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A socio-political conflict in the Qatabanian kingdom?
(A preliminary re-interpretation of the Qatabanian inscription RÉS 3566)*

Andrey Korotayev

Translation

(1) [Thus] have ordered and directed and decreed Shahr Yagill Yuhargab, the son of Hawfāʾamm, the king of the Qatabanians, and the Qatabanians, the Council, having its full complement, and the 'administrators' (fqdır) and the 'warriors' (lit. {bih}), ... and as an instruction regarding a claim which was made publicly contesting what this very king Shahr had decreed on the authority of Shahr (i.e. himself) and the Qatabanians, the Council and the 'administrators' and the 'warriors', that:[... (2)] and some of the Qatabanians of Timna and of the Valleys, and those who supported them from the (other) communities, indeed, they met and assembled and ruled tyrannically and were ruled tyrannically through a delegation; and (3) indeed the people tabin ('landowners') cried out boastfully (i.e. proclaimed illegitimate decrees?) and caused (others) to do this in Ḥatab, the temple of ‘Amm dhū Dawn in Timna', in a really self-willed and really scoundrelly manner, and without the sanction (permission) of their lord Shahr; and in (4) deed they (lit. it, s2b bbn) ordained and decreed ordinances and decrees and judgements and decisions at that meeting and assembly (the 'landowners', all their community (s2b), both its council and the 'landowners' themselves); (5) and indeed (6) some people from the council and community of 'landowners' decided and enforced (their) decisions {lit. the ones of the oaths] by swearing oaths between themselves in that temple in their really self-willed and scoundrelly manner, and without the sanction (permission) of their lord this very Shahr-(7)T, in the month dhū-Barr in the last year of ‘Asb (the clan) Ḥadrān and the son of (the clan) Shahz; and actually they continued meeting and gathering for a second(-time) in meeting and assembly jointly through a delegation, (8) some of the Qatabanians, the Council and the 'landowners' and those from the Valleys and the Plain (Barr) who supported them, in the Ahram, the temple of ‘Amm Rayān and Sahram in Timna', (9) before this month dhū-Timna in the self-willed and scoundrelly manner, and without the sanction (permission) of their lord, this very Shahr; (new paragraph) that Shahr and the Qatabanians, (10) the 'Council' and the 'administrators' and the 'warriors', have made (their) judgement and decreed from now and henceforth with respect to all (legal) cases and judgements and decrees and decisions and agreements, which were passed at those two meetings, (11) and all the judgements which those very Qatabanians, the Council and the 'landowners', gave (and) which were not enacted in the name of this very king Shahr; and {Shahr and the Qatabanians...} (12) from now and onwards have freed (lit. untied) and released and saved and exempted his (i.e. the King's) property and the houses and possessions of...
the Qatabanians, the Councillors, and the Qatabanians, the 'landowners', from all the penalties and obligations and exactions (13) (imposed by the decisions or judgements/ sentences enacted) by the oaths sworn at those two meetings and assemblies; (new paragraph) and Shahr and the Qatabanians, the Council, having its full complement, and the 'administrators' and the 'warriors', are decreeing (14) that they have not enacted and will not enact all judgements and decrees and ordinances and regulations which the Qatabanians, the Council and the 'administrators' and the 'warriors', made (15) and decreed and ordained and ordered, and which the king Shahr did not decree and ordain, or which he did not enforce, (16) which have been written and ordained and decreed and ordered by (the time of this) decreeing, and which will be written from now onwards. Wherever this is opposed, let the abrogation of those decisions and decrees and regulations (lit. those decisions and decrees and judgements and regulations (17) and their abrogations, and their authentifications and their (the authentifications') invalidations) be announced in the Highland and Lowland. Let the judgements and decrees which have not been enacted in the name of the Ki-(18)ng, this very Shahr, be annulled once and for all! And the abrogations of those judgements and decrees (literally those judgements and decrees and their abrogations) have been constituted as legally binding, obliging, coercing, acting and compelling documents (of those decrees which are not enacted (19) acted by Shahr, the Kings of Qatabanians (i.e. the Qatabanian Royal Power) and the Qatabanians, the Council and the 'landowners'); (new paragraph) and that the Qatabanians, the Councillors, and the Qatabanians, the 'landowners', should be released and freed and be safe with (20) respect to their property and with respect to their houses and with respect to their sons and daughters and all their possessions from any obligation and penalty and harm and confiscation and execution (imposed) by those (decisions which were made by the Two Assemblies through the swearing) (21) of the oaths; and may this decision and decree be engraved on the wood or stone as the King orders; and may the respective (lit. its) abrogation be enacted according to his (22) proclamation; the witnesses who signed the decree/judgement and decreed it on the ninth day of \(d\cdot\text{GBYW} \) (the last decade) of the month \(d\cdot\text{TMN}^6\) of the first year of (the eponym) \(\text{MLY} \) (23) of (the clan) \(d\cdot\text{RS}^2\text{m}\) and Banu QF\(\text{m}\) and supervised (it), men who authenticated for this decree one by one the promulgation of its correct reading, and signed (it) with their own hand (24) 's are \(Y\text{SR}\)'M of (the clan) \(d\cdot\text{GRB}^\text{w}\) and Banu \(\text{NS}^2\text{m} \) (followed by a list of 52 'witnesses' up to line 35) (35)---and MR\(\text{T}\)'D, the son of (the clan) \(\text{HNZT}\); and they have sealed (it).

Text

1. \([\text{hg-k-m}] \text{fthw} \ w-s^\prime \text{th} \ w-s^\prime \text{hr} \ S^2\text{HR} \ YGL \ YHRGB \ bn \ H\text{WF}^\text{m} \ m\text{lkb} \ QTB^\text{e} \ w-QTB^6 \ m^3\text{wd}^w \ gw \ q[hl]\ w-\text{lfqdt}^w \ w-bft^f]\ ...
2. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[\text{nm} \ w-\text{mm}^m \ b-s^\prime \text{f}^\prime \ s^l \ w-yd^d \ d-m \ hrg \ m\text{lk}\ \ S^2\text{HR-mw} \ b-th^t \ S^2\text{HR} \ w-QTB^\text{e} \ m^3\text{wd}^w \ w-fqdt^w \ w-blt^k \ k-\text{yd-m-d-m} [...]\]
3. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[\text{m} \ w-d-bn \ s^2\text{tb}^b \ QTB^6 \ d-TMN^6 \ w-d-\text{s}^2\text{f}^r \ w-d-m \ k\text{wn} \ k\text{wn-s^m} \ bn \ s^2\text{tb}^b \ f-y \ \text{qwmw} \ w-\text{tm} \ w-n\text{gs}^2 \ w-\text{ntgs}^2 \ b-bnt^\text{w} \ ...
4. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[\text{y} \ s^q \ w-s^l \ s^q \ s^b \ tbn^d \ d \ w-s^l \ HTB^m \ mhr\text{m} \ \text{M} \ d-\text{DWM} \ b-TMN^\text{e} \ hl\text{sm-y} \ w-s^h \ n\text{hmw} \ w-b-ltn \ d^n \ m^p \ \text{r}^s \ m^s \ S^2\text{HR} \ w-\]
5. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[\text{y} \ fth \ w-s^l \ hr \ fth \ w-mhrf^d \ w-\text{ftf} \ w-hwll^t \ ws^l \ s^w \ m\text{qm}^a \ w-\text{mtm}^w \ w-btn^d \ s^l \ m \ s^2b^b \ d^3m \ w-tbn^d \ w-y \ gzm \]
6. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[w-gtz^m \ b-dt\text{v} \ g\text{wvm} \ bhn\text{ynt-s^m} \ d-bn \ m^s \ d^w \ w-d-bn \ s^2\text{tb}^b \ tbn^d \ b-s^w m\text{hrr}^m \ hl\text{sm-y} \ w-s^\prime \ n\text{hmw} \ w-b-ltn \ d^n \ m^r \ s^m \ S^2\text{H} \]
7. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[R-mw \ b-y \ wrh^d \ d-BR^m \ hrf \ S^2\text{B}^\text{m} \ d-HDR^\text{e} \ w-bn \ S^2\text{HZ} \ hr^w \ w-y \ w-zw \ \text{qwmw} \ w-\text{tttm} \ tny^\text{m} \ m\text{qm}^w \ w-\text{ttm}^m \ wdh \ b-bnt^\text{m} \]
8. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[d-bn \ s^2 \text{tb}^b \ QTB^6 \ m^3\text{wd}^w \ w-tbn^d \ w-d-m \ k\text{wn} \ k\text{wn-s^m} \ bn \ s^2 \text{tb}^b \ r^w \ w-d-\text{BR} \ b-y \ w-s^l \ \text{hR}^m \ byt \ \text{M} \ \text{RY}^a \ w-S^2\text{HR}^m \ b-TMN^p \]
9. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[b-y \ qbl \ dn \ wrh^d \ d-TMN^6 \ hl\text{sm-y} \ w-s^h \ n\text{hmw} \ w-b-ltn \ d^n \ m^r \ s^m \ S^2\text{HR-mw} \ n-y \ d-k-m \ d\text{m} \ b-yfthw \ w-s^h \ S^2\text{HR} \ w-QTB^9 \]
10. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[m^s \ d^w \ w-fqdt^w \ w-blt^k \ b-kt \ x\text{rh}^m \ w-\text{ftf}^w \ w-\text{tmf}^w \ k\text{wn} \ b-s^l \ myt \ m\text{qmnyyn} \ dn \ k\text{wn} \ d^s \ hr \ w-\]
11. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[b-n-kn \ l^\prime \ hr \ w-b-kt \ \text{fth} \ b-s^m \ fthw \ QTB^6-mw \ m^3\text{wd}^w \ w-QTB^6 \ tbn^d \ d-m \ b-s^m \ l^s \ d'rbw \ b-s^m \ m^lkb \ S^2\text{HR-mw} \ w-\text{y h}\]
12. \[\ldots \ldots\] \[l \ b-yllw \ w-nf \ w-\text{mr}^w \ w-s^l \ b^k \ b-n^\prime \ w-qny \ QTB^6 \ m^3\text{wd}^w \ w-QTB^6 \ tbn^d \ kl \ x^d \ w-dyn \ w-twtf \]

