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## The kingdom of Saba' in the second century CE — A reassessment

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At the turn of the Christian era, South Arabia went through unprecedented political changes. The kingdom of Ma'īn vanished and its main cities were abandoned. The kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt reinforced its presence along the southern shore (foundation of Qanī'; reorganization of Sumhuram). Several tribal federations broke away from the kingdom of Qatabān: to the east the kingdom of Awsān became independent again; to the south, the tribes of Maḍhā, Radmān-and-Khawlān, and Ḥimyar became autonomous principalities. The latter soon became a major kingdom, probably thanks to the growth of the recent, lucrative maritime trade with Roman Egypt and India. Coinage showing Ḥimyarite kings appeared as soon as the late first century BCE<sup>1</sup>. The city of Zafār was the Ḥimyarite capital at the latest in the first century CE<sup>2</sup>. And in the same century, the Ḥimyarite kings — the dynasty of the banū dhū-Raydān — took control of the kingdom of Saba'<sup>3</sup>. This union gave rise to a new royal title: “king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān”<sup>4</sup>.

In the first century CE, the kingdom of Saba' and dhū-Raydān gathered together:

- The old Sabaeen aristocracy settled in the region of Ma'rib, Ṣirwāḥ, and the Jawf (Nashq, Nashshān)<sup>5</sup>.
- Sabaeen tribes from the western highlands: Sam'ī — including Ḥāshid, Yarsum, and Ḥumlān; Bakīl — including dhū-Raydat, dhū-'Amrān, and dhū-Shibām; Ma'dhin, Tan'im-and-Tan'imat, Ghaymān, Dhamarī (fraction of Samhar), and other minor groups;
- Ḥimyarite tribes from the south-western highlands: Dhamarī (fraction of Qasham), Muha'nif, Shaddād, Muhaqra', Maytam, Ma'āfir, and other minor groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Robin, 2010.

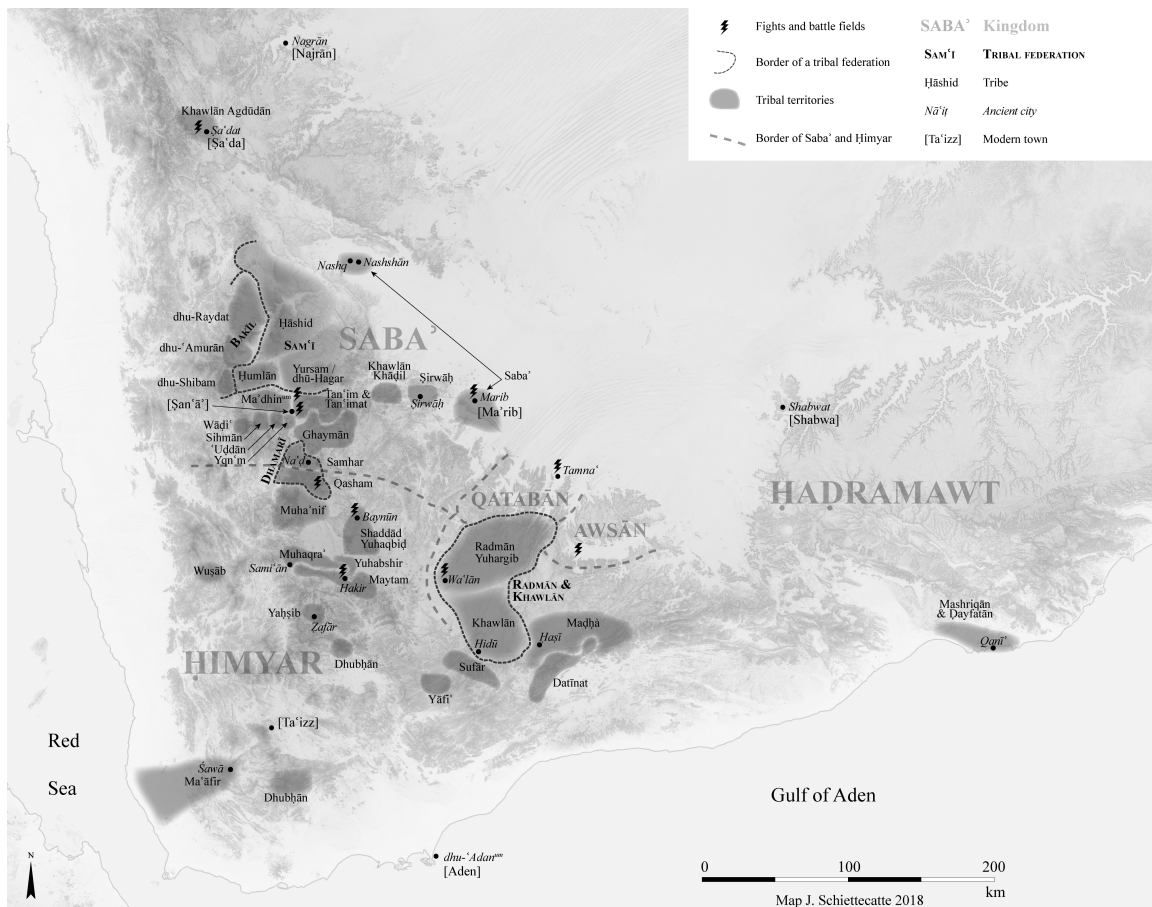
<sup>2</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* vi, 26, 104: “Intus oppidum, regia eius, appellatur Sapphar”; *Periplus Maris Erythraei* § 23: “And after nine days more there is Saphar (Σαφάρα), the metropolis, in which lives Charibael, lawful king of two tribes, the Homerites and those living next to them, called the Sabaites”.

<sup>3</sup> Bāfaqīh, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> In its very first occurrence in inscription Leiden 26, in the late first century BCE–early first century CE, it was “mukarrib of Saba' and dhū-Raydān” (*Yd' l Byn mkrb S'b' w-d-Rydn*). The ancient title of “mukarrib”, meaning “federator”, was abandoned and replaced by “king” thereafter.

<sup>5</sup> The so-called “old Sabaeen aristocracy” is referred to by the word 's'b'n (litt. “the Sabaeans”) in the Sabaic inscriptions from the second century CE; on the meaning of 's'b'n, see Bāfaqīh, 1990: 71–77; Robin, 1996: 1104–1105.

Contrasting with this relatively peaceful century, the second century CE was a period of epidemics and endless conflicts between all the South Arabian political entities: the kingdoms of Saba', Ḥimyar, Qatabān, Awsān, and Ḥaḍramawt, and the principalities of Maḍhā and Radmān-and-Khawlān (Fig. 1). It was also a time when the tribal aristocracy in the western highlands and the principality of Radmān fought with the dynasty of dhū-Raydān for the control of the Sabaean territory and also claimed the title of “king of Saba'”/“king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān”, leading to the ludicrous situation of three people claiming the Sabaean throne at the same time (c. 159 CE). The outcome of this century was the disappearance of both the kingdoms of Awsān and Qatabān, and the revival of a Sabaean kingdom headed by the tribal princes of the western highlands.



