

# Himyarite Knights, Infantrymen and Hunters<sup>1</sup>

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Given the lack of relevant texts and dated contemporary representations, the fascinating and manifold topic of warfare and hunting during the Himyarite age is fraught with uncertainty. The picture of Old South Arabian [OSA] warfare and hunting which A. F. L. Beeston contributed (1976) and which for many years has been a standard, can and must be updated. Posing the question in general how important were military aspects in OSA daily language and society, Beeston noted that some 120 related terms in the Sabaic Dictionary prove beyond question the importance of this subject to contemporaries. But for all its merit and value, his pioneer philological work failed to take what little archaeological evidence existed at the time into consideration. Beeston concluded that the sword and the spear were the main military weapons used in OSA, which certainly is a gross over-simplification.

An update is also necessary for R. Serjeant's otherwise excellent diachronic study of Arabian hunting, notwithstanding that author's fieldwork, particularly in Hadramawt (1976). Newly discovered Himyarite relief images, new inscriptions and new historical interpretations from other parts of the contemporary Arabian world enable us to update ideas about Himyarite military and hunting equipment and tactics. Within the space of this brief note we hardly intend to recast the ancient late Pre-Islamic history of the hunt and war, but rather propose to contextualise certain key issues particularly regarding the weapons which the Ḥimyar used on the strength of archaeology and philology.

Until recently the role of Himyarite cavalry and archers in warfare has not been intensely discussed because only rare such OSA texts came to bear and relevant historical material was not considered by the philologists who contributed such studies (see, however, Robin 2002). There is considerable evidence which points to lacunae in such older sources, which result from the rarity of the sources in our young field regarding the Ḥimyar and their kin. In the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Strabo's observation that there were no horses in South Arabia at the time is a good point of departure, this idea deriving from the Roman general Aelius Gallus who invaded South Arabia in 25 BCE (Macdonald 1996, p. 82, n. 29). Based on the analogy with the insignificance of antique Spartan cavalry a few centuries before, Beeston concluded that cavalry understandably also was unimportant in Old South Arabia.

1. A grant from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation enabled the Heidelberg University Zafar Expedition to undertake fieldwork in the Yemen from 2003 to 2005. Naturally, a hearty vote of thanks goes to the General Organisation of Antiquities and Museum (GOAM) in San‘ā’, which allowed the Heidelberg team to catalogue the collection of the Zafar Museum. I should like to heartily thank my colleague Jürgen Schmidt (Bamberg) for making the photo of the “knight relief” available to me. Jacques Ryckmans provided the image of the armed man with a dog (Archaeological Museum, Istanbul) on which the ink drawing in fig. 165 is based. Where not otherwise indicated, the images are from P. Yule.

During this time, the horse was generally unimportant in Greek warfare partly owing to the rough terrain there. For this reason, in recent years the early Greek use of the horse has been characterised as humane and enlightened – far from the later brutal use of disposable horses in warfare. Were one to lament the lack of physical evidence for horses (skeletons, etc.) in OSA, one might fittingly respond that analogously in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century fortified Roman/Sasanian Dura Europos no skeletons came to light. But the contemporary records from there indicate that hundreds of horses were in use (James 2004, pp. 66-67).

On the other hand, numerous OSA epigraphic mentions of horses and cavalry have come to light in recent years (table 1), particularly during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (in and perhaps just prior to the Himyarite empire period) which show that cavalry was an important part of all armies, even if horse-soldiers rarely exceed a quarter of the total of a given armed force (Sima 2000, pp. 75-77). But their modest proportions in relation to the entire force reflect only indirectly their true importance. Analogously, the proportion of cavalry in Roman armies is small but strategically important. Developments in the military technology of the Roman age can hardly have been a local phenomenon, but rather were picked up by opponents and spread to all but the most isolated areas. The early 5<sup>th</sup> century *Notitia Dignitatum*, which invaluable maps the structure of the Roman army, even prior to Byzantium, gives an idea of the different kinds of Arab units (Shahid 1989, pp. 461-462) :

- *Equitates* : higher grade cavalry;
- (in these units) *Equitates sagittarii* : mounted archers;
- *Cuneus equitatum sesecondorum clibanorum Palmirenorum* : heavy cavalry, wedge formation;
- *Alae* : lower grade cavalry;
- *Cohortes* : infantry;
- *Ala dromadarium* : camel corps.

One can imagine a similar structure in Himyarite and allied armies for strategic reasons.

## The “Knight Relief”

In a pioneer article devoted to the collections of OSA reliefs from the village of Zafār, Paolo Costa (1976) published what one might deem the “knight relief” (fig. 157-159), which depicts a Himyarite knight and a soldier. The relief derived originally from the collection of ‘Abd Allāh Ṣalīḥ al-‘Annābī, the main collector of antiquities in the entire region. Over the years, his collection has gone over into the possession of the Zafār site museum. With few exceptions the actual finders who supplied ‘Abd Allāh Ṣalīḥ al-‘Annābī, give a provenance for the pieces in the immediate area. Since in 1973 the museum was just being built, Costa does not mention it *per se* (1976, p. 449, no. 134, pl. X for the catalogue information). In 1973 Christian Robin photographed this same striking “knight relief” in the magazine of the new site museum. There can be no doubt that it was in the museum for several years. Given the newness of the museum, there was not yet time to order or inventory the numerous sculptures, a task begun by Raymond Tindel in the 1980s. In his article Costa lamented the vandalism, clandestine excavations and effects of house and road building at the site already in 1976. This danger by no means has diminished in recent years. Until 2002, owing to the lack of a proper inventory of the Zafār Museum, pieces occasionally “got lost”. By chance in the 1970s the DAI made an excellent photo prior to the disappearance of the “knight relief,” it is rumoured into a European collection.

