

# WALTER DOSTAL AND (ANCIENT) SOUTH ARABIA

## *Cultural and Social Anthropology and the “ivory tower” of Regional Studies in Ancient South Arabia<sup>1</sup>*

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“One sees the flowers fade and the leaves fall, but  
one also sees fruits ripen and fresh buds germinate”  
(Goethe)<sup>2</sup>

### A PIONEER AND HIS GROUP OF RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Esteem, humility, gratitude and melancholy are only few words that shape the memory of Prof. Walter Dostal (1928–2011) who was one of the most distinguished and pioneering scholars of Arabian studies from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century up to the beginnings of the new millennium.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s words of solace in the above quote are merely symbolic. True solace, however, can be found in Dostal’s work, which can be compared to the above quote as rich, strong, prudent seeds, whose buds are still sprouting, bearing fruits and blossoming today and in the future to come. His best students are leading researchers and research associates<sup>3</sup> today, keeping his memory and academic achievements alive in the spirit of BNYN, *Bāniyān* (asa) = *al-Bānī* (arab.) - which means builders, architects<sup>4</sup>. I shall use the shorthand formula of an “ivory tower” in this text for referring to the interdisciplinary academic basic research field of studies in Ancient South Arabia.

### THE VISIONARY IN THE SENSE OF RAʿB AL-UMŪR<sup>5</sup>:

‘Rescue’ or revitalization of the series of papers: “Sammlung Eduard Glaser” (SEG)<sup>6</sup> by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna (ÖAW/AAS), as a component of the South Arabian studies legacy in Austria:

<sup>1</sup> Some notes on the title: Why use (Ancient) South Arabia in the title rather than Sabaeen, Old South Arabian Languages and Cultures, or alternatively, Epigraphic South Arabic? On the one hand it would have been impossible to do justice to Dostal’s extensive research, on the other hand it would be rather limiting to discuss just one specific topic in an anthology. This would surely not be what Dostal intended. Dostal’s understanding of the ‘ivory tower’ or, more specifically, of ancient oriental studies guided him in the right direction, even without modern technological and scientific research methods that seem so indispensable today. Dostal’s approach still serves and will serve as a guideline and basis of research today and in the future. For this reason this is an attempt to present a more or less chronological overview of Dostal’s most important topics and concerns, his merits concerning the ‘ivory tower’ and all other specialist disciplines, his way of putting research results into practice, e.g. to be in touch with the people, as K. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) had stated.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ‘Wilhelm Meister’s Travels’, chapter 2, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/simple.php?id=2275>

<sup>3</sup> Andre Gingrich, Johann Heiss, Siegfried Haas, and their junior associates such as Eirik Hovden, Daniel Mahoney or Marieke Brandt

<sup>4</sup> Found as a tribe or proper name all over the Arabian Peninsula, e.g. in Ancient South Arabian (CIH 287, 7-8 = GI 265; RES 3709, 2; Lundin 23, 1) and in central as well as in early north Arabic. Sima 1999: 7, 93f, even documents the prevalence of the Verb , bny’, ,to build’, by means of a Lybian inscription from Wadi al-ʿUdayb (near ancient Dedan, today’s al-ʿUla, Saudi-Arabia), 8 = Stiehl A 12 = Abu l-Hasan 56.

<sup>5</sup> According to Lane 993f, ‘a rectifier, an amender of affairs’, and raʿb ‘a man who effects reconciliation, or makes peace, between people’, whereby the Sabaeen rʿb (/mlkn) in SD 112 is translated as ‘title of functionary, laqab sahib mansib’. This is however meant in the sense of a royal dignitary’s function as a mediator, as quoted by Müller 1972, 99. Wehr, in modern arabic ‘raʿaba’ is understood as ‘to repair, to fix something, to bring about reconciliation’, Lu 22,1=Graf 3 = DJE 14. Lt.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. Sienell (i. pr.).

The history of the SEG publication series was closely linked to the “South Arabian expedition” (SE, 1898/99)<sup>7</sup>, which was linked to a number of former Academy commissions, initiated in the late imperial age and later continued by the ÖAW. Studying their shared histories is not the object of this study. The key points, however, must be addressed in order to comprehend the publication series SEG and SEGI, the first of which was published as early as 1913 and followed by SEGII/1961 and SEGI/1981 after more than half a century.

In the SEG XIV/1981, ‘Sabäische Inschriften’, sub-headed as the ‘final edition’, the author Maria Höfner lists p.46 the entire SEG series from II-XIII, missing however SEG I/1913, ‘Eduard Glasers Reise nach Marib’, which was edited by D.H. Müller and N. Rhodokanakis (the latter a student of D.H. Müller and the teacher of M. Höfner in Graz). Höfner also mentions SEG III/1964 by Hermann von Wissmann, ‘Zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Alt-Südarabien’ under a different abbreviation. In her lectures in Graz she had mentioned that this particular publication was something like the ‘bible’ for subsequent research in the field.

Wissmann’s fascination for Arabia and Yemen, in particular, already became apparent during his first field venture as a young geographer in 1927/28 (accompanied by Carl Rathjens). His subsequent fieldwork increased his understanding of historical-geographical regional studies, Middle Eastern archaeological problems as well as his knowledge about the Sabaeans and Sabaeans, which he described as having learnt auto-didactically (SEG III/7). He fruitfully collaborated with the Semitist Enno Littmann in Tübingen, an academic site still known as a stronghold of Oriental Studies in 1983 (after previous joint ventures and cooperations with Vienna). From 1944 onwards Wissmann also cooperated with Höfner (going to Graz, Vienna and from 1964 to Graz again). This is how his SEG II came to be dedicated to Eduard Glaser. Wissmann was the author of the SEG XIII from 1975 ‘Über die frühe Geschichte Arabiens und das Entstehen des Sabäerreiches. Die Geschichte von Saba’ I’. He still managed to finalize ‘Die Geschichte von Saba’ II. Das Großreich der Sabäer bis zu seinem Ende im frühen 4. Jh. v. Chr.’ before his untimely death in 1979. This was published by the ÖAW publishing house – though neither as a part of the SEG nor in the frame of the Academy’s Arabian Commission – thanks to Walter W. Müller (presented by Prof. M. Mayrhofer as secretary of the phil.-hist. Kl. (humanities’ section) meeting on 4.4.1979, and came out in 1982).