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13. gzmn\^m gzmw w-s'gzmw b-s'\^myt mqmnyhn w-\^tmmnyhn w-y's\^tb S^\^SR w-QTB\^m ms'\^wd\^m gw qhm\^m w-fqad\^m w-btl\^m
14. k-d-m\^m s\^knw w-l b-y's\^knw S^\^HR w-QTB\^m ms'\^wd\^m w-fqad\^m w-btl\^m kl 'fih\^m w-mhr\^r w-'jfr\^m w-\^hffl\^r w-\^hfl\^r
15. w-s'\^hr w-\^fft w-s'\^tb w-s'\^hl QTB\^m ms'\^wd\^m w-fqad\^m w-btl\^m kl 'fih\^m b-s'\^m-l \^fth w-s'\^rb b-s'\^m mlk S^\^SR
16. dt-m s'\^rw w-f\^th w-s'\^hr w-s'\^tb 'd s'\^hr w-dt-m b-s'\^r\^tn wn-kn l-\^pr s'\^mt 'fih\^m w-mhr\^r w-'jff\^m w-\^hfl\^r
17. w-mnk\^t-s'\^m w-\^lm-s'\^m w-nf-s-s'\^m \^y-hn-mw 'kr l-\^yf\^wn b-\^ly\^m w-s'\^ff\^m 'fih\^m w-mhr\^r b-s'\^m 'l s'\^s\^rb w-s'\^m ml= 1
18. k\^m S^\^HR-mw n-l \^yd\^wn w-kwn s'\^m 'fih\^m w-s'\^mhr\^r w-mnk\^t-s'\^m s'\^hwl w-s'\^wb w-nf\^wq w-hlw\^r w-lkw\^r w-dt-m 'l b-y= 1
19. s'\^knw l-S^\^HR w-\^mlk QTB\^m w-QTB\^m ms'\^wd\^m w-\^tn\^r w-k-d-m l-\^ynf's\^wn w-hittl w-wfy QTB\^m ms'\^wd\^m w-QTB\^m 'bn\^m-n l= 1
20. w mqmh-s'\^m w-bn-s\^lw 'byt-s'\^m w-bn-s\^lw b-s'\^m w-bnt-s\^m w-kl 'qny-s'\^m bnl-d\^yn w-s\^db w-tlf\^r w-twd\^r w-twtf s'\^m mt
21. d\^w gzwm\^m w-l 'yfh\^n d\^n 'fih\^n w-mhr\^r b-'qdn 'w 'bn\^m kn-m b-yhr\^g mlk\^m w-l-\^ys\^kn mnkt-s'\^h \^g z= 1
22. r-s'\^s\^m d-m '\^lm b-'fth\^r w-f\^th\^f\^h ywm\^t ts\^m d-\^GBYW wrl\^d l-\^TMN\^m hrf 'ML\^Y
d-\^RS\^m w-bn \^QF\^m \^qm\^n w-\^tlyw \^sdf\^m \^lm\^w b-dn 'fth\^r s\^m b\^h\^tn \^dm\^r-s\^w w-\^tlm 'y \^yd= 1
23. w YSR\^m d-\^GRF\^m w-bn NS\^\^n w- \{etc. 52 names of 'witnesses' on lines 24-35\}
35. -- w-MRT\^D\^m bn HNZT w-\^htmw

Preliminary-historical-sociological commentary

The subject of the present decree appears to be the abrogation of some decrees and ordinances which were issued by two assemblies without royal consent. This seems to be completely different from other Sayhadic legal documents which tend normally to demonstrate the unity of the respective communities. The Sayhadic inscriptions generally avoid mentioning any internal conflicts, and no other Sayhadic texts dealing entirely with such subjects seem to be attested, although sometimes (extremely rarely) they are mentioned in passing (e.g. the rebellion of Nimr\^n [Akw\^n ?/]) - see the Middle Sabaeic text C 429 lines 6-7; or some obscure rebellion in the Himyarite capital Zaf\^\^r - see the Sabaeic text of the fourth century AD Ja 667A, lines 7-9). This seems to be the main reason behind the problems with the understanding of this inscription (see next section). On the one hand, it is very difficult to believe that a Sayhadic inscription could deal with such things as laws and decrees passed without royal consent. On the other hand, the uniqueness of the present document led to its employing an unusually large number of hapax legomena, which is not really strange, as the unusual subject of the document demanded unusual terminology for its description (e.g. what seem to be special verbs for the 'illegitimate, unjust rule' - ngs\^m and ngs\^m, and 'illegitimate legislation' - s\^q and s\^q).4

The whole process which led to the issuing of the present decree seems to have been initiated by the tabin ('landowners').5 This appears to have been a sort of middle autonomous 'estate' of Qatabanian society. On the one hand, they seem to have been an integral part of the Qatabanian sha'b,6 constituting one of the Qatabanian 'estates', apparently below the three upper ones - the mis\^wad {Council - 'senators?'}, the fiqdat {‘administrators?’}7 and the batal {‘warriors?’}.8 On the other hand, this ‘estate’ appears to have had a considerable autonomy - constituting a separate entity, sha'b, with its own leadership, the mis\^wad, and the present text clearly shows that it was able to undertake important collective political actions.10

The ‘landowners’ {tabin} seem to have chosen rather effective tactics: to assemble in a temple of the Qatabanian ‘national’ deity ‘Amm and to enforce the decrees they passed through swearing oaths. This might have been the main reason why the decrees of the First Assembly acquired some legal force - now they could not be simply ignored by the Royal Power, and the king had to issue a special decree in order to abrogate them.