**Figure 1:** Tribal and political map of South Arabia in the second century CE (J. Schiettecatte).

Much has been said concerning the broad outlines of the sequence of rulers and events in this century <sup>6</sup>. However, the chronology remains incomplete: the fact that a Ḥimyarite king and a Sabaean king bore the same title at the same time — that is, king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān — has been a source of confusion; the fact that the succession was rarely dynastic

<sup>6</sup> Pirenne, 1956; Ryckmans, 1964; 1967; Lundin and Ryckmans, 1964; Robin and Bāfaqīh, 1981; Bāfaqīh, 1990; Robin, 1992; 2010; 2016; Bron, 2002; Gajda, 2013; Arbach and Schiettecatte, 2017.

but rather effected by co-option/adoption among the ruling families of the different tribes also complicates any chronological reconstruction; finally, some chronological gaps are still waiting for new epigraphic material to be filled. In this paper, the recent discovery of three new Sabaic inscriptions sheds new light on three grey areas of this century: 1) the beginning of the reign of the Sabaeen king Wahab'īl Yaḥūz; 2) the date of the reign of the Sabaeen king Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān; and 3) the moment when the Ḥimyarite king Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr took control of the Sabaeen territory.

### **Chronology of Saba' in the second century CE**

At the very beginning of the second century CE, the territory of Saba' was under the control of the Ḥimyarite king 'Amdān Bayyin Yuhaqbiḍ (c.100–120 CE). In the meantime, Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub prince (*qayl*) of the tribe of dhū-Shibām<sup>um</sup>, fraction of Bakīl<sup>um</sup>, rose up against the kingdoms of Qatabān, Ḥimyar, Ḥaḍramawt, and the principality of Radmān (*CIH* 140) and claimed the title of “King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān”. He ruled over a newly independent Sabaeen kingdom, with the support of families belonging to the old Sabaeen aristocracy of Ma'rib (Ir 3, *RES* 4150) and tribes from the western highlands: Dhamarī (Ja 568), Ma'dhin<sup>um</sup> (Fa 94 + 95, Gar Ḍula' 1), Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup> (Gr 184), dhū-Hagar<sup>um</sup> (Ja 413) (Fig. 1).

From then on, a succession of Sabaeen tribal leaders from the highlands ascended the throne with the assent both of their peers (the *qayls*) and of the old Sabaeen aristocracy of Ma'rib. The chronological sequence of the Sabaeen and Ḥimyarite royal succession during the second century is shown in a synoptic table (Table 1). This table is based on the work of Bāfaqīh and Robin <sup>7</sup>, and was completed thanks to the new dated inscriptions published by Khaldūn Nu'mān <sup>8</sup> and those published below.

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<sup>7</sup> Robin and Bāfaqīh, 1981; Bāfaqīh, 1990; Robin, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Noman, 2012.





## Wahab'īl Yaḥūz king of Saba': beginning of his reign and origin

How Wahab'īl Yaḥūz ascended the Sabaeen throne is obscure. It is generally admitted that it happened after the truce called by Yarīm Aymān among the fighting kingdoms of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, Qatabān, and Ḥaḍramawt (CIH 315)<sup>9</sup>.

### *Inscription al-Ḥadā' 2017-1*

A new inscription, al-Ḥadā' 2017-1, provides an accurate *terminus ante quem* for the enthronement of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz. Only a copy of this inscription was provided to Muhammad al-Ḥājj in 2007 by the discoverer, 'Alī Nāṣir Ṣawāl. It is said to come from al-Ḥadā' area, north-east of Dhamār. Neither the provenance nor the content could be verified. The transcription is reproduced and a translation is given.

### Transcription

- 1 *ḥyrt b-hw ḥyrw Dmr'ly Yhbr d-*
- 2 *Ryd<sup>n</sup> w-s<sup>2</sup>'b<sup>n</sup> Ḥmyr<sup>m</sup> w-'s<sup>2</sup>'b-hmw b-brt*
- 3 *[... ...] b-ywm [... ... b-]*
- 4 *ḍr<sup>m</sup> b-'ly Whb'l mlk S'b' w-ḥms' w-'s<sup>2</sup>=*
- 5 *'b' mlk S'b' b-wrḥ<sup>n</sup> d-tbt<sup>n</sup> d-b-ḥrf<sup>n</sup> [d-l-...]*
- 6 *w-s<sup>1</sup>ty w-tty m't<sup>n</sup> bn ḥrf M=*
- 7 *bḥḍ bn 'bḥḍ*

### Translation

- 1 Camp where had camped Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr dhū-
- 2 Raydān and the tribe of Ḥimyar<sup>um</sup> and their tribes during the military campaign
- 3 ... ... the day when ... ... in
- 4 the war against Wahab'īl king of Saba' and the army and the
- 5 tribes of the kings of Saba' in the month of dhū-thābatān in the year
- 6 two-hundred sixty [...] of
- 7 Mabḥūḍ ibn Abḥaḍ

### Philological comment

Ll. 1-2, *Dmr'ly Yhbr d-Ryd<sup>n</sup>*: Ḥimyarite king *Dmr'ly Yhbr mlk S'b' w-d-Ryd<sup>n</sup>* without the royal title, as in Gl 1228, BynM 3, Zubayrī-al-'Awd 1 and Kh-Umayma 1.

L. 4, *Whb'l mlk S'b'*: Sabaeen king *Whb'l Yḥz mlk S'b'*. Wahab'īl Yaḥūz and Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr are also mentioned together in inscription Gl 1228.

L. 5, *b-wrḥ<sup>n</sup> d-tbt<sup>n</sup>*: “in the month of dhū-thābatān”, that is, April in the Ḥimyarite calendar<sup>10</sup>.

Ll. 5–7, *[d-l-...] w-s<sup>1</sup>ty w-tty m't<sup>n</sup> bn ḥrf Mbḥḍ bn 'bḥḍ*: “in the year two-hundred sixty [...] of Mabḥūḍ ibn Abḥaḍ”. Only the century and the decade are legible; the unit is missing. The year falls between 261 and 269 of the Ḥimyarite era, that is, between 151 and 159 CE. The range might be shortened to 155–159 CE (see below).

<sup>9</sup> Garbini, 1976; Bafaqih, 1990; Robin, 1992; Bron, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Robin, 1998: 124–128.

### ***Dating the beginning of the reign of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz king of Saba'***

This text is of major interest in several respects: it mentions a war between two rulers, the Ḥimyarite Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr and the Sabaean Wahab'īl Yaḥūz, and provides a calendar date for it.

The inscription was found in the Ḥimyarite area. It is dated according to the Ḥimyarite era, mentioning the eponym Mabḥūd ibn Abḥaḍ (*Mbḥd bn 'bḥd*)<sup>11</sup> and starting in 110 BCE<sup>12</sup>. Its author was therefore on the Ḥimyarite side, although the writer does not explicitly give a royal title to his lord, Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr. This is frequent in Ḥimyarite inscriptions of the time (see Kh-Umayma 1, Kh-Jarf an-Na'imīya 15, Zubayrī-al-'Awd 1, BynM 3), either because the title is implicit<sup>13</sup>, or because the title was then denied to Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr and was still held by Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup>.

Considering the two rulers mentioned in the text, its date would fall between 155 and 159 CE; the sequence can be summarized as follow (**Table 1**):

1) From 146 CE at the latest (MAFRAY-Sāri' 6) until 155 CE (MAFRAY-al-Ḥijla 1), Saba' and Ḥimyar were apparently united and ruled by Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid. During this decade, they fought against the kingdoms of Ḥaḍramawt, Qatabān, and the principalities of Radmān-and-Khawlān and Awsān (Ja 629, Ir 5, *CIAS* 47.82/o 2 et 95.11/o 2)<sup>14</sup>. The latest confrontation of this long-lasting war is reported in MAFRAY-al-Ḥijla 1, which mentions:

- The building of a house in the year 85 (Radmān era – 159 CE)
- An epidemic in the town *Grw* in the year 81 (Radmān era – 155 CE)
- The building of two structures “when there was a war between the king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān and the king of Ḥaḍramawt and the king of Qatabān and when there was the infection in all the lands”.

