

DEDAN - KHURAIBAH

EARLY ANCIENT KINGDOM & TRADING OASIS ON INCENSE ROUTE

The first settlement at the al 'Ula oasis was erected about 4,000 years ago and developed into one of the most important trading posts on the famous Incense Route.

It is no wonder, 1,000 years later with the rise of the Nabataean empire, that Mada'in Saleh was erected just 20kms north of it. Dedan, or Khuraibah as it is called, was one of the few ancient cities, which allowed various ethnic tribes living next to each other in peace and erecting separate temples to worship their main deities Dhu Ghaibat, Nikrah and Wadd.

The Minaean trading colony of southern Arabian tribesmen must have been significant and was a guarantor for the regular flow of incense and other valuable trading goods from "Arabia Felix" via Dedan to the Mediterranean ports.

On this trade Dedan levied a tax tahal of 10%, which was going to the royal court. The same percentage was also levied on the significant agricultural activities around Dedan, but these proceeds were passed on to the temples to support the cultural activities and numerous priesthood.

Famous Red Cliff Tombs

Most of the over 100 rock tombs are found at the foot of the red colored sandstone cliffs right next to the sprawling capital. The square tombs were cut two meters deep and horizontally into the rock face, or into the rock bed floors at the mountain base. These tombs, which we can still see today, were created during the 5th century BCE and are either single or collective tombs with funerary inscriptions. Only a few are decorated with lion figures to indicate royal status.

One of these lion tombs belonged to a Minaean leader, further proof of a peaceful diverse ethnic co-existence at Dedan. These are the only rock-face cut horizontal loculi tombs in Saudi Arabia and possibly a simple predecessor of the sophisticated Nabataean temple like facade tombs, as we can see from the pictures.

The creation of burial places and the tomb chamber interior layouts must have served as good examples and were copied by the Nabataean tomb architects, as their work is nearly identical with niches and burial pits. Dedan was first mentioned in ancient records during the 7th century BCE at Tayma with reference to o

a war between the two important trading centers. In 553BCE Neo-Babylonian king Nabonid mentioned on a stele, discovered at Harran in today's Syria, that the king of Dedan was his vassal.

From other known historic sources, Nabonid subdued the whole northern region of the Arabian Peninsula. This included the kingdom of Adumatu (modern-day al Jawf) as well as Tayma, which he made his new capital for over 10 years.

The reported peaceful conversion from Dedan to Lihyanite Dynasty around 500BCE, was actually a name change of the location name Dedan to the tribal name, so Dedanites became Lihyanites. This event was based on a change of dominance of clans or trading dynasties.

Ancient Economy "at its best"

The economy was based on the incense and spice trade with "Arabia Felix", mainly the southern kingdom of Saba/Sheba and the Levant ports, as well as on profitable agricultural activities. A Dedanite stele at the Rasafem temple at Qarna in the Ma'in kingdom in "Arabia Felix" is testimony of the close trade ties, as was the fact of the large Minaean colony in Dedan.

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The majority of residential area is still not yet excavated and lies beneath this rubble field, the al' Ula oasis with thousands of date producing palm trees lies in the background

Marriage diplomacy was already taking place also, with Dedan women being married off to Minaeans in "Arabia Felix".

There seems to have been an agreement on a certain division of labor and trading activities - Minaeans controlled and used the land routes, and Lihyantes controlled and sailed the sea routes.

We know from ancient sources that Lihyantes were experienced seafarers and controlled the Gulf of Aqaba and parts of the northern Red Sea ports.

Relations with Tayma must have been excellent for Dedan rulers to be allowed to leave regular inscriptions at the main Tayma temple. But there were also internal conflicts reported, which might ultimately have led to the final collapse of the Lihyan kingdom.

When Nabataeans became more dominant, Mada'in Saleh replaced the trading center of Dedan and Lihyantes moved south towards Makkah.

There are also traces of an earthquake and this was the reason why Dedan was finally deserted and still looks like a rubble field today.

