

# The Minaic Legal Inscription Haram 42 in the British Museum Reconsidered

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[The subject of this article is the Minaic inscription Haram 42, and a new interpretation is proposed herein, in the light of Ancient South Arabian and other Semitic sources. The document is a boundary stela dealing with the administration of landed properties that helps shed light on the ancient South Arabian legal system. Historical observations are also made in the broader context of ancient Near Eastern law.]

**Keywords:** Ancient South Arabia, Ancient Near Eastern Law, Semitic philology.

## 1. Introduction

The inscription Haram 42 is a Minaic legal text dealing with the administration of private landed properties in the ancient South Arabian (hereafter referred to as ASA)<sup>1</sup> kingdom of Ma‘īn.<sup>2</sup> This document is significant, as it provides interesting information on certain aspects of the Minaic legal system.

The significance of this document, however, has been underestimated thus far, due to the problematic reconstruction of the text of the inscription and a few linguistic difficulties. In this article, a new edition of the inscription will be proposed on the basis of the author’s personal inspection of the stone. Furthermore, a new translation with a philological commentary of the inscription will be provided, in the light of ASA sources and Semitic comparative data. Some observations on Minaic law will also be added from a broader historical perspective.

## Text and Translation

Front (Gl 288 B)

<sup>1</sup> *w-dn wtinn hfd q[ny]*

<sup>2</sup> *w-m(s<sup>1</sup>)fht wtw [ ... ... ]*

<sup>3</sup> *(qn)y Y[ ]krb bn (s<sup>3</sup>)[nn]*

<sup>4</sup> *fs<sup>1</sup>( ) [ ... ... ]ns<sup>1</sup>?(khl s<sup>3</sup>n)?*

<sup>5</sup> *m ‘l[y ... ... ]*

<sup>6</sup> *(t)h h[ ]y[ ... ... ]*

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1. ASA refers both to “ancient South Arabia” (the region in the Arabian Peninsula; geographical indication) and to “Ancient South Arabian” (the language spoken in the region; linguistic indication).

2. The author wishes to thank all the staff at the British Museum, and particularly Alexandra Porter and Tracey Sweek, for their valuable support during the author’s research period at the British Museum in 2008-2009.

## Back (Gl 287 A)

<sup>7</sup> *w-bn dn wttn w-fs<sup>1</sup>, m=*<sup>8</sup> *sfht b-'trh d-Rymn w=*<sup>9</sup> *rkl d-Ttnt w-stdq /*<sup>10</sup> *b-fih Hfyh Nfs<sup>1</sup> w-r=*<sup>11</sup> *bqhy M'n d-ngw s<sup>1</sup>m'*<sup>12</sup> *Y'ws<sup>1</sup> l' d-(Gnd) w-M'y=*<sup>13</sup> *d d-Ndf*

## Front

<sup>1</sup> Thus, this boundary stela is the limit of the pro[perty]<sup>2</sup> and the agricultural field towards [ ... ... ]<sup>3</sup> the property of Y[t]krb from the dire[ction of]<sup>4</sup> the ?East? ... ... ?direction to?<sup>5</sup> the co[ver ... ... the build-]<sup>6</sup> ing [ ... ... ]

## Back

<sup>7</sup> from this boundary stela and to the ?East? of the agricultural field<sup>8</sup> beyond d-Rymn<sup>9</sup> and on the way to d-Ttnt; and thus, made justice<sup>10</sup> the Judges' Council and the Super-  
intendents of land records<sup>11</sup> of M'n in a judicial decision which was officially issued; witnessing act by<sup>12</sup> Y'ws<sup>1</sup> l' d-(Gnd) and M'y-<sup>13</sup> d d-Ndf

Rhodokanakis based his 1917 edition of the document at hand<sup>3</sup> on Glaser's copies of two inscriptions with the sigla Gl 287 and Gl 288. He pointed out that "unser Grenzstein Gl 288/7 is auf der Vorder- und Rückseite beschrieben". He considered, therefore, the two inscriptions Gl 287 and Gl 288 as parts of the same inscription that is on two sides of one stone,<sup>4</sup> and proposed the sequence Gl 288 (B) → Gl 287 (A).

In 1992, however, Robin<sup>5</sup> provided a new edition of such document, where he argued that "comme, sur la pierre qui est entrée au British Museum, on ne trouve pas que le texte A, il faut supposer que la borne originale a été fendue en deux parties et que seule la première a été vendue en Europe. Cependant on ne saurait exclure que Glaser se soit trompé : il n'a pas vu le monument et tient ses informations de Yéménites qu'il avait envoyés dans le Jawf pour faire des estampages".<sup>6</sup> Robin did not accept Rhodokanakis' reconstruction of the document, and stated that "D'après

3. Rhodokanakis 1917, 86-94; as for older references, see Rhodokanakis 1917, 87.

4. This was also pointed out by Mordtmann 1897, 101. Rhodokanakis proposed his reconstruction on the basis of Glaser's remark that the two inscriptions were engraved on the same stone. In accordance with the edition by Rhodokanakis, the document was included in RES VI / 1, 93-94 with the label R 3310 and subsequently by Garbini 1974, 84-85 with the label M 297.

5. Robin 1992, 111-113.

6. Robin 1992, 111-112.

Rhodokanakis, les deux inscriptions ne feraient qu'un tout dans l'ordre B-A. Si on se fonde sur le contenu, rien ne le confirme expressément. Nous traitons donc le deux textes de façon indépendante".<sup>7</sup> Robin included the two inscriptions in the collection of Haram documents under the label Haram 42 (but as two independent texts A and B).

After his personal inspection of the stone, currently housed at the British Museum with the siglum BM 125144, the author could identify Gl 288 (B) on the back of the stone bearing Gl 287 (A).<sup>8</sup> This conclusively settles the epigraphic issue and confirms Rhodokanakis' reconstruction of one text inscribed on both sides of the same stone. As lines 9-13 (inscribed at the end of Gl 287 (A)) are clearly the concluding section of the document, Rhodokanakis' sequence Gl 288 (B) → Gl 287 (A) can be confirmed as well.

### Philological commentary

#### Line 1-3

The initial particle *w* does not have its usual coordinating role, as it introduces the entire text. The parallel with expressions such as *w-l s<sup>3</sup>n<sup>9</sup>* or *w-kwn wtn...*,<sup>10</sup> in the initial sections of certain Sabaic legal documents, indicates that *w* is used as a deictic that serves to emphasise the beginning of a document.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the *w-* particle in the initial section of a text only occurs in legal documents as a stereotyped stylistic feature. The use of the *w-* particle to introduce the apodosis of the conditional sentence is further evidence of its deictic value.<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with the originally emphatic function of the particle *w-* in Semitic.<sup>13</sup>

The term *wtn* is typically ASA and indicates both the "boundary stela/stone" and the "limit, border" between two territories.<sup>14</sup> It is often used in that specific type of Sabaic legal documents (unattested in Qatabanic) that is defined as "boundary stelae", which report issues regarding limits between private landed properties, as in the case of this document. This term is taken to mean boundary stela in this document as well as in the other boundary stela as-Sawdā' 65, 1 (see the observations below). By contrast, the plural pattern *'wtnh* occurring in the Minaic inscriptions Ma'in 1, 4 and MAFRAY-Darb as-Ṣabī 1, 3 (*'wtn*), 6-7 indicates the "limits" of certain areas.

The term *hfd* is problematic. It may be attested in the other Minaic inscription as-Sawdā' 65, 1.

7. Robin 1992, 112.

8. The two sides of the stone were restored in 2008-2009, and good-quality photographs of the document are currently available online at [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1887-0629-28](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1887-0629-28).

9. For the meaning, attestations and bibliography of this expression, see generally SW under the root *s<sup>3</sup>nn*; on the type of documents introduced by this formulaic expression, see Korotayev 1994, 49-50. See also the expression *w-l-k-dy 'l-s<sup>3</sup>n* occurring in MAFRAY-Qutra 1, 1 (Stein 2013, 111; Kropp 1998, 172).

10. See the inscriptions C 553+C 554, 1 and C 975, 1. Note also C 540, 1 *w-kwn l-nhl...* and Ja 2854, 1-2 *w-htrh wtn<sup>2</sup>n*.

11. As suggested by Beeston 1962, 61, 52:8; 1984, 49, 31:4; see also Stein 2013, 111.

12. See Beeston 1962, 60, 52:4; 1984, 46, 28:9; Kogan – Korotayev 1997, 239; Sima 2001, 287; Nebes – Stein 2004, 477-479; Mazzini 2020a, 256. Note the parallel use in Biblical Hebrew by Waltke – O'Connor 1990, 636, H-P. Müller 1994, 165 and more generally Eksell 1999, 90, 110.

13. See generally Eksell 1999.

14. See SW under the root *wtn*. Note that the root *wtn* is unattested elsewhere in Semitic (Cohen 1997, 658-659). The term *watan* in Classical Arabic indicating the "idols" (see in particular Qur 22, 30; 29, 17, 25) is a loanword from ASA (see al-Selwi 1987, 218). This term is also attested in Yemeni Arabic with the same meaning as in ASA, and it is an ASA lexical influence (see al-Selwi 1987, 218-219; Piamenta 1991, 517; Behnstedt 2006, 1281). The term *wasan*, "boundary, limit, border", in Ge'ez can also be considered a loanword from ASA (see Dillmann 1865, 905; W.W. Müller 1983a, 285; Leslau 1987(1991<sup>2</sup>), 620).

<sup>1</sup> *ḏn wṭn ḥfḏ ... ...]*

<sup>2</sup> *ḏ-Gzr bn s<sup>3</sup>[nn ... ...]*

if the restoration of the lacuna in line 1 is correct.<sup>15</sup> Other parallels, however, are unattested in ASA, and the root *ḥfḏ* is unknown in Semitic. The Classical Arabic *ḥafz* “bout, extrémité”<sup>16</sup> is notable, despite its phonetic inconsistency (*ḏ* Minaic / *z* Classical Arabic).<sup>17</sup> The expression *ḏn wṭn ḥfḏ*, occurring in the two texts, may be a Minaic technicality, defining the physical and legal limits of landed properties.<sup>18</sup> The context, therefore, suggests that line 1 should be translated as “this boundary stela is the limit of the la[nded property]”. The structure of the clause points to *ḥfḏ* being a noun rather than a verb pattern, as suggested by Rhodokanakis.<sup>19</sup>

The context also suggests that the lacuna at the end of line 1 should be restored as *q[ny]*, a term that occurs in line 3. The ASA term *qny* broadly refers to “property”, and in this context it appears to specifically stand for “landed property”. Significantly, *qny* is parallel with the subsequent term *m(s<sup>1</sup>)fht*.