The date of the war is not precisely given. Robin believes that the war took place in 159 CE. However, it is likely that the epidemic in the town *Grw* in 155 CE corresponds to the general infection mentioned during the war, in which case this war would date to 155 CE.

2) This 10-year conflict came to an end when Yarīm Aymān qayl of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup> called a truce among the belligerents, namely “the kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt and Qatabān” (*CIH* 315).

3) Thereafter, the leadership of the banū Gurat (Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid) over Saba' and dhū-Raydān was contested by both the banū dhū-Raydān (Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr) and a coalition gathering the tribes of Ḥumlān, Radmān, Yarsum, Khawlān, and Ghaymān headed by Wahab'īl Yaḥūz king of Saba' (Gl 1228, Gar *AION* 1976-III, *CIH* 220, *CIH* 203+182+183, Ja 561 bis). Al-Ḥadā' 2017-1 is certainly related to these events: it mentions the conflict between two of the three protagonists. According to al-Ḥadā' 2017-1, dated to 15[.] CE, the conflict clearly happened before 159 CE but is unlikely to have taken place before 155 CE.

<sup>11</sup> See also Av. Būsān 4, *CIH* 46, *CIH* 448, MAFRAY-al-Mi'sāl 2, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Robin, 1998: 125.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the Ḥimyarite inscription Kh-Umayma 8, dated to the early fourth century CE, where *S<sup>2</sup>mr Yhr 's<sup>2</sup> q-Rydn* son of *Ys<sup>1</sup>rm Yhn 'm* is the well-known Ḥimyarite king.

<sup>14</sup> Robin, 1992.

Wahab'īl Yaḥūz started to fight with both Dhamar'ālī Yuhabirr and Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid for the title of king of Saba' during this four-year period. Inscription Ir 9 mentions that he was enthroned in Ma'rib a year after the end of this conflict, in other words he was recognized by the old Sabaean aristocracy as their leader sometime between 156 and 160 CE.

### ***Origin of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz***

As previously noted, all the Sabaean kings of the second century CE originated from the highland tribal aristocracy and Wahab'īl Yaḥūz is to be sought in this area. South Arabian inscriptions mention only two Wahab'īl Yaḥūz: the Sabaean king and the prince (*qayl*) of the tribes Radmān-and-Khawlān, of the lineage of Ma'āhir-and-dhū-Khawlān. The *qayl* is mentioned in an inscription dated to 146 CE (MAFRAY-Sāri' 6), the king in a text dated to 15[.] (al-Ḥadā' 2017-1). The identification is clear from the homonymy and contemporaneity<sup>15</sup>.

This identification was questioned on the basis of the following arguments<sup>16</sup>:

1) The son of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz (*qayl*), Luḥay'athat Yarkham of the banū Ma'āhir-and-dhū-Khawlān, *qayl* of the tribes Radmān-and-Khawlān does not mention his father with the royal title (MAFRAY-al-Mi'sal 1, YMN 3, YMN 4, YMN 7).

Counter-argument: Luḥay'athat Yarkham does not mention his father as a *qayl* either, while this was the usual habit with the previous *qayls* of Radmān (BaBa al-Ḥadd 2, Ja 2861, Ja 2862, MAFRAY-Sāri' 6). This would fit in with a father being king at that time. All the more so that Robin and Bāfaqih themselves stated that Luḥay'athat Yarkham seems to have been *qayl* while his father was still alive, according to palaeographic observations<sup>17</sup>.

2) Two sons of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz (king) ascended the throne after him: Anmar<sup>um</sup> Yuha'min and Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im.

Counter-argument: if both the kings are claiming to be “son of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz king of Saba'”, this is probably a way to legitimate their ascent to the throne rather than a natural family tie. We know other examples of this kind of alleged filiation, for example, king Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' who claimed to be the son of Ilīsharah Yaḥdub king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, while it is clear that the first belongs to the lineage of the banū Gurat and the second to that of the banū dhū-Kabīr Aqyān.

It is highly likely that Anmar<sup>um</sup> Yuha'min comes from the lineage of the banū dhū-Ghaymān, princes of the tribe of Ghaymān<sup>18</sup>. This hypothesis is valid if we accept that this king was later demoted to the grade of *qayl*, a practice echoed in the Arab tradition<sup>19</sup>.

The origin of the second “son”, Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im, remains unknown. Ja 564 mentions Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im king of Saba' “and his brother Rathad<sup>um</sup> of Ma'dhin<sup>um</sup>” (*'h-hw Rtd<sup>m</sup> d-M'dn<sup>m</sup>*). The word “'h” translated by “brother” may also have the meaning of “ally”; there are not necessarily family ties between Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im and

<sup>15</sup> As already suggested by Lundin, 1973: 191 n. 18; Ryckmans, 1974: 241 n. 1; Bron, 2002: 422.

<sup>16</sup> Robin and Bāfaqih, 1981: 81.

<sup>17</sup> Robin and Bāfaqih, 1981: 80.

<sup>18</sup> Bāfaqih, 1990: 75, 359; Bron, 2002: 422.

<sup>19</sup> Bāfaqih, 1990: 355 n. 8.

Rathad<sup>um</sup>. However, the hypothesis that Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im originated from the lineage of the banū dhū-Ma'dhin<sup>um</sup> princes of the tribe of Ma'dhin<sup>um</sup> is appealing. This would fit in with the regular change of tribes at the head of the Sabaeen kingdom during this century (Table 1). Until fresh evidence is available, this remains hypothetical.

3) Wahab'īl Yaḥūz was hostile to the legitimate Sabaeen kings.

Counter-argument: he was only hostile to a single Sabaeen ruler, Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son/coregent Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid. These rulers came from the lineage of the banū Gurat *qayls* of the tribe Dhamarī (Ja 753), a tribe on the margin of the Sabaeen historical territory (Fig. 1), whose southern half joined the Ḥimyarite kingdom after these rulers were deposed.

4) The tribe Radmān-and-Khawlān is located on the south-eastern edges of the highlands, outside the historical Sabaeen territory.

Counter-argument: indeed, Radmān-and-Khawlān cannot be considered as part of the historical Sabaeen tribal federation. However, Wahab'īl Yaḥūz did not usurp the title of “King of Saba'”; he seized power within the frame of a wide tribal alliance gathering his tribes of Radmān-and-Khawlān and those located in the heartland of the Sabaeen highlands. This association appears repeatedly in four inscriptions, two of which are explicitly connected to the events of 155–159 CE: Gl 1228 and Gar *AION* 1976-III; and the other two probably connected to them: *CIH* 220 and *CIH* 203+182+183. The four show the same authors and mention the same sequence of tribes, either by their names or that of the lineage of their princes (Table 2). The sequence is always in the same order: Ḥumlān, Radmān, Yarsum, Khawlān, and Ghaymān. It corresponds to the alliance constituted by Wahab'īl Yaḥūz, then claiming the title of “king of Saba'”, in order to fight against Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid “kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān” supported by their tribe of Dhamarī, and the Ḥimyarite Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr “king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān”.