However, the Qatabanian Royal Power must have found itself in an especially difficult situation after the Second Assembly, when the ‘landowners’ {tabin} were joined not only by their supporters from the Qatabanians of Tim\^a and its vicinity (and even apparently by delegates from the non-Qatabanian communities [‘s\^\^b’] of the kingdom),
but also by some Qatabanian Councillors [mstw]. Consequently, the Second Assembly must have acquired an extremely strong legitimacy, and its decrees became a very strong legal force. It appears that such a trend might have led to the development of a very influential legislative body which would have been able to pass all the laws by itself without any royal sanction and whose political authority would have far exceeded that of the king, thus transforming the Qatabanian kingdom into a sort of constitutional monarchy, with the king becoming a purely ritual figure without any real political power.

Such a trend appears to have gone against the will of the reigning king Shahr Yagill Yuhargab (and, one would suppose, his entourage), who undertook massive legislative action in order to overcome it. It does not seem to have been easy for him to overturn the decrees of the Two Assemblies especially perhaps the second, more representative one. To do this the king had to call an unusually representative assembly apparently including all the Councillors [mstw gwh]. The authors of the document seem consciously to contrast the representative Royal Assembly with the less representative 'anti-royal' ones - the absence of the full legal complement with respect to the Two Assemblies seems to be alluded to by the constant use of d-bn 'some of, some (people) from'. An extraordinarily large number of the 'witnesses' (m't) for this decree (lines 24-35) is also noteworthy - they had to sign it personally one by one (m't 2-im), lines 23-24; and to seal it with their personal seals (line 35).

This whole detailed description (occupying lines 22-35) of the formal legislative procedures giving the full legal force to the decree appears to be unique within the corpus of the Qatabanian legal texts - no other Qatabanian decrees mention, for example, the sealing of legal texts by witnesses. However, this does not appear to have been fortuitous, as the aim of the 'royalist party' seems to have been to produce a decree whose legal force would overturn the considerable legal force of the decrees passed by the Two Assemblies, and that is why it was so necessary to record minutely all such formal procedures giving legal validity to the respective text.

Notwithstanding its evident uniqueness, the present decree seems to fit rather well into the context of South Arabian socio-political history in the second half of the first millennium BC (RES 3566 is most probably from the end of the first century BC). Indeed, at this time some general trend towards the 'democratization' of the political system of the South Arabian kingdoms could be observed, as has already been noticed by, for instance, von Wissmann (1968). This seems to have been a rather complicated process during which, for much of the time, the real centre of political power was 'oscillating' between the king and the other governing bodies, mainly the aristocratic council (mstw), but also some more widely representative ruling entities, including even the popular assemblies (sha'bs).

It seems that some role in this process might have been played by the idiosyncratic South Arabian order of the royal succession. Strabo, basing himself on Eratosthenes, maintains the following with respect to the four main South Arabian kingdoms of the second half of the first millennium BC (Sabaeans, Minaeans, 'Cattabaniens' and 'Chatramotitates'):

'No son of a king succeeds to the throne of his father, but the son of some notable man who is born first after the appointment of the king; for at the same time that some one is appointed to the throne, they register the pregnant wives of their notable men and place guards over them; and by law the wife's son who is born first is adopted and reared in a royal manner as future successor to the throne' (Strabo 16.4.3, see Jones 1966, VII : 311)

As has been shown by Lundin the above description appears to be applicable to the Qatabanian kingdom (1977; 1978; Loudine 1981). Garbini has found some evidence that a similar order of succession might have existed within the earliest Sabaean monarchy (1991).

It appears plausible that within such a framework the king was almost doomed, sooner or later, to become a 'toy' in the hands of his entourage (especially in the case of the early death of the reigning king), and the fact that this is not pure speculation seems to be suggested by the following information conveyed by Agatharchides of Cnidus:
The Sabaeans 'are not allowed ever to leave their palace, and if they do not remain within, they are stoned by the populace in accordance with some ancient oracle.'\(^{14}\) (Diodorus 3.47.4: see also Photius Cod.250.100, 458b-459a; Strabo 16.4.19, C778; Burstein 1989 : 165)

Hence, according to Agatharchides, Sabean kings of his time (the third century BC) appear to have become ritual figures, with a very high formal standing, but without any real power. This might well have been so in some periods of Sabean and Qatabanian history in the second half of the first millennium BC, as is suggested, for example, by such Sabean decrees as C 601, or RÉS 3951 (or Qatabanian RÉS 3878, or 4337) where the figure of the king seems to be overshadowed by the powerful mis\(^{3}\)wad, and which one has a strong suspicion were actually issued by the Council (or even sometimes the popular assembly), and only 'rubber-stamped\(^{15}\) by the king. Within such a context one would expect the governing bodies, sooner or later, to attempt to issue the decrees entirely by themselves without the royal 'rubber-stamp'.

Incidentally, there are certain grounds for supposing that the Qatabanian king Shah Yagill Yuhargab, the main author of RÉS 3566, succeeded to the throne at a very early age, as has already been suggested by von Wissmann (1976 : 416). On the one hand, in an unpublished Qatabanian inscription (kept in the Department of Archaeology, at the University of Edinburgh) a photograph of which was kindly given to me by Carl Phillips (London University) this king is mentioned (in line 3) as co-regent to his father (HWF\(^{3}\)M YHN\(^{3}\)M [III]), but is called simply S\(^{3}\)HR\(^{3}\), with no epithets, which suggests that he was a child at the time (Phillips & Korotayev, forthcoming). On the other hand, even in a text inscribed after his father's death (Ja 119, line 7) he is still mentioned alongside his paternal uncle (dd) who was acting as his regent (hwl).

Thus, the events preceding the issuing of the Decree might be reconstructed as follows:

(i) Hawf\(^{3}\)m Yuhancim [III] not long before his death made his very young son Shahr his co-regent (Edinburgh 1).

(ii) The father died soon after that, whereas his young son Shahr (having obtained the royal epithets Yagill, 'the one who is glorious', and Yuhargab, 'the one who is revered') remained the sole ruler. However, the actual power at this time seems to have rested with his paternal uncle FR\(^{3}\)KRB d-DRH\(^{3}\) (Ja 119).

(iii) During this period Royal Power seems to have suffered a sort of paralysis. However, the Qatabians appear to have started governing themselves by themselves, thus moving towards the transformation of the Qatabanian kingdom into a kind of 'constitutional monarchy' with a legislative body actually independent of the king.

(iv) Shahr Yagill Yuhargab (who seems to have grown up by the time of RÉS 3566) launched an apparently successful counter-attack to re-establish the royal authority. Even after that, a remarkable level of 'democracy' still seems to have remained.

Actually, RÉS 3566 does not seem to attest anything like the final victory of the 'royalists' over their opponents. The result of the conflict looks more like a compromise. Note, for example, that there is no suggestion in RÉS 3566 that the monarch should be considered as the only legitimate source of the Law. There is no insistence that the Qatabanian legislative bodies were not competent to issue laws. The only thing which the Decree stresses emphatically is that laws issued by the Qatabanian legislative assemblies cannot be enacted without royal assent. Note also that line 19 of the Decree appears to recognize implicitly the legislative rights of the tabin - not only those of the mis\(^{3}\)wad - which does not appear to have any parallels in earlier Qatabanian legal texts. Could not this mean that the tabin managed to achieve (at last some of the time) the official (royal) recognition of their right to take part in the legislative activities which they obtained as a result of their bold political action?

It might also be reasonable to view the socio-political conflict in the Qatabanian kingdom described in RÉS 3566 against the background of the general crisis of this kingdom which by the period of this inscription (the end of the first century BC) must have become acute.

