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► **To cite this version:**

Mounir Arbach. NASHSHĀN [KINGDOM AND TRIBE]. Thematic Dictionary of Ancient Arabia (dir. J. Schiettecatte, online, 2023. hal-04672248

HAL Id: hal-04672248

<https://hal.science/hal-04672248v1>

Submitted on 18 Aug 2024

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NASHSHĀN [KINGDOM AND TRIBE]

THEMATIC DICTIONARY OF ANCIENT ARABIA
(DIR. J. SCHIETTECATTE), ONLINE 2023

In the 8th-6th centuries BCE, Nashshān (Sab. Ns²n) was an important tribe and city-state in the Jawf valley (modern Kharibat al-Sawdā'). The tribe of Nashshān lost this political independence in the course of the 4th century BCE by successively passing under the authority of the kingdoms of Ma'in and then of Saba'.

Large gaps still remain in the early history of Nashshān. The earliest known historical inscriptions date from the 8th century BCE.

A powerful city-state (8th century BCE)

The city-state of Nashshān formed a small and powerful kingdom in the Jawf valley, with a territory including the neighbouring city of [Nashq](#) (now al-Bayḍā'), the cities of Qawm, Gaw'al, Dawr and Shibām, as well as the region of Aykum ([RES 3945](#)) (Robin 1998; Schiettecatte 2011: 77-78).

The language used at Nashshān was [Minaic](#) and the specific pantheon included 'Athtar(dhū-Riṣāf/dhū-Garb), [Aranyada'](#), [Wadd](#) and [Samī'](#). These deities were worshipped in several [temples](#) with decorations known as “[Banāt 'ād](#)” (the Daughters of 'Ād, Arbach & Darles 2019). At al-Sawdā', in the temple of Aranyada' — the tutelary deity of the kingdom —, Mesopotamian-inspired decorations represent images of official deities of the other city-states of the Jawf valley alongside the gods of Nashshān and his ally [Saba'](#) (Arbach & Audouin 2004; Arbach, Audouin & Robin 2004). They reflect Nashshān's political ambition to federate all the cities of the valley and to become the dominant regional power during the 8th century BCE.

The rulers of Nashshān did not explicitly bear the title of king at that time. Successions can be established in the epigraphic record, yet gaps persist and are not always interpreted as breaks in the line of succession; they may be the result of dynastic changes or documentary gaps).

Among the earliest known rulers, Abī'amar Ṣadiq was the builder of the *extra muros* temple of 'Athar dhū-Riṣāf (Breton 1992, 2011; Avanzini 1995).

A new dynasty was then founded by the descendants of a certain Labu'ān (I) — who does not seem to have reigned (Arbach & Rossi 2011). His son Ilīmanbaṭ Amar is the builder of the *intra muros* temple of Aranyada'.

During the reign of Sumhūyafa' Yatha' son of Ilīmanbaṭ Amar, the construction of the building (temple?) Qahwān is commemorated ([as-Sawdā' 95 A, B & C](#)).

Thereafter, ‘Ammī‘alī ascended the throne. He was succeeded by ‘Ammīwatar Yasarān ([SW-BA/I/20](#)) and Malikwaqah Rayad ([Garbini-Francaviglia 2 & 3](#)). During the latter's reign, an alliance with the ruler of Saba’, Yatha‘‘amar Watār son of Yakrubmalik, resulted in the settling of a neighbourly dispute with the city-state of Kamna, the recovery of lost territories and the repatriation of the statue of the god Aranyada’, which had been carried away ([AO 31929](#), [DAI Şirwāḥ 2005-50](#)). The city-state of Kamna then came under the control of Nashshān ([Kamna 21, 23](#), [Ḥarāshif 3](#)).

During the reign of ‘Ammīyatha’ Şadiq son of Nawa‘samī’, the rampart of Nashshān and the temple of ‘Athtar dhū-Garb were built. This king associated ‘Ammīshafīq with the throne ([Kamna 23](#), [as-Sawdā 90](#)), who, in turn, ruled with Yada‘‘ab ([as-Sawdā 91](#)).

Alliance and rivalry with Saba’ (7th century BCE)

Towards the end of the 8th century BCE, Yaqaḥmalik, probably son of Yada‘‘ab, ascended the throne. This marked the beginning of a new dynasty (**fig. 1**). The city of Nashshān was then allied with the kingdom of Saba’, under the reigns of the Sabaeen rulers Yatha‘‘amar (Bayān) and Dhamar‘alī (Dhāriḥ), and that of Ma‘īn, under the reigns of Yatha‘‘il and Şabḥum ([YM 2009](#)).