The association of the tribes of Radmān and Khawlān with Ḥumlān and Yarsum in Gl 1228, plus Ghaymān in *CIH* 220, is therefore a strong argument to identify Wahab'īl Yaḥūz *qayl* of Radmān-and-Khawlān attested in 146 CE (MAFRAY-Sāri' 6) with Wahab'īl Yaḥūz king of Saba' of Gl 1228 and al-Ḥadā' 2017-1<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> See Bron, 2002: 422 who has already chosen to identify Wahab'īl Yaḥūz king of Saba' with the Radmanite *qayl* on the basis of the tribal alliance mentioned in Gl 1228.

	Inscription	Ḥumlān	Radmān	Yarsum	Khawlān	Ghaymān
<b>Leader</b>	CIH 203+182+183	<i>S' dt' lb Yhṭb</i>				
	GI 1228	<i>S' dt' lb Yhṭb + Hwf' m + M(h)trn</i> <sup>21</sup>	<i>Whb' l Yhz mlk S' b'</i>			
	CIH 220	<i>... + Hwf] ' m Yzl + Mhtr[ n...</i>				
	Gar AION 1976-III		<i>Whb' l Yhz mlk S' b'</i>			
<b>Lineage</b>	CIH 203+182+183	<i>Bi'</i>	<i>M' [h] r</i>	<i>S' h[ y] mm</i>	<i>ḡ-Ḥ[ w] ln</i>	...
	GI 1228	...	<i>... ] r</i>	<i>S' (h) ymm</i>	<i>ḡ-Ḥ[ w] ln</i>	
	CIH 220	...	<i>... ]</i>	<i>S' h[ y] mm</i>	<i>ḡ-Ḥ[ w] ln</i>	<i>bnw ḡ-Ḡym[ n</i>
<b>Tribe</b>	CIH 220	<i>... ]</i>	<i>Rdmn</i>	<i>Yrs' m</i>	<i>Ḥwln</i>	<i>[ ...</i>
	Gar AION 1976-III	<i>Ḥmln</i>	<i>Rdmn</i>	<i>Yrs' m</i>	<i>Ḥ[ w] ln</i>	...

**Table 2:** Sequence of allied lineages and tribes during the conflict opposing Wahab' il Yaḥūz, Dhamar' alī Yuhabirr, and Sa' dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid (c.155–159 CE).

### Origin and reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān

Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān is the only Sabaeen ruler whose reign cannot be precisely placed within the long line of the second-century CE Sabaeen kings. Iwona Gajda<sup>22</sup> worked on the assumption that he originated from the lineage of the banū Bata' and that his reign might be placed either between those of Watar<sup>um</sup> Yuha' min and Sa' dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' (c.140 CE)<sup>23</sup>. or even earlier, at the turn of the first–second century CE, after that of Karib' il Bayyin son of Dhamar' alī Dhariḥ.

The discovery of two new inscriptions — Jabal Riyām 2006-19 and Kanin 2017-1 — confirms the origin from the lineage of the banū Bata', although it has now become clear that his reign happened much later.

### *Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān the Bata' ide, qayl of the tribe of dhū-Ḥumlān*

#### Inscription Jabal Riyām 2006-19<sup>24</sup> (Fig. 2)

It is a rectangular limestone stela photographed on the hilltop of the Jabal Riyām, among the stones covering the surface of the ancient temple of Ta' lab Riyām. The final line of the text is heavily weathered and not legible. The inscription reads:

(<sup>1</sup>) (Ra)bbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān banū Bata', qayl of the (<sup>2</sup>) tribe of Sam' ī third of dhū-Ḥumlān dedicated to his patron (<sup>3</sup>) Ta' lab Riyām<sup>um</sup> master of Raḥbān this (<sup>4</sup>) statue in praise because He gratified him and because (<sup>5</sup>) He bestowed on him the favours he sought from

<sup>21</sup> In GI 1364, *S' dt' lb* and *Mhtrn* are mentioned as members of the lineage of the banū Bata'.

<sup>22</sup> Gajda, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Hypothesis already proposed by Robin 1992: 229.

<sup>24</sup> Jabal Riyām 2006-19 was recently published in Arbach and Schiettecatte, 2017: 181–184. For the transcription and the philological comments, refer to this paper.

Him and may <sup>(6)</sup> He bestow on him the favours he seeks from Him <sup>(7)</sup> and may He grant him goodwill, prosperity <sup>(8)</sup> and the safety of his person, the satisfaction and the goodwill of his lord <sup>(9)</sup> Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān <sup>(10)</sup> son of Yāsir<sup>um</sup> Yuhaṣḍiq king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān. <sup>(11)</sup> And may He grant him good and abundant crops and harvests. <sup>(12)</sup> And may He humiliate and destroy his opponents and enemies, and may He <sup>(13)</sup> ... ..

This is the third inscription mentioning Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān as a member of the lineage of the banū Bata', with *CIH* 164 and *RES* 4412. For the first time, he explicitly bears the title of prince (*qayl*) of the tribe of Sam'ī third of dhū-Ḥumlān. It is therefore highly likely that Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān (*qayl*) is identical to Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān (king) who ascended the Sabaean throne in the second century CE.

This inscription provides a synchronous occurrence of both Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān when he was still a *qayl* and the Ḥimyarite king Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān son of Yāsir<sup>um</sup> Yuhaṣḍiq king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān. The reign of the latter started at the earliest shortly before 137 CE (Kh-Umayma 1) and continued after 157 CE (Zubayrī-al-'Awd 1, al-Ḥadā' 2017-1).

Interestingly, this text shows that a *qayl* of the Sabaean tribal aristocracy pledged allegiance to a Ḥimyarite king. It happened during a short period of Ḥimyarite control of the Sabaean territory under the reign of Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr. Although several dates can be proposed for this event, it most probably took place in the troubled period of 155–159 CE (see below).

### ***Inscription Jabal Kanin 2017-1***

Several years after the previous inscription, a second inscription, Jabal Kanin 2017-1, was engraved when Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān had become king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān. The text was recently discovered and photographed by Mahdī Maqwala, inhabitant of the town of Na'ḍ, who sent the picture to the Facebook group “Nuqūsh Musnadiyya” (Fig. 3). According to 'Alī 'Abdallāh al-Shāmī, the inscription was found on the southern side of the Jabal Kanin, near the town of Na'ḍ, c.30 km south-east of Sana'a. The stela is rectangular and broken in two pieces. The lower left corner is missing; the end of the last lines is not preserved.

