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Entre Carthage et l'Arabie heureuse

Mélanges offerts à François Bron

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Two new bronze statues from Yemen

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Comment on Inscription YM 23212

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In this contribution I shall present for the first time two bronze statues of exquisite craftsmanship. Although separated by centuries, these statues had a similar significance and function and will be discussed within the broader context of South Arabian culture and civilization.

The first and more recent bronze statue is an acephalous figure presently located at the National Museum of Ṣan'ā' (YM 23212) (**fig. 1**). From the typological perspective, the statue can be classified as a representation of offering figure, although a number of stylistic particularities make it unique and distinctive. The 80 cm-tall male figure stands with the right leg slightly advanced. The calves are well defined and muscular. Although the arms are broken at the elbow, the posture is that of traditional bronze and alabaster offering figures, in which the arms are bent at the elbows and extended forward. The bust is triangular and rather stylized. It exhibits simplified clavicles and breasts, portrayed as two small disks applied to the smooth surface of the chest. The figure wears a *fūṭah* that extends from the hips to the knees and terminates on the left side with a fringed border. A dagger in the waist belt, points diagonally toward the left

1. The author would like to express her thanks to Dr Abdallah Bawazir, former President of GOAM, to Mr 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jandārī, former Director of the National Museum of Ṣan'ā', who allowed the publication of images from the Museum's archaeological materials, and finally to the photographer Ibrahīm Ḥudayd for having kindly photographed the artworks. I extend my deepest gratitude to Christian Robin who let me use unpublished photographs of the second statue presented here.

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Fig. 1 – *Acephalous bronze statue with inscription in relief, from Qatabān (National Museum of Ṣan‘ā’, Yemen).*

side of the body. The unfortunately missing head would have revealed whether the artist followed a traditional and conventional style.

The bronze was cast through the lost-wax method. Indeed, the clay core is still visible through the fractures, since South Arabian artists kept the clay in place after casting the bronze.² The hole on the neck was almost certainly used for holding the head in place. It is likely that the forearms and feet were also cast separately and assembled afterwards.

The statue’s dominant feature is the unusual and distinctive fourteen-line long relief inscription on the cloth. On South Arabian bronze statuary known so far, the dedication is incised on the chest or robe. In contrast, high-relief inscriptions are only found on votive tablets or objects, such as vases, appliques and weights, but never on human figures in the round. Similar to stone-carved inscriptions, the relief characters on this bronze statue are framed within pre-established spaces marked by horizontal, slightly slanted parallel lines.

2. ‘Alī ‘Aqīl & Antonini 2007: 22-23.

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Although the statue is acephalous and its context of provenance unknown, the inscription indicates a Qatabanian origin, possibly a temple, according to Alessio Agostini (see below, p. 8).

As for the dating of the statue, neither the casting technique nor the practice of relief inscriptions are chronological determinants. Indeed, relief inscriptions have been documented both in artworks of the 6th-5th centuries BC and during an epoch overlapping the Christian era.³ On the basis of the comparative paleographic analysis of the inscription with similar texts found on bronze objects, Alessio Agostini and Mounir Arbach (personal communication) have suggested that the acephalous statue at the National Museum of Ṣan'ā' dates around the 2nd / 1st century BC. The name Ḍarrān belongs to the nobility of Maḏḏā, and is documented in the inscriptions found at Ḥaṣī.⁴ As Christian Robin has suggested (personal communication), the statue could originate from Ḥaṣī instead of Tamna' or other Baḥyani sites. This is the first known Qatabanian bronze statue.

The second, older statue (figs 2-4), whose provenance is also unknown, is currently part of a private collection in the United States. The statue's iconographic plan, despite some important variations, is similar to other known examples presently at the National Museum of Ṣan'ā', namely the three statues discovered during the excavation of the Awwām Temple in Ma'rib (fig. 5, YM 262; fig. 6, YM 263; fig. 7, YM 264),⁵ and the statue probably found in a temple at *Nashqum/al-Baydā'* and restored at the Louvre Museum (fig. 8, YM 23206).⁶ Each of these examples has a distinctive aesthetic value owing to the artistic rendering of details.

