

EDITORIAL

On a flight on my way to Qatar, I was immensely pleased to have read, in the magazine Ahlan Wasahlan of Saudi Arabian Airline, a news investigation on the new archaeological discoveries in Tayma and excavations in the Eastern Region and their historical periods. I was able, for the first time, to see the Cartouche of the Great Pharaoh Ramesses III having his name recorded in a remote region. Yet, this should surprise no one; at that Tayma had become in northern Arabia the second Emporium, the first being the Port of Aden in southern Arabia. That is the reason the name of the Pharaoh, King Ramesses III, was recorded as one of the “Shoppers” of the Tayma market. This implies that Tayma had, since the middle of the second millennium BC, enjoyed an influential economic position, and that it had not limited its supply to southern sources. It had also been the central point for trade activities coming from Mesopotamia and areas beyond it. Consequently, the presence of the Cartouche of Ramesses III does not signify the beginning of Tayma’s



Cartouche of Egyptian Pharaoh Ramesses III, recently discovered in Tayma, Saudi Arabia

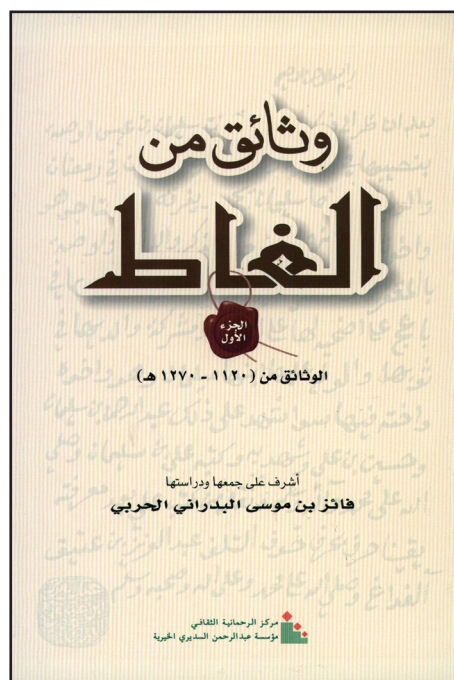
importance and active economic role, but its height. We can, therefore, say Tyam’s activities started close to the beginning of the second millennium BC if not, perhaps, earlier.

I, therefore, seize this opportunity to laud the efforts Saudi archaeologists have been carrying out in the field of excavations and research in the Kingdom. As we all pride ourselves for having this dedicated generation of researchers, we are certain HRH, Prince Sultan ibn Salaman ibn Abdul Aziz, Head of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, a man well-known for his munificent care, will spare no effort in motivating and promoting such national efforts on archaeological excavations and discoveries in the Kingdom. Such attention will certainly prompt similar national innovations that will continually feed the achievements of the homeland.

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“Al-Rahmaniah Cultural Center”, the Al-Ghatt branch of Abdulrahaman Al-Sudairy Charitable Foundation recently presented me with a priceless treasure, The Al-Ghatt Documents. I was immensely pleased with the great effort Mr. Fayez ibn Musa Al-Badrani Al-Harbi has invested in the editing of these documents.

In studying the two thousand documents, Al-Badrani Al-Harabi has shown professional scholarship, glossed and commented on every detail in every document, clarified any ambiguity, and like a physician anatomized each paper. He truly deserves the title of “surgeon of documents.” The Al-Ghatt-based Al-Rahmaniah Cultural Center has done well to have elected Al-Badrani Al-Harbi for this work. He is an expert in the field, and I have been familiar with his publications and editions, prior to this new effort. Yet, the more I read him the more I admire his expertly executed works.



The encyclopedic Al-Ghatt Documents falls in six volumes, including an introduction and indices (volume 6). In the “Foreword” one reads the commendable promise and commitment of the Foundation: “Abdulrahaman Al-Sudairy Charitable Foundation, through Al-Rahmaniah Cultural Center in Al-Ghatt, presents this work as an installment of the Center’s objectives and its dedication to preserving the literary and historical heritage of Al-Ghatt. Hopefully, this will be the first step in the Center’s Project for Support and Funding of Research and Studies on Al-Ghatt. The Center has seen fit to initiate the said project with this work, making it possible to collect and preserve as many Al-Ghatt related documents as possible. These important and authentic documents are a valuable historical source; and their publication and dissemination their content will surely be an aid to the interested student and scholar.”

The Foreword also recognizes Al-Badrani Al-Harbi for what he is, a great researcher: “The Center has chosen to assign this task to Mr. Fayez ibn Musa Al-Badrani Al-Harbi, a prolific scholar in the field with valuable expertise and long experience. He has published some thirty books, most of which are in the field of document editing.” After this Foreword, the researcher’s introduction highlights his work plan and the methodology he follows in his study. He begins with the sources, some twenty one in all. In his opinion, the monograph Al-Ghatt Province is a most comprehensive publication so far issued on the area; he has also made use of The Region of Sudair during the Saudi State, yet he says the book’s two

writers had not satisfactorily covered the historical magnitude of the Province of Al-Ghatt, nor is the book helpful to researchers in terms of essential information, especially the timeline and introduction of the Amirs of Al-Ghatt. Another limitation is the book's failure to introduce families who dwelled in and spread from Al-Ghatt. For his own work, Al-Badrani Al-Harbi provides an overview: he has limited it to highlighting the importance of the documents; he then offers a briefing on the importance of his research, a general review of the documents he has been able to collect providing for each a facsimile, a transcription of its content, glosses on what needs explanation of its vocabulary, in addition to a concise introductory note on what it involves of names, places, families, and tribes. He also points out the difficulties and obstacles he has faced in carrying out this work; of these are difficulties in obtaining local documents from those who own them, the difficulties in deciphering the script owing to the poorness of the hand-writing of some and missing parts of others, and the absence often of dates on some, along with difficulties of categorization and authentication.

He then identifies some of the shortcomings that face the recognition of the importance of private documents as essential historical sources. Of these are

1. our limited historical and research experience in comparison to other advanced nations;
2. the difficulty of obtaining private in comparison to official and foreign documents;
3. the commonly held opinion among researchers that the lives of ordinary people prior to the unification and growth of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia received no documentation and recording;
4. The difficulty of having access to the document, when one exists, owing to issues of privacy in the mind of the owner.

He then highlights the importance of the study of private documents along with the political live. He then provides a chronology of the Amirs of Al-Ghatt from 1124H-1349H according to the documents he has been able to collect. Another list marshals the names of Judges, scholars of theology, and Imams of Mosques. He then briefly gets into the dialects and the stages through which they passed, and then pays his attention to the exchanged currencies, along with authentication of lineages, ancestry chronologies, marriages, and identification of mothers. He further notes that those able to write in Al-Ghatt were no less than sixteen; and though he believes this is a somewhat meager number, I can name other places that did not enjoy as much. He also notes points of weaknesses in their language yet, in all truth, we too suffer the same points of weakness to which he points, even though we now have schools and colleges. Finally, he classifies the dated documents chronologically, beginning from 10/10/1200H.

Al-Badrani Al-Harbi then concludes this distinguished work with full and well organized lists and indices. To say the least, this is a wonderful scholarly work that, by any estimation, meets the highest standards.

Editor -in-Chief