### **Transcription**

- 1 'lh<sup>n</sup> Nhfn<sup>n</sup> bn Hmd<sup>n</sup> hqny 'ttr 'zz<sup>m</sup> w-ḏt Zhr<sup>n</sup> b'ly 'r<sup>n</sup> [Knn ... ..mr]=
- 2 'hmw Rbs<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1m</sup> Nmr<sup>n</sup> mlk S<sup>1</sup>b' w-ḏ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> b-s<sup>1</sup>tqhn w-tbr w-ḏr'n 's<sup>2</sup>'b [ḏ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> ...]
- 3 hmw w-gbd w-ḥd'n 's<sup>1</sup>rr-hmw b-ḏr tns<sup>2</sup>' T'r<sup>n</sup> ḏ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> w-'s<sup>2</sup>'b-hw (w)-[... ..]-
- 4 t w-'[s<sup>2</sup>](') [b ḏ-R]y(d)<sup>n</sup> mr'-hmw Rbs<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1m</sup> mlk S<sup>1</sup>b' w-ḏ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> l-t'w[ln b-wfy<sup>m</sup>]
- 5 b(n) 'rd Ḍmr l-yqhn ḏ-yrḏwn w-yt(')wl mr'-hmw Rbs<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1m</sup> Nmr<sup>n</sup> [ ...]
- 6 w- wfy<sup>m</sup> w-ykbn 's<sup>2</sup>'b gzyw b-'rd [Qs<sup>2</sup>]m<sup>m</sup> k-yhḥbnn byt Rym<sup>m</sup> [ ...]
- 7 [...]ḏ-bn ḥms<sup>m</sup> w-yhr(g)[w] bn-(h)[mw] ḏ-hwkbw w-s<sup>1</sup>'r-hmw (r)[...]=
- 8 b('mr)'-h(mw) Rbs<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1m</sup> Nmr<sup>n</sup> m[l]k S<sup>1</sup>b' w-ḏ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> w-ḥms<sup>1</sup>-hmw w-z[wr...]
- 9 [...] yr'yinn k-'l l-hmw kl 'nt<sup>m</sup> w-yhbrrw w-'hḏn 'ydw-hmw[...]
- 10 w-ḏ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> w-ḥmd 'lh<sup>n</sup> ḥyl w-mqm ('ttr 'zz<sup>m</sup> w-ḏt Zhr<sup>n</sup> [ ... mr'-h]=



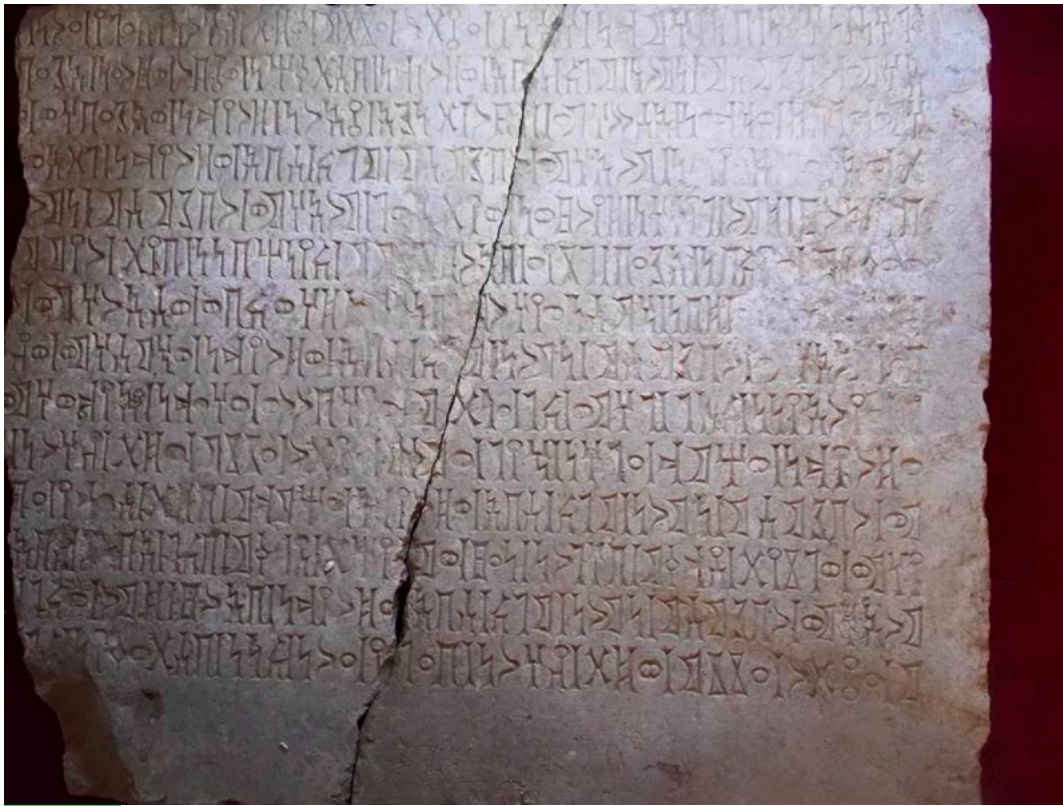
- 11 *mw Rbs<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>um</sup> Nmr<sup>n</sup> mlk S<sup>1</sup>b<sup>ʿ</sup> w-ḡ-Ry(d)<sup>n</sup> w-ḥmd<sup>m</sup> b-ḡt s<sup>1</sup>dy ʿb[d-hw ...]=*  
 12 *y-hmw w-gzyt ṣdq<sup>m</sup> b-hgr<sup>n</sup> N<sup>ḡ</sup> w-m[q]yḥt ṣdq<sup>m</sup> b-kl ʿb(r)<sup>t</sup> (s<sup>1</sup>)b<sup>ʿ</sup>[w b-ʿm]*  
 13 *mr<sup>ʿ</sup>-hmw Rbs<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>um</sup> Nmr<sup>n</sup> mlk S<sup>1</sup>b<sup>ʿ</sup> w-ḡ-Ryd<sup>n</sup> b-ʿrd Dmr w-kl [...]=*  
 14 *m ʿttr ʿzz<sup>m</sup> w-ḡt Zhr<sup>n</sup> b<sup>ʿ</sup>ly ʿr<sup>n</sup> Knn b-s<sup>1</sup>twfyn (kl) [...]*

### Translation

- 1 ʿAlhān Nahfān (of the lineage of the) banū Hamdān dedicated to ʿAthtar  
 ʿAzīz<sup>um</sup> and dhāt Zahrān Masters of the mountain [Kanin ... his]  
 2 lord Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Sabaʿ and dhū-Raydān, for having  
 triumphed, destroyed and defeated the tribes of [dhū-Raydān ...]  
 3 and sacked and damaged their valleys during the war Thaʿrān dhū-Raydān and  
 his tribes had caused [...]  
 4 and [the tribes of dhū-Rayd(?)ān, his lord Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> king of Sabaʿ and dhū-  
 Raydān for a return [in safety]  
 5 from the land of Dhamarī; may he order what will satisfy [him]; and his lord  
 Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān returned in safety [...]  
 6 and safety; and they made contact with the tribes who had taken up their  
 positions in the land of [Qasha]m<sup>um</sup> in order to storm the house Raym<sup>um</sup> [...]  
 7 [...] and the army and they killed those who they encountered and the rest [...]  
 8 [...] his lord Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Sabaʿ and dhū-Raydān and his army  
 and they be[sieged...]  
 9 [...] they showed that no contingent shall be left and they were fought in open  
 air; and pledged allegiance [...]  
 10 and dhū-Raydān. And ʿAlhān gave praise to the might and the power of ʿAthtar  
 ʿAzīz<sup>um</sup> et dhāt Zahrān [... his]  
 11 lord Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Sabaʿ and dhū-Raydān and in praise because  
 he granted his servant [...]  
 12 and a successful mission in the town of Naḡ and a perfect success in all the  
 fights he carried out [with]  
 13 his lord Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Sabaʿ and dhū-Raydān in the land of  
 Dhamār and all [...]  
 14 ʿAthtar ʿAzīz<sup>um</sup> and dhāt Zahrān Masters of the mountain Kanin in giving  
 protection to all [...]