The Dedan site was unfortunately also used as a quarry for modern-day al 'Ula with many local houses showing stone blocks featuring Dedan, Lihyan and Minaean inscriptions including carved decorations and symbols.

In addition Dedan was also destroyed earlier during the construction of the Hejaz railway in 1901 with tracks laid straight through its ruins, the same as at Mada'in Saleh.

Kings & Rulers

The Lihyan history records from various sources offer more details. This dynasty was based on hereditary succession, but the kingdomship could move to another family clan. Instead Dedan was earlier ruled by governors using a king type title. It was a highly organized and disciplined political organization with evidence of a social welfare system.

The king was assisted by an advisory council called hajbal, which played an important role. Kings used nicknames such as dhi Aslan "king of mountains", or dhi Manen "robust king". These kings were represented at their Umm Daraj mountain sanctuary with life-size elaborate and beautiful statues made out of red sandstone.

This religious center, situated on the opposite wadi side, had three temples featuring the best mountain views on the city of Dedan. It could be reached by steep staircases hewn into the cliff, of which the lower part is still visible today and which are still covered today with ancient writings and some animal petroglyphs.

These Lihyanite kings made further advances in state administration introducing a city-state system. But there was no running calendar and events were dated to the year of rule of each king, which makes precise dating difficult, if gaps in royal chronology exist.

Important Dedan Capital

The Dedan capital started on a small scale with an extension of 300x200m and later expanded with evidence of a defensive city

wall system. So far seven phases of occupation and construction have been distinguished by excavators. These phases show the building activities, their use, decline and desertion, plus different re-use and later in history random settlements at Dedan.

A major public building in the north area was excavated and inscriptions discovered, plus offering tables and statues. One wall had four pillars plus three pedestals, which are assumed to have served for these statues as various threshold plates were found with a snake guardian symbol.

It can be assumed that this building was erected between 700-100BCE and was actually a temple with sanctuary.

A landmark cistern cut in stone is easily seen today in the less than a quarter excavated archaeological ruin field of Dedan. The monolithic stone block was prepared with absolutely round walls on the outside and the carved out center has a capacity of 27,000 liters.

Internal stairs are leading down to the water level, as it was used for ritual washing for the temple of main Dedanite deity Dhu Ghaibat, also written Dhu-Ghab'a.

Pottery production traces can be seen on the city's northeast border with three small tells, where



archaeologists assume kilns to be found in future excavations.

Early Oasis Farming

One of the various oasis farming areas is situated to the north of the ancient city center called Kief al Zarah and situated right opposite today's ARAC Hotel. It's residential quarters for farm laborers lie about 1km north of Dedan on the other side of Wadi Mu'tadil.

The fenced site stretches along the main wadi cliff. It consists of simple residential structures with stone foundations and walls built of mud brick thereon in contrast to Dedan, where only stone walls were erected. The small rectangular enclosures are built at random with no regular layout and feature fire pits for cooking. Here no formal or public buildings such as temples were found.

The only possible public structure is an isolated platform with adjacent court yard with yet uncertain usage. Was it a market or date processing site? Or was it an early sacrificial site?

The latter option might be supported by the fact that the platform was erected using well hewn blocks and that fine Dedan potsherds were found, different to the coarse farming potsherds from residential quarters.

In addition a massive wall was built across Wadi Mu'tadil. This wall spanned across the entire wadi floor from cliff to cliff and was built slightly convex with sandstone blocks.

It is assumed that its main purpose was flood prevention and water redirection to the Kief al Zarah fields via a canal found on the north side. But certainly this wall also had a second purpose for protection against aggressive desert tribes intruding from the eastern desert areas.

An interesting discovery was a series of long coarse walls with associated ditches adjacent to the residential area. They are believed to be agricultural property division walls built of rough stones in single line erected parallel to the wadi water flow and therefore might have also served as flood protection walls.

They were dividing the agricultural wadi area into big fields, far too big to be cultivated by one family and therefore assumed to have been worked by groups, clans, or co-operatives. This possibly might have happened under state administration of Dedan based on ancient reports.