Following the South Arabian Commission (from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) the Arabian Commission was initiated by the Academy in 1943, due to the “plan of the AWW<sup>8</sup> to create a dictionary of ancient South Arabian that compares the vocabulary of modern day South Arabian semitic languages”.<sup>9</sup> Viktor Christian (then Professor for Semitic Studies and Dean at Vienna University, Academy member, and director of an SS “Ahnenerbe” institute<sup>10</sup>) who had been one of D. H. Müller’s last students but who rose to dubious prominence during the Nazi years, was behind that Academy initiative. This can also be seen by the fact that Viktor Christian took up his studies of Mehri again at that time (1944: 1). In SEG II/1961 (p. 4) Höfner as the head of the Arabian Commission thanked him especially for his “enduring” commitment to the edition of the Glaser series /SEG.

In the frame of the Arabian Commission several works were published on Dostal’s own initiative (for example Dostal 1979, 1990, 1993; Behnstedt 1993). That Commission was dissolved or rather, merged with the Academy’s Commission for Social Anthropology in 1992 following Höfner’s death. After Höfner’s retirement (Graz, 1979) Ancient Oriental Philology – or Arabic Studies – focussing on South Arabia had no longer existed in Austria. Dostal wrote her obituary in the almanac of the ÖAW in 1993 urging to keep Maria Höfner’s work alive (p. 472): “Maria Höfner has left us with a great deal, and it should be our duty to keep alive her work and achievements”<sup>11</sup>. With the Commission for Social Anthropology of the ÖAW that Dostal had greatly advanced since 1990 he had already laid the groundwork for its gradual transformation in 2003

<sup>7</sup> See Lechleitner, *Traces of the South Arabian Expedition in the Phonogrammarchiv (ÖAW)*, and Stiegner, *Presentation ‘Archives of the Austrian South Arabian Expedition and the Eduard Glaser Collection’ (ÖAW)* both in WOO 10/2, chap.VII.

<sup>8</sup> The designation “Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien” (Academy of Sciences in Vienna) and its acronym AWW were used under Hitler Germany’s rule as part of the Nazis’ general policy of avoiding any reference to Austria as a separate legal, institutional or political entity (editors’ note).

<sup>9</sup> Christian (1944: I), Translated by Rosalind Willi

<sup>10</sup> See Gohm and Gingrich 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Dostal (1993: 472). Translated by Rosalind Willi.

and the definite transformation in 2011 into today’s Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) of the ÖAW(AAS). Unfortunately, Dostal did not live to see the Institute’s new facility opened in the year of his decease.

The ISA (together with IKGA, i.e. the Institute for Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia, and IfI, i.e. the Iranian Studies Institute) until 2012 was part of the Academy’s Centre of Asian Cultures and Social Anthropology, and continues to closely cooperate with these two other Asian studies institutes at the Academy. They are one of several research clusters in the humanities and social sciences at the ÖAW. Apart from ISA’s regional focus and expertise on Buddhist Central Asia, and Southeast Asia and adjacent island groups in the Indian Ocean, there is a strong focus on the Islamic Middle East and the Mashriq. Elaborating Dostal’s vision Andre Gingrich writes in an email at the end of 2011: “The ISA will continue with its strong focus on South Arabia rather than Northern Arabia, due to the tradition of the ÖAW since D.H. Müller but also due to our staff’s areas of specialisation. The ‘collection Eduard Glaser’ will remain one of ISA’s two publication series and shall maintain its focus on the cultural history of South Arabia. Since 1.1.2012, for example, there is the possibility to ‘compare medieval cultural history of South Arabia (with Europe and Tibet) at the ISA over a timeframe of four years’.”<sup>12</sup>

After roughly a quarter of a century Gingrich (at the centre of research on Asian Cultures and Social Anthropology at the ÖAW) ventured the reanimation of the above mentioned SEG as that series new editor, by publishing Gertraud Sturm’s ‘Leben für die Forschung. Das Ethnologenpaar Wilhelm und Marie Hein in Südarabien’<sup>13</sup> as SEG XV. Gingrich presented this publication at the session on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2007 and in the first paragraph of his foreword he conveys the following thoughts:

“The research ventures featured in this book in and about South Arabia took place at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The works of Wilhelm and Marie Hein represent an early climax in a distinct research tradition that was continuous in Austria from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day. The main centres of this tradition were Vienna and Graz with related museums, university departments and scientific societies, very often connected to the active research department of the Academy of Sciences. The spectrum of scientific personalities ranges from David Heinrich Müller and Eduard Glaser to Maria Höfner and my teacher Walter Dostal; the academic fields involved reach from archaeology and epigraphy, to geography and humanities to Arabic Studies, ethnography and Ethnology/social anthropology.”<sup>14</sup>

By way of comparison, an extract from the manuscript on SE IX/1909 ‘Mehri- and Hadrami-Texts: Collected in 1902 in Gishin by Dr. Wilhelm Hein. Edited by DAV Heinrich Müller’ states the following:

“Chancellor D.H. Müller, chairman of the South Arabian Commission for the writings/inscriptions handed over the manuscript ‘Mehri-texts, collected and translated by Dr. Wilhelm Hein, edited by D.H. Müller’, and adds:

‘I am honoured to present the Mehri texts that were collected in Gishin in the frame of the South Arabian Commission by Dr. Wilhelm Hein who was taken out of life and research too early. [...] The texts consist of around 60 stories and a large number of poems that include sayings, games and riddles. The texts were carefully collected and greatly enrich our knowledge of the Mehri in a linguistic (lexicographically and grammatically) as well as in a folkloristic sense. I went through a number of these texts with my informants from Soqatra and Araf and could therefore assure myself of the veracity of Hein’s work. [...]’<sup>15</sup>

In short, Walter Dostal’s ideas, words and actions continue to be carried further especially by his students Heiss and Gingrich and the group of junior research associates, building upon the groundwork their teacher had laid.

Dostal was ahead of his time in many areas, partly building upon D.H. Müller’s work (1846–1912). They both remain unparalleled role models to this day in the interdisciplinary fields of Southern Arabian studies. As the quotations above reveal it has always been about multi- and transdisciplinary collaborations in international networks of researchers and scientists. Thereby the ‘ivory tower’ was an elementary basis which together with field research is of paramount importance for research in social and cultural anthropol-

<sup>12</sup> Andre Gingrich (personal email, 2011). Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>13</sup> See Sturm 2007, their detailed investigation of W. and M. Hein.

