



HAL
open science

Mi^csāl (al-) [ancient Wa^clān]

Jérémie Schiettecatte

► **To cite this version:**

Jérémie Schiettecatte. Mi^csāl (al-) [ancient Wa^clān]. Thematic Dictionary of Ancient Arabia, 2024, <https://ancientarabia.huma-num.fr/dictionary/definition/misal-al>. 10.60667/tdaa-0177. hal-04860718

HAL Id: hal-04860718

<https://hal.science/hal-04860718v1>

Submitted on 8 Jan 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License



Investigating and mapping Ancient Arabia

[DICTIONARY](#)[SCOPE](#)[USER
GUIDE](#)[EDITORIAL
STAFF](#)[AUTHORS](#)

[Home](#) / [Projects](#) / [Thematic Dictionary of Ancient Arabia](#) / [Table of contents](#) / [Mi'sāl \(al-\)](#)

MI'SĀL (AL-) [ANCIENT WA'LĀN]

Ancient city in the southern highlands of Yemen. It was the capital of the tribal principality of Radmān-and-Khawlān and one of the main urban centres of the kingdom of Himyar.

Location and place name

Al-Mi'sāl is located in the southern highlands of Yemen, about 90 km east-southeast of [Dhamār](#) and 70 km northwest of al-Bayḍā'. In [Ancient South Arabian](#) inscriptions, the site is named Wa'lān (*W'ln*) (Radt 1971: 290; Müller 1973: 160).

Discovery and exploration

The site was visited by the *Deutsche Jemen Expedition* in 1971 (Radt 1971, Müller 1973), C.J. Robin in 1973, A. Jamme (1976: 110-119), Y. 'Abdallah (1979a, 1979b), *Mission archéologique française en République Arabe du Yémen* (Robin 1981). In 2003, the French *Mission Qatabān* surveyed the inscriptions of the *extra muros sanctuary* engraved on an inaccessible rock face. The history of this site is only known from epigraphic data and a surface study of the architectural remains.

Archaeological remains

The settlement area is approximately 600 m long and 200–400 m wide, extending over a surface area of ca. 19 ha (**Fig. 1**). The foundations of several tower houses are clearly visible.

The site is surrounded by rocky outcrops which form a natural defence, supplemented by sections of [rampart](#) between the outcrops.

In the centre of the site, the ruins of a large rectangular structure preceded by a porticoed courtyard may be the remains of the Palace Hirrān, the residence of the princes of the [tribe](#) of [Radmān-and-Khawlān](#) in the 1st–3rd cent. CE (Schiettecatte 2011: 265).

An *extra muros* sanctuary was established on the rocky outcrop known as al-Qal'a, south of the site. It was dedicated to the solar deity [Shams](#) (e.g., [Ja 2861](#), [Ja 2864](#)). In this high place, the princes of Radmān-and-Khawlān had their political and military deeds inscribed on the cliffside (e.g., [MAFRAY-al-Mi'sal 1](#), [MAFRAY-al-Mi'sal 4](#)).

Important [hydraulic works](#) visible on the site and in its surroundings attest to the presence of a significant agricultural area in the immediate vicinity of the site. The construction of hydraulic structures, including five monumental [dams](#), is also commemorated by numerous inscriptions from the 1st–3rd centuries CE (e.g., [MAFRAY-Hisāya 1](#), [YMN 3](#), [YMN 4](#)).

Site history

TABLE OF CONTENTS

‘	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
–	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	

[SHOW ALL CONTENT](#)

Search



SECTIONS IN THIS ENTRY

- [Location and place name](#)
- [Discovery and exploration](#)
- [Archaeological remains](#)
- [Site history](#)
- [References and suggested reading](#)

CREATION DATE

28/06/2023

CITATION

Schiettecatte, Jérémie, 2023. "Mi'sāl (al-) [ancient Wa'lān]". Thematic Dictionary of Ancient Arabia. Online edition 2023. Available online at <https://ancientarabia.humanum.fr/dictionary/definition/misal-al> (accessed online on 07 January 2025), doi: <https://doi.org/10.60667/tdaa-0177>

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.60667/tdaa-0177>

IMAGES / TABLES



Knowledge of the site's history is skewed by the fact that all the epigraphic documentation dates exclusively from the period when the Radmān tribe spearheaded Ḥimyar (1st–3rd c. CE). The occupation of the town Wa'lān (today al-Mi'sāl) certainly predates this period, as the toponym is attested in relation to a kingdom of Radmān as early as the late 8th century BCE in the royal [Sabaic inscription from Ṣirwāh DAI Ṣirwāh 2005-50](#). It also appears a century later in another inscription from the same site ([RES 3946](#)), and on the South Gate of [Tamna' \(RES 3878\)](#) in the 4th cent. BCE. Wa'lān was therefore the capital of the independent kingdom of Radmān in the 8th century before becoming part of the [Qatabānite](#) kingdom for several centuries.

Radmān broke away from Qatabān and became Ḥimyarite in the 1st century BCE/CE. At that time, the city of Wa'lān was flourishing: many buildings were erected; water systems fed by large dams were built in the surrounding area. The city acted as a political centre for the entire tribal confederation of Radmān-and-Khawlān. Around 146–147, the kingdom of [Saba'](#) confronted a coalition comprising [Qatabān](#), the tribe of Radmān and the [Hadramawt](#) in the vicinity of the city ([Ja 629](#)). From the 4th cent. onwards, the sources provide no further information, making it impossible to establish either the date or even the reasons for the abandonment of the site. It was probably occupied on a more limited basis until at least the 10th century, when Wa'lān is mentioned by [al-Hamdānī](#) as a site with the fort dhī-Ma'āhir — named after the ancient lineage that ruled the tribe of Radmān — occupied by people from the tribes of [Khawlān-of-the-North](#) (Ukayl), [Madhhij](#) (Musliya) allied with [Murād](#) (Nājiya).

Jérémie Schiettecatte

References and suggested reading

- Abdallah Y.M. 1979. Mudawwanat an-nuqūš al-yamaniyya al-qadīma. *Dirāsāt yamaniyya* 2: 53–63.
- Abdallah Y.M. 1979. Mudawwanat an-nuqūš al-yamaniyya al-qadīma. *Dirāsāt yamaniyya* 3: 29–50.
- Jamme A. 1976. *Carnegie Museum 1974–75 Yemen Expedition*. Pittsburg: Carnegie Museum of Natural History.
- Müller W.W. 1973. Ergebnisse der Deutschen Jemen-Expedition 1970. *AfO* XXIV: 159–161.
- Radt W. 1971. Bericht über eine Forschungsreise in die Arabische Republik Jemen. *AA* 1971(2): 253–293.
- Robin C.J. 1981. Les inscriptions d'al-Mi'sāl et la chronologie de l'Arabie méridionale au III^e siècle de l'ère chrétienne. *CRAI* 1981: 315–339. DOI : [10.3406/crai.1981.13841](https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.1981.13841).
- Robin C.J. & M. Bāfaqīh 1981. Deux nouvelles inscriptions de Radmān datant du II^e siècle de l'ère chrétienne. *Raydān* 4: 67–90.
- Schiettecatte, J. 2011. *D'Aden à Zafar. Villes de l'Arabie du Sud préislamique* (Orient et Méditerranée, Archéologie, 6). Paris: De Boccard.

Alternative spellings: al-Mi'sāl, al-Mi'sāl, al-Mi'sal, al-Misal, Wa'lān, Wa'lān, W'lān, Wa'lān, Wa'lan

Under license CC BY 4.0

ANCIENT ARABIA