A highly developed irrigation systems was also discovered with stone lined canals and even sluices were used for water management.

Unique Mountain Sanctuary

Umm Daraj is a Lihyanite mountain sanctuary and temple site used between 600-100BCE. The climb is done via rock carved staircases leading up to mountain



Large public building with water basin left and tomb cliffs



Excavated quarters with huge monolith round stone basin



Residential quarters built of stone & mud brick

top with three religious structures. The first is a temple for Lihyanite god Dhu-Ghab'a with walls erected of flat thin well hewn stones and steps leading to a wide eastern entrance.

The second temple has similar size and it's north portico terrace was supported by four columns. This was the main temple where the famous life-size monumental statues of Lihyanite kings were displayed standing on pedestals on the north and west terraces. A large courtyard was used for ceremonies with small chapels separated by a corridor surrounding the main temple.

In this area also several altars of different forms were found being either square, rectangular, circular or semi-circular. Various carved holes in the ground scattered through the temple area were possibly used to place and fix further statues, possibly those from other temples being transported here during the reported annual pilgrimage and other important cult ceremonies.

Extraordinary Life Size Sculptures

The life-size statues found by archaeologists need a special mention here. They are really the most sophisticated and beautiful pieces of ancient sculpturing art at the time found in Saudi Arabia.

Therefore they have been part of the recent fascinating overseas exhibition of Saudi Arabian archaeological treasures called "Roads of Arabia", which was staged at the Louvre Museum in Paris, Hermitage in St. Petersburg and, from January 2012 at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

These statues were created out of red sandstone in a very fine and elaborate manner with perfect proportions close to the "golden ratio" of 1:7, and with great detail of human body and muscle depiction.

They truly are proof of the sophistication of Lihyanite sculpturing art, which can be easily compared to the highly developed Egyptian art, but created by a local



Stone with snake ornament, possibly sacrifice altar



Octagonal column is proof of rich decorations



Excavated buildings of uncertain use



Excavations reveal various occupational periods



Decoration element with rests of stucco

“Lihyan school” with a distinctive local style and featuring various differences such as loin cloth, fine drapery, precise musculature, leather sandals and details of jewelry bracelets.

In total over 10 such statues were found in al 'Ula, with three further colossal statues found recently at Khuraibah. All statues from the “Lihyan school” are depicted standing in a semi-plastic full face frontal pose, with arms hanging on the side and hands closed to a fist.

All statues have a rather rigid stance with parallel legs joined together at the back side for stability, as some were up to four meters tall and therefore very heavy. These kings are depicted half naked only covered with a loin cloth, a folded skirt held by a string belt with side knot, and coated with white plaster. The bodies were painted red in antiquity and

one statue shows traces of a thin bitumen coat to make it look black.

The reason for this coating is yet unknown to archaeologists, but might point to a very dark skinned ruler, which is not abnormal in this region. Lihyanite rulers mentioned in this context are Talmi bin Hun'as, Hun'as bin Talmi and Lowthan bin Hun'as.

Ancient Script & Translation Problems

With respect to all ancient Arabian scripts, their way of writing without using vowels makes any interpretation very difficult, especially when it comes to names. This is already seen when Greek historians like Strabo, who traveled the Arabian Peninsula,



Three periods of construction are visible, first buildings done with mud brick, later stone blocks were used followed in the last period with neatly hewn stone layers



Two lions guarding the royal tomb below



Minean inscription between lions & small votive niche

converted and translated royal Arabian names into Greek.

Let's look at some examples in more detail. We know that "TLMY" ruled for 44 years and was a powerful Lihyanite king. Possible ways to interpret his name including vowels were produced by Greek writers as Tulmay, Talmy, Tilmi or Takhmy. Therefore it is not certain if "TLMY" was actually Talmy ibn Loudhan or Talmy ibn Hana'us mentioned in other sources.

Other ways of writing found for "TLMY" include Takhmy ibn Lthan, Takhmi ibn Loudhan or Talmy ibn Loudhan. "TLMY" was also mentioned on a stele at Tayma dated to the 3rd century BCE.

