L'islam interdit de faire des images *de Dieu, du Prophète et même – de façon plus générale – de tout être humain. À la suite des théologiens musulmans, les savants contemporains estiment d'ordinaire que cette doctrine rompt avec les pratiques de l'Arabie préislamique et qu'elle s'inspire probablement des enseignements du judaïsme rabbinique, très rigoriste en la matière.*

L'objectif du colloque Dieux et déesses d'Arabie – Images et représentations *(volet du projet de l'Agence nationale de la recherche intitulé « De l'Antiquité tardive à l'Islam ») était d'examiner dans quelle mesure cette opinion est fondée.*

La conclusion est une nouveauté. Le colloque met en évidence que, dans l'Arabie préislamique, il existait une forte réticence à représenter la divinité sous forme humaine ou animale. Cette réticence, qui remonte à la plus haute Antiquité, semble d'ailleurs partagée par plusieurs peuples du Levant. Elle a sans doute son origine dans une conception distante et diffuse de la divinité.

Le tabou islamique n'est donc pas une innovation impliquée par l'adoption du monothéisme, même si, aujourd'hui, il n'est guère douteux que le rejet des images résulte davantage du désir de se démarquer du christianisme, que des pratiques préislamiques ou de l'enseignement des rabbins du VII^e^ siècle.

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7

Dieux et déesses d'Arabie

De Boccard

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Dieux et déesses d'Arabie
images et représentations

Actes de la table ronde
tenue au Collège de France (Paris)
les 1^er^ et 2 octobre 2007

édités par Isabelle Sachet
en collaboration avec Christian Julien Robin

De Boccard

Dieux et déesses d'Arabie

Images et représentations

Dessin de couverture : Yadaʿismu, dieu de Haram, et Nabʿal, dieu de Maʿīn, l'un comme l'autre identifié par son nom ; le premier présente sur sa main gauche deux antilopes et le second tient dans sa main droite un récipient duquel émerge une palme. Pilier IB du temple d'Aranyadaʿ à al-Sawdāʾ (Yémen) ; fin du VIII^e^ ou début du VII^e^ siècle avant l'ère chrétienne (Audouin, Arbach 2004).

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Goddesses, dancing girls or cheerleaders? Perceptions of the divine and the female form in the rock art of pre-Islamic North Arabia

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In 1877, le Marquis Melchior de Vogüé published a rock-drawing showing "un sujet assez fréquent sur les rochers du Safa[1] […] une femme nue, vue de face, tenant dans ses mains écartées deux longues mèches de cheveux" (see **fig. 1**).[2] De Vogüé guessed that the drawing was "une représentation mythologique", partly because he felt that a picture of a naked woman "ne s'accorde guère avec les habitudes de l'Orient, avec le mystère dont il a toujours entouré la vie du harem", and partly because of the small rayed circle just above the figure's outstretched right arm. In this interpretation he was followed by many scholars and when, after the decipherment of the script, it became possible to read the inscriptions next to the drawing[3] and it was found that one of them contained an invocation to several

1. De Vogüé uses the term 'Safa' loosely to refer to the whole *ḥarrah*, the desert of broken-up lava east of the Ḥawrān, rather than the specific district of unbroken lava known as Tulūl al-Ṣafā.

2. De Vogüé 1868-1877, p. 141.

3. The inscriptions on the stone and a bad copy of the engraving in de Vogüé's book were published in *CIS* v as C 4351-4352 (pl. XCVIII bis). The short inscription to the left of the drawing (C 4352) appears to read *'mr bn ḥmy*. However, the other (C 4351) which starts to the right of the figure's head, is difficult to make sense of in the form in which it was published, though de Vogüé's original copy may have been clearer. From Dussaud (1907, p. 145) onwards, most scholars have read the central passage as an invocation to three deities *w h rḥm w h ymyt w h rḍw*, while G. Ryckmans (C 4351) added a fourth (*w) h ǧ̊(dʿ)w(ḏ)*, at the beginning of the sequence. However, the most likely explanation suggested so far appears to be that of Milik who wrote "après la généalogie du graveur, laquelle contient quatre ou cinq noms propres (et donc pas une invocation à Gadd-ʿAwîd et Raḥîm [as read by C], je lis *hdmyt whrḍw q*... ["is the drawing and O Rḍw…"]. Ainsi disparaît une déesse hapax nommée Yamît par l'éditeur" (1972, p. 58).

Dieux et déesses d'Arabie, dir. I. Sachet et Chr. J. Robin, 2012 — p. 261-297.

deities including *rḏw*, the drawing was quickly identified as representing this divinity, who was in turn taken to be the goddess of the evening star.[4]

De Vogüé's drawing, as published, appears to be in better condition and to have more decorative features, than any comparable drawing discovered since. However, the illustration in his book (**fig. 1**) was made by the professional artist and engraver, Louis Bescherer (?-1897), presumably from de Vogüé's hand copy, and it is impossible to tell how much Bescherer 'tidied it up', or indeed whether he correctly understood what was represented in that copy.[5] The stone was not one of those brought back by de Vogüé and deposited in the Louvre or kept in his private collection.[6] Although Dussaud stated that he had examined de Vogüé's original hand copy,[7] I have unfortunately been unable to locate it among de Vogüé's *carnets* preserved in the archives of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.[8] The original stone has not yet been rediscovered and the published information on its provenance is, understandably, so vague[9] that it is unlikely that we will ever be able to check the accuracy of the facsimile against the original.

Fig. 1 – *De Vogüé 402 (= C 4351-4352) from de Vogüé 1868-1877, p. 141.*

4. Dussaud (1907, pp. 144-145; 1955, pp. 142-143) argued, mainly on the basis of this drawing, that *rḏw* was the goddess of the evening star. G. Ryckmans (Commentary on C 8) followed him in this identification of the drawing. For other interpretations see below.

5. It is possible, for instance, that the locks of short hair on either side of the figure's head and the unusual evenness and regularity of the curved lines running from the top of the head to the outstretched hands are the work of Bescherer rather than the original carver.

6. See de Vogüé 1868-1877, p. 140.

7. Dussaud 1907, p. 145, n. 1.

8. I am most grateful to Professor Jean Leclant, Sécretaire Perpetuel of the Académie, and to Madame Catherine Fauveaud, Librarian of the Laboratoire des études sémitiques anciennes, Paris, for their help in this matter.

9. "Sur un Ridjm entre Némara et Kséré" (de Vogüé 1868-1877, p. 141, in the caption to the drawing), and "la figure de femme, que nous avons reproduite ci-dessus, sous le nº 402, provient du Ridjm situé près de Limmé, ainsi que les nº 315-320 [C 4251-4258]" (*ibid*., p. 147).

All this is a pity because, as published, the copy of the longer inscription has clearly been garbled and the drawing contains a number of unique features. One is the presence of locks of short hair on either side of the head – which Höfner described as a "pageboy" haircut[10] – in addition to the arc running from the top of the head to each hand. In combination with the rayed circle, one can see why Dussaud and others took the semicircle to be a scarf, or even a rainbow, and in Grimme's case "the vault of heaven"![11] However, the rayed circle is one of a number of small, possibly apotropaic, signs which frequently occur beside Safaitic inscriptions, some of which do not even contain prayers, and beside drawings of all kinds. It happens to be absent from all but one of the other known drawings of female figures of this type.[12] So, its presence here cannot, of itself, be taken to be significant, let alone as indicating that the figure is an astral deity.

Dussaud's reasons for identifying the figure as *rḍw* are not convincing. At the end of one of the two texts beside the drawing published by de Vogüé there is a prayer to *rḍw* and possibly two or three other deities.[13] But there is nothing in this prayer, or in the rest of the inscription, to link the drawing to *rḍw* or to any other deity. Indeed, it is not at all certain that either of the inscriptions is connected with the drawing.[14] There are numerous cases of drawings surrounded by several Safaitic inscriptions by different persons, none of which refers to the picture.[15]

Nevertheless, Dussaud's identification of the drawing as the goddess *rḍw*, first made in 1907, has had the most extraordinary longevity and has spread far beyond the world of the Safaitic inscriptions. The conviction that Semitic religion in general, and Arabian religion in particular, were fundamentally astral in nature with virtually all the deities being linked to the sun, moon or evening / morning star[16] has bedevilled attempts to

10. "Eine Arte 'Pagenfrisur'" (Höfner 1970, p. 385).

11. "Les extrémités de sa chevelure ou d'une écharpe": Dussaud 1907, p. 144; "une écharpe": Dussaud 1955, p. 142, followed by Höfner 1970, p. 386; "l'arc-en-ciel": Ryckmans 1951, p. 51, n. 165, and commentary to C 4351 ("comam ad modum iridis"); "Himmelsgewölbe": Grimme 1929a, p. 137.

12. This is on the previously unpublished drawing from Riğm Qaʿqūl, shown on fig. 10e. Compare the drawing of a naked woman drawing out her hair beside fig. 5b where "below her left arm is a horizontal line from which seven parallel lines hang", the figure of seven lines or seven dots being an apotropaic sign which is extremely common beside Safaitic inscriptions. "Below her right arm is a little stick figure [also common with this sign] standing above seven parallel lines [cf. the stick figures with sets of seven dots on fig. 3b, 5d, and 11e, and, for instance, beside a drawing of a camel in WH 455]. Five other sets of parallel lines seem designed to give added protection to the author's handiwork" (Winnett and Harding 1978, p. 114, commentary to nº 442).

13. It is true that, if Milik is correct in reading the text as a genealogy followed by *h dmyt w h rḍw (...)* ("By N son of N… is the drawing, and O Rḍw [grant] (…)", 1972, p. 58), this would be the only divine name in the text, but this is not evidence that the drawing represents this deity. See n. 15 below for examples of drawings adjacent to inscriptions none of which mention the drawing.

14. Of course, if Milik's emendation (see note 3) is accepted, C 4351 *would* refer to the drawing, but simply as *h-dmyt*, "the drawing".

15. See, at random, WH 442-443 (pl. 79), beside a drawing of a naked woman holding her hair; WH 448, 455, 456 all of which are beside drawings of camels, but none of which mention drawings, or 1515a and b beside a man shooting at ostriches with a bow and arrow; or, again at random, the extremely interesting drawings beside C 1676, 1681, 1683, 1684, none of which, alas, are mentioned in these inscriptions.

16. See, for example, the discussion of this theory in Krone 1992, pp. 344-358. As she shows (*ibid.*, p. 358-370), Allāt has been identified by different scholars with all three astral bodies.

understand the ancient religions of Arabia since the nineteenth century. Moreover, there is a tendency to identify a particular deity with a particular heavenly body and to assume that this is a sufficient description of the deity's nature and of how it was perceived by its worshippers.[17] Yet we know from both classical mythology and, more relevantly, from the mythologies preserved in Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature, that deities in these cultures were multi-faceted and that associations with astral bodies formed a relatively small part of the relationship between them and their worshippers.[18]

The waters have been further muddied by the assumption that equivalences made by ancient writers between deities of the Semitic world and those in the Graeco-Roman pantheon were intended to be exact in every way. This is particularly unfortunate since a huge and detailed corpus of Graeco-Roman mythology has survived intact, but virtually no clues as to the native mythologies of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. We therefore know a great deal about the Graeco-Roman gods and goddesses, but hardly anything about the Near Eastern deities with which they were being equated. However, it stands to reason that in the ancient world when people from different cultures tried to get some inkling of each other's religion they would equate a deity in one culture with a deity in the other on the basis of one or two fairly significant features, without assuming an exact equivalence in every aspect. Indeed, how could it be otherwise, given the great differences in the cultures which produced these divinities? Thus, often one deity from the Semitic world may be equated with more than one from the Classical world, and *vice versa*, as happens, for example, with Allāt,[19] depending on which of his or her attributes was uppermost in the mind of the person making the equation.