There is no good reason to repeat Costa’s entire description of the reportedly grey limestone “knight relief” and its inscription (*infra*). Suffice it to say that the upper right portion of the

original composition is preserved, the left and below the relief are broken. Depicted is a mailed soldier brandishing a small circular shield and a battle axe, the latter of kind known from a tomb in the Wādī Dura' in Hadramawt (Breton *et al.* 1993, p. 88, pl. 17, fig. 48, tomb 3, *terminus post quem nun : 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century CE*). The mounted knight in the relief bears a shield in his left hand, a spear in the right, and like his horse, dons scale armour. He is depicted attacking without holding the reins. Notwithstanding the original description, in front of the horse's right hand is unmistakably visible the hoof of a second horse, galloping before it. Costa interprets the scene as the depiction of a hunt. He ventures that the scene was framed on both sides by grape vines.

### The “Warrior Relief”

In July of 2005 a second related alabaster (calcite) “warrior relief” came to light in a private collection. St. John Simpson of the British Museum, provided a photo to Christian Robin (fig. 160-162). This attractive relief shows a soldier facing right that wields a fenestrated battle axe and dons a vertically striped mail shirt strikingly similar to that witnessed in the “knight relief”. To judge from the photo, the piece is approximately 20 cm in diameter and the letter height appears to be c. 6.5 cm. The letter height of the “knight relief” is 4.5 cm. This “warrior relief” had been secondarily refashioned into a classic oil lamp circular in form with a zigzag exterior rim.<sup>2</sup>

The middle Sabaic text :

- |   |                                  |       |
|---|----------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | ... ... ...J w- <sup>2</sup> bk= | mono- |
| 2 | [rb ... ...]rtn b-r=             | gram  |
| 3 | [...]                            |       |

<sup>2</sup>bk|/... is probably the beginning of the personal name <sup>2</sup>bkrb. This <sup>2</sup>bkrb is not the king. b-r|/... is perhaps the beginning of the invocation b-r|/d<sup>2</sup>, “with the h[elp of ... ”. A second possibility of restoration is the verb br|/<sup>2</sup> “construct,” but this reconstruction fits uncomfortably with the nature of the document, which evokes rather that of a funerary stela.

The monogram consists of the letters *h*, *d*, *n* (or <sup>2</sup>). It is probably complete (but one would not exclude the disappearance of a letter (<sup>c</sup> for example) at the end. One cannot identify the name (personal name, epithet, lineage or construction) concealed at the end.

Approximate date : 4<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era, on the strength of the palaeography.

### Hypothesis of reconstruction

One might suppose that initially the document consisted of three registers.

- 1/ The text begins with a monogram to the right and another to the left of the *rinceaux*.
- 2/ The panel represents a battle scene flanked on the right and the left by *rinceaux*.
- 3/ The end of the text. In effect, the text does not terminate at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> line.

2. For an other example of an inscribed stone, cut to produce an oil-lamp, also from Yemen, see É. Bernand, A. J. Drewes et R. Schneider, *Recueil des inscriptions de l’Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite* (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres), Paris (Diffusion de Boccard), 1991, t. I : *Les documents*, 1991, pp. 351-352 (n° 265) ; t. II : *Les planches*, 1991, pl. 176.

The document can be complemented in the following way :

	A	B
1	mono-	<i>Ydwm ²wkn w-²hw(t)-[hw ....] w-²bk=</i>
2	gram	<i>rb w-²lqdm bnw H[dn w-...Jrt" b-r=</i>

The monogram on the right can be read as *y + d + m* (= *Ydwm*).

That to the left can be read as *h + d + n* (= *H[dn]*?).

The scene can be reconstructed as enframed by *rinceaux* to the right and left. The rider on the right and a soldier as well as a soldier also wielding a battle axe on the left converge perhaps on a cavalryrist.

The “knight” and “warrior” reliefs are rendered essentially in the same style and reflect the same basic composition. But the limestone “knight relief” is slightly more regular and disciplined in its carving style than the calcite “warrior relief,” which is smaller in scale. The extant part of the soldier relief also is better preserved, less weathered and more readily recognisable than its counterpart.<sup>3</sup> The soldier depicted in this eponymous relief wears no headgear. What appears to be such is actually the texturing of his hair. This allows an emendation of Costa’s description of the soldier’s hair rendered in the “knight relief”. An example of a similar head from the excavations of trench z400 shows more clearly the appearance of this type of head (fig. 163).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the *rinceaux* and armour of the two soldiers are very similar in style and no doubt share a common time of origin (*infra*). Christian Robin advances the hypothesis that the two fragments (A and B) originally were one and part of the same inscribed relief. In support of this he cites the following evidence :

- 1/ the continuity of the text from line 1 (fragment B) to line 2 of (fragment A);
- 2/ the striking identity of the sculptural style and technique;
- 3/ the stylistic similarity of the letter style.