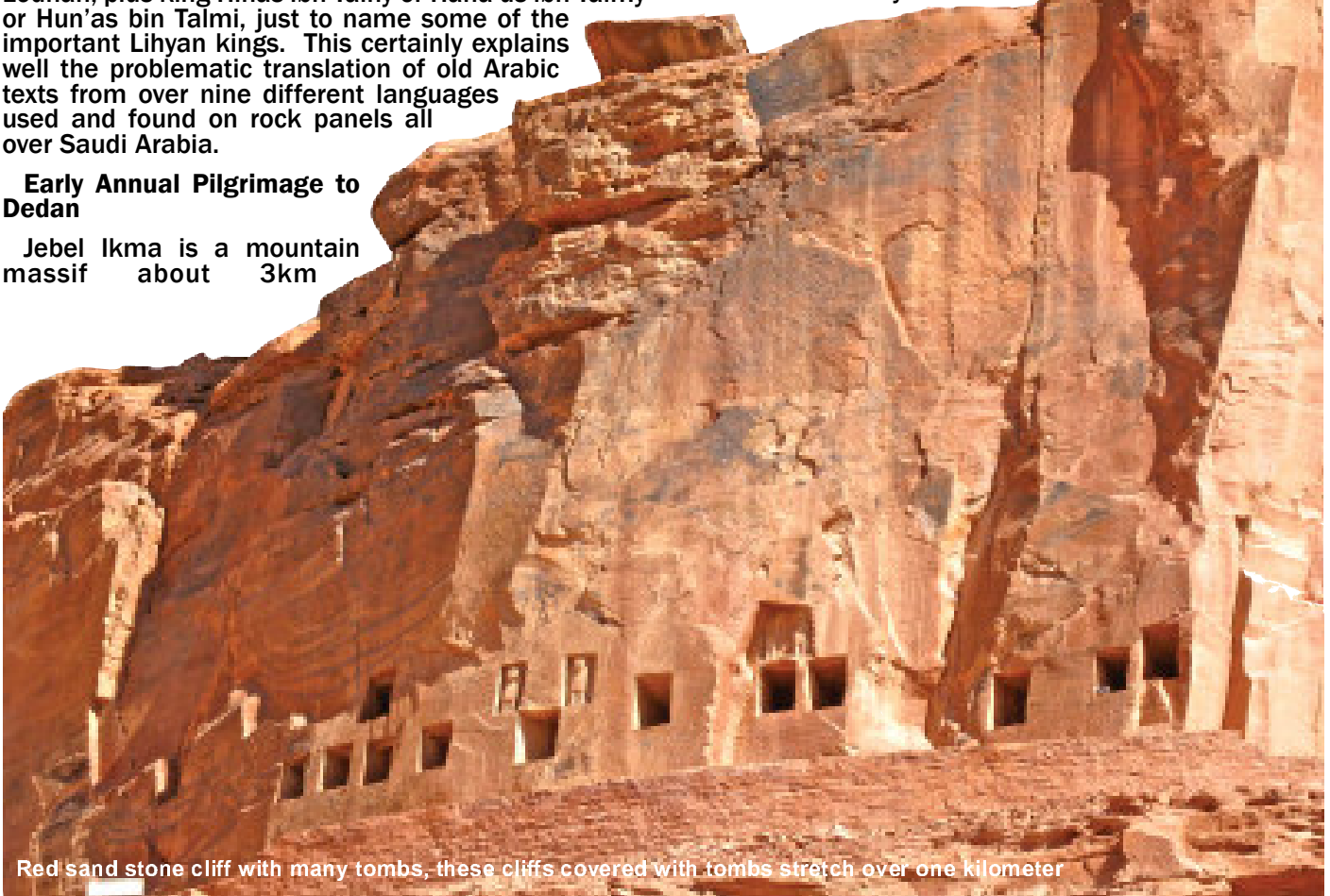
Another ancient writing example is that of Jlt Qoos or Jalt Qaws or Galti Qos, mentioned as Lihyanite governor around 400-300BCE. The same situation exists with king Mn'y Lthan ibn Hinas or Loudhan ibn Hana'us or Lowthan bin Hun'as also written as Lawdhan or Lodhan, plus king Hinas ibn Talny or Hana'us ibn Talmy or Hun'as bin Talmi, just to name some of the important Lihyan kings. This certainly explains well the problematic translation of old Arabic texts from over nine different languages used and found on rock panels all over Saudi Arabia.

