

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

THE TERM SHA'B "TRIBE, COMMUNE" IN ANCIENT YEMEN

AN EPIGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

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This lecture aims to present the term sha'b in ancient Yemen in the light of the South Arabian inscriptions. The term sha'b is an expression allocated to the major social component of the ancient South Arabian society, which was a political and socio-economic unity and is well attested in all South Arabian kingdoms (Saba, Ma'in, Qataban and Hadramawt). Actually, the Sabaean kingdom was a confederation of several sha'bs among them the sha'b of Saba and ruled by noble clans like Banū Maqār. The confederator of these sha'bs was the Sabaean ruler mukarrib.

Actually, it is difficult to define the accurate meaning and function of the term sha'b and its function in the ancient South Arabian society. However, scholars applied this term to a sedentary community with different sizes. It can be a small town, a number of various clans and communities or a federation of different communities. The basic classification of the epigraphic nomenclature system in Saba, with some variations, is as follows: (i) the individual's personal name (ii) his epithet or cognomen (iii) his partonic, i.e. the personal name of his father (iv) his clan or family name (v) the name of his tribe or the sha'b (s²b) to which his clan belongs.

Subdivisions of the sha'b are primarily designated in the Sabaean society as bin (bn), banū (bnw) and dhū (ḏ) "lineage; clan" and the family or household (byt). The clan and sub-clan was designated in the Minaean society as ahl.



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