<sup>14</sup> Gingrich (foreword in Sturm 2007). Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>15</sup> D. H. Müller, SE IX, 1909. Translated by Rosalind Willi.

ogy. Unfortunately, despite the significant number of research results the ‘ivory tower’ still has difficulties being considered influential in the field of ancient Oriental Studies, i.e. Semitist and Arabian studies.

Yet the fact that for the first time in many years ‘languages of Southern Arabia’ featured in the special session of the programme in the annual ‘Seminar for Arabian Studies’ (SAS, British Museum London, 26.–28.7.2013) gives reason for hope. In their concluding remarks the two research associates Janet C. E. Watson (Salford/U.K.) and Orhan Elmaz (St. Andrews/U.K.) mentioned: (This was) “(f)ollowed by a final meeting for discussing further questions, future research areas, and an international research network.” Whether recognition and further development actually materialise remains to be seen.

Dostal had almost always attended the SAS. He would most probably have criticised the fact that the special session was held simultaneously to the regular sessions on ‘Ancient Cultural Connections: Mesopotamia, Dilmun, Magan and the Indus’ or ‘Palaeolithic to Neolithic Arabia’, ‘Neolithic Arabia’ or ‘Archaeology of Yemen and Ethiopia’. A session on South Arabian societies as mentioned in the publications ‘Typologie des Sanctuaires de l’Arabie du Sud Antique: essai de classification’ (C. Darles), or ‘Excavations at Jebel Faya and importance of the southern Arabian Corridor for movements of Paleolithic peoples’ (Bretzke, N.J. Conrad & H.-P. Uerpmann) were not included and are of primary importance for linguists, as they were of course not isolated cultures.

*The past creates the present and the present created the future* is a frequently cited proverb, which could significantly contribute to scientific research if truly applied. Throughout most of his career Dostal engaged in finding answers to major questions on development and evolution.

The following section aims at presenting some details on the context of the ‘ivory tower’:

Today in Social and Cultural Anthropology the group of Dostal’s former research associates and their junior colleagues continue and further Dostal’s work at the ÖAW’s ISA (See Gingrich 2012: 167f). The ‘ivory tower’ is also furthered by studies of (old) South Arabic/(A)SA at the Institute for Oriental Studies/Ifo at the University of Vienna. It was a great achievement when a part-time lectureship for Ancient South Arabian languages was finally approved there. It will be offered starting from the academic year 2013/14. This means that there is now an official contact person on these research issues and the role of coordinator is entrusted to an expert who is officially affiliated to the university as well as the Ifo. Since 2014, this is George Hatke.

By way of comparison and for a deeper insight into these issues and the reason for continuing the SEG, it is indeed important to mention the lack of publications during the many ‘dark’ years which included two world wars. In the foreword of SEG I/1913: ‘Eduard Glasers Reise nach Mārib’ (1888) the two editors D.H. Müller and N. Rhodokanakis (Vienna and Graz, October 1912, p. IIIf) state the following:

“The fact that the South Arabian Commission decided to publish the previously unpublished inscriptions and carry on Glaser’s work who was a prime researcher in the area of Sabaean Studies will hopefully be an incitement for further work in this area. [...] The publication highlights his views on Islam, Christianity and Judaism as well as on culture and technical progress.

We felt that adding excerpts from his diary to the travel documentation itself and its annexes on pg. 171ff would make them more lively. [...] Dr. Adolf Grohmann completed the difficult and arduous task of converting shorthand notes in the diary written in old German shorthand. He also reworked the index of names and tribes as well as the geographical index, while the second author of this foreword completed the subject index.

Regarding the cartographical and topographical annexes and dam sketches we cite Dr. Feuersteins remarks on pg. 2011ff.

The acquisition of Glaser’s estate by the imperial Academy of Sciences was made possible thanks to the generous donation of Dr. Horace Ritters v. Landau. [...].<sup>16</sup>

This text from 1912 and the text from 1909 mentioned above convey the predominant idea of interdisciplinary research and publishing. They were published under the aegis of the South Arabian Commission which was established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>16</sup> Müller & Rhodokanakis (1913, IIIf). Translated by Rosalind Willi.



Figure 1: Walter Dostal and the “ivory tower”: 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in Vienna 15. 5. 1988. (cf. camel statue, big and large stone head: Inv.Nr. SEM 1285–1287 in the KHMW: Hölzl 2013, image 4-6) (Photo: R. Stiegner)

Therefore, it is extremely important to keep alive the ÖAW’s longstanding series - now and in future. They will be kept alive by the ASA inscriptions that can be found in diverse Viennese archives, in keeping with Höfner and W.W. Müller’s vision of divulging the inscriptions in the SEG.

#### THE “IVORY TOWER” AS A SO-CALLED “ORCHID SUBJECT”?

To a certain degree Dostal had always understood *Völkerkunde* (former German term for ethnology) as *social and cultural anthropology* in the true sense of the subject. He was ahead of his time, given the fact that many German-speaking university institutes were still called Institutes of *Völkerkunde* in his time – and a long time thereafter. In ethnology the term ‘culture’ was on a whole very vague, frequently marred by incongruence and subject to manifold re-definitions and developments. Humans are social beings whose primary means of communication is language. Language is composed of sounds and words that define, name and give meaning to something. Anything may be described through language; humans and their elementary needs such as nutrition and the ways, locations, time and circumstances of its procurement; the animal kingdom; the earth, sky, sun, moon and stars.<sup>17</sup> There is causal thinking but also thinking across boundaries - about gods, demons and so on. In sum, language is culture. Unfortunately, the deeper meanings of ancient times and oral culture can rarely be discerned today. The continuity of traditions that have been subject to change and opportunely adapted to times and circumstances do not reveal much about their origins. This is one of the mysteries of life that troubles and fascinates humankind to this day. At this point we may return to the ‘ivory tower’, the exotic ‘orchid subject’ which was often in pursuit of these hidden mysteries.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, Gingrich 1997. Referring to P. Kunitzsch, ‘Untersuchungen zur Sternnomenklatur der Araber’ (1961) the author states “...stars which belong to the basic astrothetic inventory not only among the Arabs but in any culture ...” (p. 45).

This connects to Dostal's vision of the 'ivory tower': The 'ivory tower' represents language and writing as an integral part of culture. It is a symbol of strength and embodies a strong base composed of 'mammoth and elephant tusks'<sup>18</sup>. However, only in conjunction with fieldwork and further methods can the door be opened to successful social and cultural anthropological research.