Despite the care with which some ancient writers expressed themselves, some modern authors have still tended to adopt this wholesale identification. To take just one example, when Herodotus says that the Arabs had only two deities Ἀλιλάτ,[20] whom he identifies with Οὐρανία, and Ὀροτάλτ, whom he identifies with Dionysus,[21] he is simply saying that the former is a sky-deity and the latter an earth / fertility-deity. That this was clearly understood in antiquity is shown by the fact that later Classical writers identify Ἀλιλάτ with the male sky-*gods* Uranus[22] and Zeus.[23] However, because Οὐρανία is an epithet sometimes given to goddess Aphrodite / Venus by Greek and Latin writers, some modern authors have assumed that Ἀλιλάτ *was* the deity Aphrodite / Venus and so "was" the *planet* Venus, the morning / evening star,[24] which is not at all what Herodotus wrote, or his ancient readers understood.

17. I use the neuter gender because the 'sex', or rather, I suspect, simply the grammatical gender, of Arabian deities seems to be remarkably fluid raising the possibility that they were not perceived as being male or female in anthropomorphic terms.

18. See for instance Gray 1965, pp. 152-192; Hooke 1953, pp. 12-38.

19. See, for example the six Semitic and Classical deities with which Allāt could be identified, as listed by Krone 1992, pp. 329-332; or the various identifications of Dushara as discussed by Healey 2001, pp. 97-106.

20. If this is indeed the original spelling, see Hämeen-Anttila and Rollinger 2002.

21. Herodotus, III.8, and cf. I.131.

22. Arrian, *Anabasis*, VII.20.

23. Strabo, *Geographica*, XVI.1.11. Both Strabo and Arrian were quoting Aristobulus on Alexander's decision to invade Arabia. The beginnings of a misunderstanding – though probably wilful in this case – can be seen in Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V. 37-38 where he contrasts the *Ourania* which Herodotus had said the Arabs worshipped with the *Zeus* he had said was venerated by the Ethiopians.

24. See the list of scholars in Krone 1992, pp. 358-359.

Dussaud uses this passage from Herodotus to support his argument that Allāt represented the planet Venus.[25] He begins by identifying the Palmyrene deities *ʾrṣw* and *ʿzyzw* with Venus, in the form of the evening and morning star respectively. This identification was made on the basis of a whole series of highly speculative associations, which it is worth examining since they have been accepted uncritically by almost all subsequent writers until the excellent critiques of Lucinda Dirven[26] and Ted Kaizer[27] in recent years.

Dussaud starts from the fourth oration ("Upon the Sovereign Sun") of Julian the Apostate (AD 361-363), in which the emperor states in passing that "the inhabitants of Edessa, a place from time immemorial sacred to Helios, associate with him Monimos and Azizos".[28] In a later passage, he says "Now I am aware that Ares, who is called Azizos by the Syrians who inhabit Edessa, goes before Helios in the procession",[29] from which it is deduced that Azizos is the morning star, and, by elimination, that Monimos must represent the evening star. Note that nowhere in the sources is it specifically stated that Monimos 'is' the evening star. The association of Azizos with the morning star is an interpretation of Julian's words,[30] and the association of Monimos with the evening star is simply an inference from this interpretation.

Attention is then directed to Palmyra at the beginning of the second or third centuries AD, i.e. 150-250 years earlier than Julian's oration. Here, a deity ʿAzīzū (*ʿzyzw*) is known from a number of dedications and reliefs, although a Munʿīm (the *Vorlage* of Greek *Monimos*) is found only once, on a relief of unknown provenance with a Palmyrene-Greek bilingual inscription.[31] On only one relief, from the Temple of Bel at Palmyra, is *ʿzyzw* associated with a god Arṣū (*ʾrṣw*), the former being shown as a cavalry man and the latter as a cuirassed cameleer.[32] It should be emphasized that this is the only occasion so far discovered on which these two deities are associated at Palmyra, and that on other reliefs and inscriptions each is associated with other deities,[33] or appears alone.[34] *ʾrṣw* is always shown as armed in the Roman fashion (rather than that of the nomads), and in several cases is associated with a camel, i.e. he is represented as

25. Dussaud 1907, pp. 122-123, p. 131. He makes the assumption that Οὐρανία = Aphrodite on p. 121. Despite the fact that he quotes the identifications in Strabo and Arrian, he writes "Ourania, nous le savons par Hérodote, *est Allât*. On voit déjà, et tout ce qui suit le confirmera, qu'*Allât s'identifie à la planète Vénus* et nullement, comme on l'affirme souvent, au Soleil" (*ibid.*, p. 123, my italics). See the almost identical argument in Dussaud 1955, p. 46.

26. Dirven 1999, pp. 93-96.

27. Kaizer 2002, pp. 116-124, especially pp. 117-118.

28. Julian 150 C-D. The passage is quoted in both the original and translation in Drijvers 1980, p. 147.

29. Julian 154 B. See Drijvers 1980, p. 147.

30. Note that he specifically identifies Azizos not with Venus but with Ares, i.e. with the planet Mars, which does not "precede" the sun at least in astronomical terms.

31. Starcky 1972 (= PAT 2625) for the photograph see Drijvers 1976, pl. LXIX and see the discussion in Drijvers 1972.

32. PAT 0320, Drijvers 1976, pl. LXVIII/1. The 'hundred' figure is omitted in the date in the inscription, and so could be equivalent to either AD 113 or 213.

33. Thus, for instance, Azīzū with Abgal on a relief shown on Drijvers 1976, pl. LXIV/2. Arṣū is linked with Qismaya and the daughters of El (PAT 0992); with Bel, Yarhibol, and Aglibol (PAT 1569); and possibly with *Mrwz* (see Kaizer 2002, p. 121).

34. Thus, for instance, Azīzū, see Drijvers 1976, pl. LXVI/2; for Arṣū see *ibid.* pl. LXVIII.2.

a *dromedarius* and is fairly clearly linked to the protection of the caravan routes.[35] It is important to emphasize this, since he has often been seen as a "deity of the nomads",[36] a position for which I can see no evidence in the reliefs or inscriptions.

At Palmyra he is equated with *Ares* in bilingual inscriptions,[37] probably on the basis of the similarity in the appearance of the names, and on some *tesserae* he is associated with Hermes / Mercury, no doubt in the latter's role as the patron of merchants.[38] Despite this, Dussaud claimed, on no evidence whatsoever, that *'rṣw* at Palmyra in the second or third century AD had the same relationship with *'zyzw* as Julian was to claim for Monimos at Edessa in the mid-fourth century.[39]

He justifies this by claiming that the name *Monimos* must be derived from the Semitic root N-ʿ-M 'to be gracious' and that the name *'rṣw* is to be derived from the Arabic root R-Ḍ-W 'to be favourable'. On the basis of the rough proximity of the semantic field of one *translation* of a word derived from each root in Arabic, he then claims that these *roots* are synonymous in any Semitic language – which of course they are not – and draws the conclusion that the name *Monimos* is simply a 'translation' of the name *'rṣw*, or *vice versa*.[40] This, of course, is an abuse of philological method. To compare a *translation* of

35. As already recognized by Linant de Bellefonds (1990, p. 169) and quoted by Dirven 1999, p. 95. However, there is surely a contradiction in Linant de Bellefonds' recognition of these gods as, on the one hand, "dieux protecteurs" with the function "d'escorter les caravanes à travers le desert" and, on the other, her characterization of them as "divinités bédouines", since it was *from* the nomads that the caravans were seeking protection. Her article is unfortunately based on the widespread equations: "Palmyrene = Arab, and Arab = Bedouin", see Macdonald 2009a VI, pp. 308-311.

36. See, for instance, Dussaud 1955, p. 90, quoting with approval the views of Starcky (1952, p. 85, reproduced in Starcky and Gawlikowski 1985, p. 102); Teixidor 1979, p. 70; etc. This expression is misleading since it suggests that these deities, in the manifestations in which they appear in Palmyra and its surroundings, were worshipped by nomads at the time. But, while a particular deity *may* have been worshipped by Palmyrenes and nomads alike, we have no evidence that the nomads perceived any of their gods in the forms in which they appear on the reliefs or *tesserae* of Palmyra. A nomad might appeal to the deity *rḍw* for success in a raid on a caravan, while a Palmyrene merchant might pray to Arṣū to *protect* the very same caravan. The Palmyrene reliefs do not show "deities of the nomads", let alone the anachronistic "divinités 'bédouines' " (Linant de Bellefonds 1990), they show deities worshipped by Palmyrenes who, whatever their origin, depended on uninterrupted commerce for the prosperity of their city.

37. See Dunant 1971, pp. 56-59, nº 45; and Dirven 1999, p. 96.

38. As pointed out by Kaizer 2002, p. 123, the name Mercury is derived from Latin *merx* "merchandise". The identification of *'rṣw* with *Hermes* is only *assumed* on the basis of some *tesserae* from the Temple of Arṣu which show on the obverse a figure in military dress holding a spear, with an ox-head at his feet, and on the reverse a naked figure holding a *caduceus* in one hand and a purse and twig in the other, standing next to a camel. This has been thought to show the "dual personality" of *'rṣw* as god of war and protector caravans, but it is equally possible that *'rṣw* is *associated* (not identified) with Hermes / Mercury (the symbol of mercantile prosperity), as suggested by Kaizer (2002, p. 123). However, there is one *tessera* (RTP 170, PAT 2172) on which *'rṣw* is identified in the inscription and wears a helmet with small wings (Kaizer 2002, p. 124, n. 303).

39. This is also the position suggested by Starcky (1972, pp. 62-63). The extended chain of equivalences is put very starkly by Drijvers (1972, p. 367), though he too thinks that "the analogy between Munʿim and Arṣu and Ruḍa (…) has a sound linguistic foundation" (*ibid*., p. 368).

40. The equivalence was first proposed by Clermont-Ganneau 1901, p. 167, but he did not work out the implications in detail. See Starcky 1972, pp. 62-63. Drijvers (1972, pp. 368-370) comes to the more subtle conclusion that Munʿim is "just such a god as Arṣu" by studying the iconography and apparent functions of the two.

two individual words in one language, disregarding the whole semantic fields not only of those words but of the roots from which they are derived, as well as the ways in which each word is used in that particular language, and then to assume that any words from these roots will be synonymous in this or another, unspecified, Semitic language, is clearly ridiculous. It is even more so when one is using the Arabic of the Islamic period as the basis for the comparison and then transferring one's conclusion back half a millennium to the Aramaic of central Syria and northern Mesopotamia in the early centuries AD.

Moreover, to suppose that a name derived from one root would be 'translated' by means of a name derived from another root, begs the question why would anyone want to do such a thing? It is only to the philologist that a name is a piece of philological material. To those who use the name to identify and address a deity (in this case), the name *is* that deity, not a linguistic element to be translated. If you mention or worship a deity, you do so by his / her name, regardless of its origins, you do not translate the name. Of course, if the deity has an epithet *as well as* a name, the epithet is often translated in order to make the honorific clear. Thus in Aramaic *Yešūʿ məšîḥā'* (Jesus Christ), the name *Yešūʿ* is Hellenized to Ἰησοῦς but not translated (cf. Greek *Azizos* from * ʿAzīz) but the Aramaic epithet *məšîḥā'* has been translated into Greek Χριστός. Naturally, like *Yešūʿ / Jesus*, the names *Monimos* and *'rṣw*, have etymological meanings, but as far as we know they were used as *names* not epithets, and so would have been essentially untranslatable.