Three causes of this crisis can be identified:

(1) Some part must have been played by the transfer of the main incense trade routes from land to sea, a process which gathered momentum at the period of this Decree and which led to a considerable decline in the economic importance of...
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the South Arabian lowland interior, including naturally the Qatabanian kingdom.16

(2) However, a more important part seems to have been played by the progressive silt ing up of the irrigation systems,17 producing an ecological catastrophe in most parts of the lowlands.18

(3) Perhaps, an equally (if not more) important part may have been played by the rise of Ḥimyar which began to acquire control over most of the territories (especially in the southern highlands of the Yemen) that for nearly all of the second half of the first millennium BC belonged to the Qatabanian kingdom. These three factors seem to have been interrelated. The Himyarite heartland was situated in the southern part of the highlands which was characterized by considerable amounts of annual precipitation and was not affected by the internal lowland socio-ecological crisis of the end of the first millennium BC. As a result of this crisis, the relative economic importance of the Himyarite heartland must have grown at the expense of the Qatabanian one which was seriously affected by it. The same is true of the second factor: the Himyarite heartland was situated in a part of the country from which it was much easier to establish control over strategic points on the coast and from which it could control the newly developing sea-borne communication network, while the Qatabanian heartland was better placed for controlling the declining overland routes.

These and other powerful factors must have led to a severe crisis in the Qatabanian kingdom weakening Qatabanian royal power and, consequently, facilitating the actions of the Qatabanian 'anti-royal' party. I would tentatively suggest that the socio-political conflict described in RÉS 3566 could be interpreted as an attempt by the Qatabanians to counter the crisis by replacing the old political system with a new more democratic (and apparently more effective), form of government.

To my mind, this proposed re-interpretation of RÉS 3566 seems to fit rather well into the general pattern of South Arabian history as we now know it from the extant sources.

A short history of the study of the text
RÉS 3566 is the longest known Qatabanian text (and, I believe, the most interesting one). It is engraved on two huge stones at the south-west gates of the ancient Qatabanian capital, Timna', and can be seen even now, albeit in a slightly damaged form (ca. 90% of the text seems to be preserved).

The inscription was first published by Glaser (1906); the same year a few lines of the text were also edited by Nielsen (1906a; 1906b). Later the inscription was re-edited and re-interpreted (completely or partially) several times.19

However, the most authoritative interpretation of the text was presented by Rhodokanakis (1915; 1924). In 1915 he published his translation and interpretation of the first 20 lines of the inscription and in 1924 he completed his work on the text when he published his translation and interpretation of the remaining part, together with his re-interpretation of the whole inscription. Rhodokanakis' interpretation was included (with only minor editorial comments) by G. Ryckmans in the Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique (1935 : 212-23). Since Rhodokanakis, and up to very recent times, several generations of scholars have made only minor amendments to the reading and interpretation proposed by the great Austrian epigraphist.20

However, very recently a few scholars have expressed their dissatisfaction with the 'canonical' interpretation of RÉS 3566 by Rhodokanakis. In 1984 Beeston remarked that 'the extremely complex legal RÉS 3566 [is] not yet satisfactorily analysed' (1984 : 66). In 1995 the dissatisfaction with the current state of the understanding of RÉS 3566 was expressed by Bron (1995 : 137). However, to my mind, the only significant contribution to the re-interpretation of the inscription in recent decades was that by Avanzini. This took the form of a marginal note on RÉS 3566 in the commentary to a completely different Qatabanian inscription, Av. Tâh I (Avanzini 1994 : 15-16). Despite the fact that this note only occupies half a page, to my mind, it contains all the key suggestions which make it possible to re-interpret the text in a more satisfactory manner.

These suggestions are as follows:
• to consider 'šl throughout the text as the normal Sayhadic negation particle, and not as a relatival antecedent otherwise unattested in Qatabanic (this suggestion appears to be most important);
• to translate blin throughout the text as 'without'
(cf. Sabaic b-lnn 'without', which is used in this Sayhadic language beside b-ty in also attested in Qatabanic. To the arguments presented by Avanzini in support of this suggestion (op. cit.: 16 n. 7) I would add the parallel b-ty qht w-?url bn S'HYM" ('without the order and permission of Banû Sukhaym' [incidentally, 'mr°, 'the lords', of this particular community]) from the Sabaic inscription MAFRAY/ Qutra lines 2-3. This text is fairly close chronologically and geographically to RÉS 3566, and the phrase is close in sense to the b-lnn 'dn mr°-s'm S'HR ('without the permission of their lord (the king) Shahr') of RÉS 3566.

Avanzini also makes two other important contributions to the re-interpretation of the text by providing new translations of the words hlsm and s'nhm which frequently occur in RÉS 3566. Avanzini argues against the interpretation of hlsm w-s'nhm w-b-lnn 'dn mr°-s'm S'HR as 'aufrichtig ergeben und gefügig und folgsam dem Befehl ihres Herrn S'HRR' ('in a sincerely loyal and obedient manner and complying with the order of their lord Shahr'- Rhodokanakis 1915: 34, etc; 1924: 28, etc; G. Ryckmans 1935: 216, etc.). Avanzini is completely justified in remarking that s'nhm is otherwise only attested in Qatabanic in RÉS 3566 line 6, where it undoubtedly has some negative significance (bn-kl h's°-s'm w-4hlm w-s'nhm w-ms°Py'm w-ms°nk'm bn brt-s'm, 'from anyone who damages, destroys, does harm, crushes or removes them from their places'); it seems that in RÉS 3566 the sense of s'nhm is rather similar, describing some sort of harmful action. Within the context of RÉS 3566 I would translate s'nhm as something like 'in a scoundrelly manner'.

With respect to hlsm Avanzini notices that 'HLs è una radice non attestata negli altri dialetti sudarabici e anche in qatabanico ha questa unica attestazione. In semitico sembra presentare il significato di "sottrarsi, liberarsi da", potremmo ipotizzare un significato dell'espressione avverbiale da soli, in modo indipendente' (1994: 16 n. 7), with which I agree entirely (cf. for example, Arabic halašayahušululišm°, 'to be free, or hāliš° min, 'free from'), the general sense within the present negatively shaded context, to my mind, would give hlsm a meaning of something like 'in a self-willed manner'.

Note that already these suggestions, if applied systematically, absolutely change the general understanding of the text - instead of the consensus supposed by Rhodokanakis we now see that it grows out of a conflict, and the whole inscription turns out to narrate much more interesting events than was previously supposed.

For example Rhodokanakis' reading and translation of lines 7-9 are as follows:

wz°w qwm w-utm° tyn° mqm° w-atmm° ... (8) d-bn s°b° QT8° ms°wd° w-qb° m kwn s°m bn-d°sl°r° w-d-BR° ... (9) hlsm° y w-s'nhm w-b-lnn 'dn mr°-s'm S'HR-mw

'wozu immer sich weiter versammelt und (bei dieser 2. Tagung getroffenen) Übereinkünften zugestimmt haben, ein zweites Mal in einer Tagung und Übereinkunft ... die vom (führenden) Stämme Qataban: die Herren and the Grundbesitzer und die mit diesen gleichen Standes sind von den Bewohnern der Talgründe und von BR° ... aufrichtig ergeben und gefügig und folgsam dem Befehl ihres Herrn S'HRR' (Rhodokanakis 1924: 28-9; G. Ryckmans 1935: 216-17; see also Rhodokanakis 1915: 35).

'Those from the (leading) tribe Qataban, the lords and the landowners and those of the equal status with them from the inhabitants of the Valleys and BR° ... met again and arranged the agreements (related to this second assembly) for the second time in an assembly and agreement ... in a sincerely loyal and obedient manner and complying with the order of their lord Shahr.'