**Figure 2:** Inscription Jabal Riyām 2006-19 (J. Schiettecatte).



**Figure 3:** Inscription Jabal Kanin 2017-1 (Mahdī Maqwala/Facebook group “Nuqūsh Musnadiyya”).

### Philological comment

L. 1: *ʾlh<sup>n</sup> Nh<sup>f</sup> bn Hmd<sup>n</sup>*: prince of the tribe of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup> and member of the banū Hamdān (*CIH* 2, Ghul-Ḥūth 2, *CIH* 326, Ja 561 bis). He later ascended the Sabaean throne, toward the end of the second century CE (*CIH* 308, *CIH* 308 bis, *CIH* 312, Nami NNSQ 19, ...). *ʾttr ʾzz<sup>m</sup> w-dt Zhr<sup>n</sup> b ʾly ʾr<sup>n</sup>[Knn]*: restitution after l. 14, as in Ir 5§7. Variant in Gl 1193/3: *b-Knn*.

*ʾr<sup>n</sup> Knn*: Jabal Kanin is located near the town of Naʿḍ (Ja 559/19, Ja 568/25–27, Ja 606/22–23, Ja 723/9, etc.).

L. 2: *Rbs<sup>2</sup>m<sup>im</sup> Nmr<sup>n</sup> mlk Sʾb ʾ w-d-Ryd<sup>n</sup>*: Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān is mentioned in six other inscriptions: Ja 645, Ry 542, YM 18307, Gl 1193, *RES* 4138, *RES* 4713)<sup>25</sup>.

*b-sʾtqh<sup>n</sup>*: verb in the infinitive meaning “to achieve success, triumph” (see Ja 559/8 and Ja 644/19).

*w-tbr w-dr ʾn ʾs<sup>2</sup>b [d-Ryd<sup>n</sup>]*: for the two verbs in the infinitive *tbr w-dr ʾn*, see other reports of military expeditions from the reign of ʾAlhān Nahfān (*CIH* 2; *CIH* 308; *CIH* 308 bis) and his son Shaʾr<sup>um</sup> Awtar (Ja 631). According to l. 3, the defeated tribes were probably those of dhū-Raydān. In other inscriptions of the second century CE (e.g. YM 18307 and

<sup>25</sup> On this king, see Gajda, 2013.



Gl 1228), the tribes of dhū-Raydān (<sup>s</sup>²' b *d-Ryd<sup>m</sup>*) are similarly mentioned as the opponents of Sabaeen expeditions.

L. 3: *b-dr tns<sup>2</sup> T<sup>r</sup>n d-Ryd<sup>m</sup> w-<sup>s</sup>²' b-hw*: “during the war Tha' rān dhū-Raydān and his tribes had caused”. Tha' rān dhū-Raydān can be identified as the Ḥimyarite king Tha' rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, son of Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr<sup>26</sup>. Thus, in Jabal Riyām 2006-19, Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān (*qayl*) is contemporary with Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān; in Jabal Kanin 2017-1, Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān (king) is contemporary with the son, Tha' rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān.

L. 5: *'rd Dmr*: also l. 13; *Dmr* is the defective spelling of *Dmry*, as in Ir 49/1, Ry 614/8 and Ja 631/29. The tribal confederation of Dhamarī comprised two tribes: Samhar<sup>um</sup> and Qasham<sup>um</sup><sup>27</sup> (Fig. 1). Samhar<sup>um</sup> to the north was part of Saba' and headed by the banū Gurat<sup>28</sup>. Qasham<sup>um</sup>, to the south, was part of Ḥimyar and headed by the banū Dharāniḥ<sup>29</sup>, not to be mistaken with the town of Dhamār (*Dmr* – Ja 576 + 577/14–18, Ja 584/3, Kh-Sayyah 3/3), 80 km south of Sana'a, which belonged to the territory of the tribe of Muhaqra<sup>um</sup><sup>30</sup>.

*l-yqhn d-yrdwn*: “may he order what will satisfy [him]”, the subject of the verbs *wqh* and *rḏw* refers to the king. To be compared with the expression “*tw yqhn mlkn d-yrdyn*” (Ry 507/9), where the troops are standing guard “until the king decided that he was satisfied”.

L. 6: *w-ykbn 's²' b gzyw*: “and they made contact with the tribes who had taken up their positions”, with the verb *wkb*, “make contact with, force back (enemy)” (see Ja 576 + 577/8)<sup>31</sup>, and the verb *gzy*, “acquit oneself (of a task)”, interpreted here as “accomplish a mission, take up one's position”.

*b-'rd [Qs²]m<sup>m</sup>*: “in the land of [Qasha]m<sup>um</sup>”, restitution of the name of a tribe belonging to the tribal confederation of Dhamarī (l. 5: *Dmr*) and whose territory was located immediately to the south of the Jabal Kanin. Also mentioned in Ja 576 + 577/4, 7; Ja 586/20; *RES* 4196/1; Ir 49/2.

*byt Rym<sup>m</sup>*: the house *Rym<sup>um</sup>* could have been one of the palaces of the banū Dharāniḥ, princes of the tribe Qasham<sup>um</sup>. Two other palaces belonging to this family are already known: *byt Šn'* (*RES* 4708) in the second century CE, and *byt 'hrm* (Ir 49) in the third century CE.

L. 9: *yr'yyn*: the Sabaic verb *r'* means “see”; the imperfect *yr'yyn* (inf. *r'y*) means “show to s.o. – identify” (Ja 567/7, Ja 570/5, Ja 643/15, *CIH* 456)<sup>32</sup>.

*yhbrrw*: conjugated verb, 3rd person plural in the factitive (*hf<sup>l</sup>*), meaning “make a sally, come into the open (to fight)”.

<sup>26</sup> Both Sabaeans and Ḥimyarites used to shorten the name and title of an enemy; e.g. in al-Ḥadā' 2017-1, *Whb'l* refers to *Whb'l Yḥz mlk S'b'*; in Ja 576 + 577, *S²mr d-Rydn* refers to *S²mr Yḥḥmd mlk S'b' w-d-Rydn*, etc.

<sup>27</sup> On Dhamarī, see Robin, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Robin, 2013: 160–161.

<sup>29</sup> Robin, 2013: 155–156.

<sup>30</sup> On the town of *Dmr* and the tribe of *Mhq<sup>r</sup>'m* see Robin, 1987: 127–128 n. 9; 2006; al-Rāziḥī, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Beeston, Ghul, Müller *et al.*, 1982: 159.

<sup>32</sup> Beeston, Ghul, Müller *et al.*, 1982: 112–113.

*'hdn 'ydw-hmw*: infinitive of the verb *'hdn*, meaning “covenant, make known”, followed by the substantive *'ydw*, usually meaning “fealty, loyalty”<sup>33</sup>. We render the locution by “pledge allegiance to s.o.”

L. 12: *b-hgr<sup>n</sup> N'ḏ*: the town of Na'ḏ was the seat of the banū Gurat, princes of the tribe of Samhar<sup>um</sup>, fraction of Dhamarī (Av. Na'ḏ 9, Ir 19/24, Ja 631/19).

### ***The military campaign against Ḥimyar in the land of Dhamarī***

Inscription Jabal Kanin 2017-1 commemorates the success of a Sabaeen military campaign headed by the king Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān with the support of 'Alhān Nahfān of the lineage of the banū Hamdān. Both belonged to the same tribal confederation, Sam'ī, respectively the third of dhū-Ḥumlān and the third of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup>. They confronted a Ḥimyarite coalition headed by Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, son of Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr, which included the tribe of Qasham<sup>um</sup>, fraction of Dhamarī.