Having decided that the male *'rṣw* at Palmyra represented the evening star, Dussaud then made another etymological connection between the divine names *'rṣw* and *rḍy/w* and decided that they represented the same deity, albeit the former in a male and the latter in a female manifestation. He then decided that the female figure in de Vogüé's drawing represented *rḍw*, even though he read the names of two other deities in the accompanying inscription, and concluded that the rayed circle identified the figure as representing the evening star, and hence *rḍw*.[41] He continues "l'arc de cercle formé par les cheveux ou mieux par l'écharpe, indique (…) – à l'imitation du symbolisme gréco-romain – le caractère nocturne de la déesse"[42] though he does not

41. Dussaud 1907, pp. 144-145.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 146. He seeks to support this (p. 146, n. 1) by linking it to the statue of a naked woman apparently holding "par chaque extrémité, une étroite écharpe qui passait par derrière, vers le haut des cuisses" (*ibid.*, p. 52), and thus, not at all comparable to the arc in the de Vogüé drawing which passes above the head of the figure and which Dussaud appears to compare to the vault of heaven in suggesting that it indicates "le caractère nocturne de la déesse" (*ibid*., p. 146). He calls this statue "la déesse nue de Mechatta" and adds "on peut penser que c'était une représentation d'Allât ou d'une de ses hypostases" (*ibid.*, p. 146, n. 1). Yet he describes the statue as follows (*ibid.*, p. 52): "la femme ainsi représentée a tous les caractères de la négresse, notamment les lèvres lippues…". Regardless of whether or not this is correct, the fact that he describes it in this way makes his identification of the statue as a goddess worshipped by pre-Islamic Arabs incomprehensible. It is surely obvious that the statue represents a dancer using a scarf in her act, as is commonly done. Yet it is partly on the basis of his interpretation of it as a goddess that he disputes the attribution of Qaṣr al-Mushattā to the Christian Ghassanids (it is in fact Umayyad) and attributes it to the pagan kings of al-Ḥīrah (*ibid.*, pp. 53-54). He repeats the identification of this statue as a goddess and the association of the scarf with the arc on de Vogüé's drawing in 1955, pp. 142-143, n. 6, but adds the more pertinent comparison (from his point-of-view) with a representation of Aphrodite on a lintel from Qanawāt in the Ḥawrān (1955, p. 59 fig. 12/3), in which the goddess holds a veil over her head with her right hand, though it then disappears behind her left shoulder. Thus this is also far from being an exact parallel to de Vogüé's drawing, even if one were to accept that the figure in the latter is a goddess and the even more unlikely proposition that her creator was copying Graeco-Roman iconographic motifs.

explain why the author of a Safaitic inscription deep in the desert should be imitating Graeco-Roman symbolism. The extremely shaky identification of Palmyrene *ʾrṣw* with the evening star, was then considered to have been bolstered by Dussaud's interpretation of the rayed circle on de Vogüé's drawing.[43]

As a result of this, Dussaud found himself with three candidates for the planet Venus: Allāt, Arṣu / *rḍw* and Azzizos / al-ʿUzzā, and for good measure he added Manat, for no apparent reason except, perhaps, that she was another "Daughter of Allah".[44] In order to explain this, he was compelled to propose the extraordinary theory that *rḍw*, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt were all manifestations of Allāt, representing either the morning star (al-ʿUzzā) or the evening star (*rḍw* or Manāt),[45] a situation for which there is actually no evidence at all.

Moreover, as explained above, there is nothing in the iconography of *ʾrṣw* at Palmyra to suggest any astral associations whatsoever. He is always shown, on foot or on camelback, in Roman armour and is identified with Ares, not Venus, in bilingual inscriptions.[46] Nor is there anything to link Palmyrene *ʾrṣw*, who is always shown as male, with the female figure in de Vogüé's rock drawing, or to link the latter with *rḍw*.

From the 1920s onwards, other scholars identified de Vogüé's drawing as the goddess Allāt. Hubert Grimme believed *rḍw* to have been a male deity introduced into the Safaitic area from the Ḥejāz and Nejd.[47] So, while agreeing with Dussaud that de Vogüé's drawing represented a deity, and that the rayed circle must mean that she was the goddess of the morning and evening star, he pointed out that Allāt was "the only goddess so far known in the Safaitic inscriptions" and so he considered that the drawing must 'obviously' represent her.[48] He therefore emended the text of one

43. This is, of course, a circular argument, *viz:* 1/ the assumption that Palmyrene *ʾrṣw* is the evening star; 2/ because of an assumed etymological connection with the name *ʾrṣw*, Safaitic (and Thamudic) *rḍw* is supposed to be the evening star; 3/ the presence of a rayed circle beside a Safaitic drawing of a female figure is supposed to identify her as the evening star, and the presence of a prayer to *rḍw* (among other deities) in an adjoining inscription is supposed to identify her as *rḍw*; 4/ this is then used to support the identification of *ʾrṣw* as the evening star.

44. Dussaud 1907, pp. 131-132. He also involved the South Arabian deity ʿAthtar, mingling South and North Arabian religions indiscriminately.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132 (also 1955, p. 142): "Un des traits communs à toutes les divinités identifiées avec la planète Vénus, est de se dédoubler en deux hypostases qui représentent l'étoile du matin et l'étoile du soir. […] En Arabie, la question se complique du fait que deux divinités, l'une mâle et spéciale à l'Arabie méridionale, ʿAthtar, l'autre féminine et particulière aux populations du nord de l'Arabie, Allât, représentent la planète Vénus. Il faut donc nous attendre à rencontrer quatre hypostases, deux mâles tirées de ʿAthtar et deux féminines déduites d'Allât." Strangely, he considered Azizos and Monimos (mentioned in Edessa, but not found in South Arabia) to be "les deux hypostases de ʿAthtar" (a South Arabian god, not found in this form in the north), but "à Palmyre, il semble qu'au lieu d'Azizos, et de Monimos, on ait le binôme ʿAzîzou et Arṣou. Nous trouverons dans les textes safaïtiques le correspondant féminin de ce dernier sous le vocable Rouḍâ. Quant à Allât, ses deux hypostases sont les deux ʿOuzzâ dans lesquelles M. Noeldeke a reconnu l'étoile du matin et l'étoile du soir. Il se pourrait que l'étoile du soir ait aussi reçu le nom de Manât […] que, comme nous le verrons, elle fut encore dénommée Rouḍâ (…)" (*ibid.*, p. 132).

46. The association with Hermes / Mercury, if it existed, is surely to be linked to the protection of merchant caravans.

47. Grimme 1929a, p. 136.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 40: "Da wir aus den ṣafat. Inschriften bisher nur eine Göttin kennen, die schlechthin 'die Göttin' (*ʾlt*) heißt, und auf sie offenbar die erwähnten Darstellung gehen (…)."

of the accompanying Safaitic inscriptions to make it include an invocation to Allāt.[49] He noted that, although the Thamudic inscriptions contained numerous invocations to Allāt, none of the drawings associated with them could be shown to represent this goddess and that anyway such anthropomorphic representations of deities were foreign to the religious conceptions of the Arabs.[50] However, in order to explain the relative frequency in the Syrian *ḥarrah* of drawings like that published by de Vogüé, which he thought represented Allāt, he suggested that they stemmed from an amalgamation of the Arabian goddess Allāt with another, non-Arabian, 'pre-Semitic' Allāt, a goddess of love and / or motherhood.[51] It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that there is not a shred of evidence for this.

In 1940, Enno Littmann joined the discussion. He regarded the rayed circle as the sun rather than a star, and thought that the figure represented Allāt, whom he considered to be the sun-goddess.[52] He also drew attention to a drawing which he himself had recorded at al-Mrōshan in southern Syria (see **fig. 2a-b**). This he considered might represent the sun-goddess in her 'sun-bark', or the boat in which she crosses the sky, though he later added an alternative explanation, that it might represent "the 'war-girl' of the Bedawin" in the litter in which she is "led into battle in order to encourage the warriors",[53] on which see below. However, both interpretations require a considerable amount of imagination. The stone was taken back to Princeton where it is in the University Art Museum (reg. nº 67-7). Jamme later republished it, condemning Littmann's interpretation of the drawing and saying that it "more closely resembles a palm-tree with several branches cut off and lying on the ground".[54] It is curious that neither Littmann, nor Jamme, both of whom had plenty of time to study the stone, seems to have turned it around (**fig. 2c-d**). For if one does so, it is immediately clear that it is a crude drawing of an oryx, and is not a female figure at all.

However, Littmann was also aware that not all the drawings of women in this pose could be interpreted as goddesses, and pointed out that some were clearly pictures of slave-girls, since this was stated unequivocally in the accompanying inscriptions.[55] Twenty years later, Höfner questioned the idea that *any* of these drawings represented goddesses,[56]

49. *Ibid.*, p. 40: "so ändere ich ohne Bedenken *hymyt* in *hy'lt* (…)."

50. *Ibid.*, p. 137: "eine bildliche Darstellung von ihr ist in Arabien nicht nachzuweisen und lag wohl außerhalb des religiösen Denkens der Araber, da Allāt bei ihnen vermutlich keine Ausnahme von ihrer Auffassung der Gottheiten als astrale Körper gemacht hat." In another work, he says "Nur eine von der vier angerufenen Gottheiten ist im Bilde beigefügt; die drei anderen boten dazu nicht die Möglichkeit, weil man in der altarabischen Welt sie sich wohl nie in Menschengestalt dachte und höchstens in Symbolen darstellte. Als ein solches könnte vielleicht der Stern über der rechten Schulter der Allat gedeutet werden" (Grimme 1929b, p. 59).

51. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

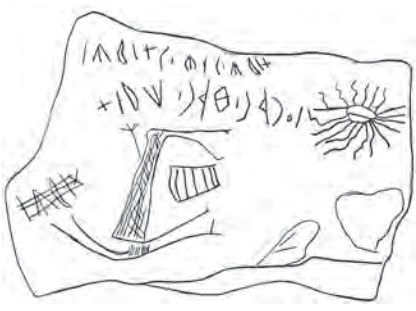
52. " […] ein Kreis mit 14 kurzen Strahlen, der alle Wahrscheinlichkeit nach die Sonne darstellen soll"; and " […] ist es mir wahrscheinlicher, daß hier die Sonnengöttin gemeint ist" (Littmann 1940, p. 118). See also " […] Allat deuten auf die Sonne" (*ibid*., p. 119).

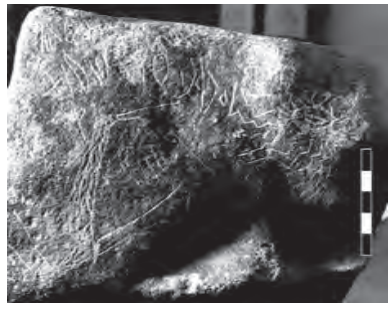
53. Littmann 1940, p. 118; Id. 1943, p. 58.

54. Jamme 1971, p. 139.

55. "Immerhin ist es möglich, daß ein Teil dieser Figuren, wenn das Sonnen-symbol dabeisteht, wirklich eine Göttin darstellt, ein anderer aber ein irdisches Mädchen" (Littmann 1940, pp. 118-119).

56. "Da die Darstellung von Göttern in Menschengestalt den Arabern ursprünglich fremd ist und unter den Tausenden von ṣaf. Zeichnungen jene Frauengestalten die einzigen Götterbilder wären, möchte man eher die Darstellung eines Menschen annehmen" (Höfner 1961, p. 464). See also Höfner 1970, p. 385: "Daß damit eine Göttin gemeint ist, ist wohl überhaupt reichlich unwahrscheinlich".