Early Annual Pilgrimage to Dedan

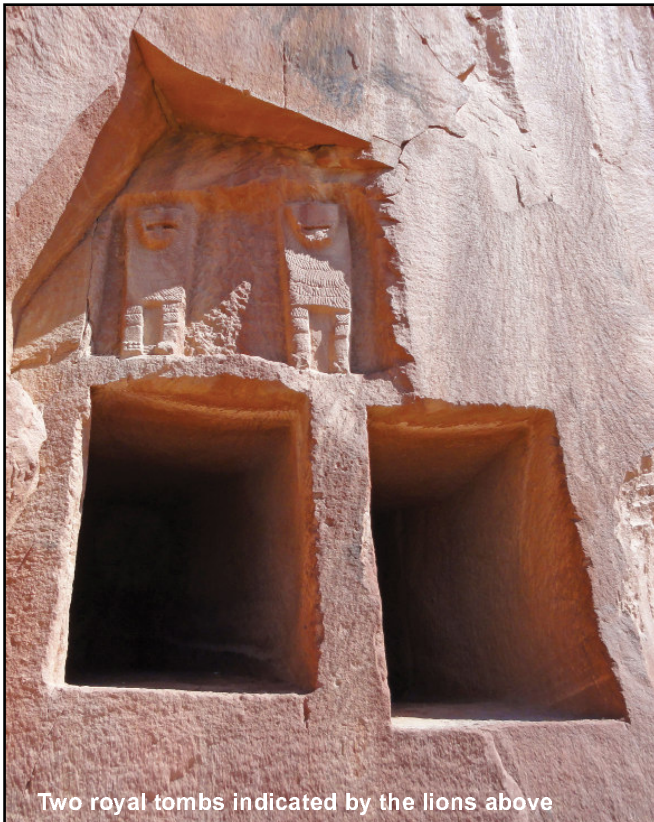
Jebel Ikma is a mountain massif about 3km

northwest of al 'Ula with 200 Lihyanite inscriptions created using different Arabic dialects and terms. This site is a rich source of fascinating information about religious practices, offerings and taxes. From these revealing inscriptions new knowledge about functions and activities were gained. These included information that nominated temple representatives undertook in antiquity tours, travelling to promote regular pilgrimage and temple tax collections or animal offerings called salha & salhat, being the male and female noun. It also attests that Dedan was an important place of ancient worship and pilgrimage, with pilgrims coming from as far away as modern-day Oman to offer and sacrifice camels, sheep and fruit.