No OSA monuments have yet come to light which have identical reliefs on two faces, so this possibility is unlikely. Solely on the strength of photos, it would be futile to consider the possibility of one being a recent copy of the other.

Developments in ancient fighting methods and parallels for the scenes in the visual arts bear an influence on the dating of the reliefs. Dated parallels for a mounted warrior occur in the royal Sasanian reliefs at Naqsh-ī Rūstām from the mid to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, major documents of the period in their manner of carving and style. Characteristic are muscular horses small in proportion to their riders. Obediently, the horses drop their heads so that the forehead forms an imaginary, nearly vertical axis. The posture of his mount shows that the Ḥimyarite knight similarly is in firm control although without the aid of reins or probably stirrups.<sup>5</sup> A difference between the Sasanian reliefs and the horse in the “knight relief,” however, is that the latter shows no trace of a Sasanian metallic cavesson or noseband. Such, as the Sasanians, Ḥimyar and others used served as part of the bridle, a protective feature for the animal as well as one for those standing near from an aggressive animal (Yule *et al.* 2004, pp. 197-198, fig. 8-10; Yule, in press 2). One interesting detail is that the Ḥimyarite horse seems to have a ring between the jaw and breast. In fact, this is an abbreviated representation of the leverage bit, which otherwise would be too small and fine to render in relief on this scale. Sasanian reliefs usually show a leverage bit connected with reins. Below this, a second band prevents the saddle from sliding backward. It is

3. 37 x 25 x 6.5 cm.

4. 7.15 x 7.4 x 2.1 cm, limestone, from trench z400 Zafār/al-Jahh.

5. The latter are known, however, in a few Sasanian representations.

not a martingale (device to prevent the horse from throwing its head upwardly), as one might assume at first glance. Such are unknown in Sasanian saddlery. Iconographic and typological comparison of the rider with those at Sasanian Naqsh-ī Rūstām suggests a hypothetical dating in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. This dating is slightly later than that which Robin suggested above.

The flying gallop witnessed with the Naqsh-ī Rūstām jousters was not used for the “knight relief”: it would have not allowed enough space for the soldier to the right. The rider was depicted on a rearing horse. Such are known in Himyarite contexts, for example on a copper buckle robbed from tomb ar1 in the village of al-‘Arāfa 2 km east of Zafār.<sup>6</sup> A favourite composition at this time in the Sasanian sphere of influence is axially symmetrical riders attacking each other frontally, which seems a fair possibility here for the original composition. But there may not be enough room for a second horse and rider. The main difficulty with this suggestion is that the warrior of the soldier relief is rendered at least partially in a frame.

By the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD auxiliary heavy and light cavalry are well-attested in Arabia and Mesopotamia, the best example being at Dura Europos on the upper Euphrates. The rider depicted in the “knight relief” belongs to the heavy cavalry which fights from the saddle. Light cavalry is more readily identifiable with camel troops, known from diverse OSA inscriptions.

### The “Archer Relief”

In 1889, a sketch of a grave relief with an archer and a short text appeared in the *Pars quarta* of the *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum* (fig. 164).<sup>7</sup> Until now the relief in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum has remained unpublished. The figure wears a long skirt and blouse and poses with a staff in his right hand, a bow in his left. His dog leaps on his left side.

The inscription :

*nṣb Hzj*”, “epitaph of Ḥaṣiyān,”

is a play of words since the proper name Ḥaṣiyān means “archer, Bowman”. More particularly, a hunter is depicted with his dog (fig. 165). A related depiction on an OSA tombstone possibly from al-Jawf has been dated from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the so-called image of Kāthibat (*Ktb*), which also shows a hunter (fig. 166).<sup>8</sup> This relief is more detailed and thus illuminates the nature of “archer relief”. The main panel of this relief shows an archer who proudly presents the head of a wild goat or ibex. The panel to the left probably shows a driver or other kind of hunt-helper. That to the right shows a hound baiting an ibex. In a separate panel above Kāthibat appears mounted. The ritual hunt, which secures rainfall, is still believed to take place in Ḥadramawt.

Such rare OSA representations are important since they provide otherwise lacking evidence for archery. Military operations and hunting are at first glance related and share the same kind of weapons. Moreover, in OSA hunts often took place in conjunction with military ventures. The hunt serves as a platform where the ruler can represent himself in a positive and active light. Thus, an entourage accompanies the royal hunter to support this social activity. Excellent such representations occur in Roman (Andrae 1988, pp. 1-185) and Sasanian art (Ghirshman 1962, pp. 194-196, fig. 236). Supporting the hunt are beaters and net-tenders. At the end of the hunt the

6. Cf. P. Yule et al. 2004, pp. 200-201, 204, fig. 12-14, 19, photo taken in the market in Ṣan‘ā’.

7. CIH 23. Archaeology Museum, Istanbul, approximate height c. 18 cm, probably limestone.

8. Vienna 1998, pp. 340 et 341, cat. no. 294.

leader divides the catch. In the case of the “archer relief” and the Kāthibat image the hunter is shown abstractly at ideal moments in life and not in a narrative. Kāthibat is obviously a hunter of the ruling class, because he is shown mounted. The figure in the “archer relief,” also a noble, had an inscription and relief fashioned of himself.