This however, was not always acknowledged in the past. For example, the disciplines in question – involving language and writing – are subordinated to the faculty of philological and cultural studies<sup>19</sup>. To name a further example, the *Festschrift* for the famous oriental archaeologist, P.R.S. Moorey was entitled 'Culture through Objects' (2003). Furthermore, in the cultural historical journal 'Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Sachforschung' that was founded in Graz more than 100 years ago the Sabaean scholar Nikolaus Rhodokanakis (Graz) wrote 'Zum Siedlungswesen im alten Südarabien' (1929). The main conceptual framework of this work is based on R. Meringer's statement: "Linguistics is only one part of the cultural sciences. Etymology needs to be explained by history"<sup>20</sup>. Another interesting example is 'Brisante Semantik. Neuere Konzepte und Forschungsergebnisse einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Linguistik' which was published in 2005 (Busse, Niehr & Wengeler 2005). While referring to Humboldt and Wittgenstein, the book describes how linguistics and semantics in particular can give valuable insights into social knowledge, departing from the traditional notion of language as a mere system of signs and as the cognitive expression of the individual. In sum, we have arrived at F. de Saussure's rule of thumb: "La langue est un fait social" (1967: 18).<sup>21</sup>

If these fundamental premises are not adhered to, even accredited and experienced researchers may severely misinterpret their findings. The following example illustrates how two researchers from a similar specialization came to different conclusions with sufficient and insufficient field research:

*barrāh*: according to J. Watson 2005/06, 61: "Given incorrectly in P. Behnstedt (1987b:101) as 'to go early in the morning'" instead of: "to fetch firewood" (from a conversation with a woman). P. BEHNSTEDT 2013, 84, who was in Yemen and had been living in the Arab world for decades replied: "[...] The Verb in Behnstedt 1987b: 143 is conjugated. If the meaning were 'to fetch firewood', then we could not have had the masculine form, as women fetch firewood in this region."<sup>22</sup> Having been in Yemen myself, I can only second this. He continues: "This would be similar to trying to conjugate 'to give birth'. The meaning of 'to go early in the morning' has been verified in [...] many [cases], and therefore primarily means 'to leave in the morning'."

Further forms of words for 'going' depending on the time of day<sup>23</sup> have been documented, from classical Arabic or two modern South Arabian languages, from Šhauri:

*be'ér*: 'travelling by night, leaving'; from Mehri: *bār*: 'travelling by night, leaving'.<sup>24</sup>

## W. DOSTAL: "VÖLKERKUNDE AND HUMAN DIGNITY".

The next section is an attempt to gain an insight into Dostal's empirical mode of research – in his 'ivory tower'. The pillars for this mode of work are presented below:

### 1. STUDIES

Even his early studies (1948) were an indication of his future academic path; studying *Völkerkunde*/ethnology (with Koppers, Heine-Geldern) and Islamic studies and Arabic philology (with H.L. Gottschalk) in Vienna and Rome which were completed with his dissertation on Semites 'Eine Studie zum Semitenproblem' (Vienna 1952). During his time as curator of the Middle Eastern section at the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna

<sup>18</sup> Even if it is not 35000 years old - unlike the ivory workshop including mammoth tusks in Saxony-Anhalt, which was discovered by the Roman-Germanic Museum in Mainz

<sup>19</sup> Since October 2012 with dean Matthias Meyer, a Germanist, and vice-dean Michael Zach, from the Institute of African Sciences.

<sup>20</sup> Meringer (1929). Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>21</sup> "i. e. language is a social fact."

<sup>22</sup> Behnstedt, 2013 (84). Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>23</sup> See Behnstedt 1987a (101): e.g. *nasaruk* 'I left in the afternoon'; 1987b: 96f; 1992: 79; Behnstedt & Woidich 2005: 141.

<sup>24</sup> Bittner 1911: 123, 1914: 77; Jahn 1902: 171. Jahn quotes *byr*, and Bittner *b'r* as linguistic root.



Figure 2: Walter Dostal and Walter W. Müller (Interim Eduard-Glaser-Ring-owner, see Müller 2002: 220) – Wien/Sievering, 16.5.2008 (Photo R. Stiegner)

(1954–1965), he went on first fieldwork ventures (with collections) (see Steinmann 2013) and pursued smaller research assignments, for example with W. Caskel (Cologne 1960) or E. Jensen (Frankfurt/Main 1962/63). This resulted in his internationally acclaimed habilitation on Bedouins in Arabia: “Eine ethnologische Studie zur Entwicklung des Beduinentums in Arabien” (Vienna 1964/1967) (see Müller 1968: 2013). The result was his appointment as professor to a newly-founded chair for ethnology at the University of Bern (1965). His assignment included the setting up of a new seminar as well as leading the ethnographic department at the *Bernisches Historisches Museum* (Museum of History in Bern). Eventually, Dostal took over the chair for *Völkerkunde I* at the University of Vienna since March 1975.

## 2. FIELDWORK

A brief glance at his first field work ventures further highlights his future path and deeply-rooted vision of his future career:

He intensely examined the life of so-called “gypsies” in Austria ‘Zigeuner in Österreich’ (AfV X, 1955, 1–15) and of a Pariah group in Kuwait: ‘Die Sulubba und ihre Bedeutung für die Kulturgeschichte Arabiens’ (AfV XI, 1956, 15–42). His fieldwork was mainly focused on social life, work and social status; in other words on cultural diversity, especially of the underprivileged. This often meant that the researcher himself faced difficult life and work situations.

## 3. OPEN IVORY TOWER

For Dostal it was important to convey his research beyond the realm of the ‘scientific community’ or academia. In the spirit of an ‘open ivory tower’ he aimed at making his findings easy to understand and accessible for as many people as possible. He tirelessly pursued this goal throughout his career which is illustrated by the following examples:

## 3.1.

“*Völkerkunde und Menschenwürde*” (*Völkerkunde* and human dignity) was a seminar that Dostal devised in 1956. It largely demonstrates his understanding that *Völkerkunde* is only one branch of the ‘science of the human’ – which he had already dedicated his life to as a child and young adult. He liked to tell one particular experience of his which was entitled “Mein menschlichstes Erlebnis: *Das Zigeunerkind*” (‘My most humane experience: the gypsy child’) which was published in a newspaper in 26. 5. 1956.