After taking into consideration the above-mentioned suggestions (together with a few minor amendments) the text presents an entirely different picture:

Some of the Qatabanians, the 'Councillors' and the 'landowners' (tabin) and those from the Valleys and the Plain (Barr°) who supported them ... continued meeting and gathering for a second(-time) in meeting and assembly ... in the self-willed and scoundrelly manner, and without the sanction (permission) of their lord, this very
Shahr.

A no less significant metamorphosis can be seen in, for example, lines 14-15:

\[ k\text{-}d\text{-}m^\text{-}l\ s^\text{\textdagger}\text{Knw} w\text{-}l\ b\text{-}\textbullet\text{ys}^\text{\textdagger}knw S^2\text{HR} w\text{-}QT^B w\text{-}fth^\text{\textdagger} \ldots kl \quad \text{\textbullet}fth^w \text{-}m\text{hrf}^\text{\textdagger} \ldots fthw^\text{\textdagger}w\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}hr \ldots QT^B \ldots kl \quad \text{\textbullet}fth^w b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m\text{-}l\ fth w\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}t b \quad w\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}rb b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m\text{mlk} S^3\text{HR} \]

Rhodokanakis understands these words in the following way:

'Was so rechtsgültig verfügt haben und verfügen werden ŠHR und Gesamtkatabân ... alle Erlässe und Anordnungen ..., die erlassen und angeordnet ... haben Gesamtkatabân ..., alle Erlässe, auf Grund derer verfügt und verfügt, die verkündet hat der König ŠHR' (Rhodokanakis 1924 : 30; G. Ryckmans 1935 : 217; see also Rhodokanakis 1915 : 37).

'Those are what Shahr and all the Qatabians ... have made and will make legally binding: all the decrees and ordinances ... which all the Qatabians ... have decreed and ordered, all the decrees on the basis of which the king Shahr decreed and ordered, or which he promulgated.'

After taking into consideration the above-mentioned suggestions (together with a few minor amendments) this text also reads in an entirely different manner:

'That Shahr and the Qatabians ... have not enacted and will not enact ... all judgements and decrees ... which the Qatabians ... made and decreed ..., and which the king Shahr did not decree and ordain, or which he did not enforce'.

However, although Avanzini's suggestions have removed all the fundamental obstacles in the way of a proper re-interpretation of RÊS 3566, she, rather surprisingly, failed to provide such a re-interpretation, mainly because she was unable to solve some apparently much easier problems of interpretation.

On the one hand, one may say that in a short marginal note Avanzini simply had insufficient space to present her interpretation of RÊS 3566 (at the end of this paper I myself shall ask the reader to excuse me for not presenting a full re-edition of RÊS 3566, for the same reason). However, Avanzini presents her general understanding of RÊS 3566, which does not appear to be entirely correct. For having rejected the orthodox 'consensual' interpretation of the text and having shown that it grew out of a conflict she seems unwilling to make the final step and instead provides a sort of compromise interpretation (without sufficient grounds, to my mind). 21

'Il re con questa iscrizione condona i passati decreti, le decisioni di tasse autonomamente prese dalle tribù, e le ratifica a suo nome' (1994 : 16).

'With this inscription the king condones the previous decrees, decisions regarding taxes independently passed by the tribe, and ratifies them in his name'.

To support this interpretation Avanzini presents her translation of the key lines (11-16):

\[ w\text{-}bn\text{-}kn l\text{-}\text{hr} w\text{-}b\text{-}kl \quad \text{\textbullet}fth^w b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m\text{fthw QT}^B\text{-}mw ms^\text{\textdagger}wd^w w\text{-}QT^B \quad \text{\textbullet}hn^w dt\text{-}m b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m \quad l\ s^\text{\textdagger}rbw b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m\text{mlk} S^2\text{HR}\text{-}mw \quad w\text{-}ys^\text{\textdagger}t b \quad S^2\text{HR} \quad k\text{-}d\text{-}m\text{-}l\ s^\text{\textdagger}knw w\text{-}l\ b\text{-}ys^\text{\textdagger}knw S^2\text{HR} \quad kl \quad \text{\textbullet}fth^w \ldots b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m\text{\textbullet}fth \ldots b\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}m\text{mlk} S^2\text{HR}\text{-}dt\text{-}m s^\text{\textdagger}trw w\text{-}fth w\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}hr w\text{-}s^\text{\textdagger}t b \quad d\ s^\text{\textdagger}hr w\text{-}dt\text{-}m b\text{-}ys^\text{\textdagger}trwn bn\text{-}kn l\text{-}\text{hr} s^\text{\textdagger}mt \quad \text{\textbullet}fth^w w\text{-}mhrf^w \]

'è da ora in poi e in tutte le ordinanze con cui hanno comandato il consiglio di Qatabân e i proprietari terrieri, quelle (ordinanze) che non hanno proclamato al nome del re Šahr ... rende valide Šahr ... come anche ciò che non ha proclamato o non proclama Šahr ... tutti i decreti che non sono stati ordinati al nome del re Šahr, quelli che sono stati scritti e ordinati e resi validi fino ad ora, proprio questi, da ora in poi, saranno riscritti questi stessi ordini e decreti' (1994 : 16).

'And from now and henceforth, and in [i.e. with respect to?] all the ordinances with which the council of Qatabân and the landowners governed, the ones (ordinances) which have not been
proclaimed in the name of the king Shahr ... Shahr gives [to them] the legal force ... as well as that which Shahr has not proclaimed and does not proclaim ... all these decrees which have not been ordained in the name of the king Shahr, which have been recorded and ordained and to which have remained legally binding up to now - from now and henceforth, these very ordinances and decrees will be re-written.'

This translation does not appear at all convincing. First of all, I have strong doubts about how Avanzini has sub-divided this part of the text into clauses and sentences. Actually, my impression is that she has artificially constructed two large clauses by lumping together several different clauses or parts of them. I am not convinced that w-bn-kn l-ḥr w-b-kl ḥvh should be considered as the beginning of a new clause, and not as the continuation of the previous one. Note that Avanzini's rendering implies the extremely odd syntax with the indirect object (ḥvh - line 11) of the verb ys/tb (line 13) placed 2 lines (58 words, 198 signs) before the verb on which it depends 22 - not to mention that w- placed in front of the finite verb (not infinitive) ys/tb, definitely indicates, in a decree, the beginning of a new autonomous sentence. These difficulties can be very easily avoided if we suppose that this noun actually depends on the same verb as ḥvh (line 10) forming an entirely logical sequence: ḥvh b-sfṭabh w-s-h'r S'H'R w-ṬR ... b-kl ḥvh ... w-b-kl ḥvh. Shahr and the Qabanians ... have made (their) judgement and decreed ... with respect to all {legal} cases {i.e. law-suits} ... and all the {judicial} judgments {i.e. sentences, verdicts produced by the Two Assemblies}'. In this case the subclause which Avanzini had to omit in order to produce some logical sense begins to look entirely sensible and appropriate, forming a completely reasonable ending of the whole clause (the one which occupies lines 9-13, and which I would call a 'restitution clause): w-s' y h lh b-yhltwn w-nfš w-mt w-s' h lh bn-tlw ṣmq-hw w-b'yt w-ṣ'qny QT'B' ṣm's'wd' w- QT'B' fhb kn kl ṣqdb w-dyn w-twff ṣmwm ṣmwm w-s' ṣmwm b-s'myt ṣmqnmnhn w-tmnynhnh, and {Shahr and the Qabanians...} from now on have freed (lit. united) and released and saved and exempted His {i.e. the King's} property and possessions of the Qabanians, the Councillors, and the Qabanians, the 'landowners', from all the penalties and obligations and exactions (imposed by the decisions or judgements/sentences enacted) by the oaths sworn at those two meetings and assemblies'. Hence, in this clause the King and the Council seem to concentrate on the judicial activities of the Two Assemblies and the formal restitution of all the property losses inflicted by those activities (most likely on those court parties which had lost their cases at the Two Assemblies).33 The words w-ys'tb start a new clause dealing primarily with the legislative activities of the Two Assemblies.