2a | 2b
2c | 2d

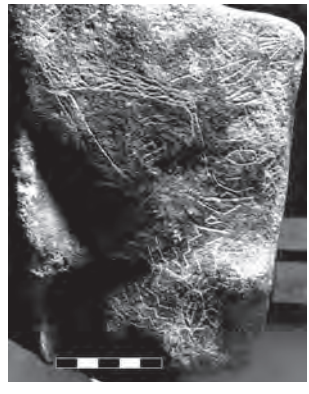


Fig. 2a-b – *LP 240-242 and the drawing interpreted by Littmann as the sun goddess in 'die Sonnenbarke' (1940, p. 118), and by Jamme (1971, p. 139) as 'a palm-tree': (a) Littmann's hand-copy; (b) a photograph (by the author).*
Fig. 2c-d – *LP 240-242 turned at 90º showing the drawing to be a crude representation of an oryx: (c) Littmann's hand-copy; (d) a photograph (by the author).*

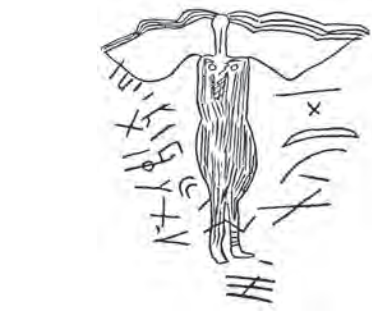
concluding instead that they were dancers.[57] In the same year, Winnett agreed, adding that "the drawings may be merely an expression of male interest in the female figure".[58]

In the last thirty-five years, many more drawings of this type, accompanied by Safaitic inscriptions, have been discovered, and several of a similar but distinct type, usually without inscriptions, have been found in south-western Saudi Arabia, see below.[59] In none of the examples from North Arabia known to me, is there any indication in the accompanying text that the subject is of religious significance, let alone that it represents a deity.

57. Höfner 1970, p. 386. She was however undecided as to whether or not they were cultic dancers, as van den Branden (1956, ii: xxv-xxviii) had suggested (see also Höfner 1961, p. 464).

58. Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 75, and see also Winnett and Harding 1978, p. 99, commentary to nos 353-355. Interestingly, however, Winnett and Reed interpreted a not dissimilar drawing which they found at Ḫabū al-šarqī near Taymā', as "an Arabian goddess" (1970, p. 33 fig. 38, pp. 167-171), see below.

59. Some of these were previously known only from Philby's appalling copies, and were discussed by van den Branden 1956, ii, xxv-xxviii; 1966, pp. 80-84.



3a
3b | 3c | 3d

Fig. 3 – *Examples of drawings of women identified in the accompanying inscriptions: (a) a drawing labelled* h-qnt *(LP 143); (b) a drawing labelled* h-ġlmt*. The stick-figure man is not part of the drawing but is an occasional accompaniment to the apotropaic sign of seven dots. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of Alison Betts); (c) a drawing labelled* h-zmrṯ *(C 1104); (d) a drawing labelled* h-qfzt*. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of the late Geraldine King).*

Indeed, when the subject of these drawings *is* specified in the accompanying inscriptions (see **fig. 3**),[60] the female figure portrayed is described as a *qnt* 'singing-girl' (**fig. 3a, 9f**), a *ġlmt* 'slave-girl' (**fig. 3b, 5d, 8c**), a *zmr(t)* cf. Arabic *zāmirah*, 'musician' (**fig. 3c**),[61] and in one case (**fig. 3d**) a *qfzt*, cf. Arabic *qaffāzah*, a word for a slave-girl

60. Some of the inscriptions make no mention of the adjacent drawing (see n. 15), and others refer to it simply as *h-dmyt* 'the picture', e.g. HSD (fig. 9a), and in effect LP 403 (fig. 5/a) as reinterpreted in Macdonald 1990, p. 27, n. 5, and possibly C 4351 (de Vogüé's drawing, fig. 1 here, see note 3, above), and unpublished examples; or *h-ḫṭṭ* 'the engraving', e.g. C 1259 (fig. 10c), WH 353, as well as a number of unpublished examples.

61. In C 1104 (fig. 3c) the *t* was read by Milik (1970, p. 57) on the basis of an incomprehensible mess at the end of the text in one of Graham's copies. The slightly different scene in HCH 79 (fig. 9e) is described in the curious expression *h dmyt zmrt*, which Harding translated "the beautiful woman played the reed pipes", and Milik, more probably, as "ce dessin (à savoir) une musicienne" (1972, p. 56).

which the lexica link to the root Q-F-Z 'to leap'[62] and which – if it really does derive from this root – may originally have been applied to dancing-girls or female acrobats. As Littmann recognized, this makes it quite clear that these particular figures represent humans and are not anthropomorphic representations of deities. Given that there is no indication that any are of a religious nature[63] and the strong (though admittedly not universal) aniconic tradition in Arabian religion,[64] I can see no evidence for the hypothesis that any of these female figures represent goddesses.

However, they are of considerable interest in their own right, and provide clues to aspects of the way-of-life of the authors of these inscriptions. A close examination of these drawings shows that they fall into two main classes which, though roughly similar in appearance, represent entirely different activities and social functions.

Entertainers

The first of these is entertainment (**fig. 3, 5-8**). In these drawings a woman stands facing out of the picture, hands raised and holding the ends of her long hair, which is often shown (unrealistically) as curving in an arc on either side of her head. A woman's loosening of her hair is considered a sexually provocative gesture in many cultures. Indeed, in Europe until at least the First World War, 'respectable' women when they reached a marriageable age were expected to 'put their hair up' and could no longer wear it loose in public, as they had as children. The nineteenth-century romantic novelist, Ouida (1839-1908), was considered not merely risqué but dangerous because she continued to wear her hair 'down' all her life. The Cretan novelist Kazantzakis describes how in Corinth he saw a woman seducing a young a soldier at a railway station, "the woman had jumped up and lifted her bare arm, abruptly she removed the comb that held her hair in place, moved her head up and down and shook it, the hair leaped down over her shoulders, cascading like deep blue water […]. Never will I forget that moment, so primitive and provocative. The soldier turned pale […]. The train whistled, we clambered aboard; the soldier and the woman remained, silent and sullen, like two beasts ready to bite each other."[65]

Women of the Ṣleyb or Solubba, a so-called 'pariah' tribe found in Syria and north and central Arabia, provided entertainment in more recent times by dancing with loosened hair, though it should be stressed that they did so clothed and swirled their hair around (**fig. 4**), rather than simply drawing it out as in the Safaitic drawings (**fig. 3, 5-8**). Indeed, variations on this form of traditional dance can be found in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula, from Syria to Yemen, and many preserve a stylized

62. Lane 1863-1893, 2551a.

63. The rayed circle, the presence of which in the drawing beside C 4351-4352 (de Vogüé 402) was one of the main reasons why the figure in that drawing was thought to be divine (see de Vogüé 1868-1877, p. 141; Dussaud 1907, pp. 144-145; Id. 1955, p. 142; Grimme 1929a, p. 137; 1929b, p. 59; Littmann 1940, pp. 118-119, etc.) is a – possibly apotropaic (see n. 12) – symbol found beside many Safaitic texts but so far only on one other occasion beside a drawing of a female figure (fig. 10e). Its presence next to C 4351-4352 is almost certainly co-incidental.

64. On this, see Patrich 1990. Anthropomorphic representations of deities at Petra and Palmyra, and in the Ḥawrān, etc. are all within the Levantine and Hellenistic traditions in which such images were commonplace.

65. Kazantzakis 1966, p. 15.

Fig. 4 – *A woman of the Ṣleyb dancing (from Montagne 1947, opposite p. 112).*

sexual element, even when performed by respectable women.[66] It is not clear whether there is any direct connection between these dances and those in the Safaitic drawings, and there may well be more differences than similarities between them. I cite them simply as a rough parallel for dancing with loosened hair.[67]

66. For instance, in Dickson's description of the Ṣleyb version which is performed before a mixed audience, the dance begins when a young girl "bare-headed and bare-faced with her tresses all undone and blowing in the breeze", dashes into the circle formed by the audience. "The girl's appearance was the sign for her brother or husband to run into the circle and embrace her, lightly kissing her on the lips […]. During the dance the girl appeared to act the following: She was pursuing her male dancing partner opposite, and trying to make him come to her. He from retiring in the first place, and acting the part of a shy lover, would eventually succumb to his lady's charms, and would start advancing and showing his admiration by his every movement. Next his girl would start retiring, having won her point, but should the admirer come too near or try to touch her, she would strike him lightly with her cane and force him to beat a retreat. … As she danced, she nodded her head vigorously, keeping time with her feet, in the direction of the man, but every now and then she varied it by swinging her tresses round and round her head by sideways and circular movements of her head. […] A feature was the girl's rouged lips […]. The dance ended by the girl's brother rushing into the ring and covering his sister's head and face with a portion of her voile garment, and taking her away" (1949, pp. 518-520).

67. On dances by Ṣleyb / Solubba women for festivals such as circumcisions, in which the hair is let down and waved around, see the passage in the previous note (Dickson 1949, pp. 518-520) and von Oppenheim (1939-1968, iv/1, pp. 138-141) who mentions parallels in other tribes. Dickson also mentions "performances given by women of easy virtue, who welcome men-onlookers in their houses, located in a part of the town reserved for them" (1949, p. 224), and dancing in private by respectable women, with no men present, in which all women dancers let their hair down when performing, and sway their bodies and heads about so that the loose hair swings from side to side in circular motion" (*loc. cit.*). On similar dances, with loose hair among the Rwala Bedouin on the occasion of circumcisions, see Musil 1928, p. 246. I have also seen photographs of similar waving of the hair in Yemen.

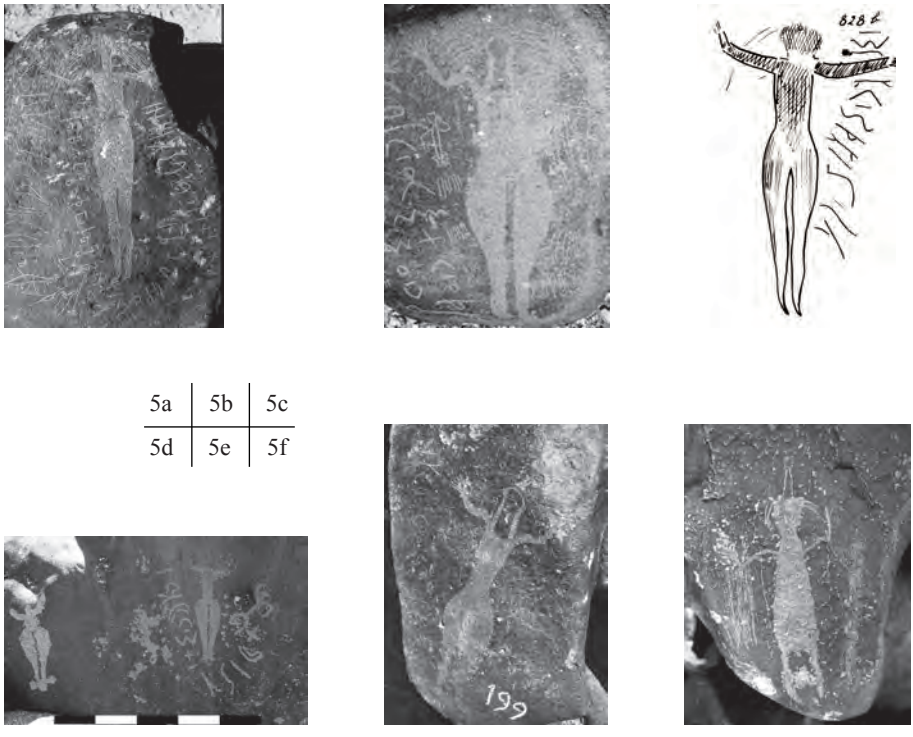


Fig. 5 – *Examples of drawings of women some with legs apart, naked or in tight trousers, others apparently in tunics: (a) LP 403 ;(b) WH 442; (c) C 3146; (d) A previously unpublished drawing labelled* h-ġlmt. *For the stick-figure man see the caption to Fig. 3b. (Shown by kind permission of Alison Betts); (e) WH 568. Note that the space between her thighs has been filled in at a later date, as can be seen by the lighter patina; (f) Girl apparently wearing a tunic. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of Alison Betts).*

Occasionally, in the drawings, the woman's breasts are indicated schematically (e.g. **fig. 3a**) and she is usually shown with her legs very slightly apart (**fig. 1, 3b, 5a-e, 6a-c**). In the more detailed drawings she is shown with bracelets and / or anklets, and sometimes with straps or sashes (?) crossing her trunk from shoulders to waist or horizontally at the waist (**fig. 1, 6a , 8b, 9, 10b**).[68] It is usually assumed that, apart from this, she is naked, but it would be more accurate to say that, in common with most Safaitic drawings of humans, clothes are rarely shown. The space shown between the legs could indicate either nakedness or that she is wearing tight-fitting trousers, and in some cases the fact that the outlines of her legs are filled in, whereas her torso is left blank or hatched, might be intended to indicate this (see **fig. 6a, 8b, 10b**). On the other hand, there are a few examples

68. Littmann (1940, p. 118) interpreted these as tattoos. Compare the similar markings on the body of a horseman in a drawing published as Clark 1984-1985, pl. 2a, nº B.1.