But what about military archery? Defensive architecture is unthinkable without archers to keep the enemy at bay as long as possible. Although proficient with this same weapon, these archers are of a different, lower social class than Kāthibat. Ancient and modern armies have different kinds of troops to carry out different operations under a variety of conditions. Thus, an army without bowmen would be in a poor position to defend itself against attacking infantry and cavalry. The OSA inscriptions mention next to nothing about archers not because they are unimportant, but rather because they belong to the lower classes which left behind no inscriptions. Equally helpless without archers would be fortifications which the attackers instantly could begin to dismantle right from the start. While OSA inscriptions rarely mention archers, the archaeological legacy furnishes much material. The city wall of Barāqish (ancient Yathill) and al-Baydā<sup>9</sup> (ancient Nashq<sup>um</sup>) presents loopholes, evidently for archers. The greatest evidence for archers of material derives from Samad al-Shān in the central part of the Sultanate of Oman and dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE. Here excavation of some 200 graves yielded the burial equipment of numerous males. Commonly, the owners frequently had a leather quiver which originally each held some 30 arrows. Common weights of arrowheads between 8 and 12 g, allow one to reconstruct the size and weight of the bows (Yule 2001, p. 198). The iron arrowheads survived, often accompanied with a dagger as well as a long dagger or a sword. The interred were not soldiers but were tribesmen probably with a militia of their own. In case of an attack a small group could shower their opponents with a barrage of arrows.

Further reliefs from the Zafār Museum may shed light on another aspect of Himyarite militaria. Fig. 167 shows what seem to be military standards or trophies.<sup>9</sup> The relief fragment shows below an eagle standard, above right possibly a feather standard and above a curious skirted object. These recall Roman trophies mostly of military objects such as armour and weapons, taken from enemies.<sup>10</sup> Conceivably they might also be standards (*liwā'*). One difficulty with this idea is that in the Near East standards may be used for a military unit, a deity or simply for some kind of procession not necessarily military in nature (Ghirshman 1962, p. 1, fig. 2 for the sun god in Hatra; p. 87, fig. 92 for Nergal in Hatra). Fig. 168 shows the broken bust of a Himyarite patrician who bears an object best explained as a standard.<sup>11</sup> The figure is graced with a neatly rendered spiral decoration around the collar, the costume of a patrician. It and the head in fig. 165 seem to date to the imperial period, to judge from the stratigraphy and <sup>14</sup>C determinations. Given the general appeal and need, the Himyar use standards would not surprise anyone.

A relief representation of a spear-wielding figure also came to light among the Himyarite reliefs of the Zafār Museum (fig. 169). A mailed figure appears to stand in a niche, which suggest that a statue is depicted and not a person. Although fragmentary, the figure clearly brandishes the weapon with his right hand. Related are ubiquitous depictions of riders that bear spears (e.g. Macdonald 1996).

These few representations date to the Himyarite period and give an idea of the nature of the available visual material. While the military technique of the day perhaps was not on a par

9. 15.1 x 11.6 x 5.9 cm, grey limestone.

10. E.g. Bianchi Bandinelli 1971, p. 9, fig. 9 (Carpentras), pp. 144-147, fig. 134, 136, 137 (Orange).

11. 7.6 x 8.5 x 4.5 cm, white marble, from trench z178 Zafār/al-Jahh.

with that of Rome, East Rome or Sasanian, it nonetheless must have been aware of outside developments owing to the intimate military contact between these powers and their allies. For example, heavy cavalry were a mainstay of the Lakhmids of al-Hīra the Sasanian buffer *vis-à-vis* the Himyarite buffer tribes, the Kinda, Madhhij and others. On the other hand, Breton has argued that OSA defensive architecture seems unaware of developments in siege methods in the West (Breton 1994). Hunting and warfare are typical male occupations and relate directly to the symbol of the ruler as a protector. For different reasons the hunt took place during military operations, during which the ruler demonstrated his rule to the armed forces and local gentry. Himyarite depictions of archers belong to this hunting milieu and depict a high-status individual, not to be confused with a common military archer. In the same way, depictions of a mounted knight would serve to underscore the status of the owner. Representations of hunters and riders make clear the stratification of highland Himyarite society. They are the high-status bearers as opposed to the silent and invisible majority.

