Anna-Katharina Rieger

Loose Bonds and Porous Boundaries among Mobile People as Religious Agents in the Greco-Roman Arabian Desert*

Abstract

What happens when people of different provenance, profession, and individual interests are en route and share the same (sacred) places for short moments in time? How inclusive or exclusive are their activities and behaviour? What elements of their identities do they emphasise to show an affiliation or distinction? The paper reviews some Late Hellenistic and Roman places along the routes of the Arabian Desert (Wadi Ramm, el-Kanayis and Wadi Hammâmât) where passers-by left inscriptions, imagery and structures in order to communicate with both fellow men coming to these places before or after them, and with the gods. Departing from the distinction of ‘styles’, ‘bonds’ and ‘boundaries’ (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) in group-formation, it explores whether and how merchants, indigenous people, soldiers, or workmen established groups through religious activity. By closely looking at location, preferred script, content, reference to former texts or images, and larger spatial embedding (intra-site and inter-site relations) the various strategies, adapted to situation and purpose of the practice, become manifest, and show a differentiation of groups in terms of spatial setting, while an on-going intermingling attests to open-ended communication.

Keywords: road-side sanctuaries, multi-script epigraphy, graffiti, (religious) identities, mobile groups, Arabian Desert, Eastern Desert of Egypt, Wadi Ramm, Wadi Hammâmât, Paneion, Allât

* The paper is part of research in the framework of the ERC Advanced Grant ‘Lived Ancient Religion’ No. 295555, directed by Jörg Rüpke, at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt. I thank him for his continuous support and input. Valuable feedback came from the participants of the conference at Copenhagen, especially Ted Kaizer, Karen King, Georgia Petridou, Rubina Raja, Michael Satlow, Emiliano Urciuoli and Lara Weiss. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers for their comments on the paper and to Linda Finnigan for correcting my English.
1 Coincidental groups, virtual networks and conceptual spaces

When people travelled in antiquity for different reasons (military, business, pilgrimage), this could pose risks, to health or goods, where one needed divine assistance. Thus, the reaffirmation of the support of ‘not unquestionably plausible agents’¹ was particularly important. But at the same time, the environment probably does not provide options for religious activities that are familiar to the individuals or groups of travellers, according to naturally and culturally determined factors. A traveller, therefore, appropriates and re-forms his or her set of religious performances, while adapting to different surroundings whether constituted for religious activity or not. When conceiving of religion in pragmatic ways as a strategy to find a way through the ever changing situations of life, how then does this strategy work in situations with many new, unknown, or unexpected elements – as occurs when people are on the move?

The imponderabilia and specific needs, sometimes threats, on a journey and the contact with people of different traditions travelling along the same routes, offer opportunities to look for fellows, but also to form new groups, to join existing groups, or even re-organise and change them. But we have to clarify what criteria constitute a group determined by religious practices. What strategies of inclusion or exclusion can be recognised in the archaeological record? How are ‘boundaries’ as distinction from other groups or individuals or social categories drawn; and ‘bonds’ as means of inner cohesion constituted and probably reflected? And what strategies are at work to reach these aims (‘speech norms’)?²

The extraordinary situation of being en route is exacerbated when crossing sparsely populated areas, where shared sacred spaces are limited in number, and people and their remains cluster due to scarceness of any kind of resource. I apply the criteria to the archaeological remains at a set of places in the Arabian Desert to explore the ways of grouping under the conditions of short-term stays, non-synchronicity of presence and long-term use of the places. Referring to sites in Wadi Ramm (Jordan), Wadi Abad and Wadi Ḥammāmāt (Egypt) (fig. 1), I examine if and what group identities or affiliations play a role and how they are communicated. I argue that the scarcer stop-overs are, the more does their reliability for religious requirements take precedence over grouping tendencies. In other words, the receptiveness of religiously used sites along routes and the different available options they

¹ Rüpke 2015a.
provide, perpetuated by ongoing activities of people, are the crucial features that make them attractive and long-standing. Group boundaries, transmitted archaeologically in choice of script, content and form as well as in location, are drawn fuzzily and remain porous, while bonds are loose and not intensely expressed. Only some speech norms reveal cohesions and relationships.3

1.1 Material practices of groups and constraints of the archaeological record

In the scope of this paper, travellers on routes of the Arabian Desert in Greco-Roman times are presumed on the one hand to be a cohesive group, behaving similarly due to their needs, interests and movements. On the other hand, they are inhomogeneous regarding their cultural backgrounds, traditions and their intentions for undertaking a journey. Usually, questions of identities, of epigraphic habits in different languages and scripts, or the relation to the environment are the subject of studies of road-side material or epigraphic remains.4 Typically, inscriptions are published by language and script, where spatial setting plays a minor role, and reliefs and architectural layouts are dealt with rather by epochs than diachronically. Thus, academic traditions hamper the consideration of social phenomena like grouping tendencies in the long durée at the sacred places along routes. Although I concentrate on the epoch of Greco-Roman antiquity, I envision also the remains from earlier periods as crucial determinants for later activities.

