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## He Made It for His Lord

### *The Verbs f'l and 'bd in Dadanitic Inscriptions*

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#### Abstract

Dadanitic is the name of the script that was used in and around ancient Dadan (modern-day Al-'Ulā, Northwest Saudi Arabia) to carve graffiti and monumental inscriptions between the 6th and late 1st centuries BCE. The recent publication of several monumental inscriptions that were discovered in the 2012 excavations of the site of ancient Dadan by King Saud University added a new attestation of the verb 'bd 'to do', 'to make' to the known corpus of Dadanitic, bringing the number of published attestations of this lexeme up to three. This article examines the distribution of the seemingly semantically equivalent verbs f'l and 'bd in the Dadanitic corpus in light of this new discovery and proposes a more narrowly defined meaning for the form 'bd as a more restricted term preferred in the context of artisanal production. In this way, the article sheds further light on possible cultural and linguistic contact between the authors of the Dadanitic inscriptions and Aramaic.

#### Keywords

Dadanitic – epigraphy – language contact – Ancient North Arabian

## الفعْلان فَعَلَّ وعَبَدَ في النقوش الدادانية

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#### ملخص

مصطلح الدادانية يشير إلى الخط الذي استُخدم في مدينة دادان القديمة وما حولها (العلا حاليًا، شمال غرب المملكة العربية السعودية) لتوثيق الكتابات والنقوش القديمة في الفترة ما بين القرن السادس وأواخر القرن الأول ق.م. وقد أضافت الدراسات الأخيرة للعديد من النقوش الدادانية التي تم اكتشافها في حفريات جامعة الملك سعود في عام 2012 في موقع دادان القديم، شواهد جديدة للفعل ع ب د "فعل" أو "صنع" إلى مجموعة الشواهد المعروفة من النقوش الدادانية، مما يرفع عدد الشواهد المنشورة في النقوش الدادانية إلى ثلاثة. يبحث هذا المقال في استخدام الفعلين ف ع ل و ع ب د اللذين يبدوان مترادفين دلاليًا في

المجموعة الدادانية في ضوء هذا الاكتشاف الجديد، ويقترح هذا البحث معنى أكثر تحديداً لصيغة ع ب د كمصطلح أكثر التزاماً في المعنى، ويفضّل فهمه في السياق الحرفي للنص. وبهذه الطريقة، يسلط المقال مزيداً من الضوء على التواصل الثقافي واللغوي المحتمل بين أصحاب النقوش الدادانية والآرامية.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

الدادانية – النقوش القديمة – التواصل اللغوي – العربية الشمالية القديمة

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In a recent publication, Muhammed Al-Thibi (2023) published several new, monumental Dadanitic inscriptions discovered during the ninth season of the King Saud University excavations in the al-Khuraybah area in 2012. Al-Khuraybah is the modern name for the site of ancient Dadan, located in the al-ʿUlā Valley in northwest Saudi Arabia. Ancient Dadan is thought to have been the capital of the Dadanite and Lihyanite kingdoms. In the ancient settlement, and in the areas surrounding it, thousands of inscriptions have been found in the Dadanitic script, a local script variant belonging to the South Semitic script family, which falls under the umbrella of Ancient North Arabian (ANA) scripts (Kootstra 2023: 31–55; see Macdonald 2000: 32–37 for the nomenclature).<sup>2</sup> The Dadanitic script seems to have produced inscriptions between the 6th and the late first century BCE (e.g., Rohmer and Charloux 2015; Kootstra 2023: 55).

The inscriptions that Al-Thibi discusses in his (2023) publication come from the area that is thought to have been the religious center of the ancient settlement (Al-Thibi 2023: 113–14; Al-Theeb 2013, 26–28), where dedicatory objects and inscriptions dedicated to the main deity of the oasis, Dūḡaybat, have been found (e.g., Al-Thibi 2023\_01 under discussion here, and al-Ḥuraybah 9; 14).<sup>3</sup> Of particular interest, here, is the first

1 I would like to thank Ahmad Al-Jallad and Simon Kootstra-Ford for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. Any remaining issues with the article are, of course, my own.