The term *ms<sup>1</sup>fht* is a *mf<sup>c</sup>lt* nominal pattern from the root *s<sup>1</sup>fḥ*, and is only attested in Minaic. This term occurs in contexts referring to working activities on landed properties such as in M 172=R 2952, 3.

...]*s<sup>1</sup>nbṭ b<sup>c</sup>r-s<sup>1</sup> Tḡl s<sup>3</sup>n mṭrn T<sup>c</sup>d w-ṣyr ms<sup>1</sup>fḥ(t)[-s<sup>1</sup>]*

where *ms<sup>1</sup>fht* depends on the verb *ṣyr* “bring into cultivation”, and the context concerns the building of a well (*s<sup>1</sup>nbṭ b<sup>c</sup>r-s<sup>1</sup> Tḡl*) near some rain-watered field (*s<sup>3</sup>n mṭrn T<sup>c</sup>d*). Similarly, *ms<sup>1</sup>fht* also occurs in Haram 2, 13.

*w-yw<sup>10</sup>m ḥfr w-s<sup>1</sup>nbṭ w-ḏ<sup>1</sup>fr b<sup>c</sup>r-s<sup>1</sup> Mṭr*  
*w-n<sup>12</sup>ḥl-s<sup>1</sup> Ys<sup>2</sup>hrmlk N<sup>13</sup>bṭ ms<sup>1</sup>fḥ ‘mm*  
*ḏ-<sup>14</sup>s<sup>1</sup>y bn gdr ḏ-<sup>r</sup><sup>15</sup>nb l<sup>c</sup>l ‘d qny-s<sup>1</sup>*

where the construction of the well *Mṭr* (*ḥfr w-s<sup>1</sup>nbṭ w-ḏ<sup>1</sup>fr b<sup>c</sup>r-s<sup>1</sup> Mṭr*) is reported, and the term *ms<sup>1</sup>fḥ* is described as an area located between a walled structure and a landed property (*bn gdr ḏ-<sup>r</sup><sup>15</sup>nb l<sup>c</sup>l ‘d qny-s<sup>1</sup>*). Robin translates *ms<sup>1</sup>fḥ* as “terrains inondables” from the Classical Arabic root *safaḥa* “«verser répandre (l’eau, le sang...)» or *safḥ* «pied, pente de la montagne où se répand l’eau qui descend d’en haut»”.<sup>20</sup> Rhodokanakis proposed “Wasserinnen” (water channels)<sup>21</sup> in view of the same connection with the Classical Arabic root *safaḥa*. The idea of “dispersing, shedding, pouring liquid” conveyed by the root *s<sup>1</sup>fḥ* is also attested in ASA, but the contexts are substantially

15. As proposed by Rhodokanakis 1917, 89; this interpretation is accepted by Avanzini 1995a, 189.

16. See Kazimirski 1860, 457-458 and more generally Lane 1865, 601 “to haste, to hurry, to incite, to press forward, to strive”.

17. See Classical Hebrew *ḥāfaz*, as in 1Sam 23:26.

18. As also suggested by the meaning proposed for this root by Rhodokanakis 1917, 89 “begrenzen”, also accepted by Robin 1992, 113 “délimiter (?)”, Avanzini 1995a, 190 “delimitare (?)” and Cohen 2010, 903 “délimiter”.

19. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89 translated it as “begrenzt”, an interpretation accepted by Robin 1992, 113 “délimite (?)” Avanzini 1995a, 190 “delimita (?)”.

20. Robin 1992, 64.

21. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89.

different from those in which the term *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)* occurs. Note the passage in the Minaic fragmentary inscription M 260=R 3034, 3.

<sup>3</sup> [... ...] *dbht-h s<sup>1</sup>fh l-yb* [... ...]

where the term *s<sup>1</sup>fh* characterises *dbht*, meaning “sacrifice”, and is similar to the expression *b-dbh s<sup>1</sup>fhm*, attested in Hadramitic.<sup>22</sup>

Comparative evidence may suggest interesting parallels for a better understanding of Minaic *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)*. Firstly, the term *māsfāh* in Ge‘ez indicates an “outspreed place, extension, place for expansion, gathering place, public place”,<sup>23</sup> as in Job 8:9 and Jer 10:12. The nominal pattern of this term is similar as is the semantic idea of a “large flat area”. Secondly, the term *siphu* attested in the Akkadian of Emar refers to a type of field, which is a small, valuable private arable plot of land.<sup>24</sup> According to Durand – Marti, the *siphu* of Emar can also be identified with the term *ZI-IB-ḫu-um* “pour designer un territoire du Habur”.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the Minaic term *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)* can be considered a nominal formation from the ASA root *s<sup>1</sup>fh*, similar to Ge‘ez, indicating a type of landed property that appears to have had an agricultural purpose. It may have had a substantial value, as it was granted by a king (*w-nḥl-s<sup>1</sup> Ys<sup>2</sup>hrmlk Nbt*) in Haram 2,<sup>26</sup> and is arranged in parallel with *qny* (see above). Furthermore, the document at hand appears to suggest that some leading political bodies had to settle a legal controversy about the boundaries of landed properties, including the *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)* one (lines 9-13, see the observations below). This implies the substantial value of the *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)* property. The parallel with *māsfāh* in Ge‘ez appears to reflect an etymological connection with the root *sfh* attested in Ge‘ez in the broad sense of something such as to “stretch forth, stretch out, extend, spread out, expand, lay open, make broad, enlarge, widen”.<sup>27</sup> A more restricted and specific meaning of “agricultural field, legally considered

22. See the inscriptions KR 11, 6-7; RF-Alīm 1,4-5; Shabwa Chantier V 1975, 4-5. The meaning of this expression is controversial. According to Bron 1991a, 62, it can be interpreted as “sacrifice sanglant” in view of Classical Arabic *sfh* “répandre, verser le sang”. By contrast, Robin – Frantsouzoff 1999, 156 propose “des sacrifices à profusion (?)” on the basis of the parallel with Ge‘ez *sfh* which indicates “l’idée d’amplitude, de largeur et de largesse” (pg. 159). This interpretation is accepted by Avanzini 2014, 503-504. The ASA root *s<sup>1</sup>fh* is also attested in Qatabanic and Sabaic but with a legal connotation such as “to declare officially, to summon”; see Mazzini 2020a, 178-179.

23. Leslau 1987(1991<sup>2</sup>), 487; see also Dillmann 1965, 402-403.

24. See Viano 2010, 265. On the specific features of the *siphu*-field, see the discussion by Viano 2010, 265, Belmonte Marín 2007, 255, footnote 67; Durand – Marti 2003, 147, footnote 32; Pentiuć 2001, 163-165.

25. Durand – Marti 2003, 147, footnote 32.

26. Note that in Haram 2, 13 the term *ms<sup>1</sup>fh* is related to ‘*mm*, a problematic term rendered by Robin 1992, 63, 64 as “publique (?)”. More reasonably, instead, such term indicates “something abundant, a large amount”. In Minaic, there are the two notable examples that point to this meaning, namely M 336, 3 ‘*mm dfw s<sup>1</sup>dfw ms<sup>1</sup>rbn* [... “abundance of sacrifices to be sacrificed on the altar”, and Ma‘īn 23, 1 *kbdytn ‘mm* “abundance of contributions” (but Bron 1998, 62 renders ‘*mm* as “par année” based on the observations by Bron 1987, 25). The Qatabanic construction inscription CSAI I, 15=MuB 457, 4-5, reporting the royal works on a type of dam (‘*dd*) in *Byhn* (the *Wādī Bayhān*), contains the passage *w-‘mm Byhn t<sup>5</sup>mm-s<sup>1</sup>*, “he (the king) enlarged of its enlargement (strongly, enormously) *Byhn*”. In the edict CSAI I, 195=Ja 2360, the area of *Byhn* along with other territories are described as agricultural areas (the royal edict prohibits any agricultural activity in these territories), hence the root ‘*mm* in CSAI I, 15=MuB 457 may indicate a type of enlargement in the *Wādī Bayhān* that involves the available farmland. This may be confirmed by the specific use of the *h-* verb stem from the root ‘*mm* in Sabaic, which is associated with an “abundance of water”, hence the meaning “to irrigate” (SD, 16 “to fill with widespread rain”; SW “tränken, bewässern”). A tentative translation of the expression *ms<sup>1</sup>fh ‘mm* as “the large, wide agricultural landed property”, which fits the observations above on the meaning of *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)*, might therefore be made.

27. Leslau 1987(1991<sup>2</sup>), 487.

as a private landed property”, attested in Minaic appears to find a significant parallel with the *siphu* landed property in Emar and the similar term *ZI-IB-ḥu-um* in Mari.<sup>28</sup> Note that the pattern *ms<sup>1</sup>fh<sup>t</sup>* in the document under consideration clashes with the pattern *ms<sup>1</sup>fh* in Haram 2, 13. The two patterns can reflect either a singular / plural opposition<sup>29</sup> or two variants of the same form.<sup>30</sup>

The term *wtw* was interpreted by Rhodokanakis<sup>31</sup> “in der Richtung nach”, which seems to be correct in that context. He compared *wtw* to the Classical Arabic root *ʾw*, meaning “way, direction”, whereas this term can be connected to the root *wtw/y* occurring in Sabaic as a verb pattern in the *h*-stem indicating the action of “bringing”.<sup>32</sup> Note that the prepositional use of this root is unique to Minaic and only attested in this inscription.

The lacuna after *wtw* cannot be reconstructed, and Rhodokanakis’s restoration<sup>33</sup> [*ʾrd w*] is not supported by any epigraphic or philological evidence.