The material evidence of practising religion and probable groupings for that purpose en route embrace graffiti and inscriptions, engraved images and objects placed in spatial relation to the course of routes and trails in architectural or natural environments of varying complexity.5 These left-overs of visitors, combined with some other facilities, marked certain places, in all the case studies, as appropriate for religious activities. 6 But what makes an

3 Multiple identities and changing self-attributions are common in the Greco-Roman Near East. They have to be defined according to the local context (cf. MacDonald 2003 on use of Nabataean Aramaic).

4 Cf. Espinel 2012, 93; Mairs 2010; Adams 2007; Durand 2012. For recent diachronic approaches to graffiti see Seidlmayer 2014.

5 For an assessment of the scholarly debate on graffiti and informal writing in the last decades see Peden 2001; Mairs 2010; Stern 2013; Yasin 2015. Despite the fact that, according to this definition, ‘graffiti’ could be applied to my test cases, I rather use ‘inscription’ for the textual remains at Wadi Ramm due to the fact that they have no ‘formal’ counterparts and are in some cases rather monumental, cf. Healey 2001, 56–59.

6 Prayers, curses or the like may be reflected in epigraphic remains as προσκύνημα-formula, thanksgivings, remembrance-formula (be the name before the god / Demotic; μνησθῇ /
activity religious? Is the name of a person engraved in a rock close to a temple representative of a religious act?7

Apart from assessing the evidence as religious or not, the archaeologically attested clusters of people reflect social practices that are not necessarily conducted in groups. Even if rudimental, I take as the most basic group a dyad.8 So the particularity is that groups can develop, disband, and re-form, with individuals not physically present at one place at the same time, by referring to earlier or future fellows when leaving a permanent dedication or invocation.9 Similarly, bonds (as one of a group’s determinants, even if not negotiated in direct contact) can also be expressed by referring to places far away.10 Strategies of how to appropriate the left-overs of other travelers appear in the archaeological and epigraphical record in similarities in design, iconographic motifs, physical or represented objects, architectural shapes (‘bonds’), as well as in script-use and form and content of written words (‘speech norm’), and their spatial settings (‘bonds’ and ‘boundaries’), with which one can make up relations to others, distant in time and space, and exclude others.11 In order to affiliate to others, certain characteristics are disclosed such as profession, provenance, beliefs and deities, but also ‘alphabetical home’, wording (beyond epigraphical formulas) or genealogies.12 The borderline to an only situational and very temporary ‘grouping’ as well as to unintended affiliations is not easy to draw. Boundaries, in turn, can be transmitted by frames in a spatial sense, spatial segregation, and script-use to facilitate or inhibit understanding.

1.2 Places of repetitive and multicultural religious activity in the Arabian Desert

As an area where population density and resource availability approach zero, the Arabian Desert offers an extreme environment where any supply places with indispensable resources and facilities like shelter, water, and

---

7 Bodel 2009, 23–24: dedications are often made in places that were not or never became sanctuaries.
9 Cf. the ‘virtual networks’ in the contribution of Whitmarsh 2017 this volume.
10 For more time and space spanning groupings see Rüpke 2015b, van Haepenen 2017 and Whitmarsh 2017 this volume.
11 See above n. 2.
12 Clustering by chance cannot be excluded for the following examples.

food, as well as divine assistance, are concentrated at certain spots. The physical environment, with clear-cut thoroughfares and places to replenish provisions, look for any kind of support, and take rest, determines where people sojourn. On the other hand, the scattered places along desert routes are closely connected to larger settlements in the Nile Valley and on the Red Sea coast, and as such to international routes along the Nile, the King’s Highway or the Spice Route. On a smaller scale, the workers’ settlements in the Eastern Desert and the indigenous settlements in Wadi Ramm form more densely populated places close to the sacred places dealt with here. However, the respective distance to more populated centres suggest that the sacred places were not visited on a daily basis.