2 Note that, as Ahmad Al-Jallad has pointed out, the ANA scripts are essentially negatively defined, as the Arabian scripts that are not Ancient South Arabian. A palaeographic connection between all of them has yet to be demonstrated. Therefore, they cannot be called a script ‘family’ in the genealogical model (Al-Jallad 2015: 10).

3 More conventional in English-language scholarship is the vocalization Dūḡābat for the theonym. It is generally assumed that the theonym consists of a relative *d* and a noun of the root ḡYB (Caskel 1954: 44; Jaussen and Savignac 1909: 383; Abū l-Ḥasan 1997: 198; 1999: 198; Farès-Drappeau 2005: 80). However, the vocalisation and interpretation of the second element are not agreed on (see Farès-Drappeau 2005, p. 80 for an overview of the different interpretations until then). Al-Said (1419/1999: 359) and Abū-l-Ḥasan (1999) follows the vocalization Dūḡaybah. Since Dadanitic generally leaves word-internal diphthongs unrepresented orthographically (e.g. *bt* for *\*bayt*), such a vocalization could match the orthographic shape. While this could mean that word internal diphthongs had monophthongized (/ay/ > /ē or /ī/-; /aw/ > /ō/ or /ī/), the presence of word internal *w* in the form *\*wdq* in two Minaic inscriptions from Dadan, which seems to have been a borrowing from Dadanitic, suggests that diphthongs may have been preserved in Dadanitic pronunciation at this time, as Minaic inscriptions do represent word-internal diphthongs orthographically (Kootstra 2018: 26). Moreover, two Dadanitic inscriptions that seem to write a *y*, following the *ḡ* in the theonym (AH 207 and 229) may confirm the pronunciation Dūḡaybat with the internal diphthong preserved (Abu l-Hasan 2002: p. 64 and pp. 122–123), and some uncertainty on part of the authors of the inscriptions on how to represent it. Finally, as Dadanitic did not undergo the sound change -at# > -ah# (Kootstra 2023: 121–23), I chose not to Arabicize the vocalization of the final syllable of the theonym (*pace* Al-Said and Abū-l-Ḥasan).

inscription he discusses (Al-Thibi 2023: 115; Al-Thibi 2023: 01 = 198 D 9), which he transcribes and interprets as follows:

1. *tm | bn | 'bd | d'l | ddn | f'l | l-mr'[-h]* *tm* son of *'bd d'l* (of/from) Dadan made (it) for [his] lord
2. *bny | bn | 'ws' | h-ṣn' | 'bd | l-mr'-h* *bny* son of *'ws'* the artisan *'bd* for his lord

The inscription was produced in relief on a prepared block of sandstone, and the reading is quite clear. However, even though I agree with Al-Thibi's reading of the Dadanitic letters, I would propose the following interpretation:

1. *tm | bn | 'bd | d'l | ddn | f'l | l-mr'[-h]* *tm* son of *'bd* of the *'l* of Dadan had (it) made for [his] lord
2. *bny | bn | 'ws' | h-ṣn' | 'bd | l-mr'-h* *bny* son of *'ws'* the craftsman produced (it) for his lord

In the following, I will discuss my interpretation of the text, with a particular focus on the meaning and significance of the use of both *f'l* and *'bd* as verbal forms with the meaning 'to do' and 'to make' in a single inscription.

### Interpretation of the Text

Line 1. Al-Thibi reads *'bd d'l* as a compound name (2023: 116). The element *'bd*, with the meaning 'servant', is commonly attested as the first element of theophoric compound names in Dadanitic (e.g., *'bdmnt* [U107; JSLih 008]; *'bds<sup>2</sup>ms'* [AH 159]; *'bddjbt* [AH 275; U 053; JSLih 291]). However, such compound names are generally not broken up by a word divider. Moreover, the name *'bd*, is also commonly attested independently in the Dadanitic corpus as a personal name (PN) (e.g. U 061; AH 340; JSLih 356).