The restoration of *Y[ʾ]krb* suggested by Rhodokanakis<sup>34</sup> is correct, as *Yʾkrb* is a name attested in Minaic, Sabaic and Qatabanic, and no alternative restorations are possible. In Minaic, it occurs as a personal name in GOAM 315, 7-8, Maʿīn 12, 1 and Maʿīn 89, 3, and as a patronymic (introduced by *bn*) in A-20-750, 1, as-Sawdā’ 30, 2 and LuBM 2, 1.<sup>35</sup>

#### Lines 3-7

In the expression *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn fs<sup>1</sup>ʾ*, the term *fs<sup>1</sup>ʾ* is problematic. It was interpreted by Rhodokanakis<sup>36</sup> as “Wasserverteiler” and by Robin as “limite (?)”<sup>37</sup> but both interpretations have no philological grounds. Instead, Bron considers this term the cardinal point for the “East”.<sup>38</sup> That the term *fs<sup>1</sup>ʾ* indicates a cardinal point appears to be confirmed by the Minaic and Qatabanic documentation. In the Minaic inscription Maʿīn 1, 4-5.

*bn fs<sup>1</sup>ʾ mḥd d-Ḥndr*

*w-bn s<sup>3</sup>nn lʾ ms<sup>1</sup>rt d-Hw<sup>5</sup>r w-ms<sup>1</sup>qyt mḥd d-Gnd*

*w-bn s<sup>3</sup>nn drʾ mwfrn Tnf*

*w-bn s<sup>3</sup>nn Ytl ms<sup>1</sup>rty ʾhl ʾmm*

28. These two terms are considered Northwest Semitic lexical elements (see in particular for *siphu* Penttuc 2001, 163-165), and the parallel with Minaic can be regarded as a specific lexical feature of Central Semitic, preserved on its northern and southern fringes; on this point, see Mazzini 2014, 481-482.

29. According to Robin 1992, 64, *ms<sup>1</sup>fh<sup>t</sup>* may be a plural as opposed to the singular *ms<sup>1</sup>fh* in Haram 2, 13.

30. Note also the coexistence of the patterns *šhf / šhft* and *mḥr / mḥrt* for the singular in Minaic. A parallel situation is attested in Qatabanic; see Mazzini 2020a, 123, 193.

31. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89. This interpretation is also accepted by Robin 1992, 113 “vers(?)”.

32. See the inscription Ja 560, 14 and the minuscule text X.BSB 109=Mon.script.sab 104, 11. Note also the use of this root as a nominal formation in the minuscule documents X.BSB 54=Mon.script.sab. 514, 5 (noun, the context is fragmentary; see Stein 2010, 213) and X.BSB 149=Mon.script.sab. 42, 14 (personal name; see Stein 2010, 519, 526). On this root, see the observations by Stein 2010, 387-388.

33. Rhodokanakis 1917, 86, 90.

34. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89.

35. On this name in Minaic, see al-Said 1995, 49, 81 and Frantsouzoff 2006, 71. On the names with *yʾ* in ASA, see W.W. Müller 1979.

36. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89, 90-91, 71.

37. Robin 1992, 113.

38. In connection with *fs<sup>1</sup>ʾ*, Bron 1991b, 36 states that “la traduction littérale reste problématique, mais qui serait l’est”; this hypothesis is accepted by Avanzini 1995a, 96, 97.

a number of buildings are listed according to their spatial arrangement. A similar structure, with identical vocabulary, occurs in as-Sawdā' 13, 1-4.

*bn s<sup>3</sup>nn dr'<sup>2</sup> nwy d-Hmy*  
*w-bn s<sup>3</sup>nn Ytl gn' 'b<sup>3</sup>krb*  
*w-bn s<sup>3</sup>nn l'l gn'm 'bkrb*  
<sup>4</sup> *w-bn s<sup>3</sup>nn fs<sup>1</sup>' br' nwy d-S<sup>2</sup>ybn*

If one accepts that *dr'* indicates the “West”, in view of the Classical Arabic expression *ḍara* ‘at al-šamsu for “sunset”,<sup>39</sup> the parallel constructions *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn + fs<sup>1</sup>' / l'l / Ytl* may indicate the other cardinal points as well.<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that *Ytl*, referring to the ancient city *Ytl* (modern Barāqiš), is to be identified with the “South”,<sup>41</sup> given that this city is located South of as-Sawdā' (ancient *Ns<sup>2</sup>n*).<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, Bron's hypothesis that *fs<sup>1</sup>'* indicates the East may be correct, with the implication of *l'l* being the “North”.<sup>43</sup>

The Qatabanic inscription ATM 866, 8, however, points to a different interpretation of the term *fs<sup>1</sup>'*. Here, a number of buildings (*byt*) are also listed in relation to their spatial arrangement.

*w- byt Whb'l S<sup>1</sup>flyn ms<sup>2</sup>rqn w-s<sup>3</sup>n Šnqn*  
*w-byt d-Hmym fs<sup>1</sup>' w-s<sup>3</sup>n Šnqn*  
*w-byt [... ...]wn bn B'n mmqtn w-s<sup>3</sup>n 'byt bn Hs<sup>2</sup>n*  
*w-bnw s<sup>2</sup>s<sup>2</sup> l'ln*

It is certain that *ms<sup>2</sup>rqn* is the “East”, and *mmqtn* is most likely the “West”, in view of Sabaic.<sup>44</sup> If one assumes that *l'ln* is the “North” in Minaic too, then *fs<sup>1</sup>'* must definitely indicate the

39. As proposed by Bron 1991b, 35 who renders the expression ‘*d s<sup>3</sup>n dr'* occurring in Ma'in 4, 2 as “du côté de l'ouest” (and the same translation in Bron 1998, 43), and suggests “de la racine DR', qui se dit du coucher du soleil”. A parallel semantic development could be reflected in the term *zlm* attested in Sabaic for a cardinal point indicating the “West”, if one accepts the hypothesis that its meaning, “darkness”, refers to the sunset; Beeston 1948, 178, 179; SD, 172; W.W. Müller 1983b, 278, footnote 6b; Mazzini - Porter 2009, 284, 285. Note, however, that in SW (under the root *zlm*), the interpretation “Norden” is preferred.

40. In relation to this geographical indication, Avanzini 1995a, 96-97 points out that “in Arabia meridionale per precisare uno spazio si usino quattro punti di riferimento”. Note also the unpublished Minaic inscription A-20-811, 5 in the Šan'ā' University Museum [... ...] *tn bn s<sup>3</sup>nn fs<sup>1</sup>'* [... ...] (see on <http://dasi.cnr.it>) where the same expression *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn fs<sup>1</sup>'* occurs.

41. This case could be parallel to the use of *Qtn* (the kingdom of Qataban) as a geographical indication in Sabaic, possibly the “South”, the kingdom of Qataban being located South of Saba'. The problem of the geographic indication conveyed by *Qtn* remains uncertain, and Beeston 1948, 178 suggested it could be the “East”; see also Mazzini - Porter 2009, 290, footnote 10; Mazzini 2011, 132.

42. In Minaic, there are other cases of toponyms used as cardinal points. The fragmentary inscription Gr 326, 2 contains the passage ...*lytn (d)ty Ytl w-s<sup>3</sup>nn M'n qdm w-(m)* [...], where both *Ytl* and *M'n* seem to indicate two cardinal points, given the use of the preposition *s<sup>3</sup>nn*. The interpretation of *M'n* as a toponym, however, is problematic, as it normally refers to the tribe in Minaic documentation. The same use can also be found in Ma'in 63, 8 '*d s<sup>3</sup>nn hgr M'n*. In Y.05B.B.13, 6, the expression *d-s<sup>3</sup>n S<sup>2</sup>bm* appears to indicate a cardinal point associated with a place called *S<sup>2</sup>bm*, a name often used in ASA toponomastics. If this *S<sup>2</sup>bm* is the important city of the Ḥaḍramawt, then it might indicate the East, as *S<sup>2</sup>bm* is located East of the Minaean kingdom. Note also Ma'in 53, 1 *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn bh'n hgr Q[rmw ... ...]*.

43. See Bron 1998, 39, who translates *bn fs<sup>1</sup>'* as “à l'est”, *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn l'l* as “au nord”, *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn dr'* as “à l'ouest” and *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn Ytl* as “au sud”.

44. See the expression *mqtt s<sup>2</sup>ms<sup>1</sup>n* in Ja 649, 32, indicating the “setting of the sun”.

“South”,<sup>45</sup> as opposed to Minaic where *Ytl* is the cardinal point for the South.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, *fs<sup>1</sup>* seems to refer to two different cardinal points, namely the “East” in Minaic and the “South” in Qatabanic, a still obscure issue in the system of geographic directions of ASA culture.

The idiom *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn* is specific to Minaic (it occurs as *b-s<sup>3</sup>n* in Sabaic and as *s<sup>3</sup>n* in Qatabanic) and is used for geographical indications (see the observations above). Stein<sup>47</sup> points out that the suffix *-n* can be attached to certain particles in ASA with “eine Richtungsänderung in der ursprünglichen Bedeutung der betreffenden Präposition”.<sup>48</sup> However, the form *s<sup>3</sup>nn* in Minaic may be a noun, reflecting the pattern *s<sup>3</sup>VnVn* which indicates a direction, consistently with Classical Arabic *sanān*, *sunān*, *sinān*, “way or road” and “course or direction of the road”.<sup>49</sup> This is confirmed by the Minaic context where the form *s<sup>3</sup>nn* is associated with both *bn* “from”<sup>50</sup> and ‘*d* “to”,<sup>51</sup> hence the expression *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn* which can be understood as “the direction from”. Instead, the form *s<sup>3</sup>n* occurring at the end of line 4 may have the prepositional use of “towards, to”,<sup>52</sup> similarly to Sabaic and Qatabanic. In lines 4-5 of the document under consideration.

*bn s<sup>3</sup>[nn]*<sup>4</sup> *fs<sup>1</sup>(‘)* [ ... ... ] *ns<sup>1</sup> ?(khl)*  
*s<sup>3</sup>n*<sup>?</sup><sup>5</sup> *m l[y]*

the expression *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn fs<sup>1</sup>’* appears to be parallel with *s<sup>3</sup>n m l[y]* to indicate an area enclosed within specific limits (from one point to another); unfortunately, the central section [...]*ns<sup>1</sup> ?khl’* cannot be reconstructed, and remains unknown. The general context of the document seems to thoroughly describe the borders of landed properties, as is also apparent in lines 7-9.

