

ARAMAIC IN TAYMA: ON THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION OF THE OASIS IN THE 2ND HALF OF THE 1ST MILLENNIUM BC

I, Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, governor of the country Sūhu and Mari:

People from Tēma (^{lu}*te-ma-'-a-a*) and Saba (^{lu}*šá-ba-'-a-a*), whose residence is far away, whose messengers have never come to me and have never traveled to me - their caravan came (...) and entered into the city Ḥindānu.

In the city Kār Apla-Adad I heard at noon time the news from them;

I put horses to my wagon and crossed the river at night,

and the next day (still) before noon I reached the city Azlajjānu.

For three days I waited in Azlajjānu, and on the third day they arrived.

One hundred of them I took (captive) alive, and their two hundred camels together with their charge: Blue purple wool, (...), wool, iron, precious(?) stones, all kinds of goods, what you could even ask for, I conquered.

Their big booty I carried away and brought it into the land Sūhu.¹

This report of a Mesopotamian local ruler at the central Euphrates around the middle of the 8th century BC, contains one of the earliest references to the name Tayma. The text says nothing more and nothing less than that merchants from Tayma were traveling together with Sabeans with a large caravan in northern Mesopotamia. That Tayma has been strongly involved in international trade, is obviously owed to the location of the oasis on an important branch of the Frankincense Trail, which

leads from Dedān, today's al-'Ulā, along Tayma and Dūma in a northeastern direction to Babylonia (Fig. 1).

This strategic location on the direct connection between Mesopotamia and western Arabia may also have been a reason for the fact that Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (556-539 BC), chose such a supposedly remote place as his residence for ten years. The background of this retreat of the king to Arabia still presents a mystery, however, in the meantime there is evidence of this royal household in Tayma established from archaeological evidence. In the Saudi-German excavations of recent years several cuneiform texts, including a fragment of a royal stele clearly attributable to Nabonidus came to light.² These findings prove that the (or at least an) administrative language in Tayma at the time of the Babylonian occupation in the mid-6th century BC has been Babylonian-Akkadian.

The next written testimony from Tayma is the famous stele with Aramaic inscription, which was already discovered in 1880 by Charles Huber and Julius Euting in the city area of Tayma and then shipped to Paris, where it is located until today in the collection of Oriental Antiquities at the Louvre (CIS II 113 = KAI 228, Figure 2).³ With this certificate, we are obviously at the transition from the Babylonian to the Achaemenid era (and thus the focus of this conference): While the iconography of the reliefs on the left side surface of the stele