### Size of OSA armed forces

<i>Date AD</i>	<i>Cavalry</i>	<i>Infantrymen</i>	<i>Camel mounted</i>	<i>Source</i>
?	5	200	—	Gl 1177/4
c. 80	4	600	—	Ja 644/25
c. 240	40	1500	—	Ja 576/15
c. 240	26	1000	—	Ja 577/4
c. 240	14	—	—	Ja 577/11
c. 260	26	300	—	Ja 616/21
c. 290	6	170	—	Ja 649/27-29
c. 295	60	—	1400	Sharaf al-Dīn 32/11-14
c. 318	70	—	750	Ja 665/15-16
	125	—	3500	Ja 665/29-31
c. 322	70	600	—	Ir 32/15-19
c. 322	3	2000	—	Schm/Mārib 28(+ Ja 668)/12-13
360	9	—	—	‘Abadān 1/16
	300	—	—	‘Abadān 1/19
	25	—	—	‘Abadān 1/21
	160	2000	—	‘Abadān 1/28

[P. Y.]

### Appendice : les armes du guerrier dans les inscriptions sudarabiques

La guerre est l'une des activités humaines qui tient le plus de place dans les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique, et tout particulièrement dans celles des royaumes sudarabiques. Mais, de manière assez curieuse, si nous disposons de données multiples sur les opérations militaires, nous sommes très mal renseignés sur l'équipement des combattants. C'est à ce titre que le relief de Zafār est particulièrement intéressant.

### *1. Lances, boucliers et arcs pris aux Aksūmites*

L'auteur d'une inscription ne décrit jamais son équipement ou celui des hommes qu'il commande, parce que ce sont des considérations triviales qui n'ajoutent rien à sa gloire. Tout au plus indiquera-t-il de combien de chevaux – un animal rare, coûteux et prestigieux – il dispose.

Les armes prises à l'ennemi ne sont pas davantage détaillées. Le vainqueur d'une expédition victorieuse mentionnera le bilan des prisonniers et des captifs, mais n'évoquera le butin qu'en termes très généraux, sans donner le détail et sans indication de valeur. Une seule inscription fait exception. Dans al-Miṣāl 2/12-14, texte qui date du milieu du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, un qayl de Radmān revenant d'une guerre victorieuse contre les Aksūmites qui ont envahi le Yémen occidental, indique en conclusion :

“or, jamais il ne revint déçu dans ses espérances, victimes, bonnes prises et trophées, ou encore armes (lances, boucliers et arcs), des anneaux d'or et d'argent, de l'or en tresses ou en fragments, tout ce que les Ethiopiens portent sur leurs têtes et afin qu'ils en protègent leurs bras.”

*f-k<sup>-l</sup> ywm<sup>2</sup>tw<sup>1</sup> hyb<sup>m</sup> d-k-b-mw<sup>1</sup> mhrgt<sup>m</sup> w-<sup>2</sup>hll<sup>m</sup> w-hwblt<sup>m</sup> w-b-<sup>2</sup>ndw<sup>m</sup> <sup>2</sup>hrb<sup>m</sup> w-<sup>2</sup>gwb<sup>m</sup> w-<sup>2</sup>qs'd<sup>m</sup> w-dglm<sup>m</sup> tyb<sup>m</sup> w-srf<sup>m</sup> w-tyb<sup>m</sup> d-<sup>2</sup>zft<sup>m</sup> w-gmwd<sup>m</sup> kl d-ys<sup>2</sup>tr<sup>c</sup>nn<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>hbs<sup>m</sup> b-<sup>2</sup>r<sup>2</sup>s<sup>1</sup>-hmw<sup>1</sup> w-k-s<sup>1</sup>d<sup>1</sup>|hmw<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>dd-hmw<sup>1</sup>.*

Pour ces trois termes, “lances” (<sup>2</sup>hrb), “boucliers” (<sup>2</sup>gwb) et “arcs” (<sup>2</sup>qs'd), ce document est l'unique référence. Leur interprétation se fonde sur le contexte et sur les termes sémitiques apparentés.

La signification de <sup>2</sup>hrb se fonde sur l'arabe *harba*, pl. *hirāb*, “lance courte”. Pour <sup>2</sup>gwb, voir l'arabe *jawb* (et *mijwab*), “bouclier”; gwb était déjà attesté en sabéen et en madhābien comme nom d'une partie du temple. Enfin, pour <sup>2</sup>qs'd, voir le guèze *qast* (pl. <sup>2</sup>aqsəst et <sup>2</sup>aqəst), l'hébreu *qešet*, le syriaque *qeštā*, le judéo-araméen *qušṭā*, l'arabe *qaws*, pl. *qisiyy*, etc., “arc”.

### *2. Deux mentions douteuses de la “lance”*

On relève encore le terme *rmh* qui a été traduit par “lance” avec hésitation<sup>12</sup>. Dans Gl 1376/6<sup>13</sup>, le terme apparaît après une lacune, sans contexte, mais le sens de “lance” (donné par l'arabe) peut convenir, puisque l'inscription rapporte des opérations guerrières. La seconde référence (Ist 7617/1) donnée par le *Dictionnaire sabéen* est inédite.