Note that the ASA particle *s<sup>3</sup>n* has an interesting parallel in the preposition *si-in* and *si-ma* in Eblaite, meaning “towards, to”.<sup>53</sup>

45. As already suggested by Avanzini 2018, 109.

46. Bron 1998, 39 translates the expression *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn Ytl* as “au sud”, without any comment. This negates the statement by Avanzini 2018, 110 about Ma’in 1, 4-5 that “*Ytl* (evidently the ancient name of the city of Barāqish) and *fs<sup>1</sup>* could be east and south, respectively”.

47. Note that the pattern *s<sup>3</sup>nn* is attested in the expression *s<sup>3</sup>nnk* in the Sabaic minuscule text XSB 104=Mon.Script.Sab 16, 6, which can be interpreted as the preposition *s<sup>3</sup>n* enlarged by the suffix *-n* and by the suffix second-person personal pronoun (*/s<sup>3</sup>Vnn-Vn-ka/*), meaning “von dir” as suggested by Stein 2010, 370, 372.

48. Stein 2013, 113, 9.5.4; see also Stein 2003, 231-238; 2013, 114, 9.5.4.3.

49. Lane 1872, 1438; see also Kazimirski 1860, 1147. The root *snn* with the second geminated radical is also known from the earliest phase of Classical Arabic, such as in the Mu‘allaqa of Labīd, 81 and in the Qur‘ān, with the abstract meaning of “tradition, practice, rule”.

50. The expression *bn s<sup>3</sup>nn* occurs in the two passages analysed above, A-20-81, 5; M 188=R 2968, 1; M 248=R 3023, 1; Ma’in 1, 4-5; Ma’in 53, 1; Gr 326, 2; as-Sawdā’ 13, 1-4; as-Sawdā’ 65, 2.

51. The expression ‘*d s<sup>3</sup>nn* occurs in Ma’in 63, 8 and as-Sawdā’ 20, 4, 5.

52. This form is also attested in the Minaic inscriptions M 172=R 2952, 3, Ma’in 4, 2 (notably with the addition of ‘*d* emphasising the idea of “movement forward”) and Y.05B.B.13, 6.

53. See Catagnoli 2012, 98; Tonietti 2012, 90-93 and Streck 2011, 349 (note however that Kogan – Krebernik 2020, 857-858 argue against this parallel). This linguistic trait linking Minaic to Eblaite can be considered an archaic lexical feature, specific to Central Semitic. This is further confirmed by the particle *si-in*, also attested once in the Akkadian of Tell Beydar (Ismail – Sallaberger – Talon – van Lerberghe 1996, 77 i 2); see the observations above on the term *ms<sup>1</sup>fh<sup>t</sup>*. Despite the current classification as an Akkadian dialect or an Eastern Semitic language, closely related to Akkadian (see Tropper 2003, Huehnergard 2006, Rubio 2006, Streck 2011 and Kogan - Krebernik 2020), Eblaite shows significant linguistic features that are typical of Northwest Semitic (see Krebernik 1996 and Gordon 1997; note also Fronzaroli 2005 who considers Eblaite as type of “Archaic Semitic”). I would like to thank Amalia Catagnoli for her valuable comments.



The pattern *m'l* can be restored as the term *m'[y]* in view of the attestation of the term *m'lyny* (in the dual) occurring in the Minaic inscription as-Sawdā' 20, 4. This term refers to a type of building or part of a building the nature of which remains unclear, due to the lack of further information. Etymologically, it refers to something going up, which might point to “stairs” or “some kind of covering”.<sup>54</sup> Considering that the document under consideration also seems to mention the building *'h* in lines 5-6 (see the observations below), the presence of the building *m'ly* seems to fit in with the context. Both buildings could be part of the landed properties described in the text.

Lines 5-6

The missing parts of the text in lines 5 and 6 cannot be reconstructed, and the content remains unknown, except for a potential reconstruction of a term between the end of lines 5 and the beginning of line 6.

The two signs for *th* at the beginning of line 6 point to the restoration of the letter ' at the end of line 5 and hence to the reconstruction of the term *'h*. That term is attested in Minaic in Kamna 5, 3, 4, M 203=R 2980bis, 2, 3, and AO 31930, 2, and indicates a type of building.<sup>55</sup> The features and purposes of such a building, however, remain unknown, due to the lack of further information. In Sabaic, this term is attested in R 4410, 1, where it indicates an unknown type of building.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, no helpful comparative evidence can be found in connection with this term.

Lines 8-9

The expression *b-'trh* was translated by Rhodokanakis<sup>57</sup> as “nach”, which seems to fit the context, which describes the physical arrangement of landed properties, as pointed out above. This interpretation is supported by the prepositional use of the pattern *'trh* in Minaic to indicate the idea of “something following”.<sup>58</sup> A similar meaning occurs in Sabaic<sup>59</sup> and Qatabanic.<sup>60</sup> The attached *h* is unclear, but it is probably a *mater lectionis* for a long vowel,<sup>61</sup> and is paralleled with the pattern

54. Avanzini 1995a, 110, renders it as “le due salite” with the comments on page 114.

55. According to Robin 1992, 173, 174, this term in Kamna 5, 3, 4, can be rendered as “bâtiment”; this interpretation is accepted by Breton – Arbach 2020, 76. In relation to M 203=R 2980bis, 2, 3, Robin 1993, 469, 489 proposes “annexe (ce serait ici l'édifice accolé au temple)”; this interpretation is accepted by Avanzini 1995b 27-28 who states that *'h* “sembra indicare, anche se i contesti sono oscuri, una parte del santuario di Nakrah che riceve una copertura (*s'qf*)”. In connection with *'h* in AO 31930, 2, Gajda 2003, 1234 states that “Il s'agit sans doute d'un type de construction ou d'un élément de construction”. This term might also be attested in Haram 29, 5, but the text is uncertain; see Robin 1992, 96.

56. This term is interpreted in SW as “ein nicht näher bestimmtes Bauwerk”.

57. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89.

58. The pattern *'trh* occurs in A-20-811, 2; al-Jawf 04.28, 7, 9; M 339=R 3538/R 3446, 1; M 337=R 3535, 4; MAFRAY-Darb aṣ-Ṣabī 3, 5; MŠM 116, 2, 3; MŠM 3634, 4, while the pattern *'tr* is attested in YM 11191, 5.

59. See SD, 9 and SW under the root *'tr*.

60. The term *'tr* with a prepositional value occurs in the expression *'tr 'bh-s'ww* attested in CSAI I, 206=Thah 4 rendered by Avanzini 1994, 14, as “dopo i suoi padri” and Avanzini 2004, 290 “as an inheritance of his fathers”. The context, however, suggests an abstract legal connotation, such as “in accordance with his fathers”, implying the idea of continuity within the family; a similar use also occurs in Sabaic.

61. See Stein 2011, 1051. Note that the Sabaic *mater lectionis* -y very often appears to correspond both to Minaic -h and Qatabanic -w, which reflect different scribal traditions. The type of vowel concealed behind this graphic system is controversial; see recently Mazzini 2020a, 182-183; 256.

'try in Sabaic (in addition to 'tr). Similar Minaic forms are 'hrh and qdmh. The addition of the particle *b-* also occurs in Sabaic *b-'try*.<sup>62</sup>

A purely prepositional use of the Semitic root 'TR is only attested in Ugaritic, as is the case with the passage in the ritual tablet KTU 1.43, 24 'atr 'ilm ylk p'nm “after the gods (the king) shall walk on foot”.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, the similar expression *bil-'atar* “immediately afterwards, presently”<sup>64</sup> in Yemeni Arabic may be an influence of the ASA substratum.<sup>65</sup>

The term *rkl* was considered by Rhodokanakis to be a “Richtungspräposition”,<sup>66</sup> and interpreted as “in der Richtung”.<sup>67</sup> Despite Rhodokanakis’s unconvincing philological arguments,<sup>68</sup> his interpretation is interesting, and requires further discussion.

Special attention should be paid to the context in lines 7-9, where the document provides more information on the physical arrangement of landed properties.

*w-bn dn wttn*  
*w-fs<sup>l</sup> m<sup>8</sup>sfht*  
*b-'trh d-Rymn*  
*w-<sup>9</sup>rkl d-Ttnt*

In particular, note that *bn dn wttn* refers to a starting point (“from this boundary stela”, the document under consideration mentioned in line 1) and *fs<sup>l</sup> m<sup>8</sup>sfht* mentions the cardinal point (“to the East(?) of the agricultural field”, the *msfht* mentioned in line 2). As *b-'trh d-Rymn* and *rkl d-Ttnt* are symmetrical, *rkl* may have played a similar role to *b-'trh*, and, given the prepositional use of the latter, one can reasonably assume that the former must have served the same purpose too; an observation that confirms Rhodokanakis’s suggestion. Unfortunately, the root *rkl* is never attested as a preposition in ASA, where it occurs as a verb indicating any “trading activity”.<sup>69</sup> In this connection, Classical Arabic lexical data may provide philological support to the potential prepositional purpose of *rkl*. It should be noted that in Classical Arabic the root *rkl* is attested in the broad sense of “kicking, striking with a foot”, often referred to a horse “in order that he should run”.<sup>70</sup> In particular, the noun *markal* “which indicates the part of a beast, when one strikes him with a foot, or leg, when putting him in motion for the purpose of his running”.<sup>71</sup> In a passage from the Mu‘allaqa of ‘Antara, 21, the poet describes his horse’s strength in association with the parts of the animal, pointing to his running abilities. Notably, the term *šawā* (‘alā ‘abli ‘l-šawā “on the strong well-rounded leg”) is paralleled with *marākil* (*nahdin marākilu-hu* “on the rich beauty of his

62. See Stein 2003, 215. Note also the parallel with Sabaic *b-qdmy* and *b-qbly* and Qatabanic *b-qdmw*. The addition of the particle *b-* to certain prepositions is typical of the ASA prepositional system; see Stein 2013, 108, 9.3.4.

63. See DUL, 124, Pardee 2000, 214, Tropper 2012, 329, 741, 771 and the observations above on the term *ms<sup>l</sup>sfht*.

64. See Piamenta 1990, 3.

65. See in general W.W. Müller 2014.

66. Rhodokanakis 1917, 92.

67. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89.