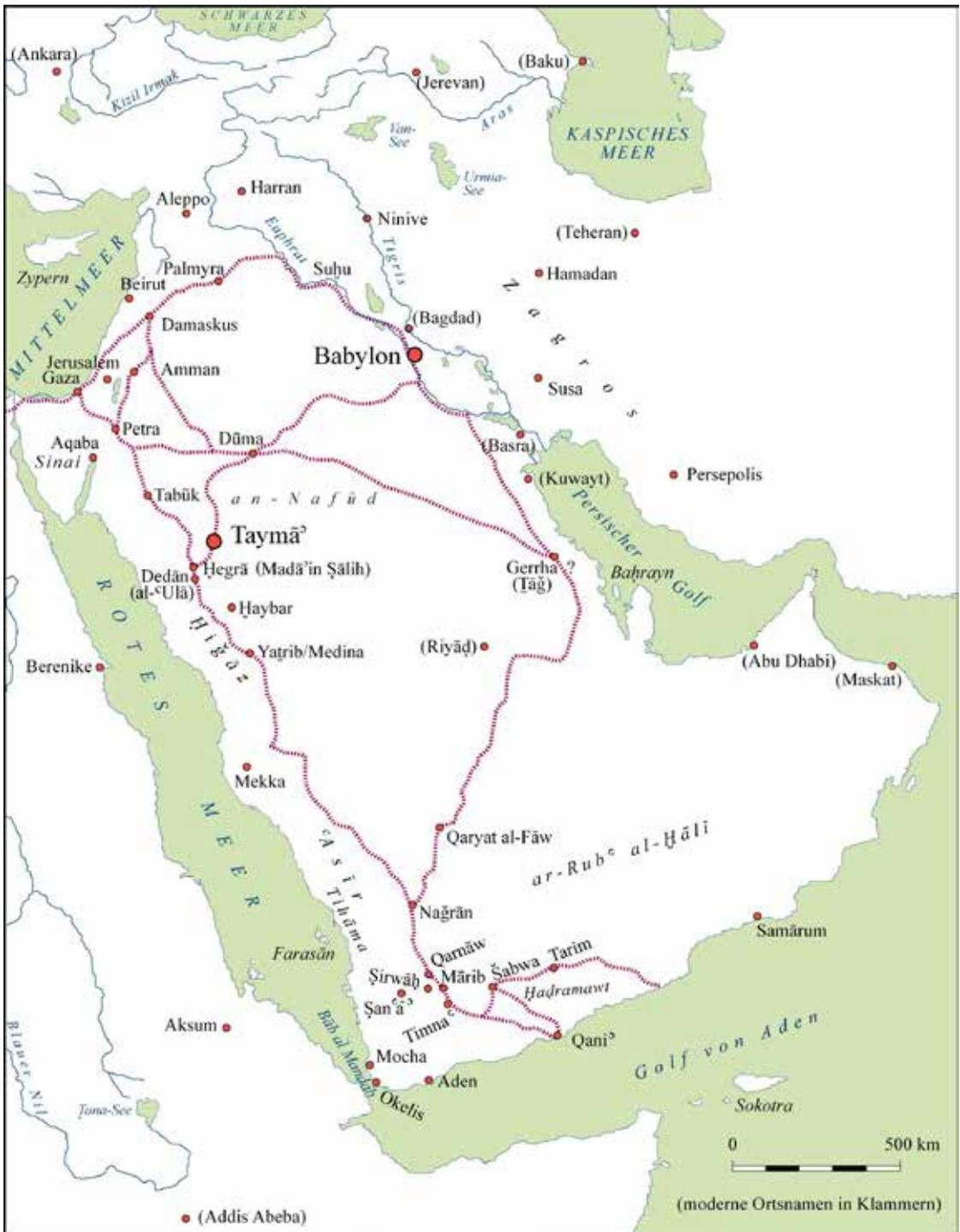


Fig. 1: Map of the Arabian peninsula in the middle of the 1st millenium BC

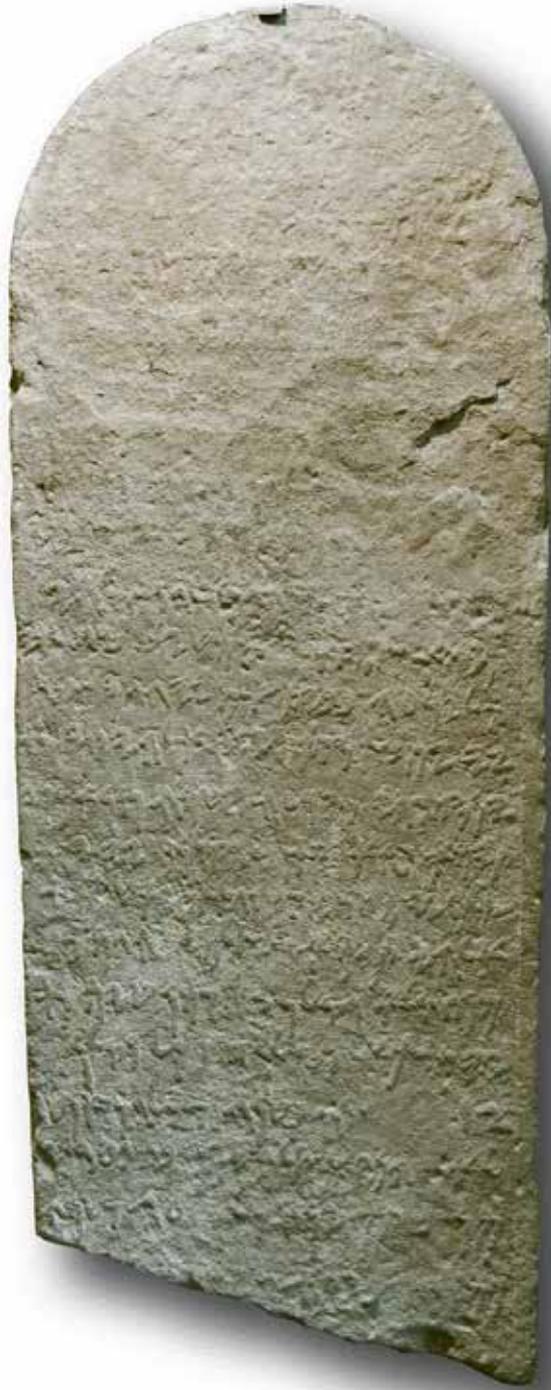


Fig. 2: Tayma stele (Photo: DAI Orient-Abteilung, Mirco Cusin)

shows yet clear Babylonian influence (which in the past has repeatedly caused confusion about the dating of the piece), the inscription clearly favors a dating into Persian time: the text is preceded by a characteristic dating formula of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions:

b-[xx l-tšr]y šnt 22[xxxxxxxx] ⁽²⁾ [m]l[k' b-ty m]'

On (day) X of (the month) Tišrī of the year 22(+X) of [...], the king, in Taymā'.

The above mentioned number of (at least) 22 years allows only one of the three kings Darius I (522-486), Artaxerxes I (465-424) and Artaxerxes II (405-359) to come into question. If the palaeographic classification of the inscription into the late 5th/beginning 4th century as proposed by J. Naveh (1970), should be taken seriously, most likely Artaxerxes II would come into consideration, which means that our stele was probably written around the year 380.

The text of the stele is about the transfer of ownership of a certain number of date palm trees to the priest of a subordinate deity in Tayma with the obvious purpose of securing the care of the family of this priest, thus permanently ensuring the maintenance of the sanctuary:⁴

On [(day) X of (the month) Tišr]ī of the year 22(?) [of Artaxerxes(?),] ⁽²⁾ [the ki] n[g, in Taym]ā'.

Šalm of [Maḥram, ŠNGL'] ⁽³⁾ and ['A]šīmā, the gods of Taymā', for [Ša]lm of ⁽⁴⁾ [H] G[M] [they have mentioned(?)] his name. On this day ... ⁽⁵⁻⁸⁾ [...] ⁽⁹⁾ [...] Therefore(?) ... this [ste]le(?), ⁽¹⁰⁾ [... Šal]mšēzeb, the son of Petosiris, ⁽¹¹⁾ in the house of Šalm of HGM.