### *3. Le poignard*

Les inscriptions mentionnent à deux reprises une arme nommée *s<sup>2</sup>zb*, qui semble être un poignard d'après le contexte. Comparer avec l'arabe *šatba*, “sabre”. Dans ST 1 (= CIAS 39.11/o2)/15, le dédicant indique que ses ennemis ont apparemment juré “sur leurs poignards” de le repousser et de ne pas demander la paix :

“Almaqah Thahwān maître d'Awām a accordé comme faveur à Son serviteur Rathad'awām ibn Ḥbṣ<sup>m</sup> et [...] de ... et de m]ettre en fuite toute la troupe de ces Shaddādites, alors qu'ils avaient juré et [...] sur leurs poignards de repousser et [...] Rathad'awām et ses hommes et de ne pas solliciter la [paix].”

*w-ḥmr w-hws<sup>2</sup>n<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>lmqh [Thw<sup>1</sup>-b<sup>1</sup>l-<sup>1</sup>wm<sup>1</sup> bd-hw Rtd<sup>2</sup>wm bn Ḥbṣ<sup>m</sup> w-[...]|... w-h]s'htn kl gys<sup>2</sup> hmt<sup>1</sup> s<sup>2</sup>ddn w-tgzm[w w-]htf<sup>1</sup>.Jwn b-<sup>2</sup>ly<sup>1</sup> s<sup>2</sup>zb-hmw l-h<sup>2</sup>bn w-khym [...]|dnn Rtd<sup>2</sup>wm w-<sup>2</sup>s'd-hw w-<sup>2</sup>l ygb<sup>2</sup>nn l-s'[lm].*

12. Le *Dictionnaire sabéen* donne ce sens avec un point d'interrogation (?).

13. SEG x, pp. 9-11 et pl. vi, 2.

La mention du poignard (*s'zb*) intervient dans un tout autre contexte dans Ja 700/13, 14, puisqu'il s'agit d'une rixe entre deux hommes qui se disputent un enfant :

“Sa<sup>c</sup>d<sup>um</sup>, conformément à la sollicitation reçue, se présenta devant Rabbīsalām et il provoqua un échange de coups à propos de cet enfant ; Sa<sup>c</sup>d<sup>um</sup> frappa Rabbīsalām avec un gourdin, tandis que Rabbīsalām arrachait le poignard de Sa<sup>c</sup>d<sup>um</sup> de son fourreau ; ils luttèrent l'un contre l'autre avec le poignard et Rabbīsalām périt de sa main, tandis que la main de Sa<sup>c</sup>d<sup>um</sup> était incisée avec la marque de Rabbīsalām.”

w-bh<sup>2</sup> | l-<sup>c</sup>br Rbs'l'm S<sup>c</sup>d<sup>m</sup> hgn s'twz<sup>2c</sup> w-s'b | byn-hmy llhm<sup>m</sup> b-<sup>c</sup>ly hwt wld<sup>n</sup> w-ys'|bt S<sup>c</sup>d<sup>m</sup> Rbs'l'm  
b-qdb<sup>m</sup> w-hrt Rbs'l|m s<sup>c</sup>zb S<sup>c</sup>d<sup>m</sup> bn hqwy-hw w-t<sup>c</sup>srw b|yn-hmy b-s<sup>c</sup>zb<sup>n</sup> w-tlf Rbs'l'm bn yd-|hw  
bytn s'bt yd S<sup>c</sup>d<sup>m</sup> b-<sup>c</sup>lm Rbs'l|m.

C'est l'indication que ce poignard, comme la *janbiyya* dans le Yémen contemporain, symbolise l'honneur de son propriétaire. Un tel rôle rappelle évidemment celui de l'épée en Europe, comme le souligne Beeston.

#### 4. Les armes de Muḥammad

Même si cela sort quelque peu du thème de cette note, une dernière source est intéressante pour connaître l'équipement d'un chef de guerre de haut rang dans l'Arabie de l'Antiquité tardive : ce sont les armes de guerre que la Tradition arabo-musulmane attribue à Muḥammad. Dans son *Histoire des prophètes et des rois*, al-Tabarī fait le point sur la question, en énumérant :

- les chevaux (*hayl*) : al-Daris, renommé par Muḥammad al-Sakk ; al-Murtajiz ; Lizāz, al-Zarib et al-Luhayf ; al-Ward ; al-Ya<sup>c</sup>sūb<sup>14</sup>.
- les épées (*suyūf*) : al-Qala<sup>c</sup>ī, Battār et al-Ḥatf pris à l'une des tribus juives, les Banū Qaynuqa<sup>c</sup> ; al-Mikhdham et Rasūb, pris dans le sanctuaire d'al-Fils ; al-<sup>c</sup>Aḍb ; dhū 'l-Faqār obtenu en butin à Badr<sup>15</sup>.
- les arcs et les lances (*qisiyy* et *rimāh*) : trois lances et trois arcs pris aux Banū Qaynuqa<sup>c</sup>. Les arcs s'appellent al-Rawhā<sup>c</sup>, al-Baydā<sup>c</sup> (fait de *shawhat*) et al-Safrā<sup>c</sup> (fait de *nab*<sup>c</sup>)<sup>16</sup>.
- les cottes de maille (ou cuirasse) (*durū*<sup>c</sup>) : deux cottes de maille prises aux Banū Qaynuqa<sup>c</sup>, al-Sa<sup>c</sup>diyya et Fidḍa. Lors de la bataille de Uhud, Muḥammad portait dhāt al-Fuḍūl et Fidḍa, et lors de celle de Khaybar, dhāt al-Fuḍūl et al-Sa<sup>c</sup>diyya . [D'après al-Wāqidī et d'autres, c'était al-Mighfar et al-Bayda lors de la bataille de Hunayn<sup>17</sup>]. On notera que Muḥammad porte deux *durū*<sup>c</sup>. Faut-il en déduire que le *dir*<sup>c</sup> se compose de deux parties, un haut et un bas ? Ou s'agit-il du casque et de la cuirasse qui protège le tronc ?
- les boucliers (*turs*) : un bouclier décoré avec une tête de bétail qu'il n'aimait pas et dont Dieu fit disparaître la sculpture.

