



Qatabanian Inscription

Egypt

Limestone

1st Century B.C – 1st Century A.D

H:29cm W:10cm L:8cm

An elegant carved stone inscription, most likely originating from the Wadi Beihan, a valley located in the heartland of the kingdom of Qataban, one of the kingdoms of ancient Yemen. Amongst the richest and most influential of the ancient South Arabian kingdoms, Qataban derived its immense wealth from the trade of spices, frankincense, and myrrh. Wadi Beihan is located on the Incense trade route, and as such would have been a centre of commerce. The text, written in the Qatabanian language, reads: ?bd?l bn ??rm s'qn[y] r?d ?nby bn-s'ww ?(m)[... ... Which translates to: ?bd?l of the family ??rm dedicated [... he committed to the protection of Anbay his sons ?m[... Anbay was worshipped in Qataban as a god of justice, and as an attendant to Qataban's chief deity, the moon god Amm. The profusion of inscriptions that have been discovered in the area suggest the Qatabanians were a highly literate society. This inscription was acquired by E. F. Stonehouse in Aden, prior to 17 May 1968. He states that whilst stationed in Aden, which was under British administration from 1839 – 1967, he visited the archaeological site at Beihan. He describes how the stone fragment was removed “quite legitimately from the site on which, it is said, stood one of the temples or stopping places for the Queen of Sheba on her journey through the Hadramut, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and so to Syria and Jerusalem.” Whilst many Qatabanian inscriptions survive, ones of this quality, with the text this clear and legible, are rare and therefore of note, highlighting as they do the elegance and aesthetic quality of the script. A letter dated to 17th May 1968 discussing the inscription from the important scholar of pre-Islamic Arabian history and inscriptions A. F. L. Beeston survives, as does one dated 3rd May 1972 from T. C. Mitchell, who was at the time Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum.

Literature:

David Aaron Ltd, 2023, No. 32.

This inscription has been registered with DASI's Corpus of Qatabanic Inscriptions