This bronze statue represents a standing man, bearded with short curly hair. The proximal portion of both arms are adherent to the body, the elbows are bent and the forearms extended forward. The right hand is open, while the left is clenched into a fist that probably, as in the Awwām Temple's bronze statues, held something, such as a spear. The torso is bare and the legs are covered by a *fūṭah*. The inscription, not clearly visible on the photograph, is incised on the front of the cloth.

The style of the artwork is unconventional. In spite of the rigid, archaic frontality, the statue's artistic originality resides in the interplay between the harmonic composition and the artist's inventive approach to formal elements. First, in comparison with conventional bronze and later stone statuary, in which a long torso is supported by short legs, here the proportions of the human figure are reversed with a short, square torso supported by long legs. The second novel element relates to the figure's full volumes; the surfaces seem to have been shaped by an artist with a rather developed naturalistic sensibility. The third element of creativity relates to the figure's formal characteristics: the bold rendering of the long beard in the shape of a lengthened collar, the original curly hair and orbital cavities framed by high relief eyelids and the novelty of imparting a certain fluidity to the rigid form of the cloth through few plastic folds, suggesting a slight, natural movement of the fabric.

3. To this latter period are ascribed a number of small votive bronze plaques, whereas two bronze reliefs are attributed to the earlier period; the first one, at the British Museum (BM 135323-135324; Simpson 2002: 168-169, No. 213), is decorated with sphinx motifs, the second one, at the National Museum of Ṣan'ā' (YM 12981; Gerlach 2003), bears a procession of winged bulls and warriors.

4. Robin 2005-2006: 64.

5. Albright 1958: 269-271.

6. Mille *et al.* 2010.

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Figs. 2-4 – South Arabian bronze statue of unknown provenance (private collection in USA).



Fig 5 – Bronze statue of Ma'dikarib found in the Awwām temple of Ma'rib dedicated to the Sabaean god Almaqah (National Museum of Ṣan'ā', Yemen).

Fig. 6 – Bronze statue with the names of the donors, Hālikī amar and 'Ammīyatha', incised on the chest. The statue was found in the Awwām temple (National Museum of Ṣan'ā', Yemen).

Fig. 7 – Bronze statue found in the Awwām temple (National Museum of Ṣan'ā', Yemen).

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Fig. 8 – Bronze statue of Hawtar'athat, probably found in a temple at Nashqum / al-Baydā' (Jawf) (National Museum of Ṣan'ā', Yemen).



The artwork evinces both a descriptive ability and an artistic maturity, which result in a strong, effective expressionism. Indeed the features of the face come alive owing to the fine modelling of the cheekbones and lips. Similarly, the muscular torso and shoulders both enhance the masculinity and at the same time model and soften the figure through chiaroscuro effects.

The formal analysis reveals both peculiar postural characteristics and a naturalism that is stylistically closer to the two-dimensional masculine representations found in the Banāt 'Ād temples (8th-7th centuries BC) than to the bronze statues from the Awwām temple (generally dated to the 6th century BC). As pointed out, this bronze statue stands apart from other bronzes owing to its perfect symmetry, the fullness of its physical masses, the new balance of proportions and, finally, the formal rendering of the hair and long beard. Furthermore, a careful analysis of the inscription, language and palaeography will help us place the artwork into a specific historical and cultural environment and define its chronology.

I would like to discuss the broader significance of these bronze works within the context of South Arabian figurative production. Bronze (statues and reliefs) and stone sculpture is by far the preferred genre in the artistic production of South Arabian populations. Both for structure and canons of representation, the typology of South Arabian statuary reveals the influence of traditional Near Eastern statuary of the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC. During the whole span of the 1st millennium BC, South Arabian traditional artworks evince both iconographic continuity and considerable stylistic variety characterised by original interpretations. Together with the large number of bronze figurines, the entire production demonstrated an unusual richness and

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assortment. These works are evidence of an artistic liveliness and experimentation by South Arabian bronze artists, whose style was certainly linked to stone craftsmanship.