Since *d'l* follows the patronym of the dedicant, mentioned at the beginning of the inscription, it seems more likely to read the *d* as the relative particle /dū/ (fem. *dt* /dāt/) that is commonly used in the Dadanitic inscriptions to introduce group affiliation (for a description of this in Dadanitic in comparison to Safaitic and Nabataean, see Nehmé and Macdonald 2015: 73). In this context, *'l*, therefore, seems to function as the group affiliation of the dedicant. In this inscription, the affiliation seems to be further specified by placing it in construct with the placename Dadan (*ddn*). Such specification, as 'the *'l* of Dadan'<sup>4</sup> is, to my knowledge, currently unique in the published record of Dadanitic inscriptions, and suggests that there were more than one *'l*. This suggests that either there were other lineage groups in the area that were known by the name *'l*, possibly with different geographic affiliations, or that the *'l Ddn* refers to a more general social group or class, in this case specifically within the social structures of Dadan.

The form *'l* likely comes from the root 'LW 'to be, or become, high or elevated.' The etymology of the root, and how it stands in construct with the place name Dadan, suggests a reading 'the high ones of Dadan,' which may be taken as a local group of high social status, possibly a chiefly class or free people.<sup>5</sup> If this interpretation is correct, this usage may be compared to Classical Arabic *'āl* (pl. *'ilya*) 'high, elevated in respect of rank, condition or state;' 'eminent, or noble' (Lane 1863: 2146c). So far, all examples

4 Al-Thibi tentatively suggested that Dadan in the first line of the inscription was meant to specify that the person mentioned before it was an inhabitant of Dadan (2023: 16).

5 I would very much like to thank Ahmad Al-Jallad (pc, March 2024) for suggesting this interpretation.

of persons indicating their social status in the Dadanitic corpus have been in the form of their function or title (such as *ʔkl(t)* ‘priest(ess)’ [e.g. JSLih 055; U 038], or *ʔn* ‘mason’ [e.g. AH 213; JSLih 074]), and not as part of a social group.<sup>6</sup> However, the indication of one’s status as belonging to a certain social stratum is attested in other epigraphic corpora. For example, the author of the grave inscription for *rbbl bn hʔm* specifies that the brother and his extended family for whom he constructed the tomb are ‘free members of the lineage of Ġalwān’ *hryr ɗwʔl ɟlwn* (Beeston 1979: 1).<sup>7</sup> Forms derived from the same root, *hrr*, are also attested in several ASA corpora with a similar meaning ‘freeman,’ ‘noble’ (Qatabanic *hr* ‘freeman’; Minaic *hr* ‘freeman’; Ḥaḍramitic *hrr* ‘freemen’).<sup>8</sup> There seems to be one attestation of the form *mʔy* (in construct with the theonym *hgrm*) in a Sabaic inscription (MS al-Maʔyana 10/1), which is variously translated as ‘the one who raises up (the deity),’ ‘the one who praises’ (al-Salami 2011: 82) or ‘the one who is lifted up,’ ‘protected.’<sup>9</sup>

Within the religious and geographic landscape of Dadan, ‘elevated’ may also be interpreted, more literally, as a reference to the mountains surrounding the valley in which the oasis is situated. In the Jabal al-Ḥuraybah area, which rises up just East of the ancient settlement, a deity named *ɗmʔy* is attested (W.Dad 16), who seems to be specifically related to this elevated area.<sup>10</sup> Taken in this context, the *ɗʔl Ddn* may alternatively have indicated belonging to a religious subclass for whom the mountains of the Jabal al-Ḥuraybah area and its affiliated deity had special significance, or another relationship to the mountainous areas around the oasis of Dadan, such as a (mythical or historical) origin story.

Based on this single occurrence, it is impossible to know whether this means that there were different lineage groups with the same name, or whether *ʔ* may have been a more narrowly defined social class.