The ruler Yaqaḥmalik associated his brother Labu‘ān (II) Yada‘ son of Yada‘‘ab ([YM 23250](#)) with the throne, before the latter began a prosperous reign around the beginning of the 7th century BCE. The name of this king is engraved on a throne ([Garbini-Francaviglia 1](#)). He is the builder of the city wall of Nashq, a town under the control of Nashshān ([AO 31930](#)), the temple of ‘Athtar Matab Khamar ([as-Sawdā 3](#)) and the monument of Yaf‘at ([as-Sawdā 89 A & B](#)).

Labu‘ān (II) renewed the alliance with Saba’ during the reign of Karib‘īl Watār ([as-Sawdā 3](#)).

Labu‘ān’s son, Sumhūyafa’ Yasarān, initially participated in Saba’’s military campaigns against [Awsān](#) and [Najrān](#) ([as-Sawdā 4](#) and [88](#), [Arbach, Audouin & Robin 2004](#)), before breaking the alliance for unknown reasons. At most, it can be assumed that the powerful city-state of Nashshān posed a growing threat to the kingdom of Saba’. Two successive Sabaeen military campaigns were successfully launched against Nashshān by the Sabaeen mukarrib Karib‘īl Watār son of Dhamar‘alī ([RES 3945](#)). Defeat entailed significant consequences: the city wall was razed, the royal palace ‘Afraw was destroyed, the city was ransacked and part of its population was massacred. A tribute was paid to the Sabaeans. The latter took up permanent residence in the city and a temple dedicated to the Sabaeen god [Almaqah](#) was built. Part of the territory of Nashshān was handed over to Saba’ — the city of Nashq and the region of Aykum and its towns — and its allies Kamna and [Haram](#): Nashshān was placed under the tutelage of a governor (‘qb) of Haram for two years ([Haram 15](#), [Robin 1996: 1122-1123](#); [Nebes 2016: 65-68](#)).

The fate of the king of Nashshān is unclear. Despite his weakened position, Nashshān regained some form of autonomy after the reign of Karibʿil Watar when Sumhūyafaʿs son, Yadaʿab, acceded to the throne ([al-Jawf 04.35](#)).

The reign of Ilīmanbaṭ Yadaʿ, perhaps the last ruler of the descendants of Labuʿān (II) son of Yadaʿab, is dated to the mid-7th century BCE. He is the author of a significant number of dedicatory inscriptions to ʿAthtar dhū-Garb (e.g., [YM 22222](#)).

In the following decades, new rulers acceded to the throne of Nashshān: Malikwaqah Rayad (II) ([YM 11191](#)) and Luḥayʿathat ([al-Jawf 04.37](#)). It is not clear whether they belonged to the same dynasty.

The end of political autonomy (6th-4th centuries BCE)

Around the 6th century BCE, two co-regents are attested: Yadaʿab and Yashhurmalik ([Moussaieff 22](#)). The latter then associated Dhamarkarib with the throne ([YM 19608](#)).

Around the 4th century BCE, ʿAmmīshafaq king of Nashshān is the author of a text written on a wooden stick and dated by ¹⁴C (L 234).

Other rulers are attested but their precise date of reign cannot be confirmed: these are Yashhurmalik and ʿAmīʿalī b. ʿAmīshafaq, mentioned on the cursive inscription L 068 and Dhamarkarib Amar, maybe a king ([as-Sawdāʿ 15](#)).

The tribe of Nashshān then lost its political independence and was absorbed into the neighbouring kingdom of Maʿīn, as evidenced by the many texts under the authority of the Maʿīn kings (e.g., [as-Sawdāʿ 30](#) and [40](#); Avanzini 1995: 50-53; Schiettecatte 2011: 79; Schiettecatte & Arbach 2020: 254).

Thereafter, Nashshān is only mentioned as a tribe. In an as-Sawdāʿ inscription written in [Sabaic](#) around the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE ([as-Sawdāʿ 97](#)), the authors define themselves as subjects of the kings of Sabaʿ (*ʿdm ʿmlk Sʿbʿ*).