The conflict took place in the territory of the tribe of Dhamarī, at the border of its two components, Samhar<sup>um</sup> and Qasham<sup>um</sup>. After repelling a Ḥimyarite offensive in the region of Na'ḏ, the Sabaeen coalition hunted the enemy down in the plain of Dhamār, up to the palace of Raym<sup>um</sup>, possibly in Yakla' (actual an-Nakhlāt al-Ḥamrā'), the main location of the tribe of Qasham<sup>um</sup>. Soon afterwards, they withdrew to the town of Na'ḏ.

Three Sabaic inscriptions dated from the reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān seemingly refer to this same event. Inscription Gl 1193, also left in the temple of 'Athtar 'Azīz<sup>um</sup> and dhāt Ḍahrān Masters in Kanin, mentions a conflict with the Dhamarītes (*'ḏmrn*). Inscription RES 4138, in the temple of Almaqah Lord of Ḥirwan<sup>um</sup> in Ma'rib, mentions the safe return of the king in the city of Na'ḏ. Finally, YM 18307 mentions an expedition to the land of Ḥimyar, during “a war between the kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān” (*b-ḏr kwn bynht 'mlk S'b' [w-ḏ-Ry]ḏn*).

In the mid-third century CE, the land of Dhamarī was once again the setting of a war between Saba' and Ḥimyar (Ir 49, Ja 576 + 577/4, 7, Ja 586/20).

It is exceptional for a prince of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup> to make a dedication reporting a military success outside the tribal sanctuary of Ta'lab Riyām on the Jabal Riyām, or in the Awam temple in Ma'rib. We may assume that the text was left in the temple of 'Athtar 'Azīz<sup>um</sup> and dhāt Ḍahrān Masters of the mountain Kanin as the Sabaeen army was returning from the battlefield. Since 'Alhān Nahfān ascended the Sabaeen throne after Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān (see below), it was likely an intentional way to reflect his growing influence on the Sabaeen political stage.

### ***Dating the reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān***

Jabal Riyām 2006-19 and Jabal Kanin 2017-1 contain clues for dating the reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān in the second half of the second century CE.

1) Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān was still a prince of the tribe of Ḥumlān in the reign of the Ḥimyarite Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr (Jabal Riyām 2006-19), that is, at the earliest a few years before 137 CE, and at the latest shortly after 157 CE (**Table 1**).

<sup>33</sup> Beeston, Ghul, Müller *et al.*, 1982: 14, 167.

2) Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān was king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān when Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im son of Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr was ruling Ḥimyar alone (Jabal Kanin 2017-1), in other words, after he reigned alongside his father. Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im had a long reign, starting at the earliest shortly after 157 CE, together with his father (Ir 6, *CIH* 457, *RES* 4775 + 4776, *RES* 4708); he was still on the throne when Ilī'azz Yaluṭ bin 'Ammīdhakhar became king of Ḥaḍramawt (Ja 923), shortly before 218 CE (YMN 10, *RES* 3958).

Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān preceded 'Alhān Nahfān on the Sabaeen throne since the latter was still a *qayl* under the reign of the former (Jabal Kanin 2017-1). The first mention of 'Alhān Nahfān with the title of *qayl* dates back to the reign of Wahab'il Yaḥūz (Ja 561 bis). In this inscription, he is mentioned as a newcomer among the princes of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup>, pushed into the background behind his father Yarīm Aymān and his uncle Barig Yuharḥib. He was then not in a position to lead a major military operation such as that described in Jabal Kanin 2017-1. We can therefore assume that the reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān happened after that of Wahab'il Yaḥūz.

To sum up, it is now certain that the reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān was posterior to that of Wahab'il Yaḥūz (c.155/159–165/170? CE) and happened prior to that of 'Alhān Nahfān (c.190–200 CE).

Between the reign of Wahab'il Yaḥūz and that of Yarīm Aymān, inscriptions provide an unbroken succession of kings. Firstly, two putative sons of Wahab'il Yaḥūz succeeded him: Anmar<sup>um</sup> Yuha'min and Karib'il Watar Yuhan'im. Later, Karib'il Watar Yuhan'im brought Yarīm Aymān banū Hamdān, *qayl* of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup>, together with him to the throne. Although a reign just before/after Anmar<sup>um</sup> Yuha'min cannot be precluded, it is highly likely that Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān ascended the throne immediately after the joint reign of Karib'il Watar Yuhan'im and Yarīm Aymān, c.180 CE, and before 'Alhān Nahfān. A body of evidence supports this hypothesis:

1) If Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān had reigned before Yarīm Aymān, 'Alhān Nahfān would have mentioned his father, Yarīm Aymān, in Jabal Kanin 2017-1, in accordance with custom. 'Alhān Nahfān does not mention the name of his father probably because he wrote the text after Yarīm's reign. The only royal name he could display was that of the reigning monarch, Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān.

2) The Sabaeen king Yarīm Aymān was originally a prince of the tribe of Ḥāshid<sup>um</sup>, from the lineage of Hamdān. His successor Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān — according to our chronology — was originally a prince of the tribe of Ḥumlān, from the lineage of Bata'. 'Alhān Nahfān, who was the son of Yarīm Aymān from the lineage of Hamdān (*CIH* 312, *CIH* 326, Ja 561 bis), claimed at one point to belong to the two lineages of Bata'-and-Hamdān (*CIH* 2, Ghul-Ḥūth 2). If, as we think, he succeeded Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān on the Sabaeen throne, his integration within the banū Bata' would make perfect sense: it was a way to make him the heir of both Yarīm Aymān and Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān and to prepare the succession. His integration within the dynasty of the banū Bata' could have been a reward for his involvement alongside Rabbshams<sup>um</sup>, especially on the battlefield.

3) Finally, the successive reigns of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān, 'Alhān Nahfān alone and in association with his son Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar illustrate a continuous war opposing the Sabaeen kings to the Ḥimyarite king Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im:

- Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān vs Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im (explicitly in Jabal Kanin 2017-1; probably in Gl 1193, RES 4138, YM 18307);
- 'Alhān Nahfān in alliance with Yada'ab [Ghaylān] king of Ḥaḍramawt vs Ḥimyar — most probably Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im — (Nami NAG 13+14).
- 'Alhān Nahfān and his son Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar in alliance with Yada'il Bayyin king of Ḥaḍramawt vs. Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im ('Abdallāh-Maḥram Bilqīs 2005).

## Discussion

We propose the following Sabaeen royal sequence in the second half of the second century CE:

1. Wahab'il Yaḥūz king of Saba' [banū Ma'āhir and dhū-Khawlān]
2. Anmar<sup>um</sup> Yuha'min king of Saba' [banū dhū-Ghaymān]
3. Karib'il Watar Yuhan'im king of Saba' [banū dhū-Ma'dhin<sup>um</sup> (?)]
4. Karib'il Watar Yuhan'im + Yarīm Aymān kings of Saba' [banū Hamdān]
5. Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān [banū Bata']
6. 'Alhān Nahfān king of Saba' [banū Bata' and Hamdān]
7. 'Alhān Nahfān and his son Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar kings of Saba' [banū Hamdān]
8. Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān [banū Hamdān]

This reconstruction clearly shows that the succession on the throne was primarily the result of a common agreement between the tribes from the highlands to choose (or elect?) one of their *qayls* to ascend the throne, with the agreement of the old Sabaeen aristocracy ('*s'b'n*). The association of a *qayl* as viceroy (Yarīm Aymān) or the choice of an heir by a king thanks to his integration within the royal lineage ('Alhān Nahfān) was probably a king's reward for alliances and for the great deeds performed by these *qayls*.