Line 2. More significant to the main discussion of this article, however, is the occurrence of the third person singular suffixing verb *ʔl* ‘he did,’ ‘he made’ in the first line of the inscription, but *ʔd* ‘he did,’ ‘he made’ in the second line. The use of a verb of the root *ʔd* with the meaning ‘to do,’ ‘to make’ is generally considered an Aramaic isogloss (Huehnergard 1995: 276; for Aramaic examples see Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 810; for its use in Dadanitic see Kootstra 2023: 256).<sup>11</sup> Kogan reconstructs *\*pʔl* (>*ʔl* in Arabic)

6 So far, the only other lexical item that seems to refer to a larger social group is *sʔt*, commonly translated as ‘party’ or ‘group’ (Kootstra 2023: 295–96). However, so far, it is not attested in a similar construction to indicate the affiliation of the dedicant. In AH 227 it occurs in broken context; in JSLih 072 it seems to be part of the title of the dedicant who identifies himself as ‘the kabir of the adviser of the party of *hns*’; in JaL 161 a, the inscription seems to be dedicated to the party of *ʔl*; and in AH 198 the *sʔt* of *nsʔhnʔktb* son of *tmsʔmsʔ* [son of] *hyw* seems to be the subject of the main verb in the inscription, which commemorates a pilgrimage. For the full records, including the transcription and translation of the inscriptions, see OCIANA: <http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/OCIANA> (accessed 02-04-2024).

7 See Al-Jallad (2018: 30) for a discussion of the language of the inscription and its linguistic affiliation.

8 Translation, examples, and references following the entry for *hr* on Sabaweb: <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=1613&showAll=0> (accessed 02-04-2024).

9 This is the translation offered on Sabaweb <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=15695&showAll=0>.

10 In W.Dad 16, *ɗmʔy* was initially interpreted as a theonym and translated as ‘Him-on-high’ when it was published by Winnett (1970: 129), but is given as ‘of the lineage of *mʔy*’ on OCIANA. [http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0036487.html](http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0036487.html) (accessed 02-04-2024). However, several currently unpublished inscriptions that were discovered during the 2021 and 2022 surveys of the Jabal al-Ḥuraybah area by the French-Saudi Dadan Archaeological Project (DAP) led by J. Rohmer and A. AlSuhaybani have since confirmed that *ɗmʔy* is indeed a theonym.

11 Note that in Aramaic inscriptions the verb is used both in the body of dedicatory inscriptions with the patron or dedicant as its subject (similar to the use of *ʔl* in Dadanitic) but also in artisans’

with the meaning ‘to do,’ ‘to make’ for Proto-West Semitic, as is attested in Arabic and Phoenician (Kogan 2015: 380).<sup>12</sup> The same root is also attested with this meaning in other ANA varieties (Taymanitic,<sup>13</sup> Hismaic,<sup>14</sup> Safaitic<sup>15</sup>).

Al-Thibi interprets *ʿbd* in the second line, as a PN, as he did for the same letter sequence in the first line. Given the fact that *ʿbd* follows *bn* ‘son of’ in the initial lineage given in the first line, the reading of *ʿbd* as a PN in the first line is certain. In the second line, however, it follows what is clearly the name and patronym of the artisan who made the inscription (*bny bn ʿws<sup>1</sup> ʿbny* son of *ʿws<sup>p</sup>*), followed by his title (*h-ʿsn<sup>ʿ</sup>* ‘the mason,’ ‘the artisan’). It is not common in the inscriptions, and there does not seem to be a particular reason for someone to add another name following their title.

The construction, PN + title, occurs at the end of several Dadanitic inscriptions to commemorate the craftsman, who produced the inscription (e.g. JSLih 082; al-ʿUlā 2). Moreover, there are two Dadanitic inscriptions that include the exact same phrase as Al-Thibi 2023\_01 (JSLih 035<sup>16</sup> and Al-Ḥuraybah 12). In fact, the artisan of al-Ḥuraybah 12 has the same name and patronym as the one in Al-Thibi 2023\_01, which could mean that they were produced by the same person.<sup>17</sup>

### JSLih 035

1. *ʿlṣr | bn | ʿmr | h-ʿsn<sup>ʿ</sup>* *ʿlṣr* son of *ʿmr* the artisan
2. *ʿbd | l-mr<sup>ʿ</sup>-h | f-rḏy-h* made (it)<sup>18</sup> for his lord so may he favor him

### al-Ḥuraybah 12

3. *bny | bn | ʿws<sup>1</sup> | h-ʿsn<sup>ʿ</sup> | ʿbd | l-mr<sup>ʿ</sup>-h | f-rḏy-h* *bny* son of *ʿws<sup>1</sup>* made (it) for his lord so may he favor him<sup>19</sup>

signatures. For several such examples in Palmyrene inscriptions, for example, see Leatherbury (2024: 90 and notes 36–37).