6a | 6b
6c

Fig. 6 – *Examples of drawings of women dancing with swaying hips and / or tasselled belts: (a) women with hatched torsos and tasselled belts. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of Geraldine King); (b) Woman with swaying hips and short tasselled belt. C 5212 (Photograph by the author); (c) CSNS 895. Woman with swaying hips but no belt.*

where she seems to be wearing a tunic reaching in one case to below her knees (**fig. 5f**) and in another to her ankles (**fig. 3c**). But these examples are crudely drawn or copied, and it is not certain that this was the artist's intention. However, in the vast majority of cases, the intention seems to have been to show the lower part of the body as naked, or at least with the shape of the limbs clearly defined.

The drawing out of the hair was apparently accompanied by swaying hips, as is skilfully shown in several of these drawings by a long, tasselled belt which swings widely on either side of the woman, at least in those for which we have reliable reproductions (**fig. 1, 3d, 6a, 6b, 6c** [swaying hips without a belt], **8a, 8c**).[69]

I would suggest that this can be seen in another curious North Arabian rock drawing which has been identified as a goddess. This was found by Winnett and Reed on the summit of Jabal Ghunaym, south-east of Taymā' (**fig. 7a**). There is no evidence to date this drawing and there is no basis for Winnett and Reed's assumption that it is contemporary with the Taymanitic inscriptions: it could equally well be much older or much more recent. The figure is clearly female, the breasts being shown in relief, and Winnett and Reed interpreted it as "an Arabian goddess", despite the fact that there is no internal or external evidence for this, and none of the inscriptions at the find-place – which they took to be an

69. The presence of the belt (though not its purpose) was first noted by Höfner (1970, p. 385). She mentions this feature in C 4351-4352 and Dn 1339 (= C 286), and HSD (p. 386, n. 358). Jamme (1972, p. 17) is therefore incorrect in his assertion that he was the first to remark on this feature.

7a | 7b
7c

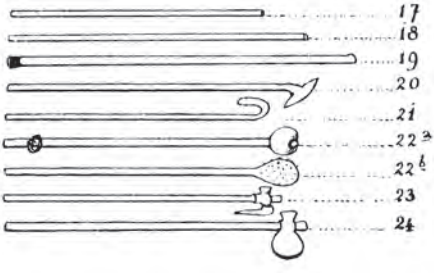


Fig. 7 – (a) The rock drawing of a female figure from Jabal Ghunaym, south-east of Taymā' (= Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 33, fig. 38, photograph kindly given to the author by F.V. Winnett); (b) a rock drawing near al-'Ulā showing a figure seated on a stool or 'throne' (photograph by P. Piérard); (c) n° 21 is the bākūr *or* bākūra *(from Euting 1906, pp. 396-397).*

"open-air sanctuary" – mentions a goddess. They also admit that she bears no resemblance to what they interpret as the "heads of several divinities" on the rock-face below.[70]

Reed, who wrote the chapter on this drawing in *Ancient Records from North Arabia*,[71] states that the female figure "is seated on a four-legged chair or throne the legs of which terminate in claws such as those of a lion". I find this interpretation difficult to accept. As the rock drawing on **fig. 7b** shows, if one is drawing someone sitting on a throne, the natural place to position the throne is *below* the person, not behind him or her. The lines to which Reed refers seem to me much more like a tasselled belt, cf. those on (**fig. 1, 3d, 6a, 6b, 8a, 8c**). The apparent sitting position is also common in the drawings of male dancers accompanying dancing-girls in the Safaitic drawings (**fig. 8a-c**), and in one case of the girl herself (**fig. 9f**).

Reed regarded the object in the figure's left hand as a mace-like sceptre. However, I doubt very much whether this is what she is holding since the curve at the top does not meet the stem, which would be necessary if it were to represent the knob on top of a mace. It is much more reminiscent of the bākūr (**fig. 7c**)[72] or bākūrah,[73] the stick made of willow wood used by shepherds in Syria and Arabia and which, as de Boucheman points out, figures very frequently in *wusūm* or tribal marks. A cane is a standard part of the dance of

70. Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 167.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-171.
72. Thus Euting 1906, pp. 396-397, n° 21.
73. Thus de Boucheman 1935, p. 103.

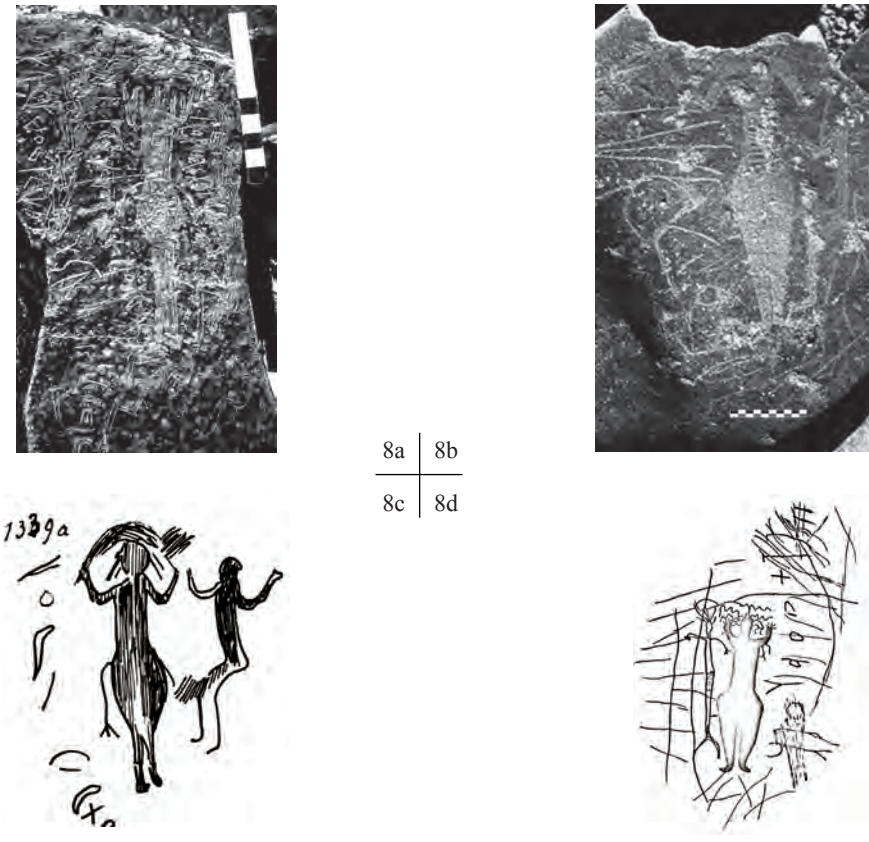


Fig. 8 – *Examples of woman entertainers accompanied by men: (a) dancing girl with exaggeratedly long hair and tasselled belt. Note the physical reaction of the men dancing with her. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of Geraldine King); (b) a dancing girl with a man reaching out to her and with an exaggerated physical reaction. (Previously unpublished photograph by the author); (c) C 286 (Dn 1339a) A dancing girl (labelled* h-ġlmt *in the inscription) with a tasselled belt and a man dancing beside her; (d) CSNS 69 where the man beside her has been added later.*

the Solubba women as described by Dickson[74] and others (see **fig. 4**). While such comparisons can, of course, be no more than suggestive and do not constitute evidence, I would suggest they could help provide what I hope is a more coherent interpretation of this figure than the pure assumption that she is a goddess of an otherwise unknown type.

Reed interpreted the object below the hand holding the 'stick' as an incense burner from which "the artist seems to have attempted to portray smoke ascending".[75] I am not

74. Dickson 1949, p. 519.
75. Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 169.

Fig. 9 – *Musicians: (a) HSD, showing a horseman and two woman with elaborate coiffures and apparently dressed in tunics, each holding a* kithara*; (b) C 2839-2840 (Dn 294a-b) showing a coiffured woman holding a* kithara *seated on an equid which is led by a man or a woman; (c) a woman, apparently naked, holding her hair with her right hand and a* kithara *(?) with her left hand. The diamond shape to her right is a later addition. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of Alison Betts); (d) a fresco at Herculaneum showing a woman playing a* kithara*. (From Scott 1957, pl. XII, opposite p. 414); (e) HCH 79. A woman with an 'Afro' hairstyle playing the* magrūn *or double flute, with a man dancing in front of her; (f) C. 1677 (Dn 401a). A woman in profile, called* h-qnt *in the inscription, possibly playing a pipe, with a man dancing in front of her (cf. fig. 9e); (g) A relief on the North theatre at Jerash showing a woman playing the double flute or* aulos *(Photograph shown by kind permission of Ina Kehrberg-Ostrasz).*

convinced by this explanation either and indeed I wonder whether this and the supposed 'basket' held in her other hand are really part of the original drawing, since they are both more crudely carved than the figure. If I am correct that this drawing represents a dancer, similar, though by no means identical, to those shown in the Safaitic drawings, then it would be the most southerly representation of the subject in this form.

To return to the Safaitic drawings, it is clear that, in some cases at least, these are representations of a sexually provocative dance, since the physical reaction of the male audience is portrayed unambiguously in two pictures (**fig. 8a, b**).[76] In other cases, one or more men are shown dancing beside the woman, usually in the position with their knees bent, mentioned above (**fig. 8b, c, 9e, f**).

Entertainers playing musical instruments

However, there are some interesting variations which suggest perhaps more innocent musical activities. One is the magnificent drawing (HSD, **fig. 9a** here) published by Lankester Harding[77] which shows a standing woman holding a lyre, or more likely a *kithara*,[78] with another, also holding a *kithara*, seated on what is probably a domestic ass or mule[79] with a tasselled saddle-cloth, accompanied by a horseman, and a hound. The composition is surrounded by six Safaitic inscriptions only one of which mentions the drawing, referring to it simply as *h-dmyt* 'the picture'.

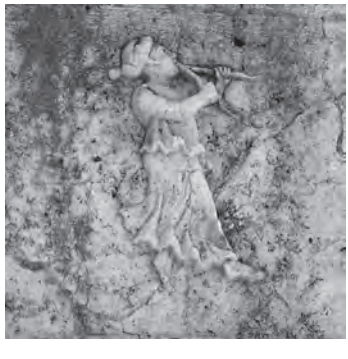
76. The stone with this drawing and the accompanying Safaitic inscriptions was, like several others shown here, found by the late Geraldine King on the Basalt Desert Rescue Survey and will shortly be published in the Safaitic database online on the website *Ancient Arabia: Languages and Cultures*.

77. Harding 1969, p. 69, fig. 1, and pl. XIX.

78. "The Greek lyre (λύρα) and *kithara* were distinct instruments. In Roman times the lyre tended to die out and the *kithara* acquired more strings; the sounding-board became larger and more unwieldy" (Scott 1957, p. 409). See the fresco from Herculaneum reproduced on fig. 9d.