68. Rhodokanakis 1917, 92.

69. In Minaic, the root *rkl* occurs as a verb in M 377A=R 4053, 3, M 247=R 3022, 1, Ma’in 10, 4 and Ma’in 7, 3. In Sabaic, it is attested in B-L Nashq, 13; see in general Said 1994, 260-262, Bron 2013, 173 and SW under the root *rkl* with a discussion and a list of references. The same meaning is also attested in Classical Hebrew and Classical Arabic.

70. Lane 1867, 1148; see also Kazimirski 1860, 918.

71. Lane 1867, 1148; see also Kazimirski 1860, 918.

striding gait”).<sup>72</sup> Significantly, in Classical Arabic the term *markal* has also acquired the further meaning of “road”, which implies that the part of the horse for running indicates the road he treads.<sup>73</sup> In view of the above observations, a prepositional value of *rkl* appears to be preferable to the rendering suggested by Robin,<sup>74</sup> “les terrains de parcours (?)”. In support of the latter interpretation, Robin points out that the *rkl* “désigne les zones non cultivées où la circulation et le pâturage sont libres”,<sup>75</sup> but no historical data prove such a reconstruction. The two proper names *ḏ-Rymn* and *ḏ-Tḥnt* may refer either to certain areas or to certain families, as suggested by the context. In Minaic, the name *Rymn* is the proper name of buildings in as-Sawdā’ 20, 4<sup>76</sup> and Kamna 23, 3,<sup>77</sup> but it is also attested as a family name. The name *Tḥnt* is a hapax in Minaic and has no parallels anywhere else in ASA.

#### Lines 9-13

These lines constitute the concluding section of the document, which reports the judicial decision made by the Minaic central authority. The verb *ṣtdq* is a *-t-* stem from the root *ṣdq*, and it is also attested in YM 26106, 7. Given that the subject of the verb are two legal institutions, the *Hfyh Nfs<sup>1</sup>* and the *rbqhy M’n* (treated as one single group), and the verb refers to *fth*, the “judicial decision” (see the observations below), this verb pattern reasonably appears to point to the resolution of the legal case in the sense of “establishing justice”. This meaning may be confirmed by the same verb pattern *ṣtdq* occurring in YM 26106, 7

*w-l-(ṣt)dq b- ḡyln<sup>8</sup> w- ‘ḏb*  
*w-ntḏr k-Wd bn wrd<sup>9</sup> b-ḡyln w- ‘ḏbn (b)-ḏr w-s<sup>10</sup>{m}lm*

Despite the controversial meaning of this inscription,<sup>78</sup> it seems to deal with a sin committed by the whole community, including the king, against (or in relation to some issue concerning) the water supply provided by the god *Wd*. This passage is the concluding section of the document, and the context suggests that the two verb patterns *ṣtdq* and *ntḏr* refer to the re-establishment of justice and the general confession of the sin to the god *Wd* in order to reinstate the water supply (*bn wrd*) in the wādī.<sup>79</sup>

72. See the passage *wa-ḥaṣiyyatī sarḡun ‘alā ‘abli / ‘l-ṣawa nahdin marākilu-hu nabīli ‘l-maḥzimi* “and my mattress is the saddle on the strong well-rounded leg, on the rich beauty of his striding gait, on the noble girdle”; see the interpretation and commentary by Larchet 2000, 33, 41. I would like to thank Giovanni Canova for his valuable help in translating this passage.

73. Lane 1867, 1148; see also Kazimirski 1860, 918.

74. Robin 1992, 113.

75. Robin 1992, 113.

76. Avanzini 1995a, 110.

77. Avanzini 1995a, 209-210.

78. The document, from *Qrnw* or *Yl*, was published by Arbach 2007, 52-53, who translates the passage under consideration as “and fulfilled his promises to the valley<sup>8</sup> and apologised and confessed to Wadd for what happened<sup>9</sup> in the valley and to the assembly in time of war and in time of “peace”. However, the inscription as a whole needs to be revised. The term *ḡyln* is parallel to *‘ḏb*, “dyked land”, and refers to a canalisation system; see Stein 2009, 337, 338, 342.

79. At the beginning of the document, the king *‘bkrb bn ‘lmyd* and *M’n* (meant as the whole tribe *M’īn*) are mentioned as involved in a collective confession of their sins to the god *Wd*; this confession is expressed by the verb *ntḏr* in the singular, though it refers to both the king and the tribe. They very probably are, therefore, the subjects of the two verbs in the singular, *ṣtdq* and *ntḏr*, where the document ends.

“and so he / they (the king / the tribe Maʿīn) re-established justice in relation to the canal and the dyked land and confessed (the sins) to *Wd* in relation to the flowing (of the water) in the canal and the dyked land at war and peace”.

Notably, the *šdq* verb pattern is rarely attested in Sabaic and Qatabanic, but with substantially different meanings.<sup>80</sup> Generally speaking, the root *šdq* in ASA indicates “something that is rightly fulfilled”<sup>81</sup> but the sense of “establishing justice” is not specifically attested. It should be noted, however, that there are certain examples in Sabaic, such as Gl 1563, 2, YM 18352, 5 and MAFRAY-Ḥuṣn Āl-Šāliḥ 1, 2, in which the root *šdq*, in the context of litigations concerning landed properties and water supplies, implies the establishment of justice after the resolution of the litigation.<sup>82</sup>

This meaning of the root *šdq* is an archaic lexical trait of West Semitic, already occurring in the second millennium to describe the enforcement of justice, and is associated with the figure of the king.<sup>83</sup> Note its use in Ugaritic in KTU 1.14 I 12, where it refers to king Kirta,<sup>84</sup> and in KTU 2.81, 2, 11, 20, 31, where it refers to the Pharaoh,<sup>85</sup> and in the Akkadian of el-Amarna in EA 287, 32 in relation to the king of Jerusalem Abdi-Ḥeba.<sup>86</sup> The same meaning is also attested in Classical Hebrew<sup>87</sup> and Geʿez.<sup>88</sup> This use of *šdq* in ASA, therefore, can be considered an archaic lexical feature which is also reflected in ASA onomastics, as is the case with the personal name *ʿmšdq* clearly corresponding to the Amorite name *ʿAmmiṣaduqa*.<sup>89</sup>

80. In Sabaic, the verb pattern *šdq* occurs in C 429, 11 and MAFRAY-Ḥaṣī 1, 8, and is interpreted in SW as “(für jemanden) angemessen sein, erfüllt werden” (for a discussion, see also Mazzini 2020a, 209, footnote 317). The same verb pattern occurs in Qatabanic, in the edict CSAI I, 199=R 3691, 9, and is interpreted by Mazzini 2020a, 164 as “to receive one’s due” with a commentary on page 209.

81. See in general Mazzini 2020a, 152-153 and, in Sabaic, the interpretation in SW as “(angemessen) erfüllen, (ordentlich) erfüllen, (eine Verpflichtung) erfüllen; Passiv: (in einem Prozeß) gerechtfertigt werden” and SD, 141.

82. See the passages in Gl 1563, 1-8 <sup>1</sup>Bydʿl w-<sup>2</sup>mḏrʿ *šdq* b-<sup>3</sup>s<sup>1</sup>qy nḥl-h<sup>4</sup>my bn ḏt <sup>5</sup>ḥrrtn <sup>6</sup>b-fḥ m<sup>7</sup>s<sup>3</sup>wd <sup>8</sup>rrt<sup>8</sup>m; YM 18352, 5-9 <sup>5</sup>ywm *šdq* b-nḥl-hw <sup>6</sup>w-mḥy-hw b-fḥ S<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>bʿ w-S<sup>1</sup>mḥrym w-ms<sup>3</sup> <sup>8</sup>wd <sup>9</sup>rrtm w-Ktl<sup>9</sup>m; MAFRAY-Ḥuṣn Āl-Šāliḥ 1, 2-4 <sup>1</sup>kn fḥ ms<sup>3</sup>wd Ytl <sup>2</sup>bʿl Y<sup>3</sup>šb w-S<sup>1</sup>wmn w-*šdq* <sup>4</sup>b[ʿ1] <sup>5</sup>Y<sup>3</sup>šb b-fḏdm b-m<sup>6</sup>ḥd n m<sup>4</sup>n l-m<sup>7</sup>ḥd <sup>8</sup>šmn ḏ-wdm. Here, the root *šdq* is associated with the *fḥ*-procedure carried out by the leading legal authorities, similarly to the document under consideration. According to SW, the verb pattern *šdq* in these Sabaic texts should be interpreted as “(angemessen) erfüllt werden”, which implies that justice was obtained in a legal case.

83. Westbrook 2003, 26, in describing the main points of ancient Near Eastern law, pointed out that *šdq* defines “its dynamic aspect of correcting abuses or imbalances that have invaded the system”.

84. On this aspect, see Cazelles 1973; Dietrich – Loretz 1999; 2003, 135-153.

85. On this text, see Bordreuil – Caquot 1980, 356-358 and Pardee 2003a, 98-99. Here, the expression *mlk šdq* is used (Pardee 2003a, 98 “the just king”). Interestingly, Bordreuil – Caquot 1980, 357 state “le titre *mlk šdq* «roi de justice» (... ) bien qu’il soit donné ici à un pharaon, ce n’est pas la transcription d’un titre égyptien précis, mais une expression courante chez les sémites”.

86. Note the passage <sup>32</sup> *a-mur* LUGAL EN-*ia ša-du-uaq a-na ia-a-ši* <sup>33</sup> *aš-šum* LÚ.MEŠ *ka-ši-yi* rendered by Rainey 2015, 1112-1113 as “<sup>32</sup> look, O king, my lord, I am in the right (I have righteousness) <sup>33</sup> concerning the Cushite men”. The expression *ša-du-uaq a-na ia-a-ši* was similarly interpreted by Knudtzon 1907, 865 “Recht habe ich”, but differently by Liverani 1998, 92 and Cazelles 1973, 66; on the morphosyntactic role of the term *ša-du-uaq*, see Rainey 1996, 306. Notably, here the text emphasises the position of the king with the West Semitic root *šdq*. On the Amarna letters from Jerusalem, see in general Vita 2015, 90-91.

87. See in general Krašovec 1988.

88. See in particular the verb pattern *ʿašdaqa* in Is 1:17; 50:8; Mi 7:9, and more in general Leslau 1987(1991<sup>2</sup>), 548 and Dillmann 1865, 1311-1312.