Therefore the gods ⁽¹²⁾ Taymā' have granted to Šalmšēzeb, the son of Petosiris, ⁽¹³⁾ and to his descendants in the house of Šalm of

HGM (the following gift). And anyone, ⁽¹⁴⁾ who destroys this stele – the gods of Taymā' ⁽¹⁵⁾ may they eradicate him, and his descendants and his name from the face of ⁽¹⁶⁾ Taymā'.

And behold, this is the gift, which ⁽¹⁷⁾ Šalm of Maḥram, ŠNGL' und 'Ašīmā', ⁽¹⁸⁾ the gods of Taymā', [have given]to Šalm of HGM [...]: ⁽¹⁹⁾ of (ordinary) land (of) date palms: 18(?), and of the land ⁽²⁰⁾ of the king (of) date palms: 6, all date palms (in sum): ⁽²¹⁾ 21(!), year by year.

Neither gods nor a man/people ⁽²²⁾ shall remove Šalmšēzeb, the son of Petosiris, ⁽²³⁾ from this house nor his descendant[s] or his name ⁽²⁴⁾ (as) priests <in>(?) this house for[ever].

The text quite obviously follows a Babylonian form: The motif of mentioning names by the superior triad of gods in lines 2-4 and the curse formulas in lines 13-16 and at the end of the text are well known from cuneiform literature, whereas the focus on transfer of agricultural land is reminiscent of the so-called land grant certificates or Kudurru from Middle- and Neo-Babylonian periods. Also, the imagery beautification of the stele has its prototypes definitely in the Mesopotamian region. Language and writing are nevertheless Aramaic - and thus follow the customs as practiced by the Achaemenids outside of the heartland of cuneiform culture. The Louvre stele is therefore at the beginning of several centuries of anchoring of the Aramaic written language, known as Imperial Aramaic, in the oasis of Tayma.

The epigraphic documentation from the oasis has grown considerably with the Saudi-German excavations of recent years. The number of known Imperial Aramaic written records from Tayma has almost doubled in the last decade from 33 to 64 texts. However - this relatively high number is not accompanied by a corresponding substantive yield of the

texts. Comprehensive, linguistically rich texts have not yet emerged, comparable to the large stele, although some small fragments support the basic existence of other such stelae. However, even the existing texts are fruitful both linguistically and in terms of content. These yields we will consider in the following by means of representative examples in order to finally approach the question which significance the Aramaic language in Tayma actually occupies.⁵

The most commonly documented text genre are grave inscriptions, which make up about one-third of the known inscription stock. In the simplest case, a grave inscription contains only the name of the deceased:

ʿzyzw⁽²⁾ br ḥnzw (TA 8947)
 ʿAzīzū, the son of ḤNZRW.

More detailed grave inscriptions precede the name with the noun *npš* (actually “soul”) in the transferred meaning “tomb” (i.e. *npš X br Y* “Tomb of X, son of Y”). Only very sporadically are grave inscriptions dated (Teima 22). This limited form allows, apart from the proper name (more on that later), hardly more in-depth discussions on linguistic history.

The genus of dedicatory inscriptions, comparable by approximately 20 representatives, is far more productive in content. The form consists of a nominal identification of the object in question, which is followed by the actual dedication ceremony in the form of a relative clause:

[m]ytb ʿzy qr⁽²⁾[b] m ʿnn br ʿm⁽³⁾rn l-šlm ʿlh⁽⁴⁾
 ʿl-ḥyy npš-h (Teima 2)

The pedestal, which Maʿānān, the son of ʿAmrān, offered to the god Šalm for the life of his soul.

As this example shows, a dedicatory inscription is usually concluded by one or more stereotyped purposes. On the grammatical level

we would, for example, refer to the relative pronoun *zy*, which occurs here in its linguistic-historically older form, while in other, completely comparable texts regarding content, however, occurs in the younger form *dy* (e.g. in TA 981/1: *mytb ʿdy qrb*). Such differences will play a significant role in the chronological fixing of the Aramaic era in Tayma.

Historically relevant are also dating formulas frequently documented in building and dedicatory inscriptions, especially if they can be brought in accordance with external historical data. Here we have first and foremost to respond to a newfound building inscription, which contains not only detailed historical data, but also belongs to the most extensive and best-preserved text finds from Tayma (Fig. 3). The text may be translated as follows:

[On (day) X] of (the month) ʿAdār of the year [x]+3 of Lawdān, the king⁽²⁾ [of Li] ḥyān. Naṯirʿel, the governor of Taymāʿ (*pht tym*ʿ).

At that time⁽³⁾ Naṯirʿel, the governor of Taymāʿ – may the Lord and the garrison⁽⁴⁾ of Taymāʿ be remembered! –, h[as set up] this gate. (TA 964)

Apart from the archaeological relevance of the text that reports from the construction work of the inner city wall, where it has been found in the rubble, here two central political authorities are named, who were completely unknown from Tayma so far: the author of the inscription, and thus the client is a “Governor of Tayma” (*pht tym*ʿ). Although this person assumes the title *pāḥā*, the well-known Aramaic designation from Imperial Aramaic texts, this does not mean that we are still in the area of influence of the Achaemenid Empire. Rather, the introductory dating formula mentions a certain Lawdān (Aramaic *lwdn*), King of Liḥyān, as supervisor of our governor.

