

Preface

Giovanni Mazzini began his research on the Qatabanic inscriptions because, at the time, they were comparatively little known. From the very beginning, he was fascinated by the legal documents of Qataban, which until then had not been studied systematically and which provide vital information on the language and culture of Ancient South Arabia. During field work in the Wādī Bayḥān in Yemen, he examined at first hand and photographed the inscriptions on the southern gate of Timna^c and on Ġabal Labaḥ. A substantially developed and updated study of these legal texts is published here. The inscriptions that form the basis of this work are edicts issued by the king and the major political bodies of the kingdom of Qataban. First, however, a careful linguistic analysis was necessary since we still lack a grammar of the Qatabanic language and the only available dictionary has long been out of date. In addition, it was necessary to study these texts in the light of the different Ancient South Arabian cultures and what links them with those of the rest of the ancient Near East. Thus it is essential to approach these written sources from both a philological and an historical angle. There is a lack of general overviews of the major social and political institutions of the Ancient South Arabian civilisation and this has helped to marginalise interest in the history and culture of ancient Arabia among specialists on the ancient Near East. The author, therefore, started from a strictly linguistic analysis of these documents in order to reconstruct a detailed understanding of the content. He, then, placed this content within the broader historical and cultural background. As Giovanni Mazzini's fundamental study clearly shows, the Qatabanian legal system played a significant part in the social life of the kingdom of Qataban and is a reflection of cultural patterns that are deeply rooted in the Ancient South Arabian civilisation.

Norbert Nebes

Weimar, im Oktober 2019