On reconnaîtra assez aisément l'équipement des cavaliers sur le relief de Zafār (fig. 157) et sur la plaquette d'al-Ārāfa (Yule *et al.* 2004), armés d'une lance et protégés par une cotte de maille, un casque et un bouclier. Quant à l'usage de l'arc, de la lance et de l'épée, on peut supposer qu'ils correspondaient à trois moments différents du combat : le combat à distance, la charge et le corps à corps.

[Ch. R.]

14. Al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, texte arabe, I, pp. 1782-1783 ; traduction pp. 148-149.

15. *Ibid.*, texte arabe, I, pp. 1786-1787 ; traduction pp. 153-154.

16. *Ibid.*, texte arabe, I, p. 1787 ; traduction p. 154.

17. *Ibid.*, traduction, p. 155, n. 1056.

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## Planches



*Paul Yule and Christian Robin - Himyarite Knights,  
Infantrymen and Hunters*



*Fig. 157 – “Knight relief”, limestone (formerly in the Zafār Museum, photo DAI, Grünewald).*

*Fig. 158 – “Knight relief” drawing.*

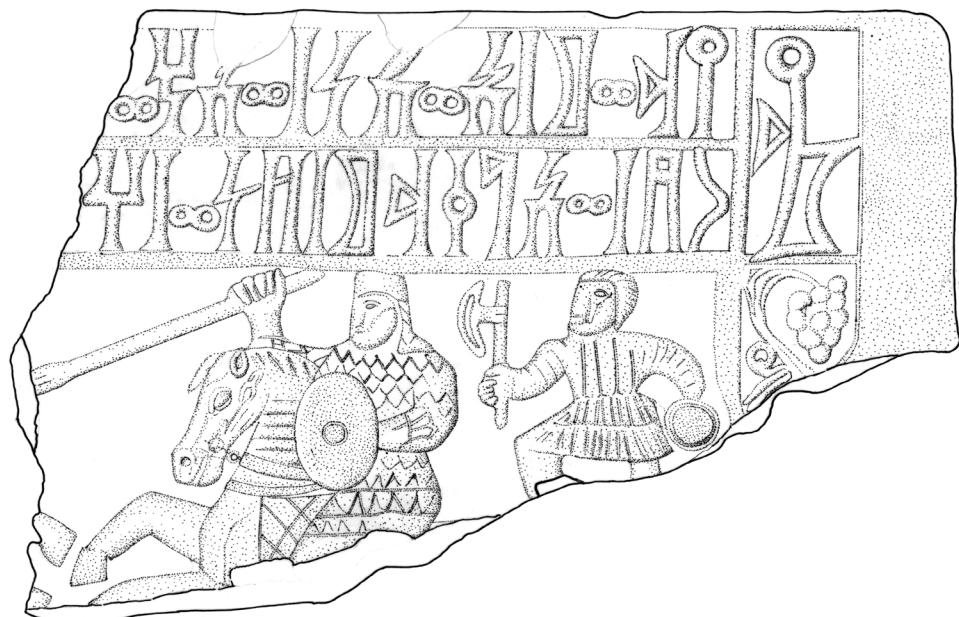
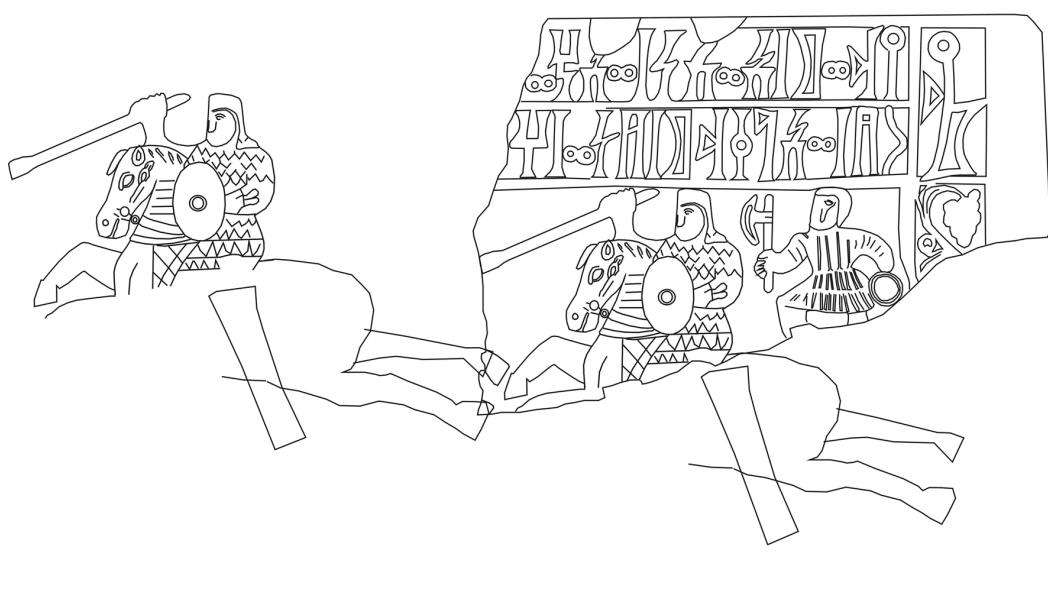
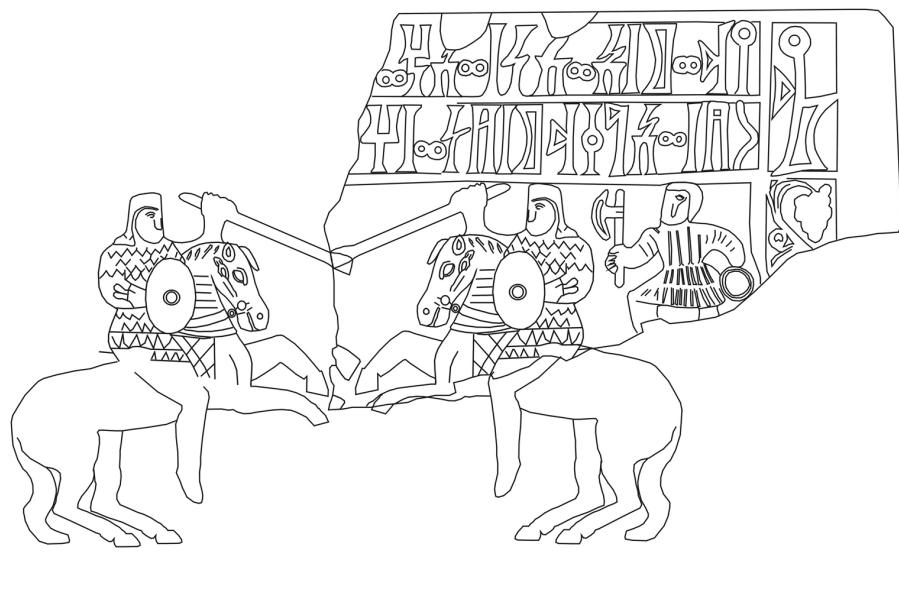