This is by far not the only example. In a building interpreted as a shrine, a stele and two pil-



Fig. 3: Building inscription from Tayma (TA 964, Photo: DAI Orient-Abteilung, Mirco Cusin)

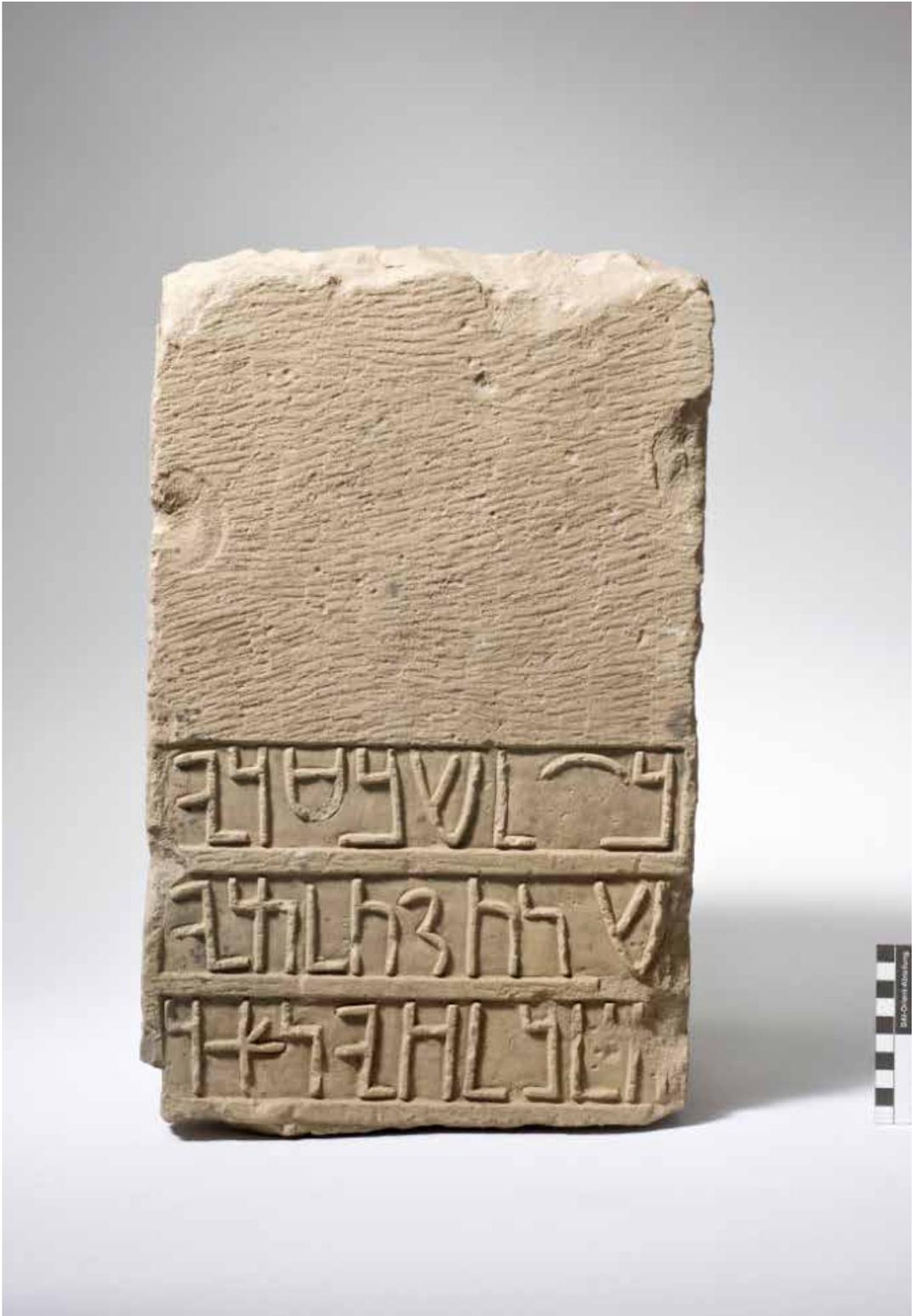


Fig. 4: Inscribed pillar from Tayma (TA 2382, Photo: DAI Orient-Abteilung, Mirco Cusin)

lars were excavated, whose entire inscriptions are dated after a round (!) year of reign of a king Tulmay of Liḥyān, e.g. (Fig. 4):

b-10 l-šbṭ dy ⁽²⁾ *šnt 20 tlm̄y* ⁽³⁾ *mlk lḥyn* ⁽⁴⁾ *d* ⁽⁴⁾
[...] (TA 2382)

On the 10th (day) of the (month) Šōbāt of the year 20 of Tulmay, the king of Liḥyān. At that time [...]

The other two texts (TA 4916 and TA 4915) indicate the year 30, respectively, 40 of the same king. Even if the subsequent text is lost in all three cases, the striking distance of ten years each, makes likely the assumption of a regularly scheduled ceremony, such as a consecration, which was performed by the king in this sanctuary.