89. See the syllabic transliterations *Ḥa-am-mi-za-du-uaq* and *Am-mi-za-du-ga* in Streck 2000, 248 rendered by the author as “Mein Vatersbruder ist gerecht”; on the pattern *šaduq*, see Streck 2000, 327. The name *ʿmšdq* is attested in Sabaic, Minaic and Qatabanic; see in general Hayajneh 1998, 200. Note that the cult of the god *ʿm* is only typical of

The expression *b-fth* indicates that the boundary stela was the result of a *fth*-procedure. Such a procedure was a typical feature of the ASA legal system, which consisted in consulting the most important legal bodies of the state to deal with any kind of litigation.<sup>90</sup> The enforcement of that procedure allowed litigations to be settled legally. The text, therefore, specifies that justice was established by means of the “judicial decision” issued by two legal bodies, the *Hfyh Nfs*<sup>1</sup> and the *rbqhy M'n*.

The *Hfyh Nfs*<sup>1</sup> is a specific legal institution of the Minaean legal system, with no parallels anywhere else in ASA. According to Ghul,<sup>91</sup> the two nouns *Hfy* and *Nfs*<sup>1</sup> can be interpreted in the light of Classical Arabic *ḥāfi* “judge”<sup>92</sup> and *nāfasa / nifās, munāfasa* “to fight / rivalry”. This interpretation has been recently accepted by Bron,<sup>93</sup> who states that the *Hfy(hy) Nfs*<sup>1</sup> “seraient les «juges des litiges»”. From a philological point of view, Ghul’s suggestion is reasonable, and can be supported by further comparative evidence. In particular, *Hfy* also finds an interesting parallel with the modern Yemeni Arabic term *uhfiyāt*, meaning the “fee payable to persons appointed by the Court to inspect a dispute or claim, or to investigate conflicting evidence on the spot”.<sup>94</sup> As no Semitic parallels are available, this may well be an ASA lexical influence.

The term *Nfs*<sup>1</sup> appears to be related to the root *nfs*<sup>1</sup> used in Sabaic and Qatabanic legal language in the general sense of “fighting”. In particular, note the legal contexts in the Minaic edict A-M-845, 4,<sup>95</sup> the Sabaic edict C 612+C522, 1<sup>96</sup> and the Qatabanic edict ATM 866, 16. A further interesting parallel can be found in Old Assyrian, where the verb pattern *napāsu* means “to make a claim” in legal contexts.<sup>97</sup>

Ghul also suggested that the office of the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> was “judicial, that of an arbitrator of litigations”.<sup>98</sup> In view of the comparative evidence, such hypothesis is reasonable, and appears to be consistent with the document under consideration, where the *fth*-procedure is applied to settle a litigation. This is further confirmed by Maʿīn 62, 1, where such body, along with the king and other legal and religious institutions, enforced the *fth*-procedure. Unfortunately, the case herein dealt with

Qatabanic religion, whereas that deity is unknown in Sabaʿ and Maʿīn, which points to the formation of ASA onomastics in a historical phase preceding the ASA cultures of the first millennium and one which can be related to a common Amorite tradition; see Mazzini 2004. Many ASA names have the pattern *šdq* (*ʿbšdq, šdqydʿ, šdqsmʿ, šdqʿly, šdqʿmr* etc...) and can be compared to Amorite onomastics. Note in particular the ASA name *Yšdqʿl* corresponding to the Amorite *la-aš-du-ug*-DINGIR interpreted by Streck 2000, 197, 230, 327, footnote 4, *Yašduq-ʿel* as “Gerecht gezeigt hat sich der Gott”; see also Bron 1991c, 89, 90-91 and Hayajneh 1998, 178. More generally on law in the Amorite cultural context, see Lafont 1998. In this connection, the use of the root *ft* in ASA legal language is also noteworthy. It is another well-known root in Amorite law, which is also largely attested in the Northwest Semitic languages of the late second and first millennia; see Mazzini 2020a, 154; Westbrook 2003, 26; Lafont 1998, 166.

90. On this procedure, see Mazzini 2020a, 270-272.

91. Ghul 1959, 11-12.

92. Ghul 1959, 11-12; the author pointed out that the term *ḥāfi* in the Classical Arabic sources is regarded as a synonym of *qādī*. This parallel had already been suggested by Rhodokanakis 1917, 93. This suggestion is also accepted by Robin – Ryckmans 1988, 104.

93. Bron 1998, 34. See also the renderings by Rhodokanakis 1917, 89 “Seelenrichter” and Robin 1992, 113 renders “magistrats du nafs”. According to Agostini 2012, 4, footnote 7, the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> is “a particular juridical board”.

94. As reported in Piamenta 1990, 100.

95. This is an unpublished inscription in the University Museum of Şanʿāʿ, which is available online at <http://dasi.cnr.it>.

96. Note also the use of the term *nfs*<sup>1</sup> in the Sabaic edict R 4176, 10, regulating religious matters. Here, this term appears to refer to potential fights during the pilgrimage; see W.W. Müller 1997, 93, 104; SD 93.

97. Many examples are available; see CAD 11 / 1, 312.

98. Ghul 1959, 11.

remains unclear, due to its fragmentary condition.<sup>99</sup> It should be noted, however, that the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> is also reported in the edict MAFRAY-Darb aṣ-Ṣabī 1, 4 as having taken part, along with the king, in the promulgation and enforcement of a ruling issued by the god *Nkrh* in relation to the establishment of boundaries in the area of a temple.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> is mentioned in Ma<sup>c</sup>in 1, 3 as having built a tower on the city wall of *Qrnw*. Similarly, in Ma<sup>c</sup>in 2, 1 the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup>, along with the king of Ma<sup>c</sup>in, are reported to have dedicated the construction of the tower *Zrbn* on the city wall of *Qrnw* to the main Minaean deities. These documents show that the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> was not only in charge of litigations but that it was a principal legal body in Ma<sup>c</sup>in that was more generally involved in major legal activities, and had an impact on the social life of the kingdom.<sup>101</sup> The importance of the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> is also corroborated by the existence of a *mfly*, a physical place, possibly a building, where such body could meet, as reported in the expression *Hfyhy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> *b-mfly* in Ma<sup>c</sup>in 62, 1.

From a morphological point of view, the pattern *Hfyh*, with the addition of *-h*, is a hapax in Minaic, while the pattern *Hfy* occurs in MAFRAY-Darb aṣ-Ṣabī 1, 4, Ma<sup>c</sup>in 1, 3 and Ma<sup>c</sup>in 2, 1.<sup>102</sup> Notably, there is also the pattern *Hfyhy* with the suffix *-hy*, attested only once in Ma<sup>c</sup>in 62, 1. In Minaic, the suffix *-h* can be added to the noun in the singular construct,<sup>103</sup> while the suffix *-hy* is the ending of the sound plural construct.<sup>104</sup> Assumedly, then, the form *Hfyh* is a singular, whereas *Hfyhy* is a plural.<sup>105</sup> The pattern *Hfy* without the *-h* as a singular remains unclear, but it could be regarded as a *scriptio defectiva* for *Hfyh*. The plural form *Hfyhy* may point to a legal body composed of multiple members as also proven by the expression *Hfyhy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> *b-mfly* in Ma<sup>c</sup>in 62, 1, possibly referring to a “plenary assembly” of all those members. The switch between the singular and the plural could mean that such legal body was meant as a group or that only one of his members was in charge of specific legal cases in some circumstances.

The expression *rbqhy M'n* is only attested in this document and possibly in the fragmentary inscription A-20-266, 2 in a context [... ...]y *rbqhy* [... ...]<sup>106</sup> in which the same expression *rbqhy* [*M'n* ... ...] can be reconstructed. Rhodokanakis<sup>107</sup> suggested the translation as “Häscher von Ma<sup>c</sup>in” and pointed out that such expression referred to a group of officials.<sup>108</sup> Such suggestion was also accepted by Beeston<sup>109</sup> who stated that *rbqhy* “are evidently persons of considerable importance”. The expression *rbqhy M'n* clearly indicates that the *rbq*-office dealt with legal issues

99. On this document, see Bron 1998, 77-79. Note that the *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> also occurs in the legal inscriptions M 348=R 3562, 2 and as-Sawdā' 35, 2 (see Avanzini 1995a, 138, 139) along with the leading political and legal institutions of the Minaean state. Unfortunately, such documents are very fragmentary, so the legal matter therein addressed cannot be reconstructed with certainty.

100. On this document, see Robin – Ryckmans 1988 and Agostini 2012, 4.

101. The lexical observations above suggest a literal rendering of *Hfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup> as “Office of Peace Commissioner”, according to current legal terminology in English, or a more generic translation (adopted herein) as “Judges’ Council”.

102. In the inscriptions M 348=R 3562, 1 *w-Hf[...][f[s<sup>1</sup>]* and as-Sawdā' 35, 2 ...*(n)fs*<sup>1</sup>, the morphological pattern used for the term *Hfy* cannot be definitely established.

103. See Beeston 1962, 37, 33:2 (the difference between *-h* and *-hy* is not specified); 1984, 61, 12:1; Robin – Ryckmans 1988, 115; Nebes – Stein 2004, 470; Kogan – Korotayev 2007, 175; Stein 2011, 1051.