These are by no means my only objections to Avanzini's rendering of lines 10-16. However, I believe this is quite sufficient to show that her interpretation is untenable. I would add just one point. Avanzini attempts to support her rendering with the following observation.

'Une delle difficoltà di questo testo è anche costituita dall’uso di una serie di verbi (ṣkwn, s’rb, stb) che noi riusciamo solo a tradurre tutti quanti con 'proclamare', ma che evidentemente presentavano differenze di significato, che ci sfuggono' (Avanzini 1994 : 16 n. 8).

'One of the difficulties [with the interpretation] of this text consists in the use of a series of verbs (ṣkwn, s’rb, stb) which we can only translate all together as 'proclaim', but which no doubt had different meanings that escape our understanding'.

Yet, to my mind, she is mistaken in this. To start with, none of the verbs s’kl(wn), s’rb and stb means 'to proclaim'. Not only do they have quite different senses, but, in addition, it does not seem to be particularly difficult to determine the main differences in the meaning of these verbs.

Let us start with s’rb. As has been shown by Lundin the verb ṭrb in Qatabanic in most cases means 'to enter' usually with a specific idea of entering the sacred part of the temple (1976 : 22, 25; 1988 : 4). Lundin finds this verb also in Sabaic in RES 4773 (line 1) and suggests that even in Sabaic 'the meaning "enter" should be regarded as basic to all the others' (1987b : 50). A similar conclusion is arrived at by Al-Said with respect to Madhabic
(1994: 264; see also Arbach 1993: 14). Keeping this in mind, the causative form, $s^\text{tr}$, must have some basic meaning of 'to bring something in; to enter something; to introduce something', which in a legislative context, 'to introduce a law', must mean something like 'to enact a law'.

The basic semantics of $s^\text{trwk}$ are even more transparent. The causative form for the basic $k(w)n$ ('to be') must mean something like 'to cause to be, to cause to exist; to bring something into being', which within a legislative context, referring to a decree, etc. which has already been passed, would signify something like 'to enforce (a decree), etc.' which is, incidentally, not far at all from Rhodokanakis' rechtsgültig verfügt haben (1924: 30).

Hence, both $s^\text{tr}$ and $s^\text{kn}$ in a legislative context seem to have the basic meaning 'to enact, enforce (a decree), etc.' On the etymological grounds one can only suggest that $s^\text{kn}$ is somehow 'stronger' than $s^\text{tr}$ - 'to cause something to be, to bring something into being' seems to be stronger than 'to bring something in, enter something, introduce something'. Naturally, these considerations do not sound quite convincing; however, they seem to be supported by the context of RÉS 3566.

Firstly, throughout the text the subject of $s^\text{tr}$ is the king alone, or this action is performed in the name of the king alone, whereas the subject of $s^\text{kn}$ is both the king and the supreme legislative assembly. Hence, it would appear that $s^\text{tr}$ denotes a sort of 'royal ratification' of a legally significant document, whereas $s^\text{kn}$ meant its final enforcement for which the royal power alone does not seem to have been sufficient, that is for the final enforcement the formally documented decision of both the king and the supreme legislative assembly was necessary. Thus the general implication of the text is that a legally significant document approved ($s^\text{tr}$) by the king still needed to be enforced ($s^\text{kn}$) by the legislative assembly. On the other hand, the contrary position that a decree without the royal ratification ($s^\text{tr}$) could not be enforced ($s^\text{kn}$) does not appear to have pertained - a special, rather complicated act, formally prohibiting the final enactment ($s^\text{kn}$) seems to have been necessary to strip the documents, which the king had refused to approve, of their legal force. The general implication of the text is that the final enforcement ($s^\text{kn}$) of the document by the supreme legislative assembly was more important than its royal ratification ($s^\text{tr}$).

Hence, the original impression produced by the etymology of the respective verbs appears to be supported by the text, and I would suggest that $s^\text{tr}$ in a legislative context refers to some preliminary ratification of a legally significant document (being a royal prerogative in the Qatabanian kingdom), whereas $s^\text{kn}$ denotes a significantly more important legislative action - the final enforcement of a decree, etc. which could not be executed by the king alone (at least not in the period of RÉS 3566).

Thus, $s^\text{tr}$ and $s^\text{kn}$ denote two different 'ratifying' actions. On the other hand, $s^\text{t}$ (together with such verbs as e.g. $s^\text{hr}$, or $t$) seems to refer to an entirely different stage of the legislative process. Actually, it is difficult to understand why Avanzini was unable to provide an adequate translation of this verb, because the verb $s^\text{t}$ occurs quite frequently in the Sayhadic inscriptions and its meaning in legislative contexts seems to be well established, i.e. 'to decree' (Ricks 1989: 178); 'decree, ordain' (Beeston et al. 1982: 151); 'decree' (Biella 1982: 542); 'décétrer, ordonner' (Arbach 1993: 98). However, although in general I agree with these renderings, I would suggest that a more accurate reading might be 'to produce a legal normative text of $m$ type'. In this case this verb would belong to quite a large class of the legislative/legal verbs each of which has a corresponding noun denoting the textual result of the legislative/legal action; in RÉS 3566 we find examples of this class of verbs in $f$ (to produce $f$, judgments [including court judgments?]), $s^\text{hr}$ (to produce decrees $m$), $t$ (to produce ordinances $t$), $s^\text{h}$ (to produce regulations $h$). As regards $s^\text{t}$ this appears very likely in respect to Sabaic and Madhābic where this legislative verb occurs together with the noun (m$mb$t, $s^\text{tr}$, decree, ordinance') denoting the textual result of the respective legislative action. However, this noun does not seem to be attested in Qatabanic, and in RÉS 3566 in sequences of the type $f$ $w$ $m$ $w$ $w$ $t$ $w$ $f$ $m$ $w$ $h$ $w$ $f$ $w$ $s^\text{t}$ we find nouns corresponding to all the legislative verbs except $s^\text{t}$. Hence, the other possibility is that unlike in Sabaic and Madhābic where it seems to be a 'specialized' legislative verb denoting the issuing
of a decree of a certain type (mḥt), in Qatabanic s'ṭb may well be a 'general' legislative verb meaning something like 'to decree', denoting the issuing of any legally significant texts, not necessarily of one particular type.

From this it will be apparent that s'ṭb (together with s'ṭhr, sft, etc.), on the one hand, and s'ṭrb with s'kn, on the other, belong to two different classes of Qatabanic legislative verbs: the first denotes the issuing of legally significant texts (decrees, ordinances, etc.), whereas the second signifies the ratification and enforcement of such decrees, etc.

Avanzini's failure to identify the difference in the meaning of the verbs s'ṭrb, s'kn and s'ṭb is one of the principal causes of her failure to achieve an adequate rendering of RÉS 3566, since the text is built to a considerable degree around an important feature of Qatabanic legislative practice: a decree passed by a legislative assembly and/or a competent official could be, or could not be ratified (s'ṭrb) by the king, and finally it could be, or could not be enforced (s'kn) by the supreme legislative assembly.

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A full philological commentary to RÉS 3566 would occupy several times as many pages as I have used. However, limitations of space prohibit the addition of any further commentaries and, consequently, this paper can be considered simply as a preliminary re-edition of RÉS 3566.

Notes
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1 The explanations in round brackets are those of the authors of the decree and not of the editor.