What kind of kings are Lawḏān and Tulmay? We know the kingship of Liḥyān so far almost exclusively from inscriptions in the so-called Dedanic or Liḥyanic dialect,⁶ a local representative of early North Arabian and distant relative of classical Arabic. There are several hundred inscriptions,⁷ in the majority graffiti, but also monumental rock inscriptions, in a separate expression of early North Arabic script, which have been left in the oasis of Dedān, today's al-'Ulā, 150 kms southwest of Tayma. In these inscriptions, mostly in the context of dating formulas, members of a Liḥyanic royal family are repeatedly mentioned, including several bearers of the names Lawḏān and Tulmay, e.g.

šnt ⁽⁸⁾ *šrn tlm̄y* [*mlk l*]⁽⁹⁾*ḥyn* (AH 64/7–9)⁸
(in) year 20 of Tulmay, the king of Liḥyān.

However, although already 12 different rulers of Liḥyān, some even with filiation, could be proven in this way, neither the internal chronology nor the absolute dating of the Liḥyanic kingship has been clarified. The approaches vary between the 6th and 2nd century BC, however, recently a limitation is preferred to the Achaemenid-Ptolemaic era. In complete

absence of concrete synchronisms, out of necessity, even the name of our King Tulmay, which could be deduced as a loanword from Greek Ptolemy (although this is controversial), is used as a witness for a Hellenistic dating.

Here now our Aramaic inscriptions can contribute to some degree to an elucidation. If we summarize the presented historical, palaeographical and linguistic findings, we will reach the conclusion that the disputed inscriptions from the time of the kings Lawḏān and Tulmay in Tayma have come into existence in any case much later than 380 (the probable date of the paleographically significantly older Louvre stele). Thus we most likely move already into the Hellenistic period, which provides a sufficient historical evidence of the political break between the (still manifested in the Louvre stele) Achaemenid domination and the seizure of power by a local Arab kingdom in Tayma. The Aramaic inscriptions from Tayma that mention a Liḥyanic supremacy, and the texts to be paleographically connected with them, should therefore be dated at the earliest in the outgoing 4th century BC.⁹

That the texts also could not have come into existence much later, is suggested by philological considerations. A striking example at the phonological level is the treatment of the original interdental voiced fricative /d̪/, which is reproduced because of the absence of a corresponding grapheme in the 22-consonantal writing system in North-West Semitic languages, as we know, either with *z* (as in Hebrew) or *d*. Whereas the later Aramaic unanimously shows *d*, *z* can be found in the older language stages; however, the transition between the two spellings is allocated to the (best documented in this period) Egyptian-Aramaic in the 5th century BC.¹⁰

In the inscriptions of Tayma both spellings are found, whereby signs of a transition in the texts of the Liḥyanic era become visible: Whereas we have in the building inscription TA 964

(with the king Lawdān) still present the older spellings with *z* (in the participle *zkyr* in line 3 and in the demonstrative pronoun *z'* at the very end of the text),¹¹ the stele inscription TA 2382 written under Tulmay with the relative pronoun *dy* at the end of the first line, shows already the later practice. Therefore, this transition with reference to the Egyptian-Aramaic findings, should not be determined too late.

There are historical considerations, too. If we count together all previous years of the reign of the Liḥyanic kings mentioned in the inscriptions, we come to a total of at least 180 years, which needs, given the incomplete tradition situation,¹² certainly to be significantly rounded up. Considering a Liḥyanic establishment of the monarchy in the wake of the decline of the Achaemenid Empire in the 2nd half of the 4th century BC, we arrive with about 200 years minimum duration of the dynasty easily in the outgoing 2nd century BC, and thus in a time that is shaped by the rise of a new regional power, the Nabataeans. The Nabataean kingdom should have established its until today impressive monumental rock tomb outpost in Ḥegrā no later than the 1st Century BC (Arabic Madā' in Šālīḥ) in the immediate vicinity of the old Dedān, thus becoming the successor of the Liḥyān as rulers of the region. Nabataean inscriptions are consequently present also in Tayma. As in the northwestern bordering regions, the Nabataean language replaces Imperial Aramaic as a written language.

Babylonian - Imperial Aramaic - Nabataean: Within just half a millennium of archaeologically documented settlements, the written culture of the oasis of Tayma has changed twice foundationally. This of course applies only to the epigraphic form of literacy: inscriptions in the public realm for the purpose of representative display. Mundane records such as business documents or letter correspondence are not found among them - as in most neighboring regions this kind of literature was

written on perishable materials, which have been preserved only in exceptional cases. But this material is linked to the question of the language of the people in everyday life, therefore, linked to the ethnic composition of the population of the oasis.

If we ask about the ethnicity of the authors of our texts, their names give us first reliable evidence. As we have seen, the names of the persons mentioned in the texts are only partly in Aramaic (e.g. Naḥīr'el referred to in the building inscription TA 964). In contrast, the name of the priest of the Louvre stele Šalmušēzib (or Aramaizing Šalmšēzeb) is clearly under Babylonian influence, the name of his father, Petosiris, even of Egyptian origin.

Most commonly, however, personal names of Arabic origin are attested, such as in

npš tym (2) br zyd (Teima 23)
Grave of Taym, the son of Zayd.

Also the name of the deceased of the above-cited grave stele TA 8947, 'Azīzū is clearly of Arabic provenance (with the later very characteristic suffix /-ū / for the Nabataean). The same goes for the founder of the pedestal Teima 2. These "Arabs" now of course are by no means semi-nomadic surrounding neighbors of the oasis who have been confronted with the city and its literary culture only in passing. As some inscriptions in early North Arabic script have documented, these Arabs have already occupied highest offices in the administration of the city under Nabonidus:

'n mrdn ḥlm nbnd mlk bbl (2) 'twt m' rbsrs
... ('Taymā' 1'/1f.)¹³
I am Māridān, the companion of Nabonid,
the king of Babel.
I came together with the house-court-master
...

