomastic index, as well as superb photos and maps (also in digital form).

Reviews

We must be grateful to Norbert Nebes for this insightful investigation into a text that will certainly continue to stimulate intense debate concerning several historical and linguistic issues related to the archaic Sabaean phase.

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CHRISTIAN JULIEN ROBIN, ed., *Le judaïsme de l'Arabie antique. Actes du Colloque de Jérusalem (février 2006)*, *Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme*, 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015). 567 pp., 115 illus. Price: €105.00. ISBN: 978-2-503-55115-9.

This volume edited and mainly authored by Christian Julien Robin is an indispensable contribution to the study of the history—the origin, emergence, development, character, and impact—of Judaism in Ancient Arabia. This is a classic topic for the religious history of the wider area, namely of Arabia, and South Arabia, particularly in its connection to the Roman, Persian, and even African world of Late Antiquity. The issue is of great significance, from several points of view. Judaism in South Arabia has long been understood as a decisive factor for the emergence of Islam and, as for Ethiopianists, the question might also be evaluated in the light of the emergence of Christian monotheism in fourth-century Aksum. Apart from the well-known fact that no South Arabian polytheistic dedicatory inscription was produced from the last quarter of the fourth century (c.380 CE) onwards, the importance and extent of Judaism in Ancient Arabia has gained momentum in the course of the last twenty years, as new evidence has emerged showing both the depth and pervasiveness of a phenomenon which is almost completely ignored by mainstream Talmudic Judaism.

This wonderful publication, carefully edited and rich in illustrations, is formally presented as the proceedings of a Jerusalem conference convened by Robin on 5–7 February 2006, although some of the contributions included have been substantially updated, so that they present the state of the art as of the date of publication. However, two essays are posthumous. The thick volume is divided into two sections according to the sources considered, ‘Épigraphie et archéologie’ (pp. 13–434), and a much smaller one, ‘Traditions manuscrites’ (pp. 435–538): this distribution, in and of itself, marks a paradigm that, on the one hand, reflects the state of the most recent research (no less than 50 to 100 inscriptions document Judaism in South Arabia) and, on the other hand, might also point to the need for further research of manuscript sources on a larger scale.