2 Unfortunately, the beginning of line 3 is situated in the least accessible part of the upper stone. It seems always to be covered by shadow at those times of the day when it is possible to make legible photographs of the rest of the text. Consequently, on the basis of all the photographs which I could consult (including the very good ones kindly sent to me by Dr Christian J. Robin) it appears entirely impossible to estimate the correct number of signs missing at the beginning of line 3. However, Robin's photographs show quite clearly a considerable lacuna (not less than 3 signs) at the end of line 2 which all the previous editors of the text do not appear to have noticed. Hence, Rhodokanakis' conjecture k-ḥy-dm[r]m (1924 : 22 - accepted by Conti Rossini [1931 : 90-1]; G. Ryckmans [1935 : 213]; Beeston [1950 : 265-6]; Ricks [1989 : 83], etc.) appears untenable as it implies that only one sign is missing in the text here; k-ḥy-d-m is evidently the well known combination k-ḥd-m widely used in the Qatabanian decrees (including the present one - lines 9, 14, 19) to introduce the text of the decree or its new paragraph (RÉS 3854 line 2; 4337A lines 7, 17, 22; see also e.g. Lundin 1987a : 48) with the enclitic particle 'y (unusually frequently employed in RÉS 3566) inserted between k- and -d' (incidentally, the use of 'y in conjunction with k-d-m is also attested in RÉS 3566 on line 9).

3 The only proposed rendering for ngs² seems to be 'Steuern auferlegen, fordern / to demand, impose tribute, taxes' (Glaser 1906 : 176; Rhodokanakis 1915 : 34; 1924 : 40; G. Ryckmans 1935 : 216; Ricks 1989 : 103) supported by such etymological references as Hebrew nōgēš, 'ruler, exactor of tribute', and Ethiopian nāgsa, 'to reign'. However, it is useful to examine a wider range of meanings in Hebrew: nāgaš - 'drängen, treiben (zur Arbeit od. die Arbeiter); misshandeln; eintreiben, dringlich einfordern (Tribut); brandschatzen; eintreiben (eine Schuld);
zusammentreiben, -halten (eine Heerde, ein Heer); 

nögeh - 'Antreiber, Eseltreiber; Führer, Herrscher, Tyrann' (Fürst 1876, ii: 15, see also, for example, Koehler & Baumgartner 1958: 594 - 'oppressor, tyrant'). The general impression is immediately that the basic meaning here is 'to drive cattle.' Incidentally, this had already been noticed by Rhodokanakis who cites Arabic 

dağasa = tarada (1924: 40, n. 2). See also dialectical Yemeni 
munag'ish, 'moving, stirring, rousing, stimulating,' (Piamenta 1991: 479). From this we can observe a logical development 'to drive (the cattle) > 'to rule (the people)'; 'cattle' driver > 'ruler of the people', but also, another no less logical evolution towards 'to mishandle', on the one hand, and to 'oppressor, tyrant', on the other. Nothing seems to exclude the possibility of such a semantic development in Qatabanics which seems to have produced verbs to denote both the 'illegitimate, tyrannical rule' (ngs²) and the submission to such a rule (ntgs²).

The proposed renderings of šq are not so far removed from one another - 'ausrufen (promulgieren)'; 'zur Kenntnis brachen'; 'to announce' (Rhodokanakis 1915: 34; 1924: 28; G. Ryckmans 1935: 216; Ricks 1989: 137) supported by such etymological reference as Hebrew šā'aq, 'to cry, call out, call', which can be very easily augmented by the data of such languages as Jibbáli, Soqotri, Mehri or Ḥarsúsí where the verb šz(c)q also has such meanings as 'to shout, yell, cry, cry out' (Johnstone 1977: 113; 1981: 234; 1987: 356; Leslau 1938: 355).

Note, however, that this may not mean simply a neutral announcing of something in a loud voice. Taking into consideration this basic range of meanings one should not really be surprised to find in Hebrew šā'aq: denoting also 'laut rufen, prahlerisch u. grossprecherisch' (Fürst 1876, ii: 281) - 'to shout loudly in a boastful manner'. Does it not look like an entirely appropriate term for a 'royalist party' to denote the 'demagogic' political opponents?

Ricks (1989: 77) ascribes to Conti Rossini (1931: 159) the rendering of lbn as 'landowners' on the basis of the southern Arabic dialectal 
labyin ('patron of farmers'). However, this very rendering was proposed by Rhodokanakis (1924: 36) a few years before Conti Rossini.

Judging, for example, by lines 8, 11 and 19 of the present text. It should be mentioned that Rhodokanakis had arrived at this conclusion (1924: 36).


{bt²} The suggested rendering of bt² as 'warriors' is extremely hypothetical. Most of the previous interpretations simply left it without any translation (Rhodokanakis 1915; 1924; G. Ryckmans 1935: 216-20; Ricks 1989: 34, etc.). Indeed, in addition to this text the term only occurs in the inscription RÉS 3878 line 2. The context of these inscriptions allows one to understand only that the term denotes one of the upper Qatabanian estates without conveying any of its actual characteristics. Bron compares the Qatabanic bt² with Hebrew betála ('girl') and Akkadian batál ('young man') (Bron 1995: 138). Similar comparisons are made by Diakonoff & Kogan (forthcoming). Here one may recall that the age-gender group of the 'young men' sometimes tends to get transformed into the estate/caste/stratum of 'warriors' and 'war leaders' - cf., for example, ancient Greek méirax ('a young man/girl'), Old Indian márýa ('a [warlike] young man') and Ancient Persian marikâ ('free high-status warrior') - see, for example, Kullanda 1989; 1993; and especially Ivanchik & Kullanda 1991: 199-201; Kullanda 1992: ca. 56-104; 1995: 106-7ff.

The cases when sha'bbs denote in the Sayhadic text anything except territorial communities of various levels are extremely rare, though not completely unknown. In ZI 22 a person identifying himself as tly jfrs² mlk², 'the royal horseman', mentions s²b-hm² w-twl², 'their sha'b, the horsemen'. The fact that this person does not mention his clan affiliation leads one to suppose that he and his fellows were situated outside the normal clan and tribal organization: thus their community of the horsemen acted as a certain substitute for the normal sha'b (see, for example, Robin 1978: 46, 50). The author of Ghul B (a private letter in the cursive script - Beeston 1989: 17; J. Ryckmans 1993) mentions addressing his correspondent bt-k w-s²b-hw², 'your house and its
sha'b, community' (line 2). This usage very likely reflects unofficial, colloquial, non-epigraphic style which is known only in a few published documents in 'cursive' (minuscule) script.

It should be stressed, however, that the expression ms'wd w-fqdt w-bt occurs in only one other inscription (RÉS 3878) and from the context it is not clear whether these were three different 'estates', or if the 'administrators' (fqdt) and the 'warriors' (bt) constituted two categories of the Council members. The point here is that, taking into consideration the Sayhadic syntax, ms'wd w-fqdt w-bt could mean both 'the Council, administrators and warriors' and 'the Council, i.e. (both) the administrators and the warriors'.