104. See Nebes – Stein 2004, 470; Kogan – Korotayev 2007, 175; Stein 2011, 1051.

105. As also suggested by Robin – Ryckmans 1988, 104.

106. This is an unpublished inscription in the University Museum of Ṣan'ā', which is available online at <http://dasi.cnr.it>

107. Rhodokanakis 1917, 89.

108. Rhodokanakis 1917, 93.

109. Beeston 1981, 63. The author also emphasised that Rhodokanakis' interpretation “Häscher” was “infelicitous”, as it did not render the importance of the *rbqhy M'n*.

in the interest of the entire community (the tribe Maʿīn). The importance of such office is also substantiated by the fact that the expression *rbqhy Mʿn* is associated with *Ḥfy Nfs*<sup>1</sup>, one of the main legal institutions in the Minaean state (see the observations above). Beeston also drew a parallel with the Qatabanic edict CSAI I, 195=Ja 2360, 1, where the term *rbq* seems to refer to the god *'nby*. According to Beeston, the *rbq*-official “in Maʿīn and Qataban was responsible for the control of water supplies”,<sup>110</sup> as he considered the Qatabanic edict a general regulation on the administration of water resources in the Wādī Bayḥān.<sup>111</sup> However, neither the text under consideration nor the Qatabanic edict CSAI I, 195=Ja 2360 lay down any rules on water resources,<sup>112</sup> hence Beeston’s hypothesis cannot be accepted. By contrast, both documents deal with the administration of landed properties, which suggests the possibility of the *rbq*-office being concerned with the administration of landed properties. The exact interpretation of the term *rbqhy* is, however, problematic, as there is only the aforementioned parallel in Qatabanic, while the root *rbq* is unknown in the rest of ASA and in Semitic.<sup>113</sup> Beeston compared it with Classical Arabic *raqaba*, meaning “(to) exercise surveillance”,<sup>114</sup> a parallel which is interesting and worth further discussion. In particular, it is notable that the term *raqīb* occurs in the Qurʾān as an epithet of Allāh in the sense of “Guardian, Keeper, Watcher”. The passage in Qur 5:117 *kunta 'anta 'l-raqība 'alay-him wa-'anta 'alā kulli šay'in šahīdun* is significant, as the two terms *raqīb* and *šahīd* are used in parallel to describe the role of Allāh. The use of *šahīd* in the legal language may point to a legal connotation for the epithet *raqīb*. The connection between the Minaic *rbqhy* and the Qurʾānic epithet *raqīb* is further strengthened by the use of *rbq* in the aforementioned Qatabanic edict, describing a legal role of the god *'nby*. This parallel with Classical Arabic, however, is undemonstrated, since the phonetic inconsistency between the Minaic *rbq* and the Classical Arabic *raqb*, and Beeston’s explanation of such inconsistency as a metathesis, are problematic<sup>115</sup>. On the basis of the above observations, therefore, the *rbqhy Mʿn* can be regarded as an important legal office, typical of Minaean law, which was in charge of controversies about the administration of landed properties.

The expression *d-ngw* is typical of Minaic legal language. The root *ngw* was interpreted by Rhodokanakis as “kundgemacht haben”<sup>116</sup> and associated with a procedure for the “Publikation” of a legal deed that implied a “ursprünglich mündliche Kundmachung, Verlautbarung”.<sup>117</sup> Such

110. Beeston 1981, 64.

111. Beeston 1981, 64. Avanzini 2004, 265 accepts this interpretation, and renders *rbq* as “waterkeeper”. Jamme 1972, 23 had already proposed this parallel with CSAI I, 195=Ja 2360, 1, but he rendered the term *rbq* as “the lawmakers” which is very unlikely, as the text reports a decision conveyed by the god *'nby* to the king by means of an oracle; hence, the term *rbq* appears to define a specific role of the god. Jamme 1972, 24 connected Qatabanic (and Minaic) *rbq* with Classical Arabic *rabaqa* “to tie up, to bind”, in line with Rhodokanakis 1917, 93, which does not have any legal connotation. This semantic parallel, therefore, appears to be inconsistent with the legal contexts of ASA.

112. This idea was first suggested by Pirenne 1971 and subsequently accepted by Avanzini 2004, 265-267 and Mouton – Schiettecatte 2014, 134.

113. The root *rbq* occurs in Sabaic and Ḥaḍramitic with the completely different meaning of “doing something evil”; see SW under the root *rbq*. Note that this meaning is also attested in the Qatabanic inscription R 2641. There appears to be two homographic roots with different meanings in ASA.

114. Beeston 1981, 64.

115. Beeston 1981, 64.

116. Rhodokanakis 1917, 87, 93-94; see also Rhodokanakis 1915, 21, 43; 1926, 466 “verlautbaren”.

117. Rhodokanakis 1917, 94.

interpretation has been accepted by scholars over the years,<sup>118</sup> but further discussion on the semantic value of the root *ngw* is required. The idea of a public announcement is suggested by the use of the root *ngw* in Sabaic, where it points to the idea of a “public statement, declaration, speech, conversation”. In Sabaic, however, such root has no legal connotation, as opposed to Minaic.<sup>119</sup> Here, *ngw* mostly occurs as a verb, very often referring to the expression *ḏn s<sup>l</sup>trn* (one time *ḏn mhrn*) and to the term *šlwt*.<sup>120</sup> This suggests that the root *ngw* defines the purpose or nature of a written legal document. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the root *ngw* in Classical Arabic conveys the idea of “coming out”. In particular, note the Qurā’nic use of this root as a verb in the D stem associated with the expression *’ilā ’l-barr*, meaning “to deliver to the land”.<sup>121</sup> The same meaning is attested in Ugaritic too, where the passage in KTU 1.14 III, 27 *ng mlk lbt* can be interpreted as “depart, king, from my palace”,<sup>122</sup> with *ng* deriving from the root *ngy*.<sup>123</sup> The two parallels point to the reconstruction of the Semitic root NGW/Y, which covers the semantic area of “something coming out, departing”.<sup>124</sup> In Minaic legal language, the use of *ngw* may convey an abstract sense indicating the idea of the “issuance” of a written document by an official authority. This interpretation is also suggested by a similar semantic development of the roots, pointing to a concrete idea of movement, such as *hwr* (“to settle in a city”), *hlk* (“to accomplish work”), *ṭwb* (“to return”), which are used in ASA legal language in the sense of “decreeing, conforming oneself, establishing”, respectively.<sup>125</sup> The idea of the official issuance of a legal document may indicate the effectiveness and legal validity of a legal deed. Given the crucial role of writing in ASA law, such issuing procedure might have reasonably led to codifying the legal deed in writing, as the association between the root *ngw* and the term *s<sup>l</sup>tr* and *mhr* seems to suggest. From this perspective, Rhodokanakis’ idea of a public announcement is not convincing.<sup>126</sup>

118. This interpretation is accepted by Robin 1992, 113 “a été proclamé”; see also Avanzini 1995a, 138 “proclamazione”, 145 “notificare”, 153, 155 “notificare, precisare” and Bron 1998, 47 “proclamation”, 72 “publier”.

119. See these meanings with a list of references in SW, under the root *ngw*.

120. This term is attested in ASA to indicate an architectural structure such as a “façade”. In Minaic, it occurs in legal contexts (A-20-850, 1, as-Sawdā’ 37, 1; as-Sawdā’ 40, 1, 2; M 253=R 3028, 1), and seemingly has a different semantic connotation. Its meaning, however, is unclear, and it might be a type of “official request” as also suggested by the parallels with Akkadian *teslītu* (from *sallû / šallû*), “request, petition, prayer” (CAD 18, 369-371) and *šālu*, “to enter into a lawsuit” (CAD vol 16, 89).

121. See Qur’ān 21:71; 29:65; 31:32.

122. See also DUL, 615-616 and Pardee 2003b, 335 who renders the verb as “leave” (similarly Wyatt 2002, 195). This interpretation is further confirmed by the use of the verb *rhq*, in *parallelismus membrorum* with *ng*, which clearly means “to go away, to remove” (see DUL, 726).

123. The verb pattern *ng* is considered by Tropper 2012, 427, 629, 663 as an imperative that can be reconstructed such as */nu/əgû/* or alternatively */n<sup>i</sup>gû/* from the root *ngw/y* (it is rendered by the author as “zieh ab!”). A similar passage occurs in KTU 1.14 VI, 15 *ng Krt l-hzr[y]*, “depart, *Krt*, from my mansion”; see Pardee 2003b, 337, who renders the verb as “leave” (similarly, Wyatt 2002, 203).

124. Note the terms *mngt*, *mngyt* and *mngw* in Sabaic rendered by SW as “Ereignis, Schicksal” (see under the root *ngw*; see also SD, 94 “event, good/bad luck”) and *mngw* in Qatabanic with the same meaning of “outcome, result”. This meaning is consistent with the above interpretation of the Minaic verb pattern in view of Classical Arabic “to come out”, which in ASA semantically evolves into “outcome, issue (of an affair)” in the sense of “good / bad luck”, as suggested by Beeston 1977, 84.

125. See Mazzini 2020a, 56, footnote 41.

126. The hypothesis of a public announcement is suggested by the L stem of the root *ngw* and certain nominal formations in Classical Arabic which mean “to talk privately, to pray god”; see Qur’ān 15:52; 58:12 and Kazimirski 1860, 1209 (also in Yemeni Arabic “to shout to”; see Piamenta 1991, 479). The same meaning may be attested in the use of the root *ngw* in Safaitic, according to Al-Jallad 2015, 331. That meaning, however, may be a specific semantic development of the L stem and of some nominal formations, from the basic idea of coming out, that is “the spreading out



Syntactically, the expression *q-ngw* is largely attested in Minaic legal documentation. The contexts suggest that the pronoun *q-* refers to the people representing the authority in charge of the case. In the document under consideration, such authority is the *Hfyh Nfs<sup>1</sup>* along with the *rbqhy M'n*, meant as one single group, hence the use of the pronoun in the singular. Such structure also is consistent with the aforementioned use of the expression *qn s<sup>1</sup>trn* (or *qn mhrn*), following the verb *ngw*, which stands as the object of *ngw*. That the pronoun *q-* refers to people (those representing the legal authorities) can also be seen in M 237=R 3013, 1, where the noun *s<sup>1</sup>d*, meaning “people”, replaces the pronoun *q*.<sup>127</sup> The expression “*q-ngw qn legal document*” can, therefore, be considered a formula of Minaic legal language, the meaning of which is “(the authorities) that officially issued this written legal document (as valid)”.<sup>128</sup> Note that the object of the verb *ngw* can be omitted, as implicit. This is the case of the document under consideration and of the inscription M 318=R 3342, 3 *w-ft<sup>h</sup> hg Nkrh q-ngw s<sup>1</sup>m' W* [proper names ...].<sup>129</sup>

The expression *s<sup>1</sup>m' Y'ws<sup>1</sup>'l q-Gnd w-M'yd q-Ndf* describes the witnessing procedure, as indicated by the ASA legal term *s<sup>1</sup>m'*. The purpose of such procedure in ASA law has been recently discussed by the present author.<sup>130</sup> The term *s<sup>1</sup>m'* appears to refer to the two individuals *Y'ws<sup>1</sup>'l q-Gnd* and *M'yd q-Ndf* in charge of such procedure. It is not clear whether the term *s<sup>1</sup>m'* is a singular referring to the two individuals considered as a single group,<sup>131</sup> a broken plural such as *s<sup>1</sup>VmV'*,<sup>132</sup>

of a sound”. A similar semantic development may explain the aforementioned use in Sabaic. This root is also attested in Akkadian, e.g. *nagû* “to sing joyfully”, *nigûtu* “joyful song”, *nûgu* “jubilation”, *tamgûtu* “rejoicing song”. In particular, see the verbal patterns in Enûma eliš VI, 73; VII, 138, rendered by Kämmerer – Metzler 2012, 262, 309 as “jubeln, jauchzen” (the passage in VII, 149 contains two variants, *li-ig-gi-ma*, Kämmerer – Metzler 2012, 311 “jubeln”, and *la-ig-g[i-m]a*, Lambert 2013, 133 “is not negligent”) and in the Pennsylvania Gilgamesh Tablet III, 103 rendered by George 2003, 177 as “he was singing”. The Akkadian root may be a further development of the semantic connotation attested in the aforementioned L stem in Classical Arabic. The Akkadian sense of “singing joyfully”, however, is used in completely different contexts to describe a state of joyfulness.