## 3.2.

„...*Und es suchte das Leben*“:

Two years earlier, in 1957, Dostal attempted the adaptation and a first literary edition of the ancient oriental epos of Gilgameš “Nachdichtung und erstmalige dramatische Bearbeitung des altorientalischen Epos von Gilgameš” as an audio book: „*Und es suchte das Leben*“.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, the following excerpt from his foreword is more relevant today than ever:

“[...] an attempt at gaining an insight into the spiritual world of the third and fourth millenia B.C. It aims at countering the somewhat antiquated views of people of the pre-antique period. Or more generally: we hope to humbly contribute to the rehabilitation of pre-historic humans. This is a necessity considering the historic events of our time. We have never more urgently needed respect for ourselves – for humankind. However, how can the human of today respect himself, if he merely sees animalistic gruesome brutes in his predecessors? [...] the relics that are left are witnesses of intellectual life and must speak for themselves without being faced by prejudice. Their inherent creative spirit will allow us to recognise the human in them. We will be free from presumptuous assumptions of our own culture and our stance towards unknown cultures will be tolerant. This is a path to direct the human towards the humane”<sup>26</sup>

G. Selz (2011) further developed and explained Dostal’s ideas in the above quote and is a good reference to enhance their understanding; Dostal’s main aim was to comprehend the situation out of which the Gilgameš-Epos arose. He predominantly underlines the chthonic character of the Sumerian religion:

“At the centre of religious thinking and sacred acts was the eternal cycle of the dying and reincarnating god of vegetation. This god had various names, of which Tammuz is the most well-known. The fate of Tammuz is analogue to the fate of grain: sowing - harvest. The notion was supported that in earthly life each sin must be paid for. The punishments for sin were diseases, suffering and early death. The human was rooted in the mortal world. It is therefore understandable that man wished to break the eternal cycle of life and death and to overcome the power of death. He longs for absolution. The Gilgameš-Epos mirrors humanity’s tragic struggle to overcome death...”<sup>27</sup>

## 3.3.

‘*Austrian ambassador in the Orient*’ (*Botschafter Österreichs im Orient*)<sup>28</sup>: One of his biggest and most sustainable successes in putting theory into practice, as already mentioned above in the subchapter ‘open ivory tower’, was his foundation of the Hammer-Purgstall-Gesellschaft (Hammer-Purgstall Society). One of his former students, Siegfried Haas, later took over its leadership. It was re-developed as the Österreichische Orient Gesellschaft – Hammer-Purgstall (ÖOG, Austrian Society for the Middle East-Hammer Purgstall) which also includes an academy for Oriental Studies. Dostal also founded the Austrian Yemeni society which used to be associated with the ÖOG. In recent years, however, it has almost exclusively been focusing on social services and is more oriented towards the GÖAB (Society for Austro-Arab Relations). Dr. Margarete Dostal, Dostals wife, must not be forgotten in this context. She was very active in the Austrian

<sup>25</sup> I’d like to acknowledge architect Franz Kiener’s invaluable help. He rendered invaluable documents and pieces of information. F. Kiener had been a life-long friend of both Walter Dostal and his wife Dr. Margarete Dostal.

<sup>26</sup> Dostal, 1954. Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>27</sup> Selz, 2011. Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>28</sup> Presentation of the Golden Hammer-Purgstall-Medal (1993) with the above mentioned conferment of a symbolic title by S. Haas.



Yemeni Society and was especially interested in adult education. She went on fieldwork expeditions and was an active co-worker in a wide array of different functions.

## DOSTAL AND THE SEARCH FOR HISTORY IN THE PRESENT

### PRE-ISLAMIC SURVIVALS

#### *Preliminary remark: The problems of ,seeking and finding‘*

Pagan, pre-Christian elements are quite commonly known in Europe, although their acknowledgment and acceptance is less widespread. In western occidental culture, ancient, pre-Christian Greece is still perceived as the cradle of civilization and our culture. More often than not the Middle Eastern areas of the Mediterranean and their influence are overlooked.

To a certain degree the Muslim world’s stance towards its own pre-Islamic age (al-ġāhīlīya) is similar. The time before 622 A.C. which is the beginning of the Islamic calendar is often seen as a time of ignorance. In recent years however, the interest and openness towards this time has been on the rise (Dostal 1983; Musée du Louvre 2010). For example, it is now known and acknowledged that Jews and Christians were (both) ‘ahl al- kitāb‘ ‘people of the Book/Scripture‘ and had the legal status of ‘ahl al-ḍimma‘ ‘protected non-Muslim citizens‘. After receiving the scripture and proof, the two religions split (analogous to al-Qur’ān 98, 4) (See various articles in EI, from 1986).

Alternatively, the first printed version of the Koran only became known in Europe (Venice) by 1530, and two further editions towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Only since 1834 an official version of the Koran has been available in Europe and the first one with concordance since 1842, which was made accessible by Gustav Flügel.<sup>29</sup>

Ancient South Arabian inscriptions often are known to locals as pagan, pre-Islamic, or Himyar elements. They were largely destroyed, having been inscribed in houses, wells, columns and gates. According to mainly Arabic sources and records ‘Quellen und Überlieferungen‘ (Stiegner 1986,94) first tiny fragments of these inscriptions were copied by U. Jasper Seetzen in 1810 who neither had any knowledge of the script nor of the language. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall published these in ‘Fundgruben des Orients‘ in 1811 (vol.2, 282). Following subsequent findings Wilhelm Gesenius managed to decode the language comprehensively for the first time in 1841 (Stein 2013: 275.). Further decodings were undertaken according to increasing discoveries, until Glaser made his major discovery (at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). This led to the establishment of a new branch of research – Sabaeen Studies. The first Ancient South Arabian grammar book ‘Altsüdarabische Grammatik‘ was written by Höfner in 1943. The first Sabaeen Dictionary (SD) followed in 1982. Currently Norbert Nebes and his students (cf. DOT 2013) are working on a comprehensive dictionary and grammar (according to new technical standards) in Jena, which can be seen as the new German-speaking academic stronghold for Ancient South Arabian studies.