This text in the most beautiful (early North) Arabic language stands in line with about 400

other short inscriptions and graffiti that have been found in the city and the nearby areas of Tayma, commonly dated in the 6th-5th century BC. It is a part of the formerly designated as Thamudic, widely scattered inscription corpus, which is subdivided in recent times in various, clearly defined regional dialects, including a so-called Taymanic (formerly: Thamudic A).¹⁴ Even the numerical preponderance of these inscriptions compared with the Akkadian or Aramaic texts makes it clear that here we have to look for the real mother tongue of the majority of the population. Like the neighboring oases Dedān (see above) or Dūma, Tayma was inhabited by an Arabic-speaking community, which - at least for the purpose of spontaneous expressions of presence in the sense of "I was here!" - could also utilize their own writing, resulting from intra-Arabic tradition.

That this writing experienced a certain perception even superregionally, could be read from the deeds of a Syrian local ruler in Carchemish from the period around 800 BC. In this hieroglyphic-Luwian inscription, a certain Yariris boasts, not only to know 12 languages, but in addition to the local (i.e. hieroglyphic), the Assyrian (cuneiform), and possibly the Phoenician (*su-ra*, probably < Šūr = Tyre) but also to have been conversant with a "Taymanic" (*ta-i-ma-ni-ti*) writing.¹⁵ Although here the employed toponym allows a number of other interpretations, the reading "writing from Tayma" appears (in the sense of early North Arabic script generally) readily plausible, especially if we consider that only a few decades later actually a caravan titled as "Taymanic" in the Syrian region has been on the road, which takes us once again to our first text example.¹⁶

So we have to state in Tayma a steady coexistence of (at least) two writing systems - a local early northern Arabic and an external one, which correlates with the conventional system used elsewhere by the respective prevailing super power. Although there obviously existed

for a long time a local tradition of writing, it was not used in public life. This should probably be explained by the fact that institutions which make such a use of writing necessary, such as a provincial administration with associated bureaucracy, have been installed only in the course of the residence of King Nabonidus in Tayma. Such an administrative machinery with professional scriptorium, self-evident in Babylonia, with archives and the like should, once set up, also have been taken over by the new rulers, the Achaemenids. Only that, following the practice in the rest of the empire, the Aramaic has established itself as the written language. The density of the Aramaic tradition in Tayma in comparison with the neighboring oases makes it likely that the center of the Achaemenid administration of north-west Arabia had been installed here.¹⁷

That the officers of this administrative apparatus whose training is not just limited to reading and writing, but must have included a thorough instruction in certificate forms, legal terminology and the like, is obvious. In a peripheral administrative center as Tayma these specialists are therefore not initially recruited locally, but have been seconded from the respective political and intellectual centers there. This may explain why among the priesthood or in the provincial administration, we can find bearers of Babylonian or Aramaic names, while the majority of the population was probably of Arabic origin. Also the fact that the Aramaic writing culture in Tayma was preserved even after the fall of the Persian Empire, can be given an explanation in this way: to the new rulers, the kings of Liḥyān, an appropriate administrative apparatus with pronounced literary culture was simply not available. As far as we know, the use of liḥyanic writing, like its early northern Arabic neighbors (as in Tayma) remained mostly limited to the field of epigraphy, i.e. representative inscriptions mostly on rock walls. Whether there has been a developed everyday correspondence in Dedān and in which language and writing this was

composed, is unknown up to now. The almost total absence of Aramaic inscriptions in the oasis of al-‘Ulā¹⁸ suggests in any case that the Aramaic here acquired no comparable meaning as in Tayma. This may be related to the fact that the very formative Achaemenid state power in Tayma did not extend in the same measure as far as Dedan.

Anyway, in Tayma the once established Aramaic writing culture is continued under the new local rulers until the Imperial Aramaic

is replaced in the entire region through a new stage of development: the Nabataean. This transition, which is likely to have taken place in the course of the 1st century BC, gradually emerges in Tayma. A number of inscriptions from this period has peculiarly deformed cadences which provide already discernible distinct echoes of the Nabataean writing and, as far as we can see, has been so far verified only in Tayma (TA 8181 and more pronounced TA 3335 and TA 4457, cf. CIS II 336). The transition from the spread of the Imperial Aramaic