- 12 Kogan reconstructs ʿšy with the meaning ‘to do,’ ‘to make’ for Proto-Central Semitic, as this form is attested in the ASA corpora (Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabanic) and Hebrew (Kogan 2015: 380). This would make the use of *fʿl* with this meaning in Arabic, Phoenician, and the ANA varieties that use it, a shared retention from Proto-West Semitic.
- 13 E.g. Esk. 026 and TA 09302. Via OCIANA: <http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/OCIANA> (accessed 03-04-2024).
- 14 E.g. KhMA 2. Via OCIANA: <http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/OCIANA> (accessed 03-04-2024).
- 15 KRS 1427 see (Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019: 68).
- 16 Cited by Al-Thibi as an example of an inscription with the noun *ʿsn<sup>ʿ</sup>* (Al-Thibi 2023: 117). Note that he also cites inscription 6 in Al-Theeb’s publication of the excavations of Al-Khuraybah as an example of an inscription with the same title (Al-Theeb 2012: 161). According to Al-Thibi this inscription came from the same area as Al-Thibi 2023\_01 (Al-Thibi 2023: 116). Notably, the inscription does not only contain the same title, but the artisan also has the same name and patronym. Given the proximity of the two inscriptions, it seems likely that they were produced by the same person (but see note 16).
- 17 Since both names are relatively common in the Dadanitic corpus, it is not impossible that we are looking at two individuals with the same name, patronym, and occupation. See Macdonald (2023: 362–63) for a brief discussion of the use of short lineages to identify individuals in the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions.
- 18 Note that the translation of this inscription in the OCIANA database translates *ʿbd* as ‘he served for his lord’. [http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0037820.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0037820.html) accessed 15-03-2024.
- 19 OCIANA gives the translation: ‘the artisan, made [this] for his lord and so may it satisfy him’. [http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0038730.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0038730.html) (accessed 19-03-2024). However, it is more likely that *f-rḏy-h* follows the regular Dadanitic blessing formula and takes the deity as the subject of the suffixing verb with an optative meaning ‘so may he satisfy him’. Requesting blessings for the artisan in such signatures, especially in inscriptions that were produced for religious settings, is not unique to Dadanitic writing culture. Compare, for example, mentions of mosaicists in Greek and Syriac mosaics in Christian churches from the fifth century (Leatherbury 2024: 95–100), even though the formulae employed to do so are very different and the writing cultures are not directly related in any way.

### The Interpretation of *fʿl* and *ʿbd*

Reading *ʿbd* as a verb in the second line means that Thibi 2023\_01 contains two almost identical phrases, giving a name and patronym followed by additional identifying information – group affiliation in the first line and occupational title in the second – followed by the statement that ‘he made it for his lord.’ This raises the question of why the author of the inscription would have used two different verbal forms to express this.

#### Epigraphic Context

An essential clue to this can be found in the specific contexts in which both verbs are attested. I know of ten attestations of verbal forms from the root *fʿl* in the Dadanitic corpus.<sup>20</sup> In most inscriptions, the verb occurs in the narrative part<sup>21</sup> of a dedicatory inscription (AH 088, 235, 247; Al-Saʿīd 2011.1, 2011.2; U 039; al-Ḥuraybah 11). In some inscriptions, the verb is followed by a direct object indicating what is being made or dedicated. For example, AH 247 commemorates the construction or dedication of a temple (*h-bt*), U 039 dedicates a statue (*h-šlm*), and the initiator of AH 088 made or set up a *zll* inscription (*h-zll*).<sup>22</sup> The inscriptions Al-Saʿīd 2022.1 and 2011.2, inscribed on the same block, are more similar to Al-Thibi2023\_01 in their omission of the dedicated object. The verb in inscription al-Ḥuraybah 07 seems to be followed by a direct object, but the inscription is too fragmentary to be certain of the context of the verb (only ... *fʿl h- ...* ‘he made the ...’ is preserved<sup>23</sup>).