79. See Macdonald forthcoming. Note that the horseman sits close to the animal's neck, as is normal on a horse, while the woman sits much further back, as is normal on an ass.

9a	9b
9c	9d
9e	9f
	9g



There is another drawing (**fig. 9b**) in which a woman, apparently with a similar coiffure and possibly holding a *kithara*, is shown mounted on a similar animal which is led by a man or woman with cross-hatching on his / her torso (Dn 294).[80] Dunand's copy of the drawing is fairly rough and few other details can be made out, but it is worth noticing that, as in the composition published by Harding, the woman appears to be sitting towards the rear of the animal with her legs tucked up on its back, rather than dangling down one or both sides. Two inscriptions by the same author (C 2839-2840) refer to the drawing simply as *h-ʿr* 'the mule'.[81]

In contrast to the women in the other drawings, the two in the composition published by Harding appear to be clothed, at least from below the shoulders to below the knees. The standing figure has bracelets, anklets, and a long tasselled belt like de Vogüé's woman. But unlike the latter, and all the other female figures, the hair of the two women in HSD and Dn 294 is arranged in elaborate coiffures, rather than being loose and drawn out by the hands.

I would tentatively suggest that these may represent 'respectable' female musicians rather than the dancing girls of the other drawings, or that they are singing / dancing girls shown on the move rather than during a performance. However, the use of the *kithara* did not guarantee respectability as can be seen from another drawing where an obviously naked woman holds her loose hair in one hand and a *kithara* in the other (**fig. 9c**). A possible explanation for the presence of the horseman, if indeed he is part of the composition, is suggested below.

Other drawings show different forms of musical entertainment. HCH 79 (**fig. 9e**) for instance shows a woman, who appears to be naked,[82] playing a double flute (the magrūn)[83] while a man, apparently with tassels or possibly bells attached to his calves, dances to the music. Unlike the other female musicians, the woman in this picture is shown in profile and has an 'Afro' hairstyle. However, this latter in itself is not a distinguishing mark of sex, since the male figures in other drawings by the same artist have very similar hairstyles.[84] The inscription describes her as *zmrt* (cf. Arabic *zāmirah*) 'a flute-player'.[85] **Figure 9f** shows what may be a similar scene.

Entertainers as booty

Singing and dancing girls were a class of slave which was highly valued in pre-Islamic Arabia. They could even be used as a form of currency. Al-Balādhurī records that when Wabara ibn Rūmānis was captured by the warrior poet Yazīd ibn al-Ṣaʿiq, he "paid a ransom of 1000 camels, two singing girls and an allotment of his possessions".[86]

80. The inscriptions which mention the drawing are Dn 294a-b (C 2839-2840). There were three other texts on the same rock (Dn 294c-e = C 2841-2843) but these do not mention the drawing.

81. The practice of referring to a drawing by the animal depicted rather than the humans or the activity, is common in Safaitic rock art.

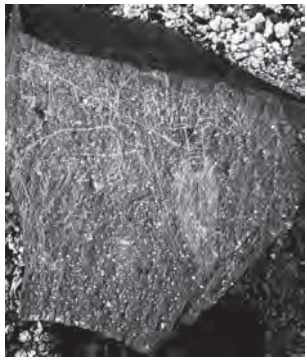
82. This is suggested by the space between the legs.

83. Compare the double *aulos* being played by a woman in fig. 9g, and by a man in a fresco in Tomb II at Marissa (Kloner and Braun 2000, p. 50).

84. HCH 78 and 80.

85. The inscription refers to the drawing as *h-dmyt zmrt*, see n. 61 for the suggested translations.

86. See Kister 1968, pp. 156-157.



10a	10b
10c	10d
	10e

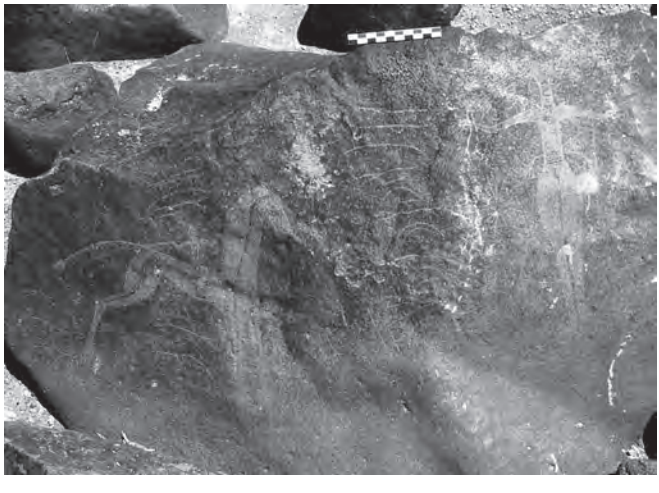


Fig. 10 – *Raiding camels and raiding dancing girls: (a) LP 325, showing camel raiding (Photograph by the author); (b) a drawing showing a horseman raiding a dancing girl who is described as* bzt *'booty' in the accompanying Safaitic inscription. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of William and Fidelity Lancaster); (c) C 1259, showing a raider touching a dancing girl with his spear; (d) C 1122, showing a horseman with a spear and a dancing girl; (e) A drawing from Riğm Qa'qūl, southern Syria, showing a horseman and a dancing girl, probably representing a raid. (Previously unpublished photograph by the author).*

In contrast to Bedouin practice of the Islamic period, in which women, children, guests and slaves were considered both inviolable and 'out-of-bounds' to raiders, singing-girls appear to have been 'fair game', at least among those who produced the Safaitic inscriptions and the drawings which accompany them. There is thus a sub-class of drawings of entertainers which shows a horseman touching one of these girls with his spear,[87] the traditional sign in a raid that this particular prize is his.[88] I hope to have shown elsewhere that this is what is happening in rock-drawings which previously were interpreted as inexplicably late representations of camel-hunting[89] (see **fig. 10a**). As

87. As Höfner pointed out, it seems highly improbable that these pictures show horsemen killing women (1970, p. 386). In the drawing published by Harding (see fig. 9a) the sword of anachronistic shape and disproportionate size wielded by the horseman is a later addition. There may be traces of a shorter, thinner sword beneath and slightly to the right of the later one, but it is hard to be sure from the photograph. Images of a horseman wielding a sword are very occasionally found elsewhere, e.g. Petra and further south in Arabia, and there are occasional Safaitic drawings in which a horseman is shown with a sword at his belt. But, to the best of my knowledge, this would be the only known *Safaitic* drawing of a horseman wielding a sword. The normal weapon for a horseman in these drawings is the lance. There is a very thin and shallow line which crosses the horseman's body and the fore-quarters of the horse and seems to end up at the feet of the standing woman. Harding considered that this line was intentional and that it represented a lance (1969, p. 68). If so, and if it is indeed touching the standing woman, this could be another example of raiding dancing-girls (cf. C 1259, fig. 10c, where the spear is touching her calves).

88. Thus Burckhardt reports "whatever these Arabs take in a successful expedition, is shared according to previous agreement. Sometimes every horseman plunders for himself; at other times, an equal division is to be made. In the former case, whatever an Arab first touches with his lance is regarded as his sole property" (1831, i, p. 140). Musil also describes how in a raid "every one tries to reach an animal with his spear, calling at the same time on his comrades to witness that it was he who captured it; he then drives it before him to a second and third, which he also makes his own. A long spear is very useful in this kind of work." (Musil 1928, p. 524). See Macdonald 1990.

89. It is generally thought that wild camels died out in Arabia at the end of the second millennium BC, whereas the Safaitic inscriptions are normally dated to between the last century BC and the fourth century AD, and the South Arabian relief (*CIH* 445, Musée du Louvre AO 1029), which I showed in Macdonald 1990, p. 26, fig. 4, is dated (on palaeographical grounds) to the early centuries AD. Naturally the drawings made by the Rašīdī prince Māǧid of Hā'il for Julius Euting (*ibid.*, p. 27, fig. 5), date from some 3000 years after camel-hunting is thought to have ceased. There are, of course, rock-drawings in Arabia which *do* show camel-hunting, as I made clear in my 1990 article. Among these Anati 1968, p. 69, pl. VIII; p. 64, fig. 15, is one of the most dramatic. But note that here the hunters are on foot (not on horseback), mostly with bows, and the short spears (not the long lance) have been thrown and are *sticking into* the camel, not held by a rider and touching the camel's side as is shown in the Safaitic drawings and very clearly on the South Arabian relief where the lance-head is clearly outlined against the camel's flank. In a recent article, Hani Hayajneh has questioned my interpretation of the scene on this stela where a horseman touches a camel with his spear. He considers it "difficult to interpret the scene […] as a raiding scene", though he does not say why and instead prefers to see it as "a camel with a horse rider, who is presumably the deceased, holding a lance behind it while he drives his *balīya*-camel before him, which he takes, according to the Arabic narration, to mount on the day of resurrection" (Hayajneh 2006, p. 112). This is surely a misunderstanding both of the purpose of the *balīyah* and of nomadic practice. Hayajneh (2006, p. 110) quotes the descriptions of the purpose of the *balīyah* as outlined in the Classical Arabic lexica, which was to provide the deceased with a camel to ride on the Day of Resurrection, so that he will not be shamed by having to arrive on foot. The sources say nothing about riding a horse and driving a camel, or about leaving a horse to die at the grave, as well as camel, to make this possible. Indeed, all the reports on Bedouin life state that in going to an event, such as a raid or a battle, it is

usual in these rock-drawings, each element is shown with its characteristic features[90] regardless of whether, in naturalistic terms, these are appropriate to the circumstances of the composition. Thus, a gazelle is almost always shown with its tail horizontal, something which normally only happens when it is in flight; female camels are depicted with their tails up in all circumstances, and male ones with their tails hanging down,[91] etc. Here, the slave-girl who is being captured in a raid is shown holding her flowing hair in exactly the same attitude as when she is performing, in order to make clear what kind of woman she is (**fig. 10b-d**, and probably **10e**). This interpretation of this sub-class of drawings is confirmed by a previously unpublished picture where the girl is described as 'booty' (*bzt*) in the accompanying inscription (**fig. 10b**).

Cheerleaders

However, some very similar drawings of women would seem to depict a quite different activity, which I would describe, rather frivolously as the equivalent among the ancient nomads of the modern American practice of cheerleading.

In his *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, Musil describes several times how in a raid or a battle the girls of the Rwala would unbutton the front of their dresses to show their breasts, let down their long hair and mingle with the warriors in order to urge on their menfolk to ever-greater valour.[92] In a raid, "if it seems as if the enemy would win, the girls, if present, with words and gestures encourage the warriors to persevere. With their breasts bared and hair loosened they ride on camels where the greatest danger appears, call to their friends and to those dear to them, remind them of amorous moments spent together, and threaten to join the enemy if their own people disappoint them."[93] In several Safaitic drawings of raids, there is one or more female figure with loosened hair, who probably represents these perfectly respectable girls of the tribe, performing the role of 'cheerleader', see for instance LP 325[94] (**fig. 10a**) which shows a horseman raiding a Bactrian camel and a dromedary, where there is one such figure at the extreme right of the picture.

the camel which is ridden and the horse which is led, so that the latter will be fresh when the rider mounts it at his destination. Ever since its introduction, the horse has always been a far rarer, more valuable and more prized possession than the camel among the nomads, and it is therefore reserved until the last possible moment so that it can perform at its best. The scene on this stela as interpreted by Hayajneh, would turn Bedouin practice on its head. Moreover, in this life, if you are riding one beast you *lead* not drive your other mount (as can be seen on photographs of Bedouin on their way to battles and raids). By contrast, as Musil states in the passage quoted in n. 88, in a raid, the raider, mounted (if at all possible) on his horse, touches one or more of the victim's camels with his spear and calls out to his fellows to note that they are his and then drives the captured beast(s) before him, exactly as is shown on this relief (see Macdonald 1990).