The systematic collection (corpus) of all Ancient South Arabian inscriptions (CSAI) which encompass around 15.000 texts, their publications or exhibitions, is being carried out in Pisa since 2000 under the leadership of Alessandra Avanzini and her students. This will enable experts, specialists but also a wider audience from various disciplines (archaeologists, linguists, cultural historians etc.) to gain access to the data, a previously extremely difficult matter. This project has been growing in recent years, always in European-Arabic cooperation (MENCAWAR- Mediterranean Network for Cataloguing and Web Fruition of Ancient Artworks and Inscriptions) or Cataloguing the Inscriptions Conserved in Yemeni Museums (CASIS) since 2007. Additionally the scope of the project was expanded by a 5-year European project (DASI) in 2011: “(...) with the objective of extending the scope of the CSAI to the entire body of epigraphic documentation from pre-Islamic Arabia (...) improving its power and flexibility as a research tool (...and) excellent teaching tool (...)”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Johann Fück (1955: 36, 94f). See also de Sacy (1934).

<sup>30</sup> A. Avanzini, Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions: The CSAI Project. In: WOO 10/2, Kap. IV. - <http://csai.humnet.unipi.it>

Nowadays we know a great deal more thanks to these initiatives. We know, for instance, that there was neither one Ancient South Arabian language nor various dialects, but that there were several Ancient South Arabian languages. Moreover, in addition to the epigraphic monumental script *musnad* the cursive form of the ancient Yemeni alphabet (Stein 2013, i. pr.) is known, and much more. From this extended knowledge, further questions and discussions have arisen.

#### DOSTAL'S EFFORTS IN ACADEMIC HISTORY

W. Dostal's habilitation thesis (1964/67) was an ethnological study on the development of camel pastoral culture, entitled: 'Die Beduinen in Südarabien: Eine ethnologische Studie zur Entwicklung der Kamelhirtenkultur in Arabien'. In a very successful manner, it also emphasized the fertility of (ethno)linguistic approaches. In a parallel way, his doctoral thesis also to an extent had been an ethno-linguistic study of Semitic languages written in 1952: 'Eine ethnologisch-linguistische Studie über das Problem der semitisch sprechenden Völker'. Furthermore, the aforementioned publication (1967) 'Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik' fits into the frame of the 'ivory tower'.

#### THE MAHRA ETHNIC GROUP AS THE BASIS OF RESEARCH:

##### 1. – Mehri:

Mehri is one of six dialects and is the most prevalent. Mehri, along with Soqoṭrī are defined as Modern South Arabian languages, both of which are in danger of becoming extinct due to the dominance of modern standard Arabic. Mehri should not be confused with other South Arabian dialects such as Yemeni or Saudi vernacular or local languages. These are different, although the latter also are extremely rare (cf. SAS, London 2013: 'Languages of Southern Arabia'; or Elmaz 2011a, i. pr.). Apart from the aforementioned recordings, publications in the SE or by W. Hein (Sturm 2007) and the continuation of these studies in 1944 by Christian in Vienna, a further scholar attempted to take up the study of the Mehri language. The talented young Semitist Alexander Sima set about continuing this old tradition and updating it according to the current state of research (for example, verifying the SE publications among other things). Tragically, the 35-year old scholar died in an accident in September 2004 on the way to his area of fieldwork, the Mahra-country in the Yemeni Southeast where he planned to verify some of the data for his habilitation thesis. His exceptional skills and diligence are evident through the extensive list of publications, compiled by Stefan Weninger (Arnold et al. 2009, IX-XIII). Further works by Sima have been and are still to be published posthumously. His habilitation thesis could not be published as it was not finished when he died.<sup>31</sup>

This explanation should help to understand Dostal's emotions after this tragedy, which seemed to jeopardise the tradition of combining ethnology and epigraphy with the 'ivory tower'. However, it was picked up again in 2008 when Ancient South Arabia became a focus at the IfO in Vienna as mentioned above.

Dostal's findings in the areas of the Mahra and further ethnic groups (Baṭharī, Ḥarsūsī, Šaḥrī, etc.; see Dostal 1967: 34, 146, 163, etc.) with a similar language and cultural history are of course not complete and may be criticised or amended in terms of certain linguistic details. However, they serve as a basis for Dostal's and other scholars' international research in terms of today's global interconnectedness of studies on the pre- and proto-historical Ancient South Arabian region. In 1990 D. T. Potts, for example, already addressed this global interconnectedness in his 'Notes on some horned buildings in Iran, Mesopotamia and Arabia'. Further work on the region led to the research question in 1997 on whether South Arabia could be seen as a bridge between Africa and Eurasia: 'Süd-Arabien. Brücke zwischen Afrika und Eur-Asien?' (Stiegner 1997: 241-366).

<sup>31</sup> See J. C. E. Watson (2012). On the cover of this extensive book is stated: '...Based on fieldwork conducted by the author and material in Sima this is one of the first studies of any non-state language to include data from new technology (SMS and e-mail)'.

In addition it would be important to consider the Baluchistan region in terms of the Indus Valley Civilization (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century.). This region, and in fact, large parts of Central Asia have remained under-researched due to on-going political tensions in the area.

Thanks to space technology and satellite images since the 1980/90s we now know that the northern Yemeni Ġawf valley used to be connected to the southern Yemeni Wādī Ḥaḍramawt by a river system that ran all the way down to the Indian Ocean. Today, the two areas are divided by the desert. Towards the western area of northern Africa, it has long been proven that the Ethiopian syllable script is derived from the Ancient South Arabian script.<sup>32</sup> However, only in 2008 following the DAI excavations (by Iris Gerlach and her team) and the involvement of other researchers (e.g. Wolbert Smidt among others) it was evident that there were substantial ties between Ancient South Arabia and Ethiopia as early as the 8<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. Norbert Nebes (i. pr.) substantiated their claim and translated and interpreted an Ancient South Arabian inscription found in Tigray (Ethiopia, 7<sup>th</sup> century; also with typical bull heads).

This recalls the story of the so-called geo-botanical ‘Nubo-Sindian province’ (in India, South Arabia, Northeast Africa) where changing climate phases and sea level fluctuation were scientifically proven only recently, including an ensuing battle for survival by inhabitants, which subsequently contributed to specific cultural developments and changes over centuries. Undoubtedly there were migration flows in these areas from and to more populated areas and their peripheries. The influence of autochthonous areas must also be considered, however, as W. Dostal did in his study of the Mahra.<sup>33</sup>

In summary we know today that Mehri and Soqotri, i.e. Modern South Arabian languages, are not directly derived from Ancient South Arabian. W.W. Müller described them as being daughter languages of the periphery populations in 1968: „Tochtersprachen von Randvölkern der alten Hochkulturzone“. This however only says very little about the true nature of these languages. This linguistic (and etymological) problem has persisted ever since.