Finally, the verb *fʿl* occurs in two graffiti (Nasif 1988: 86, pl. CXVI/e and Jabal al-Khramāt no. 4). Nasif 1988: 86, pl. CXVI/e is a short inscription that only contains the author’s name and the verb.

#### Nasif 1988: 86, pl. CXVI/e

1. {sʿ}lmh | bn | ʿsʿd | mrh | fʿl {sʿ}lmh son of ʿsʿd made (it)

Jabal al-Khramāt no. 4, on the other hand, clearly functions as a signature to claim the production of the lions that are represented in the rock art on the same rock face.<sup>24</sup>

#### Jabal al-Khramāt no. 4

1. ḡttt fʿl ʿl- ḡttt made the
2. ʿsʿd lion

So, including the inscription published by Al-Thibi, we now have three attestations of *ʿbd*, each time in the signature of the inscription with the craftsman as its subject.

20 AH 088, 235, 247; Al-Saʿīd 2011.1, 2011.2; Nasif 1988: 86, pl. CXVI/e; U 039; al-Ḥuraybah 07, 11; Jabal al-Khramāt no. 4.

21 This follows terminology used by Alexander Sima for the basic identification of three main formulaic elements in Dadanitic inscriptions as *superscriptio*, *narratio*, *invocatio* (Sima 1999: 49; following Knauf 1980). These elements are commonly found in epigraphic material (also from outside the Arabian Peninsula), but are also attested in Ancient South Arabian and other Ancient North Arabian epigraphic traditions, such as Safaitic. The first verb of the *narratio*, which often immediately follows the *superscriptio*, in which the initiator of the inscription gives their name, can generally be used to identify the kind, or typology, of the inscription (Avanzini 2017: 98).

22 This follows the interpretation of the *zll* inscriptions as offered in Kootstra (2022). See the same article for an overview of alternative interpretations of the *zll* inscriptions.

23 See [http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0038564.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0038564.html) for the record of the inscription, including a link to a photograph of it (accessed 19-03-2024).

24 The lions and the position of the inscription are visible in María del Carmen Hidalgo-Chacón Díez’s publication of the inscription in figure 2 (2018: 220).

Verbal forms of the root *fʿl*, on the other hand, are all found in the narrative part of the inscriptions, with the initiator(s) of the inscription or the dedicant(s) as its subject, most commonly in dedicatory inscriptions.

The two main outliers to this are the two graffiti that include *fʿl*. While it is unclear from the inscription itself whether Nasif 1988: 86, pl. CXVI/e should be interpreted as a signature or a dedication, comparison to other graffiti that mention verbs related to writing or inscribing suggests that ‘he made, he inscribed (this inscription)’ is the most likely interpretation in this context. In Jabal al-Khraymāt no. 4 there is little doubt that the inscription should be interpreted as a signature. Therefore, the use of *fʿl* in these two graffiti seems very similar to that of *ʿbd* in terms of meaning. The main difference between them is the status of their author and the context in which the inscriptions were produced, *ʿbd* being used in signatures by professional masons in inscriptions that were commissioned and produced in a more formal context, while *fʿl* was used in signatures by private individuals, who seem to have carved their inscriptions in less formal contexts. Such a contrast between *fʿl* as the common word for ‘to make’ and *ʿbd* with a more specific meaning to indicate the production of an inscription by a trained crafts-person on commission, would explain the distinction made in Thibi2023\_01, where the two verbs are used side by side in the same inscription.