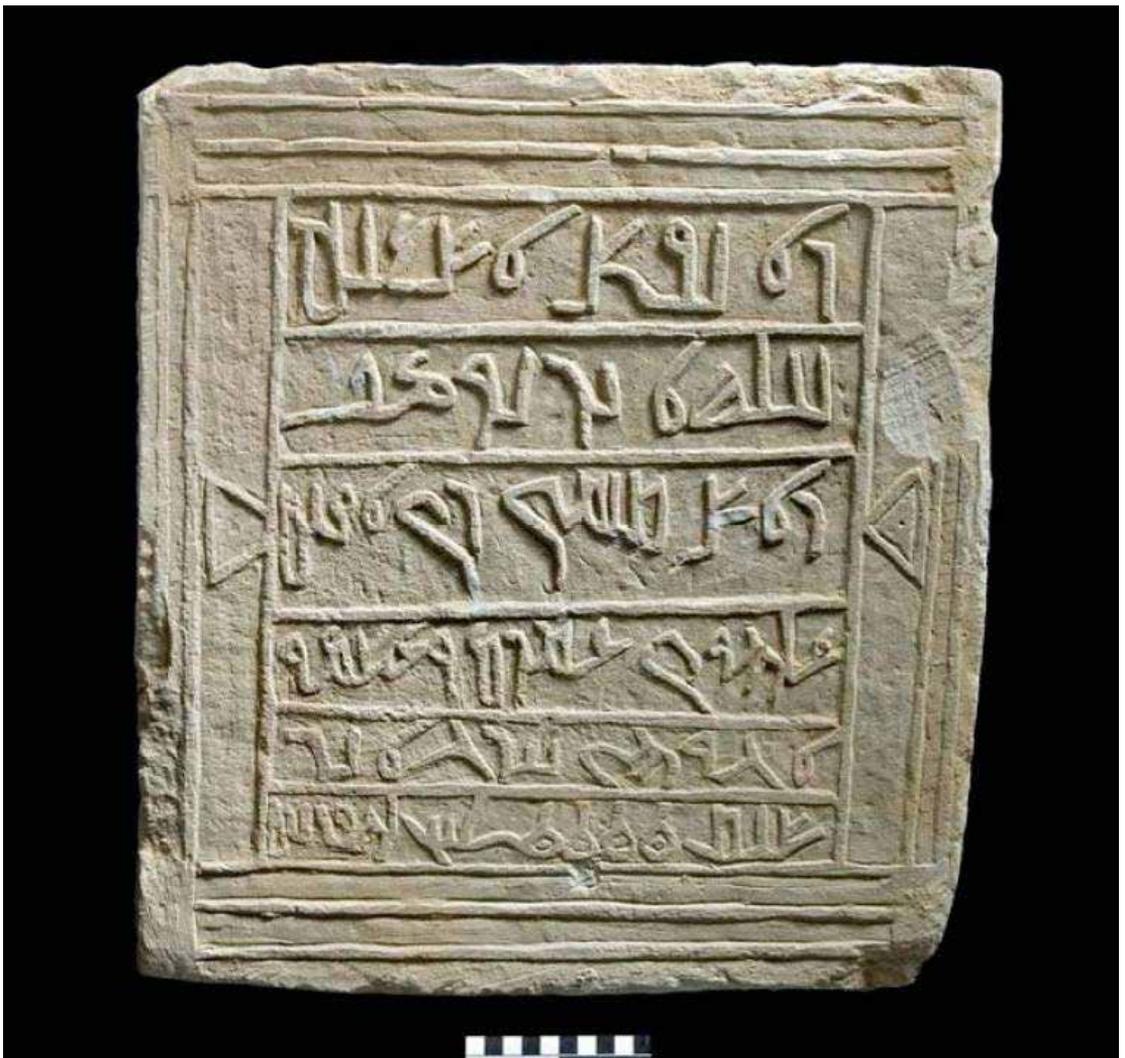


Fig. 5: Nabataean grave inscription from Tayma (Photo: DAI Orient-Abteilung)

writing culture throughout the whole Near East towards the regional differentiations of the BC/AD era can be reconstructed in Tayma apparently quite consistently.¹⁹ Thus Aramaic remains present in Tayma - in the shape of the *lingua franca* of the Nabataean Empire.

The Nabataean language and writing will hold its ground in Tayma - until well into the post-Christian period - in the entire North West region of the Arabian Peninsula. As one inscription discovered in 2009 in the city area of Tayma shows, the religious and political circumstances have changed radically in the meantime (Fig. 5):

This is the grave ⁽²⁾ of Isaiah (ʿšʿyh), the councilman(?), the son of Josef (ywsp), ⁽³⁾ the head of Tayma (rʿš tymy), which ⁽⁴⁾ ʿAmram und ʿŠMW, his brothers, have erected above him ⁽⁵⁾ in the month Iyyār ⁽⁶⁾ in the year 98 of the province (= 203 n.Chr.).²⁰

No longer the polytheistic cosmos of gods of northern Arabia, but the Jewish religion now shapes the social life in the oasis. The names of the protagonists of this grave inscription are largely, though not exclusively, Jewish connotations, and obviously a follower of Judaism was at the head of the local administration. That this was not an isolated case, has long been documented by a grave inscription known for quite some time from Madāʿ in Šāliḥ, the ancient Nabataean outpost northeast of Dedān/al-ʿUlā, which is dated into the year 356 AD (251 of the province) and mentions the descendant of a Samuel as prince of Tayma (line 3f.: *mrw br ʿdywn br šmw ʿl* ⁽⁴⁾ *ryš tym*).²¹

A reminiscence of this Jewish dominance in the oasis has even preserved the later Arab tradition that knows of a Jewish poet named Samuel among the poets of the pre-Islamic period (as-Samawʿal ibn ʿĀdiyā), in the 6th century AD who is said to have resided in Tayma. But the poems attributed to him are already written in (pre-classical) Arabic. The

Nabataean writing (and thus the Aramaic element) in northwestern Arabia is sustained at least until well into the 5th century, only to be almost imperceptibly replaced by the Arabic writing culture.²² Even though we are missing written documents from Tayma itself, it can be assumed that at the latest with the expulsion of the Jewish population during the Islamization of the oasis in the early 7th century, Aramaic as a written language in Tayma has become obsolete.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Cavigneaux/Ismail (1990) Nr. 2, col. iv, 26–38 (translation changed according to *ibid.*, 351). This is a clay table copy of an unpreserved commemorative inscription of this ruler, which must have been set up in one of his residences in or around the city Anat in middle Euphrates. For the interpretation of the content of this text cf. also Macdonald (1997) 338–340.