The presence of these bronze statues on the Yemeni territory are evidence of highly specialized craftsmanship since the first centuries of the 1st millennium. These craftsmen presumably operated in support of the Temple, the key driving force of social life within South Arabian culture. The variety of artistic details on these bronze statues indicates that these works were aulic in character and not common objects such as the bronze or terracotta figurines characterised by an extremely simplified shape.

Finally, the bronze statues appear to have a votive rather than cultic significance since they lack attributes clearly associated with a divinity.⁷ In fact, the human statues placed in the temples, might represent the devotee who dedicated his own stereotyped image to the divinity for devotional purposes or in gratitude for a blessing — recovery from illness, a granted prayer, protection of the devotee's family, assets or sovereign, etc. This hypothesis is supported by the very nature of the dedications to Almaḡah in tens of inscriptions sculpted on the stone bases of statues found in the Awwām Temple in Ma'rib.⁸ The dedications were commissioned by people belonging to local eminent families, by sovereigns or by women and men. They offered bronze or brass statues in their likeness to the god or else statues representing sacred animals such as bulls, ibexes and even horses.⁹

Comment on Inscription YM 23212

Alessio AGOSTINI

Reading

1. [Dh]rm bn M'(d)-
2. (k)rb ḡ-(D)rn (sⁱ)q[n]-
3. y 'm ḡ-(w)rtm (b-)[M]-
4. rt'm (ḡ)lm ḡhb[m]
5. b-ḡtm s't'n w-(kt)[r]-
6. b Dhrm '(m) l-bn-(sⁱ)
7. Rgbm w-ywm mt' [-]-
8. m Rgbm bn (m)r(d)[m]
9. qbl b-'lw-sⁱ r(t)[d]
10. Dhrm 'm n(fsⁱ)-sⁱ [w-]
11. 'ḡn-sⁱ w-bn-sⁱ Rg(b)[m]
12. w-kl 'wld- s'my [w-]
13. (')qny- s'my w-(z)r(b)-[s'm]-
14. y w-ḡ-l- s'my b-m w-b-'n[by]

7. Antonini 2012.

8. Jamme 1962.

9. Maraqtan 2008.

Translation

1. [Dh]rm bn M'(d)-
2. (k)rb d-(D)rn dedicated
3. to 'Amm d-(w)rtm in M-
4. rt'm (this) bronze statue
5. as Dhrm was helped and he was obliged
6. to 'A(mm) for his son
7. Rgbm and when 'Amm saved
8. Rgbm from the illness
9. that affected to him.
10. Dhrm entrusted to 'Amm his own person,
11. his property, and his son Rg(b)[m]
12. and all their children [and]
13. all their possessions and their property rights (?)
14. and what they possess. By 'Amm and Anb[ay].

Commentary

L. 1:

Dhrm – This proper name is not known from Qatabanic sources. In Hadramitic onomastics, it is found in a second position (Shabwa S/76/47).

M'dkrb – This proper name is widespread in South Arabian sources, particularly as a first name (for Qatabanic cf. Ja 303, Ja 2466, RES 3566, RES 3692, TC 1620 etc.).

d-Drn – The name *Drn* is attested in CIAS 95.11/o2 n.2, a text coming from Yāfi' and dated to the 1st century AD. A family bearing this name has been recently found associated with the Maḏḥā tribe, headed by the banū Haṣḥaḥ. This is a very important indication of the object's place of origin (cf. below).

L. 2:

s'qny – the verb “to dedicate” is formed with the Qatabanic causative prefix (*s*¹-). Before the 5th century BC, even in the Qatabanian area, the Sabaic form of the causative (*h*-) seems more frequent: at that time, the influence of Sabaeen textual model was stronger on dedicatory inscriptions.¹⁰

L. 3:

d-(w)rtm – This specification can be interpreted as an epithet of the god 'Amm. The form is not comparable to those already known. The closest might be *d-Zwrm*, but a first *Z* can certainly be excluded here. The most common epithets for the god 'Amm are *d-Dwnm*, *d-Lbh*, *d-Rymtm*. In the southern part of the Qatabanian kingdom,

10. Avanzini 2004: 28-29, 140.

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especially in the area of Madhā and Datīna where the statue probably originated, other epithets for 'Amm are known (notably \underline{d} -*'btm*, \underline{d} -*Mbrqm*, \underline{d} -*Bhl*, \underline{d} -*Bṭm*).

