

## PROLOGUE

The Austrian Academy of Sciences (AAS) is proud to possess a sizable collection of squeezes of inscriptions, copied epigraphical material written in various Ancient South Arabian languages, and ethnographic photographs, which are preserved in the collection of the Austrian Orientalist and explorer of Yemen, Eduard Glaser. The present volume is closely associated with the 'Glaser Collection'. The chapters by Monamy and Sienell follow the collector's adventurous life and the fate of his collection. Hatke focuses on relations between the ancient South Arabian kingdoms and the ancestors of today's Modern South Arabian speakers (300 BC to 550 CE). Ruzicka gives an overview of his software program KALAM, a kind of Sabaic word analyzer and, together with his colleague Hatke, explains the workflow of digitizing the collection of squeezes. Stein and Multhoff elaborate on the epigraphic material of Mleiha (Sharjah, U.A.E.) and on Sabaic linguistic material (new definition of the  $\text{nd}'$ ,  $\text{\$sy}$  and their various cognates), while Japp discusses monumental structures at  $\text{\$irw\text{a}h}$  and other sites (5th to 1st centuries BCE). Daum devotes his chapter to the role of tithes in the ancient religions of Yemen and Mecca and at present. Then in the article by Darles and Arbach, an impressive overview is given of the development of the pantheon of gods, with a focus on the period between the 9th and 6th centuries BCE, and with reference to monumental and epigraphic material.

The vast corpus of epigraphical and photographic material collected by Glaser provides many opportunities for historical, philological, and anthropological research. Squeezes constitute a fragile corpus, are difficult to preserve, and are to be studied only with extreme care. In former times such materials were difficult to access, but the methods of digitization open new windows of opportunity. The department of Library, Archive, and Collections at the AAS has profited tremendously from the funding programs devoted to the Digital Humanities associated with the AAS. Petra Aigner and her team were awarded twice with projects on digitization, edition, and dissemination of the squeezes. In the course of these projects, they convened the conference on Ancient South Arabia, the proceedings of which you have at hand. In this way, Aigner and her team seek to carry on the scholarly tradition exemplified by Maria Höfner, who undertook pioneering work on Ancient South Arabian philology (often based on the material brought back to Europe by Glaser), and the

anthropological research of Walter Dostal (ASA, Institute for Social Anthropology) in Yemen. In addition to his own fieldwork in Yemen, Dostal made extensive use of the photographs and notebooks of Eduard Glaser.

Despite the current, tragic state of contemporary Yemen, the AAS is honored to serve as a hub of research into this often overlooked corner of the Near East. It is hoped that this volume will contribute to the preservation and appreciation of a cultural heritage now partly destroyed and difficult to access.

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October 2018

The cover shows GL1069\_01, a squeeze from the Glaser collection at the Austrian Academy Of Sciences.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the nineteenth century, Austria has played an integral role in the exploration and study of the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, a region encompassing all of today's Yemen and neighboring areas of Saudi Arabia and Oman which is commonly referred to as South Arabia. Travelers, epigraphers, linguists, historians, and ethnographers from Austria have made invaluable contributions to the field of South Arabian studies, helping this still understudied area of the Near East to achieve greater recognition by the scholarly community. Therefore it was entirely appropriate that the conference *Ancient South Arabia: Kingdoms, Tribes, and Traders* was held from 31 August to 2 September 2016 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, an institution which has been intimately involved in South Arabian studies since the late nineteenth century. Together with the University of Vienna, which also helped fund the conference, the Academy is responsible for reviving the study of pre-Islamic South Arabia in Austria and it was with this in mind that the conference was organized.

The title of the conference, *Ancient South Arabia: Kingdoms, Tribes, and Traders*, was chosen to emphasize such key elements of South Arabian history as the interactions between central powers and small-scale tribal communities within state society as well as the long-distance networks of interaction that linked South Arabia with the outside world. That the conference itself brought together scholars in different disciplines from across Europe testifies to the importance of networks in facilitating the exchange of ideas and information. At the same time, contributions to the conference included presentations not only on ancient South Arabian history, culture, and language but also on the role of digital humanities in preserving the South Arabian past. This was particularly timely given the current state of Yemen, a country in chaos whose rich and unique heritage is just as much under threat as the lives of its present-day inhabitants. Digital humanities also play a vital role in making South Arabia's ancient past accessible to a wider community of scholars and laymen alike. It is hoped that the proceedings of the conference which are published in this volume will be useful and of interest to both groups.

George Hatke, June 2018