Lines 11-13 and 19-21 might suggest some probable causes of the success of the 'royalist counter-attack'. According to these lines some decisions of the Two Assemblies seem to have affected the material interests of a section of Qatabanian society (and, incidentally, the material interests of the king too, as suggested by line 12), imposing on their property unspecified ḏb w-dyn w-twtf ('penalties and obligations and exactions'). Of course, we can only guess at the circumstances. Could this imply confiscation of some property belonging to members of some Qatabanian estates (e.g. a sort of agrarian reform)? Or could this just mean the imposition of new taxes (including 'extraordinary' ones), or the imposing of the taxes upon such groups and persons who had been exempted from taxation before? In any case the above-mentioned lines suggest that the king managed to get some support from a certain section of the Qatabanians by the annulment of the 'penalties and obligations and exactions' imposed on their property by the Two Assemblies. However, one may also offer here another interpretation of the enigmatic 'penalties and obligations and exactions' imposed on the property of some Qatabanians by the Two Assemblies which is less dramatic in sociological terms but, perhaps, generally more plausible. The point is that the Two Assemblies seem to have constituted themselves not only as the supreme legislative bodies but also as the supreme judicial ones as well (incidentally, such a practice has Classical parallels - cf., for example, the ancient Roman comitia 'popular assemblies' which had both the supreme legislative authority and the supreme judicial one [Dozhdev 1996: 85]). Note that among the decisions undertaken by the Two Assemblies the authors of RÉS 3566 constantly mention ḥ ('court judgements' - lines 5, 10-11, 14-18); line 10 of the text even mentions directly ḥ, 'legal cases' considered at the Two Assemblies. One may further notice that in the clause principally concerned with releasing the Qatabanians' possessions 'from all the penalties and obligations and exactions' (lines 9-13) this is referred to in direct connection with the mention of ḥ, 'legal cases', and ḥ, 'court judgements' (no doubt, concerning the above mentioned legal cases). This, of course, suggests that the 'penalties and obligations and exactions' may well have been the ones imposed by the Assemblies on those parties who lost their cases (and whom the 'royalists' would naturally consider as their potential allies). Note that among the 'objects' protected by the Decree from the decisions (judicial sentences?) of the Two Assemblies, line 20 mentions bn-s'm, 'their [i.e. the Qatabanians] sons', which could suggest that the Two Assemblies might have issued some death sentences (this of course is not the only possible interpretation - one could as well suppose that the line implies, for example, the annulment of a sort of debt slavery, when, say a head of a party which lost the case would have to sell his son/daughter to meet the sum which he had to pay as a result of the lost case, etc.). However, the very fact that the king's property appears to be mentioned (line 12) among possessions freed by the Decree from the 'penalties, obligations and exactions' imposed by the Two Assemblies would seem to suggest that the decisions of the Two Assemblies implied some really profound changes to the socio-political system of the Qatabanian kingdom. Even if what was implied was not a sort of 'agrarian reform' (some redistribution of property on a new basis), or the imposition of taxes on social groups exempted from them before (including the king himself), even if what was
implied was just the establishment of a new
supreme judicial authority, it would have meant
real legal equality for Qatabanian citizens (when
the king himself could lose a legal case at a
democratically organized assembly acting as a
supreme court of law), it would have meant the
establishment of a democratically organized
political body placed far higher than the king.
Summing up, it should be stated that the text of
RÉS 3566 leaves no doubt that the Two
Assemblies assumed supreme judicial authority
in the country; however, it also suggests that they
initiated some profound socio-political (and
possibly even socio-economic) reforms. In any
case what could be maintained is that although
the text of RÉS 3566 does not specify clearly the
contents of the Two Assemblies' decisions, it
leaves no doubt that they implied a radical
transformation of the Qatabanian socio-political
system, its profound democratization.

Their list appears to include the representatives of
all the leading Qatabanian clans.

Most likely, of course, its 'cursive' (minuscule)
version on the wooden sticks (the fact that the
decree was supposed to be recorded both on the
wood and stone is also mentioned in the text, line
21).

The possibility of the temples playing an
important role in the process of the restricting of
the king's powers through their oracles looks
rather plausible in the case of ancient South
Arabia. It seems remarkable that the 'anti-royal
party' with its actions as depicted in our text also
appears to attempt to counter the royal authority
with that of the 'federal' temples.

Or, in ancient South Arabian terms, rather 'wax-
stamped'.

J. Ryckmans 1951 : 331; Bowen 1958a : 35;
Irvine 1973 : 301; Robin 1982a, I : 98; 1982b : 17;
1984 : 212; Crone 1987 : 23-36; Audouin,
Breton & Robin 1988 : 74, etc.

It seems to have been caused partially by the
degradation of the natural plant cover of the
western slopes of the Yemeni mountains due
both to the anthropogenic factors and probable
climate change (see, for example, Robin 1991 :
88).

(Bowen 1958b; Serjeant 1960 : 583; Piotrovskiy
& Piotrovskaya 1984 : 107; Robin 1984 : 220-1;
1991 : 88; Sauer et al. 1988 : 102, etc.). In
addition, one of its likely causes is 'an increase in
the saline content of the soils and clays due to
centuries of intensive irrigation' (comparable to
the well known Mesopotamian case) which has
been shown to have taken place at least in the
Wadi al-Jubah which, incidentally, belonged to
the Qatabanian kingdom for most of the second
half of the first millennium BC (Sauer et al. 1988 :
107).

Rhodokanakis 1915 : 33-49; 1924; Montgomery
1928; Conti Rossini 1931 : no. 92; G. Ryckmans
1935 : 212-23; 1951 : 126, pl. 4; Beeston 1950 :
265-6; Jamme 1972 : 58-9; Ricks 1989; Avanzini

Montgomery 1928; Conti Rossini 1931 : no. 92;
4; Beeston 1950 : 265-6; Jamme 1972 : 58-9;
Ricks 1989.

The principal reason for my dissatisfaction with
Avanzini's interpretation is that it artificially
'smoothes' over (for no discernible reason) the
true level of the conflict portrayed by RÉS 3566,
presenting it as significantly less intense than, in
my view, it actually was.

This is not apparent in Avanzini's text because
most of the words in question are replaced by
three dots in her quotation.

As has been mentioned above, this seems to have
been a reasonable (and effective) step on the part
of the 'royalist party' aimed at acquiring allies
among those court factions which had lost cases,
thus splitting the power base of the Two
Assemblies, most notably the 'landowners' - lines
12 and 19 appear to imply that some 'landowners'
had also lost their court cases at the Two
Assemblies. Incidentally, the Decree mentions
the Qatabanians' 'sons' (bn-s'lm - line 20) among
those to be protected from the Two Assemblies'
decisions and this implies that the Decree also
annuls the death sentences passed by the Two
Assemblies during their tenure of the supreme
judicial authority within the Qatabanian
kingdom.

The interpretation of s'rb as 'to proclaim' suggested already by Rhodokanakis on the basis of
Arabic d'raba (1915 : 47) and accepted by
subsequent scholars including Ricks (1989 : 124) and Avanzini (1994 : 16), seems to be an anachronistic mistake. In Arabic we can observe the semantic development 'to express something in clear Arabic > to express something (in general) > to proclaim' - note, incidentally, that in the earliest known text where the expression 'the Arabic tongue, language' (lisân ʿArabi) occurs, it already occurs as lisân ʿArabi mubīn, [the] clear Arabic tongue', (al-Qurān XVI:103); note that in all the cases when ʿArabi occurs in this Holy Text in the sense of 'Arabic' (and not 'Arab', or 'Arabian') it has connotations of 'clear' (XII:2; XIII:37; XIX:97; XX:113; XXVI:195; XXXIX:28; XLII:3, 44; XLI:7; XLIII:3; XLIV:58; XLVI:12). But it is evident that a development 'to express something in language X > to express something clearly' could only occur within language X. We find, for example, a similar development in German: Middle High German diu, 'German' > Middle High German bediuen, 'make clear, intelligible' > Modern German beuden. But in Slavic languages speaking in German (pomonetski) would correlate with speaking unclearly, unintelligibly, indistinctly, inarticulately, with mumbling, etc. (Vasmer 1987 : 62) - note also in Arabic ʾaqām (non-Arabs, foreigners; Persians); inʾaʿgama (be unclear, unintelligible); ʿuğmah, foreign speech: vagueness, incomprehensibility, etc. Hence, there do not seem to be any grounds at all to expect the semantic development 'to speak in clear Arabic > to express > to proclaim' in Qatabanic. As a result of such a development in this language (which in any case existed long before the formation of the Arabic language and the very notion of lisân ʿArabi [mubīn]) one would rather expect something like 'mumble' - incidentally, cf. Lettish mēmsmemulis, 'dumb, stutter, stammerer' - Ukrainian nimiıy 'stuttering, stammering' - Russian nemnemets 'stutter, stammerer, dumb/ a German' (Vasmer 1987 : 62); though here we are more likely to deal with the development 'the mumblers' > ethnonym denoting neighbouring ethnic group whose language is difficult to comprehend, rather than the other way round.

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der neueren Forschung. II. Principat. Neunter

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