(*b*-)[*M*]r*t*'*m* – The first *mīm* is hypothesized given the space allowed at the end of the previous line. The preposition *b*- is otherwise quite evident upon close examination. Given its syntactic position in the phrase, it is quite reasonable to infer a toponym indicating the site where 'Amm \underline{d} -('w)*rtm* was worshipped. Neither the particular aspect of the divinity nor its temple are known. In Qatabān, a group name exists with this form (\underline{d} -*Mrt*'*m* in RES 3941).

L. 5-6:

s'*t*'*n* – To be connected with the 'WN root. This word was recently attested in Qatabanic, cf. inscription FB-Ḥawkam 2.¹¹

(*kt*)[*r*]*b* – This reading is highly hypothetical, but the first two signs are quite decipher. A *t* infixed pattern from the KRB root is therefore possible. In this case, we could explain it as a Sabaic stylistic influence.¹² In Qatabanian dedicatory inscriptions, the stem *tkrb* seems more common (e.g. RES 311).

L. 7:

Rgbm – This is the first instance of this proper name. We can identify the RGB root, already known in onomastics, such as *Hrgb* (considered to be a causative stem) in Sabaic and Hadramitic (e.g. Bā Quṭfa 49), or the royal Qatabanian epithet *Yhrgb* (imperfect verb of the causative stem, e.g. Ja 119, Ja 121, etc.).

w-ywm – This temporal clause may have a consecutive nuance in relation to the request made by the father to the god: “and in fact 'Amm saved *Rgbm* ...”.

The integration of the 'ayn at the end of the line, thus reconstructing the divine name of 'Amm again, is consistent with the context. Every sentence is, in fact, built in the same pattern, where every verb is followed by its subject; and in this case it is again the divinity. Furthermore, the *mīm* at the beginning of the next line should have been interpreted as a mimation of *mt*', which is difficult to sustain given that this word here is clearly a verb form.

L. 13:

The integration of the suffix pronoun *-sⁱmy* is consistent with the preceding, which are all duals (referring to the author and his son). This integration is moreover suggested by the space available at the end of the line, even if no trace of signs is visible on the photograph.

(*z*)*r*(*b*) – The reading of this word is very uncertain, mainly because of difficulties regarding the first and third signs (which could be *Z* / *Ṣ* or *B* / *D*, respectively). Given

11. Bron 2009: 122-124, fig. 3.

12. Beeston (1981: 26-27) suggests that the meaning of *tkrb* in Sabaic corresponds to that of the stem *tkrb* used in Qatabanic. The form *tkrb* is also very common in Minaic legal texts.

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the particular position of the word, and according to similar dedicatory texts, whose closing formula is often fixed, we might expect the word *'rd*, but an initial *'alif* should certainly be excluded.

L. 14:

Construction *d-l* + suffix pronoun has been found in Qatabanic: e.g. CIAS 95.11/o2/n.2 and RES 4336, both also coming from a peripheral linguistic area of Qatabanic (dated to the beginning of the 1st millennium AD).

Discussion

This dedicatory text is addressed to the god 'Amm by a man who thanks the divinity for having healed his son. The bronze statue is mentioned in the text itself (l. 4: *šlm dḥb[m]*). Doubts remain about whether the statue represents the author of the text, i.e. *Dḥrm*, or his son, whose healing was the real reason for this *ex-voto*.