90. This convention is explained in more detail in Macdonald 2005, pp. 336-338.

91. This feature was first noted in Searight 1983, p. 575.

92. Littmann (1943, p. 58) quotes a similar description by Hess, "Eine Jungfrau, meist Tochter des Schêchs, wird auf einem Kamel – gleichsam als lebende Standarte – in die Schlacht geführt. Sie steht auf dem Sattel in einer Art Gerüst, unbedeckten Hauptes, mit aufgelöstem Haar, trillert und singt Kampflieder, um die ihrigen anzufeuern" (1938, p. 101).

93. Musil 1928, p. 527.

94. On this inscription, which was rediscovered and photographed by the Safaitic Epigraphic Survey Programme, see Macdonald, Al Mu'azzin and Nehmé 1996, pp. 467-472.

According to Musil, in a pitched battle (*manāḫ*), before the attack "the tribal emblem Abu-d-Dhûr is fastened to a camel which walks in the midst of the bravest youths on horseback. These warriors are accompanied by the prettiest women and girls of the camp, who, with their bosoms bared and hair loosened, keep shouting "He who runs away today shall never receive anything from us".[95] In Safaitic drawings of battles there is almost always one or more female figure with loosened hair, sometimes with their breasts shown, at the edge of the fray. Two girls giving this sort of encouragement can be seen on the edge of the battle shown in the drawing accompanying WH 3914 (**fig. 11a**), and another in the battle scene from south-west of Tabūk on **fig. 11b**. There are even women in similar attitudes shown beside duels between two men (**fig. 11c, d**). These women are distinct from the entertainers in that they have no belts and usually their shape is far less distinct than those of the dancing girls, possibly suggesting that, apart from their hair and breasts, they are fully clothed.[96] Moreover, whenever the drawing is clear enough to make it out, the woman's hands are raised *above* her flowing hair and are not being used to draw it out in the provocative gesture described above (**fig. 11a, b, d, e**). As we shall see below, this subject may occur in drawings from another part of Arabia.

There is also one drawing (**fig. 11e**) of what is presumably a hunt, though it looks more like a dangerous game of taunting a hyena, in which what appears to be a cheerleader of this sort is also shown. Regardless of whether the drawing shows a hunt or some sort of ritual activity, or even a game, the considerable dangers to which the men were exposing themselves no doubt meant that they benefited from the encouragement of a cheerleader.

Before leaving North Arabia, it may be noted that, although the Hismaic inscriptions of southern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia are often much more sexually explicit than the Safaitic,[97] women seem to be rarely if ever represented in the drawings which accompany them. The drawings from southern Jordan shown on **fig. 12**, which belong to the class which has been called 'femme ouverte' and which is discussed in Hédi Dridi's paper in this volume p. 431-446 are not accompanied by Hismaic inscriptions. They have been interpreted as representing women giving birth, though this is not obvious in every case.

Throughout the rest of the Peninsula, it is rare to find figures which are clearly identifiable as women, except in the south-west of Saudi Arabia.[98] However, one of the problems of Arabian rock art is that relatively few of the drawings are signed – unlike those associated with the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions – and those showing humans are almost never identified in inscriptions. This not only robs us of evidence with which to date them[99] but also leaves us ignorant of what the artist intended to

95. Musil 1928, p. 540.

96. However, this does not seem to be the case in the drawing on fig. 11b, though it is, of course, impossible to tell how accurate this copy is.

97. See King 1990, pp. 105-111.

98. A relatively thorough search of the literature on the rock art of the Arabian Peninsula reveals that within Saudi Arabia there are a few rather crude drawings which can be identified as women in the north-west and a relatively large number of much better ones in the south-west, but elsewhere very few indeed. As far as I can tell, there are only a handful in Yemen, concentrated in the far north-west. I can find very few indeed in Oman and along the Arabian-Persian Gulf.

99. In passing, however, it may be noted that a great many of these figures are carved over earlier rock drawings and Ancient South Arabian and Southern Thamudic inscriptions.

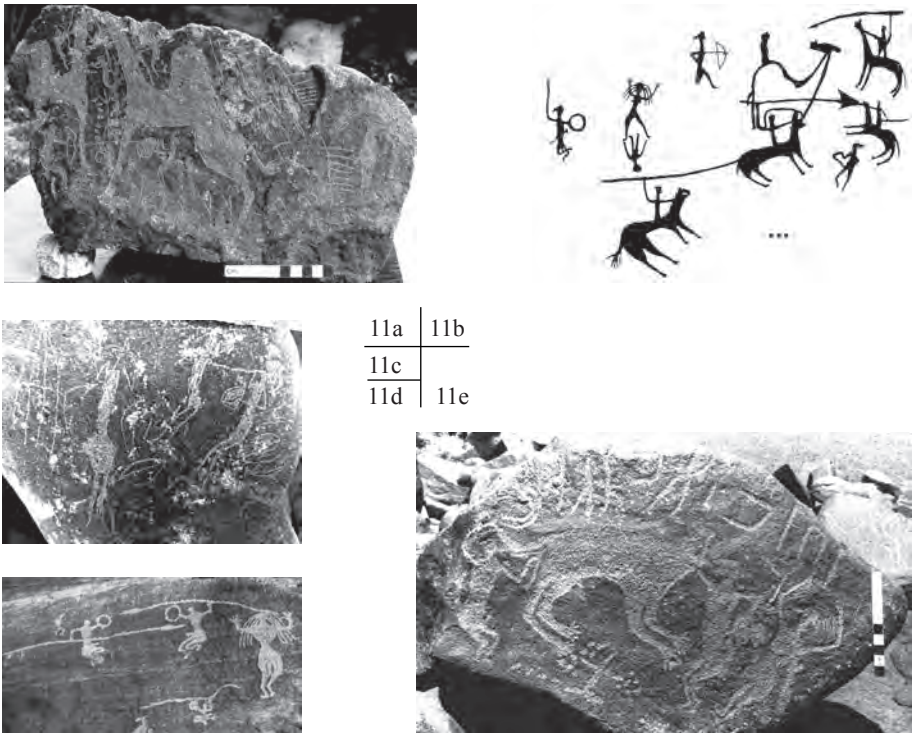


Fig. 11 – *Women as cheerleaders: (a) WH 3914 from north-eastern Jordan, showing a battle with cheerleaders on the edge. (Photograph by Geraldine King); (b) a cheerleader beside a battle in a drawing from Wādī ʿAṣāfīr, south-west of Tabūk. (Facsimile from Nayeem 2000, p. 76, fig. 68); (c) a cheerleader beside a duel. (Previously unpublished photograph from north-eastern Jordan shown by kind permission of Geraldine King); (d) a cheerleader beside a duel from south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Anati 1974, p. 73, fig. 195); (e) a cheerleader (?) beside a hunt or some kind of ritual baiting of a hyena. (Previously unpublished photograph shown by kind permission of Geraldine King).*

portray. Nevertheless, there are some which I think can usefully be compared with the Safaitic drawings I have discussed above.[100]

As far as I can tell, it is unusual in Arabian rock art outside the drawings accompanied by Safaitic or 'Thamudic' inscriptions, for unambiguous sexual features to be represented in drawings of the female form. Long hair is not necessarily exclusive to women in Arabia, as many Bedouin men of the early twentieth century[101] and boasts in the pre-Islamic

100. I am not here dealing with the so-called 'female profile figures' (see Khan 1990) which are simply identified as female on the basis of the exaggeratedly large buttocks, since, quite apart from the difficulty of identifying whether they really are female, they are not engaged in the activities discussed here.

101. See, at random, Raswan 1935, opp. p. 24, p. 151, p. 188; Hess 1938, frontispiece; Thesiger 1959, pl. 12, 61; Mauger 1988, p. 111, etc.

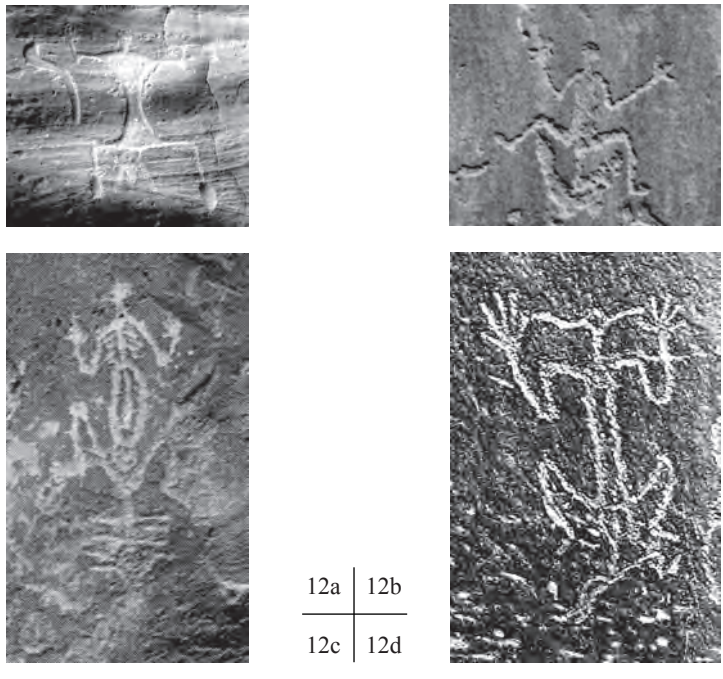


Fig. 12 – *Drawings from southern Jordan apparently showing women giving birth: (a) From Khaz Ali, Wādī Ramm (Harding and Littmann 1952, p. 13, pl. III); (b) From Wādī Ramm (Unpublished. Shown by kind permission of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, photograph n° A 2123); (c) From Wādī Ramm (Campetti and Borzatti von Löwenstern 1983, Pl. XXIXa); (d) From Jabal (*sic*, actually Barqat) al-Mudawwarah, southern Jordan (Photograph from Borzatti von Löwenstern 1993, p. 20).*

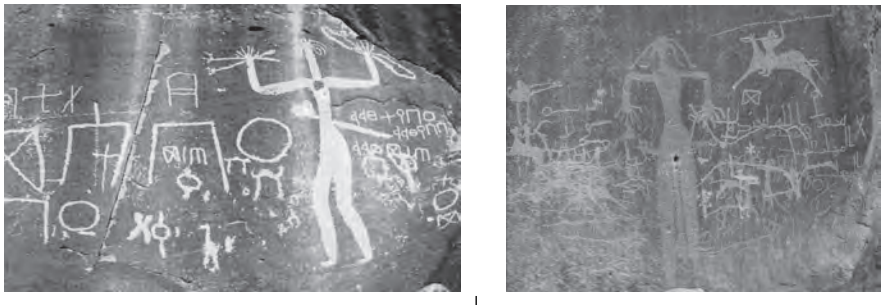
poetry[102] have shown. Nor is the so-called 'orant' posture with the arms raised above the head.[103] Even markings which have been taken to represent breasts can be found on what are almost certainly male figures (**fig. 13a**), and occasionally female sexual attributes have been added later to what are clearly rather optimistic representations of males (**fig. 13b**).[104]

It is therefore as well to be cautious even in identifying a figure as female, let alone trying to interpret the activity in which she is engaged. Nevertheless, I would suggest that when a long-haired figure with raised arms is shown in a scene of battle in which the combatants do not have these attributes, it is relatively safe to assume that it is a woman and that she is performing the function of 'cheerleader' (e.g. **fig. 11b**).

102. See for example, al-Shanfarā *lāmiyyat al-ʿarab*, lines 63-64.

103. 'Orant' is, of course, simply a convenient term to describe the standing position with arms raised, an allusion to the posture of prayer in early Christian art, and does not imply that the figure is actually at prayer.