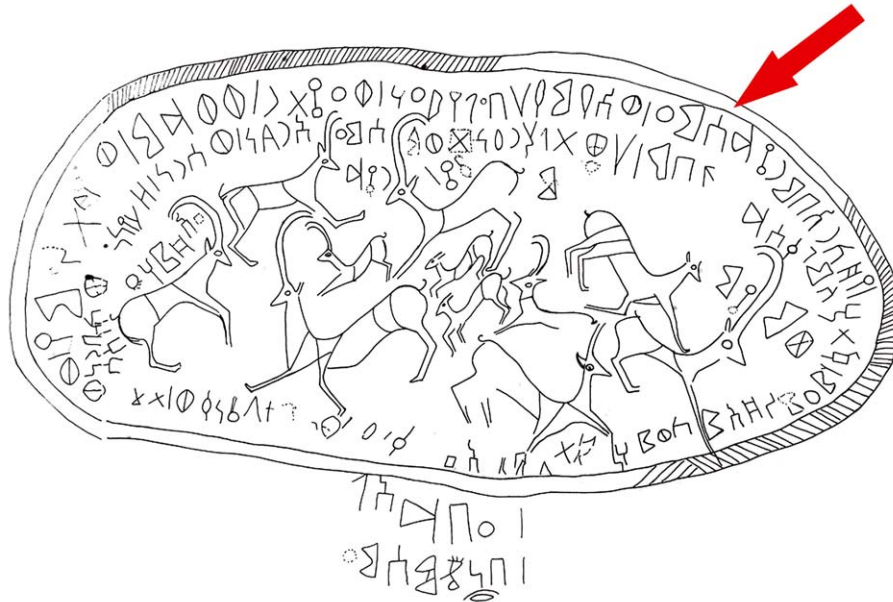


Figure 3: GI A 844 + 845 as a tribute to the great Arabia-pioneer Walter Dostal (first facsimile attempt based on the original copy, R. G. Stiegner).

<sup>32</sup> Rainer Voigt (Berlin), *Sprache, Schrift und Gesellschaft im Axumitischen Königreich*. In: WOO 10/1, Kap. III.

<sup>33</sup> It would go beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on even a few of his most important topics, but they are discussed in more detail in my other papers, especially in ‘Keynote 3’, WOO10/1. See also Gebhard J. Selz, *Das Verändern der Erzählungen. Zur Bedeutung der Altsüdarabienforschungen aus Altorientalistischer Perspektive*. In: WOO 10/1, Keynote 2.

## 2. Onomastics:

The archaeologist P. Yule clearly verified the place names that Dostal (1967) mentioned. The dispersion of these place names and of Mehri (see comment nr. 23) can be traced on the basis of signs (Yule 2013: 19-22). In general these historical languages do not only stretch from south-western Saudi Arabia to Yemen/Oman to south-eastern Saudi Arabia, but have also been available on the internet since about 1980 on the NGA QuickGeo-Names server. However, they would still need to be verified by qualified Arabists.

## 3. Camel- (or dromedary-) saddle types:

According to Dostal (1967) ḥaulānī and šadād saddles are placed on the croup (for transporting) or on the camel hump. The Mahra used the ḥawlānī saddle as well as a special saddle for use by women and for transporting packages (cf. Yule 2013: 23).

## 4. Matronymica – matrolinearity – sexual hospitality

Since and especially due to the rise of monotheism in the Middle East many Arabic genealogists and kinship experts, often because of their own patrilineal leanings and stereotypes, did not like to accept the fact that the kinship systems of the Mehri and Soqoṭra ethnic groups were predominantly matrilinear. Dostal writes about these issues mainly from his own fieldwork experience but also in discussion with other well-known scholars in the annex of his publication in 1990 (137-174). His final critical thoughts on the question of kinship systems in Arabia will be published in the WOO 10/2, chapter. V (Dostal i. pr.).

## 5. Wild goats, ibex, gazelles – Ancient South Arabian: zbyṭ, Arabic ẓby

These horned animals have dominated the South Arabian regions from prehistoric times up to the present day. They were domesticated and utilized for productive livestock in the Mahra areas and on Soqoṭra along with sheep - although these had a different meaning and were of lesser importance. They were also sacred animals and symbolically represented the oldest Ancient South Arabian gods, such as Almaḡah, ‘Attar, SM’ = Sami’ (as the one who is hearing - *al-Samī’* - in the Koran in the list of 99 names of Allah) or as Sami’ (Höfner 1961: 15). Around the turn from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. a new Ancient South Arabian god appeared: Ta’LaB (Ta’lab) took over all the attributes, symbols and temples of the older god SM’ about whom there is little documentation. Höfner (1961: 13-16) notes that there are a few key documentations about SM’. He was one of the moon gods and was often associated with related symbolic animals, therefore also interchangeable. For example, Almaḡah is symbolically and in meaning represented by a ‘bull’ (*ṭwr*; cf. Dostal 1983; Gingrich 1989) as well as having the nickname “lord of the ibex”. Another prominent scholar, W.W. Müller (1997) also discusses this topic.

These animals are omnipresent in mythology. Jahn (1902: 124-127) published: “Erzählung in der Mundart von Qāšān (*Qīšīn*)”: which was a transcription of the Mehri text, the wild goat, with a German translation (which includes among other aspects the transformation of a boy into a wild goat through other wild goats). In *Sheep and Goat in Socotran Mythology* Vitaly Naumkin und Victor Porkhomovsky close with the following comment (p. 119):

“Goats are not the most common domestic animal in Northern Europe, yet in this rather atypical plot almost all the motifs that have been discussed are present: a pair of animals, death and rescue from death, ritual consumption of goat flesh, teeth (with particular stress on tusks, or fangs) and even a little boy.”<sup>34</sup>

Here are a few additional comments by the author (cf. comment 28 on page 85):

“[...]Herewith a complex system of belief emerges that described the Sumerian-Arcadian pair of gods Dumuzi (Tammuz) / Inanna (Ištar) as the ‘leading goat of the land’, as ‘a child that provides life-giving

<sup>34</sup> See also Stiegner 1986: 82-85, starting from the above mentioned Ta’lab, the „rain provider“, b<sup>1</sup>/ššrm, b<sup>1</sup>/zbyn, and therefore ‘Lord of the Animals’ (Höfner 1976) which reminds of the coessential Mesopotamian Ištar, that Dostal recognised to be a ‘Lady of the Animals’ as early as 1962.