² Cf. tentatively Eichmann/Schaudig/Hausleiter (2006) sowie Hausleiter/Schaudig 2010.

³ Cf. for the following tentatively Stein (i. Dr. 1) which substantiates the interpretation of the inscription which is taken as basis here, including references to older literature; an extensive revision of the text according to an autopsy of the stele which has been carried out by A. Hausleiter and P. Stein is in preparation.

⁴ The text is subdivided into sense units; the raised numbers stand for line positions on the stele.

⁵ The texts which are introduced in what follows will be published in Stein (i. Dr. 2); also information on the already published inscriptions from Tayma as well as a detailed discussion of the only slightly mentioned philologi-

cal and historical aspects can be found there. Already published inscriptions are cited with Siglum Teima+Number according to the numbering of Schwiderski (2004) 410–413.

⁶ For the terminological discussion cf. Macdonald (2000), who prefers the name „Dadanitic“. The separation into an (older) Dedanic and a (later) Liḥyanic phase found in older literature cannot be sustained.

⁷ In his foreword to the monography of Farès-Drappeau (2005) 17 Ch. Robin speaks of up to 1000 known Liḥyanic inscriptions, of which one have has been published. The *ibid.* 127–231 edited texts, which mainly contain the larger inscriptions, count 166 numbers. Several further texts have been edited by Sima (1999).

⁸ Cited according to Sima (1999) 38. Cf. for the following *ibid.* 49–51 as well as Farès-Drappeau (2005) 122–126.

⁹ For the assumption of coexistence of a Liḥyanic dynasty with Persian rule (thus for instance Knauf (1990) 205f.) there is no apparent reason: The addition of the name of a Liḥyanic king in a lacune mentioning “Governor of Dedān” (*ḫt ddn*) in the end of JSliḥ 349 = Caskel 55 = D 153 is in no way binding (cf. the edition in Farès-Drappeau (2005) 221, which leaves open the end of the text).

¹⁰ Thus Muraoka/Porten (2003) 3–6. Certainly this has been a gradual process whose implementation may have taken several generations longer in peripheral regions of Aramaic writing culture than in cultural centres.

¹¹ The name of the ruler in l. 1 of this inscription renders the etymologically identical sound /d/ with *d* which could be a reflex of this transition period. On the other hand it is not established at all that the realization of this phoneme in the Aramaic of the time was identical with that of the neighbouring early north Arabian dialect of Liḥyān.

¹² That the rulers which are mentioned in the Liḥyanic inscriptions only represent a part of the dynasty is illuminated by the circumstance that in the Aramaic inscriptions from Tayma at least one further so far completely unknown king of Liḥyān appears (TA 8827+8828:

Ġulaym (or ‘Ulaym) Šahrū). Also the length of reigns must surely exceed the years which (by chance) are mentioned in the texts.

¹³ Cf. the extensive publication of Müller/al-Said (2002).

¹⁴ Cf. again for clarification Macdonald (2000), especially 33f. incl. note 30. The best historical linguistic description of early north Arabian dialects is given by Macdonald (2004).

¹⁵ Karkamiš A15b § 19f., cf. the latest edition of Hawkins (2000) 130–133. On the *ibid.* 133 offered proposals for the identification of the respective toponyms cf. the extensive plea of Livingstone (1995) 134–137 for the above given interpretation, which is also cautiously followed by Macdonald (1997) 340f.

¹⁶ Cf. Robin (2008), who also considers Tayma as a hub through which early north and ancient south Arabian writings might have been distributed on the Arabian peninsula.

¹⁷ This conclusion is already reached by Knauf (1990) 206f by means of the epigraphic finds which were known then, but have – as has already been shown – doubled in the meantime.

¹⁸ Which are very few – additionally to the very short rock inscriptions from al-‘Ulā and surroundings (cf. Sima (1999a) 54f.) – and by number stand in no proportion to the corresponding documentation in Tayma or to the wider evidence of Liḥyanic inscriptions in Dedan.

¹⁹ This transition even becomes evident within one written document that has been found during the campaign of the year 2011. The grave stele TA 10277 contains the grave inscriptions of three women from different periods underneath each other: one in imperial Aramaic relief script whose characteristic style corresponds almost completely to that of the pillar inscription TA 2382, one in transition form and a third in Nabatean script.

²⁰ Without siglum published by Al-Najem/Macdonald (2009); the interpretation given above follows the former description.

²¹ First published by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl in the year 1968; cf. the extensive new edition with corrected a reading by Al-Najem/

Macdonald (2009) 212–215.

²² The epigraphic finds of recent years from the entire north-west of the Arabian peninsula make clear, that the assumed gap between the dwindling Nabatean sources and the emergence of Arabic writing culture in the 6./7. centuries can no longer be taken seriously, on this matter cf. especially Nehmé (2010).