Due to the longevity of the routes, whose courses follow favourable pas sageways and connect economically interesting destinations (for natural resources from mining and quarry sites and trade goods from overseas), some of the (sacred) places in the Arabian Desert were frequented over centuries. Differentiated mostly according to script-use, but also other cultural markers such as pottery or habitations, we know of Nabataeans, Greeks, Aramaeans, Romans, Palmyrenes, Egyptians from the Nile Valley, Aksumites, Blemmyes and Arabic groups frequenting the routes. Hence, the case studies from the Arabian Desert are suitable to explore how people from different backgrounds appropriated existing installations at different times.

2 Different options at Wadi Ramm

The area of the Wadi Ramm in Southern Jordan is a part of the Ḥismā Desert dominated by high peaks (up to 1800 m asl). In terms of mobility and infrastructure, it functions as a crossroads for routes between the Arabian Peninsula and Red Sea harbours, first of all Aila, c. 40 km to the west, and the King’s Highway, heading west to Sinai or north to Petra (fig. 2). Stone structures, burials and rock engravings testify to human activity in the area from prehistoric times onwards. The local North Arabian tribes left pictures and inscriptions on the rocks using Ḥismāic script from the first century BCE to

---

13 Travellers coming to settlements that offer a variety of choices for religious activity are more thoroughly studied (Khirbet et-Tannur, Petra, Dura Europos or Palmyra).

14 At places like harbours or oases (Palmyra, Berenike, Dura Europos) inner-community groupings are more often recognisable, cf. Dirven 1999; Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens 2008.

the first century CE. During this time, Wadi Ramm belonged economically to the Nabataean sphere of influence, and later became administratively part of the Roman Empire.

At ʿAin esh-Shallāla on the western slope of Jebel Ramm, where various springs rise from the rocks north of the present-day village, various traces of religious activity are concentrated. An open-air sanctuary developed at a larger spring, while at the foot of the cliff a temple building was constructed in the first century BCE (fig. 2–10). Building structures in the valley attest to local inhabitants and passers-by in antiquity making use of the water of a string of sources along the ridge collected in large reservoirs, even though the environment seems to Mediterranean eyes not suitable for a settlement of nomadic people. For the argument of the formation of religiously determined groupings, Wadi Ramm provides contexts in close spatial relation that enable us to look for differentiated habits of their users.

2.1 Groupings of images and texts at the spring

At the water spring of ʿAin esh-Shallāla 26 inscriptions attest to religious activity. A further inscription commemorating members of the family of King Rabbel II (70–106 CE), the only one belonging to a structure made from well-cut slabs (fig. 4–5), offers a chronological clue, whereas all other inscriptions are undated. Of the 27 total inscriptions, only two are written in Greek, the remaining in Nabataean Aramaic.

Most inscriptions mention only the writer’s and his father’s names, refraining from invoking a deity. In twelve texts Allāt is addressed (fig. 5–7); one inscription is directed to el-Uzza and ‘the Master of the house’ (fig. 6) as well as el-Uzza and el-Kutba. Another writer leaves a thanksgiving to

---

17 For a brief overview see Dentzer 1999, 233–237.
18 Tholbecq 1998; Savignac 1933; Savignac 1934. The remains correspond to the settlement Aramava, mentioned in Ptol. 6.7.27, cf. Tholbecq 1998, 252.
19 Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 1, 407–411, fig. 2. All inscriptions can only roughly be dated between the first century BCE and the second century CE according to script use and letter forms as well as surrounding structures.
20 The Hismāic inscriptions and later Arabic wasam represent the same conduct of inhabitants and passers-by (cf. fig. 4).
21 Savignac 1933, Nabat. nos. 2. 3. 5. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 13. 14. 15; Savignac 1934, Nabat. no. 16. One of the Greek texts mention an anonymous θεα, Savignac 1933, Greek no. 2.
22 Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 4; Savignac 1934, Nabat. no. 17 (probably with al-Kutba, cf. Gudme 2013, 114).
Ba’alshamin and Du’shara (fig. 5). Most use the ‘remembered be’ formula. Except one, all these invocations are placed at the central grotto and are connected with reliefs of standing stones (fig. 4–6). Whether the reliefs were sculptured as dedications only or used for any cultic practices – as a relief of a standing stone with horn-like extensions may usually indicate – remains open.