The language of the inscription is Qatabanic, as is clear owing to certain linguistic features, in particular the suffix dual pronouns. Other cultural elements reinforce this conviction: the mention of this divinity, along with the possible mention of the god Anbay at the end of the text. We can, however, hypothesize that this object comes from a peripheral area of the Qatabanian kingdom: the family name *Ḍrn* suggests the southwestern highland corner of the ancient kingdom of Qatabān, in particular the region of Maḏḥā and Datīna.¹³ The sanctuary and specific divinity to which the statue is offered are, for reasons already explained, not known. It is, therefore, difficult to identify the actual site of provenance. Concerning the family *Ḍrn*, we only know of a temple *N'mn* dedicated to 'Amm *d-'ḏbtm*.¹⁴

The inscription follows a very common pattern in this sort of text. It can be divided into three main sections: the dedication of the object to the divinity (lines 1-4), the explanation of why the dedication was made (lines 5-9), the placing of the devotee, his family and belongings under the god's protection (lines 10-14).

As for the chronology, we can only rely on lexical features (for the artistic issues see Antonini above). First, the presence of the noun *nfs'* should be noticed (l. 10) since its use seems to have waned at the end of 1st millennium BC.¹⁵ Moreover, the Sabaic language was used more frequently in this area at that time:¹⁶ this is our *terminus ante quem*. Secondly, there is the presence of the verb "to dedicate" in its Qatabanian form, which was adopted during the 5th century BC; this should be our *terminus post quem*. We can, therefore, propose a dating at the third quarter of the 1st millennium BC.

There are very few inscribed bronze statues from ancient South Arabia; among them: the two Sabaean statues from the Awwām temple in Ma'rib (Ja 400: "Ma'dikarib" – **fig. 5** – and Ja 401 – **fig. 6**); the texts on the fragmentary statues from Naḥḷa al-Ḥamrā' (RES 4708), the small figurine from Najrān (Ja 2815), and pieces of bronze statues from

13. Robin 2001: 196; Id. 2005-2006: 64.

14. *Ibid.*: 36 (Ḥaṣī 10).

15. Avanzini 2004: 140.

16. Robin 2001: 200.

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the Hellenistic period coming from the Jabal al-‘Awd. Recently a statue from the Jawf area, probably from the ancient Sabaeen site of Našqum, was acquired by the Archaeological Museum in Ṣan‘ā’ and restored by the Louvre¹⁷ – **fig. 8**. In the case of the Qatabanian area, we have two bronze anthropomorphic statues with inscriptions, whose content is mainly onomastic (Ja 864 and Ja 888). This scarcity is probably explained by the fact that bronze objects were more often pillaged and destroyed in order to re-use the material which was in high demand. It should be pointed out that inscriptions were also carved on a separate base for the object, evidence of this being the stone bases, found in the Awwām temple, with marks for erecting the statue. The extraordinarily preserved “Lady Bar‘at” from Tamna‘ is one of the very few objects found on its original inscribed stone base (CIAS 47.11/o1/F 72). Given the large span of time and space regarding the provenance of these objects, no connection or textual affinities can be proposed by observing the pieces as a whole.

We can therefore conclude that this object is unique for several reasons. It is a masculine bronze statue with a Qatabanic inscription; the inscription itself is in high-relief¹⁸ and, therefore, not incised with the double-lined signs that are more common in the case of inscribed statues.¹⁹ Finally, the text is positioned on the *fūtaḥ* and not on the upper body as in other Sabaeen examples.

The content is, however, original: although this text as a dedicatory inscription, it has a more personal style and a narrative intention, which sets it apart from stereotyped dedications (as it is quite clear if we compare it to Aylward 2 and Ja 349). The reference to healing an illness is of special importance, since it is the real reason for this dedication. Furthermore, we must consider that this kind of reference is new in Qatabanian sources: the term *mrq* has not been attested in this linguistic area; it occurs more frequently in Hadramitic and Minaic sources, especially in expiatory texts.

Inscription *sigla*

For inscriptions *sigla* and bibliography published before 2000, see Kitchen 2000.

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17. Mille *et al.* 2010.

18. But cf. the applied inscription of the proper name on a small fragmentary bronze statue, part of the decoration of a scale: Mift 00/52. Antonini & Arbach 2002: 37-38, 89, pl. 28d.

19. See, too, the other inscribed statue presented by Sabina Antonini in this same article, whose reading was unfortunately not possible (**figs. 2-4**).

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