### *Linguistic and Cultural Context*

The distinction between the use of *fʿl* and *ʿbd* for different contexts, which follows from the distribution of their usage within the Dadanitic corpus, also fits well with the distribution of other lexical items with an apparent Aramaic origin in the Dadanitic inscriptions. In a previous discussion of the verb *ʿbd*, I discussed it within the context of other Aramaic influences on Dadanitic inscriptions and showed that the main areas in which we find such influence are in architectural terms and dedicatory objects, such as *mgdl* ‘tower’, *ʿrbʿw* ‘sanctuary’, ‘square structure’, and *mhrw* ‘incense burner’ (Kootstra 2023: 17–18).<sup>25</sup> Given the importance of artists and craftspeople, such as masons (*ṣnʿ*), in the production of both, the use of *ʿbd* to indicate the production of crafted objects, such as inscriptions carved in relief, would fit neatly within this realm of cultural and linguistic influence.

Based on the evidence currently available, it is impossible to say whether the use of *ʿbd* in the signatures of masons merely reflects a semantic difference between *fʿl* and *ʿbd* within Dadanitic usage, or whether the masons also chose to use it to claim a certain cultural prestige that may have been connected to the use of Aramaic as the Lingua Franca in the region at the time.<sup>26</sup> Even though Dadanitic seems to have been the undisputed language of choice for inscriptions within the oasis of Dadan, the Aramaic inscriptions that were commissioned by kings of Liḥyān in the nearby oasis of Taymāʾ (Stein 2020, 23–25) show that these Liḥyanite kings were aware of the utility and prestige of Aramaic for communicative purposes outside of Dadan (Kootstra 2023: 16–17). Regardless of its cultural implications, if the three masons’ signatures<sup>27</sup> that use *ʿbd* are representative of

<sup>25</sup> While the observation on the specific semantic field in which we encounter Aramaic loanwords in Dadanitic is still valid, there I still concluded that *ʿbd* and *fʿl* were used with equivalent meanings, as Thibi 2023\_01 had not been published yet.

<sup>26</sup> For a recent discussion of how artists’ signatures could be used to boast one’s craftsmanship, and how linguistic choices in such signatures could be used to reflect the artists’ linguistic and cultural identities, see Leatherbury (2024).

<sup>27</sup> Artists’ or artisans’ signatures, as a category, have received quite some scholarly attention within art historical research, especially as they relate to concepts of identity and authorship (e.g. Leatherbury 2024; Lidova 2017; Boffa 2013; Donderer 1989).

how a craftsperson could sign their work, it seems that in Dadanitic this verb had been borrowed from an Aramaic context with the specific meaning ‘to make’ restricted to the production of craftspeople.

### Conclusions

Based on new epigraphic evidence from the King Saud University excavations of the site of ancient Dadan (al-Khuraybah), recently published by Al-Thibi (2023), this article discussed the meaning of the verbs *ʿbd* and *fʿl* in the Dadanitic epigraphic corpus. By placing the inscription Al-Thibi2023\_01 in the broader context of the Dadanitic corpus, I suggest that the inscription represents a unique example of a single inscription in which the two verbs *fʿl* and *ʿbd*, which were previously thought to be semantically equivalent, are used side-by-side, with *fʿl* used in a general sense ‘to make’ to refer to the facilitation of the production of the inscription and *ʿbd*, more specifically, to the artisanal production of the inscription by the mason. Al-Thibi2023\_01 is, therefore, instrumental in understanding the verb *ʿbd* as part of a group of Aramaic loanwords in Dadanitic that are mostly found in the semantic domain of architecture and dedicatory objects. As part of this group of Aramaic loanwords, a more precise understanding of the verb *ʿbd* with the meaning ‘to make’ in Dadanitic adds to our understanding of the cultural and linguistic connections between Dadanitic and the surrounding linguacultures.

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### Sigla

Al-Thibi2023    Inscriptions published in Al-Thibi (2023)

Al-Kharymāt    Inscriptions published in Hidalgo-Chacón Díez (2018)

All other inscriptions are given with their sigla as they are found in the OCIANA database: <http://krccm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana> (accessed 19-03-2024).

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