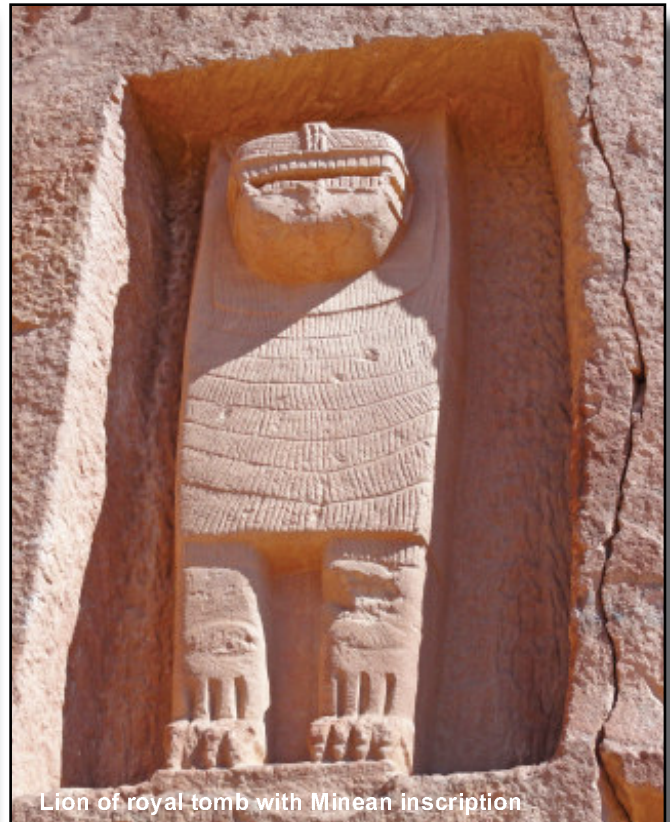
The whole Dedan mountainous area is covered by an enormous amount of inscriptions and petroglyph symbols. Over 1,000 inscriptions from the 7th century BCE onwards were discovered here mainly



Red sand stone cliff with many tombs, these cliffs covered with tombs stretch over one kilometer



Two royal tombs indicated by the lions above



Lion of royal tomb with Minaean inscription

produced in Dedanite script and over 300 inscriptions created in various other scripts such as: Lihyanite, Thamudic, Minaean, Aramaic, Nabataean and even Greek and Roman. These inscriptions are predominately of funerary and votive nature with memorial texts found on offering tables and water basins.

A remarkable piece of rock art with a memorial inscription is depicting a male camel rider holding the reigns in his left hand and a stick in the right with an inscribed word meaning priest. Another inscription with three lines refers to a pilgrimage visit to temple. The most southern Lihyanite inscription was found at al-Faw close to Wadi Dawasser at a distance of over 1,000 km.

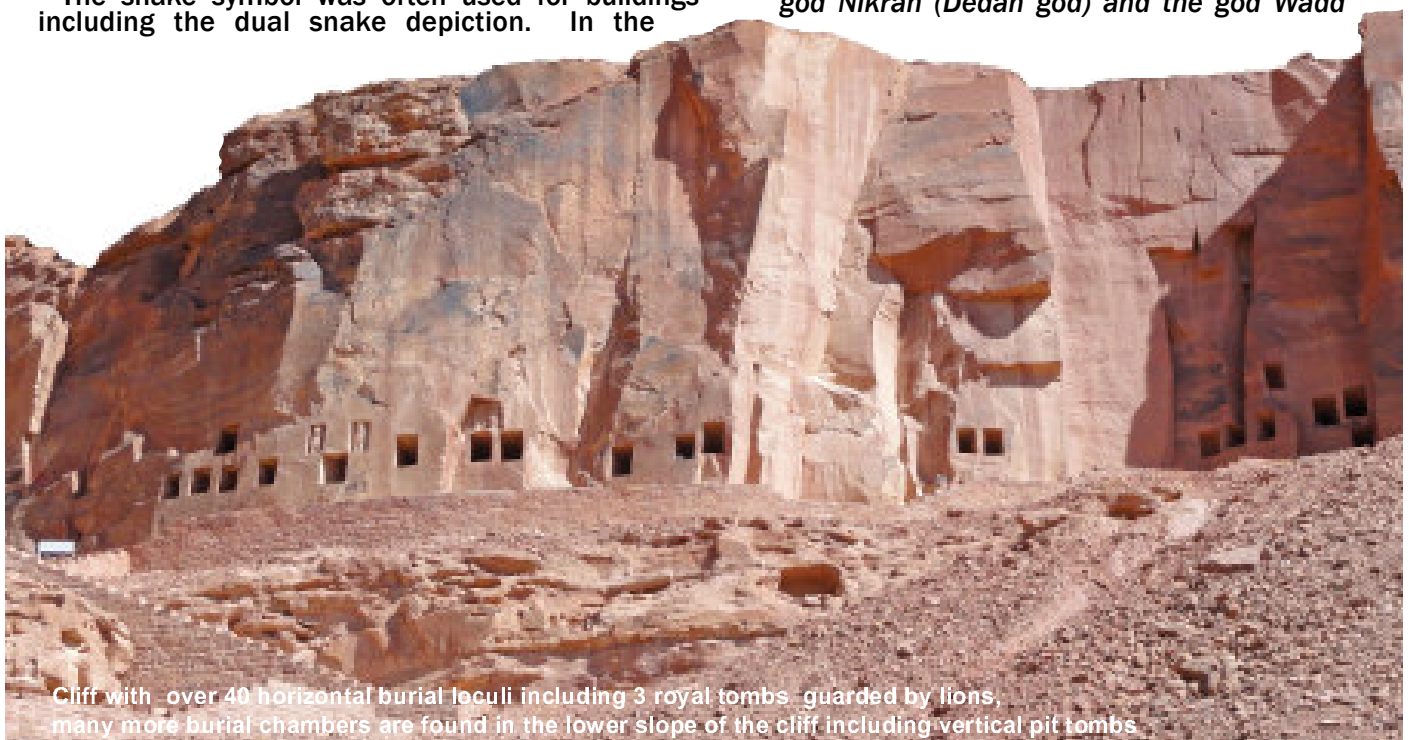
The snake symbol was often used for buildings including the dual snake depiction. In the

