

The Hasaeen Tombstone J 1052

A. F. L. BEESTON

Oxford

The tomb inscriptions at Thāj in the al-Ḥasā' province of eastern Arabia,¹ written in a variety of South Arabian monumental script but not in a South Arabian language, are on the whole somewhat uninformative linguistically, consisting as they do mostly of proper names with a stereotyped funerary formula such as *wgr/wqbr* 'tombstone and grave of . . .'. Nevertheless, there are two proper names which show an interesting and significant feature, namely a definite article in the form *hn*—, well known in Lihyanite, Safaitic, etc. Thus, *hn^cbd* in J 1044, equivalent to *al-^cabd*; and *rmhn^olt* in J 1043, a formation comparable with Safaitic *zdhn^olt*, etc., where the second element is undoubtedly equivalent to *al-^oilat* 'the goddess'. Jamme's reading of *hn* (both in the Hasaeen and in the Safaitic examples) as *hawn* = *sakīnah* is highly implausible, since it would produce three-member composita of a type virtually never attested outside Akkadian.

In contrast to the majority of these texts, J 1052 does contain (I would argue) a full sentence. It reads: (1) *bdlt/bn/nylt^o* (2) *fk1/hbs²/wšd* (3) *qh/m^odb/ḡh* (4) *s¹h/wydh/wd^ob*.² This is rendered by Jamme, "Bādilat son of Nīlat, priest of Yabiš, and Šadiquh, the courtier of his brother Wayiduh." He offers no comment on the word *ḡhs¹h* and it is incomprehensible how the rendering 'his brother' has been extracted from it. The following word is obviously not a proper name, but simply 'and his hand'. The most likely explanation then of the mysterious *ḡhs¹* is that it is a dialectal variant of *ḡhḡ*. There is a parallel for this: in J Sa (Lihyanite) 65 there is a word which Jaussen and Savignac read as *ḡhḡ*; but Caske³ justifiably stated that the last letter as written is indeed a cursive *s*, while at the same time claiming that it is 'falsch geschrieben' for *ḡ*. Our Hasaeen text suggests that there is no mistake: *ḡhs* was a variant actually in use. Jamme's rendering of *m^odb* as 'courtier' is based on the Sabaic use of the plural *m^odbt* meaning 'vassals, adherents'; but since *šdq* is obviously a verb with its object-pronoun having a personal reference, we require an abstract sense for *m^odb* something like 'service'. In this context, *ḡhs¹* reminds me of the Arabic expression *ḡhaḡa ḡihḡahum* 'he

1 See throughout A. Jamme, *Sabaeen and Hasaeen Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia* (Istituto di studi del Vicino Oriente, Studi semitici 23; Roma, 1966).

2 The last word needs no discussion, since it is simply the South Arabian apotropaic formula very commonly placed on buildings and monuments of all kinds to ensure protection for them. See B. Doe, "The WD^oB Formula," in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 9 (1979), 40-44.

3 *Liḡyan und liḡyanisch* (Köln, 1954), 126, no. 97.

behaved like them / he adopted their life-style'. Hence I would propose the rendering, "B son of N, priest of Y.⁴ And he (B) faithfully rendered him (Y) the service of his life and his handiwork."

4 The divine name is almost certainly from the root *bašša* 'smile, be friendly', and should be transcribed as Yabašš.