Figure 4: G1 A 844: Rock graffiti copy, photographed by A. Jamme (1943).

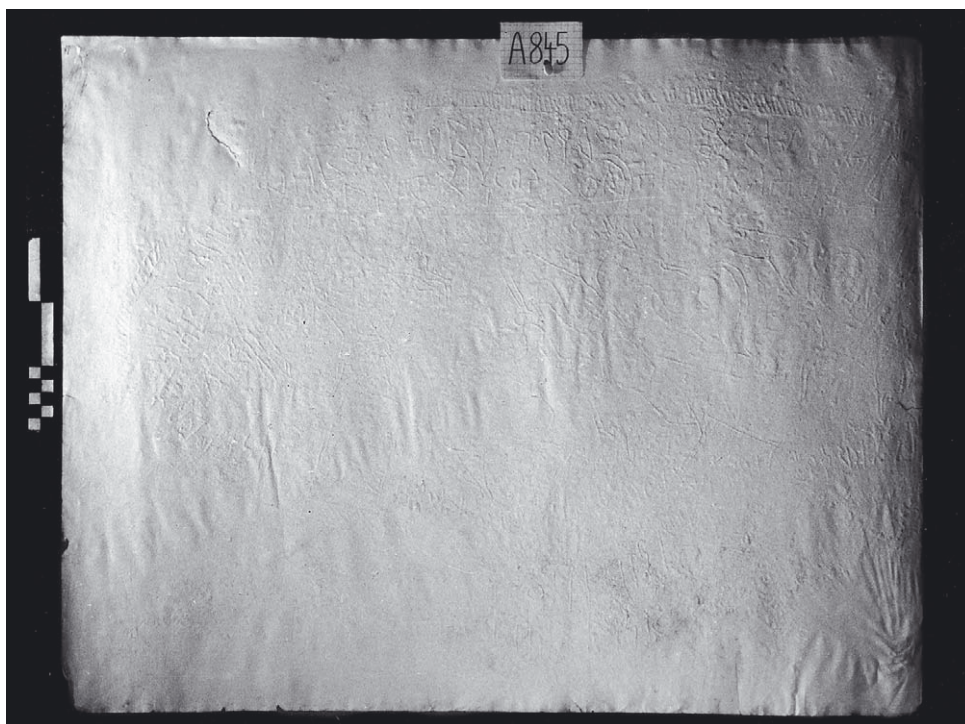


Figure 5: G1 A 845: Rock graffiti copy (small part of G1 845), photographed by A. Jamme (1943).

water’ or as a ‘Virgin She-Goat’. Furthermore, the goat is described in the Artemis legend, for example, as a substitute sacrifice for a girl. In our hemisphere the ibex is perceived as a ‚walking pharmacy‘, and also is related to the tautological figure of the Habergeiß – the demon of vegetation.”<sup>35</sup>

I sincerely hope that Dostal would have appreciated my first attempt at a facsimile (figure 3) in his honour. The original consisted of two copies made by locals (figures 4 and 5) which was collected by Glaser from the north-western Ġabal Dabāb mountain range of the Wādī al-Sirr (around 30 km to the north-east of von Šan‘ā; it has not been exactly located).<sup>36</sup>

In the spirit of *murāṭad/marṭad Sāmi‘/Samī‘*, let us hope that the memory as well as the inherited ground-work of the Arabian pioneer (or protégée in the sense of Protegee according to SD 119) Walter Dostal will live on.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Translated by Rosalind Willi.

<sup>36</sup> See Höfner 1944: 73, in „Graffiti der SEG“, where she notes that these are all unsigned, mostly without mentioning the sources and predominantly unclear or even illegible. Therefore they have all remained unpublished so far.

<sup>37</sup> See Stiegner 2009: 371. Fig. 4 shows a survey map of approximately the whole area, in which god SM‘ is attested. Unfortunately the map was published in an almost unreadable state. About the author’s first facsimile attempt: it was a difficult operation considering that I did the facsimile without technical aides. I hope that my work will be furthered by colleagues from Berlin and Hamburg who were in the archive of the ÖAW in June/July 2011 with the aim of digitalising all SEG-copies. The copies that have been preserved for over 100 years will be digitalised. Special thanks to Dr. Iris Gerlach of the DAI Berlin/Yemen and Ethiopia for all her efforts.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

ASA/asa	Altsüdarabisch / Old South Arabian
AfV	Archiv für Völkerkunde /archive for Völkerkunde (Vienna)
DAI	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (Oriental-department), Berlin.
DOT	Deutscher Orientalistentag
EFAH	Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel. DAI. Hgg. von Norbert Nebes (Jena).
EI	The Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Ed. ab 1986)
Gl	Eduard Glaser
GMS	Grazer Morgenländische Studien. H.D. Galter and B. Schol (Hg.)
IfO	Institut für Orientalistik; Institute for Oriental Studies
JR	Jemen-Report. Mitteilungen der Deutsch-Jemenitischen Ges. e.V., Hg. Horst Kopp. Stuttgart/Freiburg (www.djg-ev.de)
KAWW, ph.-h.Kl.	Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien, philosophisch-historische Klasse; philosophical-historical class
KHMW	Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna.
Lu	Lundin, A.G.
NHM	Naturhistorisches Museum Vienna.
ÖAWW	Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien; Austrian Academy of Science, Vienna
PSAS	Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies. Archaeopress, Oxford.
SB	Sitzungsberichte; session reports (ÖAW)
SD	Sabaic Dictionary. Beeston, Ghul, Müller, Ryckmans. 1982 Beyrouth.
SE	Südarabische Expedition / KAWW; South Arabian expedition
SEG	Sammlung Eduard Glaser
w.M.	Wirkliches Mitglied (der KAWW bzw. ÖAWW); official member
WBEA	Wiener Beiträge zur Ethnologie u. Anthropologie; Viennese contributions to ethnology and anthropology
WOO	Wiener Offene Orientalistik. Wiener Universitätsreihe, hgg.v. Gebhard J. Selz.
WOO 10/1+2	s.u. Stiegner (ed.) 2013 (in print)
ZAL	Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik. Harrassowitz Wiesbaden