127. On the use of *s<sup>1</sup>d*, see Mazzini 2020a, 247. Note the parallel in M 236=R 3012, 8 ... *Ytl 'hl ngw*, where the term *'hl* (meaning “people, community” in ASA) replaces both *q-* and *s<sup>1</sup>d*, which further demonstrates that the pronoun *q-* refers to the people representing the legal authority.

128. Note that the expression *q-ngw qn s<sup>1</sup>trn* refers to private individuals instead of legal institutions, in M 185=R 2965, 4 (*'hl Hfd*) and al-Jawf 04.28, 6-7, 8-9 (*'hl Bbn*, the restoration of lines 8-9 in Bron 2008, 298). In the inscription M 185=R 2965, the *Hfd* family commissioned some major work to be done on the city wall of *Ytl*, while in al-Jawf 04.28, 6-7 the *Bbn* family were the recipients of a tomb granted by the king. Based on the official issuance of the document, these individuals seem to have officially established the legal validity of their private activities, thus further substantiating the hypothesis of the verb *ngw* standing for the validation procedure. The passage in M 237=R 3013, 1 [... ..] *w-'tbnw-s<sup>1</sup>m s<sup>1</sup>d ngw slwt byth 'tr q-Qbd* occurs in a fragmentary context, and the identity of all the people (mentioned in the lacuna preceding *w-'tbnw-s<sup>1</sup>m*) referred to by the verb *ngw* cannot be found out. The passage in MAFRAY-Darb aš-Šabī 1, 14-15 *w-mhrm<sup>15</sup> nfs<sup>1</sup> q-m ngw qf q-nfs<sup>1</sup>* is noteworthy. This part of the text is the concluding clause of an edict regulating the limits of an area around a temple. Despite the unclear meaning of the term *nfs<sup>1</sup>* (Robin – Ryckmans 1988, 101 “sacré”; Agostini 2012, 4 “consecration”), here the verb *ngw* appears to enforce the legal value of the stela (*qf*, the edict itself, which was situated in the area of the temple) that defines the limits of the sacred area of the temple (*mhrm nfs<sup>1</sup>*). This clause, therefore, emphasises that the sacred area of the temple (*mhrm nfs<sup>1</sup>*) is that which is legally established (*q-m ngw*; note the suffix *m-* added to the pronoun to strengthen its importance) by the stela/edict (*qf q-nfs<sup>1</sup>*). The specific connotation of the verb *ngw* in this unique context is consistent with the validation procedure suggested above.

129. Note that in this text the legal institution is replaced by a deity (*Nkrh*), which is a distinctive feature of ASA law, where deities are often the authority in charge of some legal cases.

130. Mazzini 2020a, 339-341.

131. Note the parallels in Ja 2288, 3-4 *s<sup>1</sup>m' Ys<sup>1</sup>m' l bn Mrd q-Zylm<sup>4</sup> [... ..] Thyw q-Rt'* and as-Sawdā' 37, 8-9 *s<sup>1</sup>m' Y'ws<sup>1</sup>'l bn S<sup>2</sup>rh q-Rfz<sup>2</sup>n w-Y'ws<sup>1</sup>'l bn Hn' q-Gnd*; a similar structure in Sabaic can be found in Y.90.DA 2, 10-12 *s<sup>1</sup>m' Y'dr' l bn S<sup>1</sup>ddm w-Ybhr' l bn S<sup>2</sup>b' t*.

or an abstract noun indicating the procedure itself, followed by the two individuals in charge. Note that *Gnd* and *Ndf* are family names and *M'yd* is a personal name, all typical of Minaic onomastics,<sup>133</sup> while *Y'ws<sup>1</sup>l* is a personal name, attested in Minaic and in Sabaic.<sup>134</sup>

## 2. Concluding remarks

The document provides an accurate account of the borders of different landed properties (lines 1-9) and the involvement of the legal authorities (lines 9-13). This points to a litigation arising out of the establishment of those borders, which is not specifically indicated in the inscription.<sup>135</sup> The dispute had to be settled by the *Hfyh Nfs<sup>1</sup>*-body and the *rbq*-people, two leading authorities of the Minaean state. They appear to have resorted to the *fth*-procedure, according to which the exact definition of the borders between the properties was conclusively established (lines 9-11). The final result of the *fth*-procedure was officially written on the boundary stela (lines 11-13) which was most probably located near the landed properties involved in the case.<sup>136</sup>

The importance of the document under consideration lies in the fact that it is the only available boundary stela from the kingdom of Ma'in,<sup>137</sup> while all the other ASA boundary stelae are attested in Sabaic legal documentation. Crucially, this Minaic boundary stela appears to share all the typical features occurring in the Sabaic ones,<sup>138</sup> such as a litigation concerning the borders of landed properties, the involvement of the most important legal institutions of the state, the application of the *fth*-procedure to settle the dispute, and the official issuance of a document inscribed on a stone near the landed properties. This confirms the existence of major sectors of the law that were common to the different areas and periods of ancient South Arabia. The unique and specific features of ASA law point to an old and local tradition in the ancient Near East. In particular, boundary stelae provide evidence of a well-shaped system of patterns covering the legal sector of what, in modern terms, can be defined as “civil law”.<sup>139</sup> Such a system reflects a social organisation based on public institutions in charge of the administration and control of private property. This reveals the essential role played by the central authority of the ASA state in keeping the community's wellbeing perfectly balanced.<sup>140</sup>

132. Note that the broken plural pattern of the root *s<sup>1</sup>m* ('*s<sup>1</sup>m*') is attested in as-Sawdā' 30, 10 ('*s<sup>1</sup>m*'*h-s<sup>1</sup>mn*'), Ma'in 1, 4 ('*s<sup>1</sup>m*'*h-s<sup>1</sup>*'); M 236=R 3012, 7 ('*s<sup>1</sup>m*'*h-s<sup>1</sup>m*') and M 347=R 3535, 4 ('*s<sup>1</sup>m*'*h-s<sup>1</sup>m*'). The contexts, however, suggest that such forms refer to the *s<sup>1</sup>m*'-documents, that is the written documents issued by the *s<sup>1</sup>m*'-officials after the witnessing procedure. Note that the plural patterns '*s<sup>1</sup>m*'*m*' and '*s<sup>1</sup>m*' are attested in the Qatabanic edict CSAI I, 208=R 3566, 22 and in the Sabaic fragment C 613, 13, respectively, both referring to the officials in charge of the procedure.

133. See al-Said 1995, 163; note the family name *M'yd*m in Qatabanic (with the *-m* suffix).

134. On this name, see Mazzini 2020b.

135. Note that the majority of ASA legal texts basically give an account of the settlement of the case from an apodictic perspective. The legal issue underlying the controversy, therefore, is not reported. There are a few exceptions, such as the royal edict CSAI I, 208=R 3566 (see Mazzini 2020a, 272-274), where the legal issue is fully described, or the edict CSAI I, 204=R 3878 (see Mazzini 2020a, 33-86), which is a full-scale law, containing all rulings concerning murder.

136. On this specific point, see Mazzini – Porter 2009, 289.

137. Note that as-Sawdā' 65 belongs to this type as well. This text, however, is a small fragment, where only the beginnings of two lines are legible (the original has been lost, and the fragment is a copy by Halévy; see Avanzini 1995a, 189-190 and the observations above). The content of that document cannot, therefore, be reconstructed.

138. See in general Mazzini - Porter 2009.

139. Mazzini – Porter 2009, 289; Mazzini 2020a, 236, 376, 381.

140. Mazzini 2020a, 27, 54-55, 375, 381.

On the other hand, features unique to the Minaic legal system are also noteworthy. Emphasis should be placed on the two institutions *Hfy(hy) Nfs*<sup>1</sup> and *rbqhy M'n*, the *q-ngw* validation procedure and the type of landed property called *ms<sup>1</sup>fh*, which have no parallels anywhere else in ASA areas. This is consistent with a general trend of ASA civilization, affected by significant fragmentation within a broader cultural continuum. Notable examples are its language and religion which show independent and specific traits recurring all over the ASA regions. The law was a significant area in ASA civilization, and hence local variants of it can be identified within the larger legal system that was common to the whole of ancient South Arabia.

A final observation can be made about the elements of continuity with the rest of the ancient Near East. The involvement of the central state in the administration of private property is a recurring mechanism in the socio-political systems of many ancient Near Eastern areas since their earliest history. In particular, the enforcement (by specific legal bodies) of the typical rules of “civil law” (applicable to a number of disputes about landed properties) is a wide-spread feature in ancient Near Eastern law.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, the lexical parallels, such as Minaic *ms<sup>1</sup>fh(t)* / Akkadian of Emar *siphu* (and possibly Akkadian of Mari *ZI-IB-ḫu-um*), referring to similar types of landed property, and Minaic (ASA) *šdq* / West Semitic *šdq*, referring to the same legal idea of justice, specifically demonstrate the strong linguistic and cultural similarities that linked ancient Arabia to the rest of the ancient Near East.

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141. See Westbrook 2003, 25-33 on the general features of civil law (defined by him as “administrative law”) and private property (pp. 54-56) in the ancient Near East.

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