A real dynastic succession, from father to son, rather than the election of a *primus inter pares*, was only established by the end of the second century CE, with the banū Hamdān, from the reign of 'Alhān Nahfān onwards. It lasted only two generations: 'Alhān Nahfān, 'Alhān Nahfān and his son Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar, Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar alone, then Sha'r<sup>um</sup> Awtar with his brother Ḥayū'athtar Yaḍa'. Power then shifted to Luḥay'athat Yarkhum, whose origin is unknown, and to the new dynasty of Fāri'um Yanhub, his sons Ilišarah Yaḥḍub and Ya'zil Bayyin, and his grandson Nasha'karib Yu'min Yuharḥib, the last Sabaeen king.

Our historical reconstruction of the second century CE leaves a few unresolved issues.

Firstly, why did Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān adopt the long title of “king of Saba' and dhū-Raydān” when all the other kings before and after him held the short title of “king of Saba'”? We can only speculate on this.

Secondly, at a certain point in their reigns, the Ḥimyarite kings Dhamar'alī Yuhabir and his son Tha'rān Ya'ub Yuhan'im controlled the Sabaeen territory. This period is not precisely dated. Inscription RES 4775 + 4776 mentions hydraulic works in the oasis of Ma'rib taken in charge by these kings. Four more inscriptions show members of the highland Sabaeen aristocracy<sup>34</sup> and of the old Sabaeen aristocracy<sup>35</sup> pledging allegiance

<sup>34</sup> The *banū Bata'* (Jabal Riyām 2006-19); the *banū Sa'ran* (Ir 6).

<sup>35</sup> The *banū Ḥazfar<sup>um</sup>* (CIH 365); the *banū dhū-Saḥr* (CIH 457).



to the Ḥimyarite king Dhamar'ālī Yuhabirr alone (Jabal Riyām 2006-19; *CIH* 365), or together with his son Tha'rān (Ir 6; *CIH* 457). It cannot be determined whether this corresponds to one or two different periods of Sabaeen control by Ḥimyar.

Inscription Ir 6 shows that Dhamar'ālī Yuhabirr and his son Tha'rān controlled Saba' at a time when a conflict pitted the *qayls* and the old Sabaeen aristocracy ('*s'b'n*) against a plausible *qayl* of the tribe of Bakīl<sup>um</sup> (fraction of dhū-Shibām<sup>um</sup>), Luḥay'athat of the banū dhū-Kabīr Aqyān<sup>um</sup>. In the second century CE, the sharing of the Sabaeen throne by the main Sabaeen tribes of the northern highlands had clearly stirred up tension between them. A reversal of alliances including temporary allegiance to the Ḥimyarite kings did happen, going so far as to allow temporary control of part of the Sabaeen territory by Ḥimyar. This/these episode(s) did not appear to last. Two periods were particularly favourable for such a reversal:

1) The end of the reign of Sa'dshams<sup>um</sup> Asra' and his son Marthad<sup>um</sup> Yuhahmid (c.155 CE), assuming that the Sabaeans resolved to join Dhamar'ālī Yuhabirr before they finally sided with Wahab'īl Yaḥūz, *qayl* of Radmān. In both cases, the leadership is sought outside the Sabaeen area.

2) The interregna between Wahab'īl Yaḥūz, Anmar<sup>um</sup> Yuha'min, and Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im, a period during which Ma'rib was often the setting of conflicts (al-Jawf 04.15, Ja 564).

## Conclusion

With numerous conflicts involving most of the South Arabian kingdoms and tribal confederations, many reversals of alliances, and only a limited number of inscriptions to write its history, the second century CE is both exciting and frustrating. In this paper, three Sabaic inscriptions — Jabal Riyām 2006-19, Jabal Kanin 2017-1 and al-Ḥadā' 2017-1 — shed new light on specific moments of this century.

The new dated inscription al-Ḥadā' 2017-1 allows us to date the beginning of the reign of Wahab'īl Yaḥūz between 155 and 159 CE. A reassessment of this king convinced us of his Radmānite origin.

Inscription Jabal Riyām 2006-19 definitively proves the Bata'ide origin of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān. And inscription Jabal Kanin 2017-1 provides enough clues to date the reign of Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān sometime between c.165 CE and c.190 CE, very likely after the joint reign of Karib'īl Watar Yuhan'im and Yarīm Aymān, and before that of 'Alhān Nahfān. In this way, it is clear that the adhesion of the Hamdānide 'Alhān Nahfān to the lineage of Bata' was a political move by Rabbshams<sup>um</sup> Nimrān to make 'Alhān Nahfān his natural heir and prepare his succession.

It is only at this time that the second-century CE Sabaeen royal succession shifted from the recognition of a *primus inter pares* chosen among the *qayls* to a real dynastic one, from father to son.

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Details regarding most of the inscriptions can be found in the Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions of the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI) developed by the University of Pisa (<http://dasi.cnr.it/>):

al-Jawf 04.15	Ir 3	Ja 2861
Av. Būsān 4	Ir 5	Ja 2862
Av. Na'ḍ 9	Ir 6	MAFRAY-al-Ḥijla 1
BaBa al-Ḥadd 2	Ir 9	MAFRAY-al-Mi'sal 1 =
BynM 3	Ir 19	Ja 2867
CIAS 47.82/o 2	Ir 49 [= Ir 40 in Robin,	MAFRAY-al-Mi'sāl 2
CIAS 95.11/o 2	1987]	MAFRAY-Sāri' 6
CIH 2	Ja 413	Nami NNSQ 19
CIH 46	Ja 559	RES 3958
CIH 140	Ja 561 bis	RES 4138
CIH 164	Ja 564	RES 4150
CIH 203+182+183	Ja 567	RES 4196
CIH 220	Ja 568	RES 4412
CIH 308	Ja 570	RES 4708
CIH 308bis	Ja 576 + 577	RES 4713
CIH 312	Ja 584	RES 4775 + 4776
CIH 315	Ja 586	Ry 507
CIH 326	Ja 606	Ry 542
CIH 365	Ja 629	Ry 614
CIH 448	Ja 631	YMN 3
CIH 456	Ja 643	YMN 4
CIH 457	Ja 644	YMN 7
Fa 94 + 95	Ja 645	YMN 10
Gar Ḍula' 1	Ja 723	YM 18307
Ghul-Ḥūth 2	Ja 753	Zubayrī-al-'Awd 1
Gl 1364	Ja 923	

Inscriptions not included in this archive are:

'Abdallāh-Maḥram Bilqīs 2005: 'Abdallāh, 2005.

Gar AION 1976-III: Garbini, 1976: 298–300.

Gl 1193: Schaffer, 1972: 20–21.

Gl 1228: Bron, 2002: 419–421.

Gr 184: Bauer and Lundin, 1998: 55.

Kh-Jarf an-Na'imīya 15: Noman, 2012: 87.

Kh-Sayyah 3: Noman, 2012: 103.

Kh-Umayma 1: Noman, 2012: 74.

Kh-Umayma 8: Noman, 2012: 135–136.

Nami NAG 13+14: Ryckmans, 1969.

Leiden 26: Stein, 2015: 202–203; Drewes and Ryckmans 2016: 20.

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