Nabataean context the snake was a guardian pictogram and used as sign to protect tombs. The depiction of an ibex discovered carved on a column for example was interpreted by experts as representing an Arabian deity.

Petroglyphs in the area included mainly animals such as cattle and ibex, which are very early Neolithic work, plus camel and horses, which were created later during the Bronze & Iron Age.

A specific royal inscription of Dedan king Aasi refers to him offering a divine sacrifice and is dated around 600BCE. A Dedan cemetery inscription in Minaean script reads:

"Hani bin Wahab al Malih has been granted remission of his sins by offering sacrifice to the god Nikrah (Dedan god) and the god Wadd



Cliff with over 40 horizontal burial loculi including 3 royal tombs guarded by lions, many more burial chambers are found in the lower slope of the cliff including vertical pit tombs

(Minaean god) and many gods punish whoever removes the tomb (or damages) as long as there is earth and skies".

Some stone slabs with Dedanite inscriptions were discovered with raised or incised letters dated to "hegemony" Dedan period and others to Lihyan period after 500BCE.

Items of Daily Use Excavated

Excavators at Dedan have unearthed a long list of typical, but also some rather rare items. For example offering tables for placing sacrifices in front of gods were a typical Dedan and Lihyan culture and ritual item. Small channels for drink offerings (libations) were carved into their stone slabs, which were mostly rectangular, but a unique circular tri-pod offering table was also found.

A common item were incense burners made of red sandstone, volcanic rock or ceramic, which were decorated with intricate geometric and fauna motifs and some even carried inscriptions. Various alabaster vessels were polished on both sides and were covered with a lid. The handles had an animal shape and one specific carried a three line Dedan inscription.

Unique were the boat-shaped sandstone lamps with vertical handles not found anywhere else on the Arabian Peninsula. The jewelry items in turn consisted of: beads of different form, multi-colored agate, stones, glass, shells which were globular, cylindrical or swollen punch shaped, pyriform and faceted with flower decoration or wavy patterns.

Dedan Pottery

A variety of imported pottery was discovered during excavations in Dedan attesting the described long distance trade ties and that these were not one-way. Foreign ceramic ware identified includes early Nabataean red pottery dated around 100BCE, Minaean white potsherds, early red and black "Greek Attic" ware and Hellenistic green glazed pottery items.