Fig. 159 a and b – Two graphic simulations of the “knight relief”.





*Fig. 160 – “Soldier relief”, obverse (private collection, photo courtesy of St. John Simpson, British Museum).*

*Fig. 161 – “Soldier relief”, reverse (private collection, photo courtesy of St. John Simpson, British Museum).*



*Fig. 162 – “Soldier relief”, drawn after photo, Irene Steuer-Siegmund.*



Fig. 163 – Stone head excavated from mixed strata in trench z400 (Zafār Museum, zm3048).



Fig. 164 – Original sketch of the “archer relief” (CIH 23).



*Fig. 165 – “Archer relief” (CIH 23),  
Himyarite (Archaeological Museum,  
Istanbul, drawn after photo,  
I. Steuer-Siegmund).*



*Fig. 166 – Grave relief  
of Kāthibat, from al-  
Jawf, 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century CE  
(after Vienna 1998,  
p. 340, n° 294).*



Fig. 167 – Standard of the Himyarite period  
(Zafār Museum, drawing after a photo,  
I. Steuer-Siegmund, zm0450).

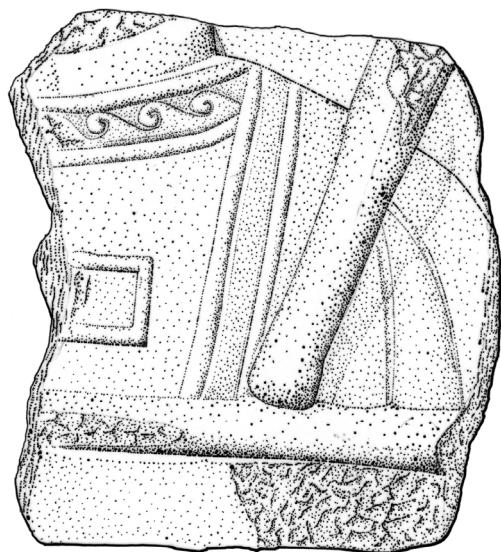


Fig. 168 – Male torso probably shown  
bearing a standard (Zafār Museum,  
from trench z178, zm2256).



Fig. 169 – Mailed figure  
which brandishes a spear,  
posed in an arch (Zafār  
Museum, photo M. Schicht,  
zm0600).