If we accept the identification of ancient Nashshān with the oppidum of Nestum (Plin. *HN* VI, 32, 160, cf. Wissmann & Höfner 1953: 249), the city would have been stormed during the Roman expedition of [Aelius Gallus](#) in 26-25 BCE.

From the first century onwards, the name Nashshān only occasionally appears to designate a geographical origin ([YM 11735: *ḡ-Ns²n*](#), [Ja 700 + 814: nisba *Ns²nytn*](#), [YM 11125: nisba ʿs²s²n](#), see Schiettecatte 2011: 80).

By the 6th century CE, Nashshān had become a mere toponym associated with that of Nashq under the designation *hagarayn*, ‘the two cities’ (*The Book of the Himyarites*, [RIEth](#) 195, see Robin 2004: 119-120).

In the 10th century CE, the city is mentioned by the Yemeni encyclopaedist Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hamdānī](#) as a ruin, al-Kharibat al-Sawdāʿ (al-Hamdānī/Müller, *Ṣifa* 167).

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Nashshān (site): see *al-Sawdā'* (ancient Nashshān)

Date	Ruler name	Synchronism
8th cent. BCE	Abī'amar Ṣadiq [SW-BA/I/1-4]	
	...	
	'Ammīyatha' Ṣadiq son of Nawa'samī' [as-Sawdā' 94]	
	...	
	Ilīmanbat Amar son of Labu'ān (I) [as-Sawdā' TA 1A 7, as-Sawdā' TA 2B]	
	Sumhūyatha' son of Ilīmanbat [as-Sawdā' 95 A, B, C]	
	...	
	['Ammī']'alī & 'Ammīwatār [YM 28489]	
	Malikwaqah Rayad son of 'Ammī'alī [Garbini-Francaviglia 2]	Yatha''amar Watār son of Yakrubmalik mukarrib of Saba' [AO 31929]
	'Ammīwatār Yasarān son of 'Ammī'alī [Garbini-Francaviglia 3]	
	...	
	'Ammīyatha' [YM 29827]	
	'Ammīyatha' son of 'Ammī[watār] [as-Sawdā' 98]	
	'Ammīyatha' & 'Ammīshafīq [as-Sawdā' 90, al-Ḥarāshif 3, Kamna 23]	
	'Ammīshafaq & Yada''ab [as-Sawdā' 91, Arbach 2006]	
...		
Yaqaḥmalik [son of Yada''ab] [YM 2009]	Yatha''amar [Bayān] & Dhamar'alī [Dhāriḥ] [mukarribs] of Saba'	
Yaqaḥmalik [brother of Labu'ān (II)] [YM 23250]	Yatha''il & Ṣabḥ ^{mm} [kings] of Ma'in [YM 2009]	
...ym son of Yaqaḥmalik [as-Sawdā' 5]	Yada''il [mukarrib] of Saba' [as-Sawdā' 5]	
7th cent. BCE	Labu'ān Yada' (II) son of Yada''ab	Karib'il Watār son of Dhamar'alī mukarrib of Saba' [as-Sawdā' 3, as-Sawdā' 89 A, B]
	Sumhūyafa' Yasarān son of Labu'ān [as-Sawdā' 92]	Idem [RÉS 3945]
	Daddkarib brother of Sumhūyafa' and Yada''ab [SW-BA/I/13]	
	Ma'addkarib brother of Sumhūyafa' and Yada''ab [SW-BA/I/11]	
	Yada''ab Amar son of Sumhūyafa' [al-Jawf 04.35]	
	Yada''ab & Ilīmanbat [as-Sawdā' 88]	
	Ilīmanbat/Ilīnabat Yada' [al-Jawf 04.39, Haram 15]	Karib'il [mukarrib Saba'] Yadh ^m malik + Bi'athtar [kings of Haram] [Haram 15]
	...	
	Malikwaqah Rayad (II) [YM 11191]	
	...	
6th cent. BCE	Yada''ab & Yashh ^m malik [Moussaïeff 22]	
	Yashh ^m malik & Dhamarkarib [YM 19608]	
	...	
	Dhamarkarib Amar [as-Sawdā' 15]	
5th cent. BCE	...	
	...	
4th cent. BCE	'Ammīshafaq [Oost Inst. Leiden, n° 234]	
	...	
	Yashh ^m malik & 'Ammī'alī son of 'Ammīshafaq [Oost Inst. Leiden, n° 68]	

The rulers of Nashshān (8th-4th cent. BCE)

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