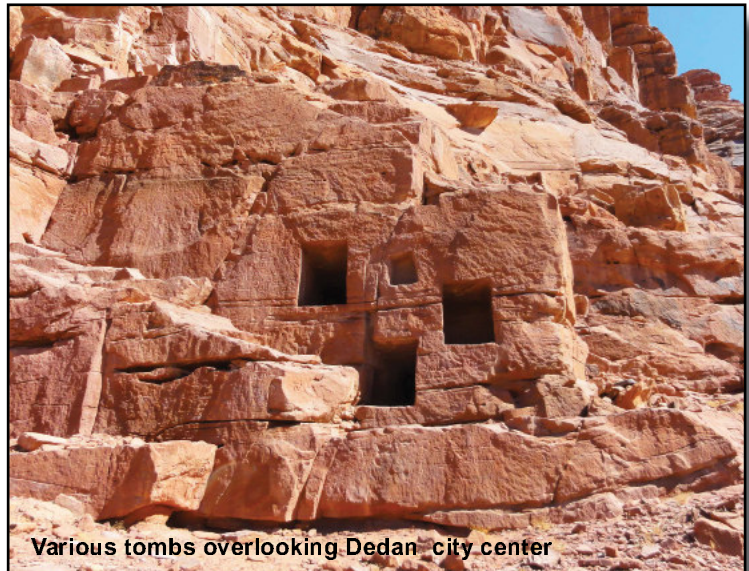
The Dedan ware was produced for over 500 years starting from 600BCE and can be described as similar in form and decoration to Tayma and Qurayyah ware, but was different in quality. It was wheel and mass produced using brown medium coarse fabric for mainly plain vessels, large storage jars and bowls. The decorations included painted geometrical bands, flora and fauna motifs in black, dark red and brown red. Decorations were applied to the interior, exterior or both sides.

A second type with deeply incised parallel lines, rows of vertical lines, cross hatching or wavy lines was also manufactured. Not to forget the common terracotta figurines of camels with incisions or painted saddles and other decorations.

Summary

All this proves that the early cultures in Saudi Arabia were highly sophisticated and heavily involved in complex long distance trade not only over land but also on sea. At that time the Incense Route was well established as a two way trading network with many tracks branching off across the Arabian Peninsula.

The list of supply goods was over 100 items long including spices, medication, perfumes and textiles. When the "Roads of Arabia" exhibition comes back to Riyadh in mid 2012, it should be a must see event for everybody. Citing a famous historian: "If you do not have a past, you will not have a future" - based on this Saudi Arabia has all the necessary preconditions to have a bright future!



Various tombs overlooking Dedan city center

Travel Tips

- Al 'Ula is worth a trip because you have 3 interesting archaeological sites in one: Madain Saleh (UNESCO world heritage site), Dedan and Wadi Abu Oud, with a 4th only 200km further north at Tayma
- You can make it a short week end trip (by plane) or a full week holiday with lots to explore and see
- Since October 2011 the brand new al 'Ula airport is open, unfortunately there are from Riyadh only Saturday & Monday flights
- There are 3 other airports all about 400km distance from al 'Ula: Madinah, Hail & Tabuk. Al Wadj airport is nearer but flights from Riyadh are indirect via Jeddah.
- ARAC Hotel is the best place to stay - phone manager Ahmed Saleh al Gauraany at 050 333 4891 or mail: hotelalula@arac.com.sa
- If you need a professional guide - phone Ahmed al Fadel 055 333 828
- Dedan is unfortunately not open for visitors, but can be

seen & photographed from the fence

- Wadi Abu Oud is the new secret tip with various sites of fascinating huge panels of rock art & petroglyphs close to the ARAC hotel at al 'Ula
- As it is a level 3 track with sand dunes you need well equipped 4x4 or ask the guide Ahmed to take you with his Toyota
- Co-ordinates of the main site are N 26° 41' 166", E 37° 52' 642"

SCTA Visit Permits

- Madain Saleh like any other fenced archaeological site in the country needs a SCTA visitor permit, which the ARAC hotel can organize for you
- If you want to see any other fenced archaeological site in the country you can also apply directly to the SCTA office in Riyadh via fax 01 880 8844 or go to their Riyadh offices next to the National Museum with your written application naming the site, visitor names & time of visit & always attach copy of your iqama



Close view of royal tomb row, possibly closed with cap stone