104. See the figure on pl. 13b which has a penis reaching to his calves but which has undergone a sex change at a later date. Note that, unlike the other two, apparently female, figures on this panel (see Macdonald 1996, pp. 80-81), this one has his arms hanging down rather than raised.



13a | 13b

Fig. 13 – *(a) Figure with what have been taken to be representations of breasts, but which is almost certainly male. (Photograph from Nayeem 2000, fig. 340); (b) A male figure which has been 'converted' into a female. (Photograph from Macdonald 1996, p. 81).*

This can be seen on an interesting drawing of uncertain date from south-western Saudi Arabia (**fig. 11d**), which shows a dual between two men apparently dressed in the *izār* or *futah*, fighting with the long lances and small round shields of the Bedouin.[105] At one side is a woman, apparently swaying her hips, with flowing hair, and hands raised, who is presumably encouraging one of them.[106]

There are other drawings in south-west Arabia which appear to show women performing this function,[107] but in most the standing figures are far larger than the participants in the battle raging around them. The rock face shown on **fig. 14a** is a palimpsest of drawings of various periods and it appears that one drawing of a horseman has been superimposed on part of the central standing figure, but that the upper standing figure has been superimposed on another horseman. These battle scenes are fairly common in the area of Bi'r Ḥimā in south-west Saudi Arabia, and in some cases it is possible that whoever drew the horsemen incorporated existing standing figures into his composition using them as cheerleaders, even though that was not the intention of the person who originally drew them.

Single or multiple long-haired figures of uncertain sex in the 'orant' position, are a common subject of rock-drawings in south-western Arabia (**fig. 14a-c**). One of the most interesting of these, found recently by Christian Robin near Najrān, is illustrated in Hédi Dridi's paper in this volume p. 431-446. This is clearly female, and as far as I know, it is the only such figure from south-west Arabia to be associated with an inscription, which I take to be a personal name. I cannot see any indication that this represents a deity.

105. Men wearing what looks like the *izār* can be found in several rock-drawings, see the discussion in Macdonald (2009b, p. 171) and Crone 2008, pp. 7-8. The long lance and small shield were the typical accoutrements of the Bedouin up to the early modern period (see Hess 1938, pp. 104-105). They are also often depicted in the Safaitic rock-drawings.

106. It is, of course, possible that *this* drawing, as opposed to those showing full-scale battles, represents a ritual 'war-dance' of some kind, but it is impossible to prove it.

107. See, for example, Zarins, Murad and al-Yaish 1981, pl. 40A; Nayeem 2000, fig. 67, 346, 350, 352, etc.

Fig. 14 – *Standing long-haired figures in the 'orant' posture: (a) A battle scene partially superimposed on long-haired figures in the 'orant' posture. From Jabal Kawkab in south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Nayeem 2000, p. 247, fig. 352); (b) Long-haired figures in the 'orant' posture superimposed on much earlier drawings. From Jabal Qarah in south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Khan 1993, Pl. 6); (c) Four long-haired figures in the 'orant' position, three of which are superimposed on a South Arabian or Southern Thamudic inscription. From Jabal Thaer in south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Nayeem 2000, p. 269, fig. 386).*

I would suggest that it is impossible to tell what these figures represent. Are they goddesses, dancing-girls, or simply "an expression of male interest in the female form"?[108] Indeed can we even be sure that some of them are female? The habit of treating anything for which there is no obvious explanation as 'cultic' is now, happily, more or less discredited, and I can find no evidence at present to suggest that any of these figures represent goddesses, or even humans engaged in religious activities, such as the sacred prostitution and homosexuality suggested by van den Branden.[109]

Regardless of whether they are male or female, a possible interpretation of some of the figures may be that they are dancing, not necessarily as dancing-girls, but as part of a communal activity, whether religious or secular. This is suggested by the apparently swaying hips of some of the figures not involved in battle scenes, as for instance in **fig. 15a** and **b**, where the figures have in the past been interpreted simply as steatopygous, but may in fact be moving their hips. The apparently grotesque steatopygia of the figures in **fig. 15c** could also be an attempt to show this, as can be seen if they are compared with a representation of a dancer in three dimensions (**fig. 15d**).

So, in conclusion, I would suggest that we have no evidence for the anthropomorphic representation of female deities within what might be called the native tradition in North and Central Arabia.[110] Of course, there are Hellenistic imports in the Ḥawrān and urban centres like Petra, and there was a long history of anthropomorphic representation of divinities in the Levant and Mesopotamia, of which the religious art of Palmyra and Hatra is an expression.[111] But, I would argue that we have no evidence for anthropomorphic representation of the divine in what might be called the indigenous Arabian religious tradition.

One of the great problems with the pre-Islamic religion of North and Central Arabia is that we have the names of many divine beings but very little indication as to how they were perceived by their worshippers. An examination of the prayers in the Safaitic, Hismaic and 'Thamudic' inscriptions shows that, in general, there is no specialization in the sort of requests which are made to each deity. The same prayers seem to be addressed indiscriminately to any divine being, or to several of them at the same time. Even the sex – or, rather, grammatical gender – of some deities is unclear, despite the large number of invocations, because most of the prayers are couched in the imperative where the difference between masculine and feminine is lost in the severely consonantal script.[112]

108. Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 75; and see also Winnett and Harding 1978, p. 99, commentary to n^{os} 353-355.

109. Van den Branden 1956, ii, xxv-xxviii; 1966, pp. 82-84.

110. I would also suggest that we have no evidence either for the representation of 'male' deities in the 'native' tradition, but that would need to be demonstrated in a separate paper.

111. In Macdonald (2009a VI, p. 309-311), I have questioned what is meant when the label 'Arab' is attached to the populations and cultures of these cities, and the concept of 'Arab' deities, which it is often stated were worshipped there. Certainly there is nothing to connect the religious art of these two cities with North Arabia. They are firmly within the anthropomorphic traditions of Levantine, Mesopotamian, and Hellenistic religions.

112. Van den Branden 1966, p. 113 claims that *rḍy/w* is female because "the verb is always in the feminine". However, this is not correct as pointed out in Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 75, n. 19. The question remains open because of the ambiguities of the Ancient North Arabian orthographies (on which see Macdonald 2004, pp. 494-497). For possible evidence of the masculine see WH 1255 N *w gyz rḍy* if (*contra* the edition) this is an optative meaning "may Rḍy water the land". For prayers to *rḍy* for rain, cf. WH 1770 *f h rḍy mṭr*.

15a | 15b

15c | 15d

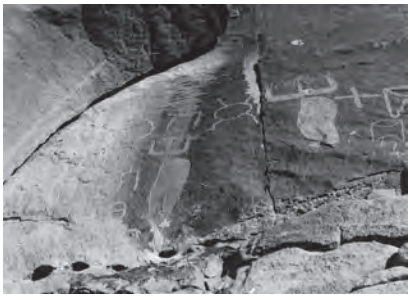


Fig. 15 – *(a) Figures with apparently swaying hips from Jabal Kawkab in south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Nayeem 2000, p. 241, fig. 344); (b) Figures with apparently swaying hips from Jibāl al-Qahr in south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Nayeem 2000, p. 272, fig. 388); (c) Figures which are either steatopygous or are moving their hips from Jabal Qarah in south-western Saudi Arabia. (Photograph from Nayeem 2000, p. 243, fig. 347); (d) Ivory figurine of a dancing water goddess found at Begram, Afghanistan. Now in the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul (registration n° MK 04.1.14). (Photograph from* Afghanistan, les trésors retrouvés. Exposition au Musée Guimet, Paris, 6 décembre au 30 avril 2007*, n° 147, p. 216).*

In fact, outside the Nabataean culture, we have not a single securely identified example of an anthropomorphic representation of a deity in North or Central Arabia. Of course, arguments from silence are always suspect, but given the large numbers of such representations in the adjacent cultures of Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt, and most strikingly at Palmyra, this particular silence seems deafening.

I would propose as a working hypothesis that in origin, divine beings in North and Central Arabia were not perceived in anthropomorphic terms. They would therefore, by definition, have been sexless,[113] and did not require physical representation. I use the term 'divine being' because we do not even know whether they were perceived as what we would recognize as deities, or in more animistic terms. We have no means of knowing whether these divine beings existed within a rich mythology, like their counterparts in Mesopotamia or Ugarit, since – with the possible exceptions of the Qaniya 'hymn' and the two lines of Old Arabic in the 'Ēn 'Avdat inscription[114] – we have no literary or theological texts.

This non-anthropomorphic perception is apparent in the fact that many of them have epithets rather than names, 'the most powerful', 'the companion of the people', the 'lord of heaven', etc. The urge to set up standing stones (*anṣāb* or *maṣṣēbōt*) as an act of piety or as a memorial of an encounter with the divine, as in the story of Jacob after wrestling with the angel, may well have been widespread in Arabia, as it appears to have been in Bronze and Iron Age Palestine. Certainly, it is mentioned in the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions. From this, perhaps, the *naṣb* – that is the stone itself – may have come to be identified as representing the divine being, albeit in a way which we are in no position to define. One might compare the veneration of certain images of the Blessed Virgin Mary in many Roman Catholic countries where, for some worshippers, the statue itself is endowed with a sanctity and power to perform miracles, even though in official doctrine it is merely a vehicle or conduit for divine mercy.

This seems to be implied in the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions where the activity *nṣb*, and the object *nṣb* or *mṣb*, are mentioned several times. The context is usually uninformative, but in one Safaitic and one Hismaic inscription[115] we find the statement *nṣb h-lt* which must surely mean 'he erected the Lt', i.e. 'he erected [the stone representing the goddess] Lt'.

In Nabataea, possibly under Levantine or Hellenistic influence, the stones were anthropomorphized by the addition of stylized eyes, nose and, in one case, a mouth,[116] while retaining the exterior characteristics of the *naṣb*. But these types of anthropomorphized *anṣāb* are a feature of Nabataean religion, and we do not find them in the rest of North Arabia, either carved on the rocks or as portable objects. The question of how divine beings were perceived in pre-Islamic North and Central Arabia remains open. All we can say for certain is that, outside Nabataea and the Hellenized areas, drawings of the female form almost certainly depict women engaged in earthly activities, and are not representations of the divine.

113. Obviously, they had to have grammatical gender but it is not at all clear whether they were perceived as male or female beings.

114. On the first, see Robin 2001, pp. 516-522; on the second see Macdonald 2009a I, pp. 98-99.

115. The Safaitic is LP 237 (confirmed on a photograph taken by the Safaitic Epigraphic Survey Programme) and the Hismaic is HU 571. On the term 'Hismaic', see Macdonald 2009a III, pp. 44-45.

116. The stela found in the so-called 'Temple of the Winged Lions' at Petra, see Hammond 2003, p. 225, fig. 246.

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Abbreviations

C	Safaitic inscriptions published in *CIS v.*
CIH	*Inscriptions and objects published in Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars IV. Inscriptiones Ḥimyariticas et Sabaeas continens,* Paris: Reipublicae Typographeo, 1889-1932.
CIS v	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars V. Inscriptiones Saracenicas continens, Tomus 1. Inscriptiones Safaiticae*, edited by G. Ryckmans, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1950-1951.
CSNS	Safaitic inscriptions and drawings in Clark 1979.
Dn	Copies of Safaitic inscriptions made by Monsieur and Madame Maurice Dunand and published in *CIS v*.
HCH	Safaitic inscriptions and drawings in Harding 1953.
HSD	The drawing in Harding 1969.
HU	Hismaic, Taymanitic and Thamudic inscriptions copied by Charles Huber as renumbered in van den Branden 1950.
LP	Safaitic inscriptions in Littmann 1943.
PAT	Hillers (D.R.) and Cussini (E.)*, Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (Publications of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project), Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
RTP	Tesserae in Ingholt, Seyrig and Starcky 1955.
WH	Safaitic inscriptions and drawings published in Winnett and Harding 1978.

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