Slight references between several inscriptions allow for interpreting them as intentional. Two invocations by different people to Allāt, for example, are written onto the rock as follow-ups (fig. 7). Another inscription seems to be the third line of one above it, which itself is the prolongation of the second line of an inscription to its right. The writers might have intended to show a connection through the positioning of their inscriptions. The similarity in the letter forms and sizes of the three of them emphasises this referentiality.

Two of these inscriptions with the similar writing come from men involved in building work, as do five more whose writers claim to be artists, architects or sculptors, masons, and plasterers (fig. 6. 7). Yet these individuals do not only constitute a group due to their professions in the construction business, but also through the location of five of the seven inscriptions, covering a long stretch of the rock face. Although neither the absolute nor the relative dates of the inscriptions can be fixed, they were written by people with the same professional background (a work team?) and appear on
the long southern stretch of the abri, although two sets of dedications can be distinguished (fig. 4).32

Whereas these relationships were visible and perceived at least by the writers when adding their inscription to the existing ones or writing them in a concerted action, another dedicational inscription recalls a virtual relationship according to the provenance of the deity: in an inscription in a well-cut frame, the Allāt of Bosra is invoked, which points to the city in the north on the King’s Highway (fig. 5).33 The dedicants – appearing as a group (‘servants of afkal’, a religious office) – refer to the goddess of this place in order to demonstrate a closeness to Bosra (and its gods), whether living or originating from there. As far as we can see from the preserved inscriptions, no one else was attracted to refer to this particular Allāt at the sacred spring. The virtual reference to a place far away, but frequented as part of the interregional route system of the Near East, made by a group of people, suggests a group prone to show this affiliation.34

After all it comes not as a surprise that only one religious specialist appears as writer of an inscription on an isolated boulder close to the spring.35 Negotiations about specialists’ expertise and organisation of access were not the foremost function of the place at the spring. The reliefs and inscriptions rather give evidence of a continuous setting of scripts and gods side by side when one approaches the spring from below. The strong predominance of non-Greek attitudes (script, motifs) attests to a certain clientele. The grotto with its water source offers an open way of veneration of gods, but even if an open-air place, it is culturally predefined and preferred as such by Aramaic-writing people.

2.2 Groupings of images and texts at the temple

The temple at the foot of the Jebel, in its phase of the second century CE, resembles sacred buildings in the region: a square cella (app. 4 × 5 m) with a corridor around it was built on a substructure (c. 12 × 14 m), surrounded by rooms on three sides (figs. 2. 3. 8). Columns around the cella supported an

32 Since there is no hint of a dedication, it remains open whether they are invocatory or dedicatory records, Gudme 2013, 114.
33 Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 2, 411–412, fig. 3.
34 Reference to Allāt of Bosra is also found at Medain Salih, Saudi Arabia, see Savignac 1933, 412. I would doubt the explanation of Savignac 1934, 585 ‘que son culte aura été importé de cette localité à Ramm.’
35 Savignac 1934, Nabat. no. 23, i. 37, another priest of Allāt left evidence at Kashem Djedaydeh, Savignac 1932, 590–592 not doubtlessly a sacred place. The ‘servants of afkal’ in the inscription to the Allāt of Bosra refer also to a kind of religious office.
unknown roofing structure, and the floor is paved with an elaborate pattern made from the local sandstone (fig. 8).\textsuperscript{36} Inner and outer walls and architectural parts were covered with painted stucco. A doorway through the rear row of rooms led out. Steps leading into the substructure are not preserved, but two staircases in the back gave access to the roof. A platform with altar was added in this time in front of the temple.

The temple is surrounded by facilities that include a cistern in the southwestern corner of the podium and structures to the west of the temple, added in the second century CE and connected with it through doorways.\textsuperscript{37} Further east, reservoirs and more structures are visible. The finds there attest mainly to domestic activities, while a complex about 50 m to the east of the temple building contains a bath and courtyards of different sizes from Roman times – maybe the rest house of Wadi Ramm where mobile people and travellers gathered (figs. 2, 8).

The remains from the temple of interest in this context include inscriptions, standing stones, an altar and a lower part of a sitting statue. Of the eleven readable epigraphical records (five Nabataean, four Greek, one Hismāic, one Latin), two refer to Allāt: a Nabataean script on the elaborate second style decoration of the parapets between the columns addresses the ‘Great Goddess of Iram’, and the same goddess is mentioned in an earlier Hismāic inscription on an ashlar, speaking of a ‘byt’ for ‘Lat’ – a house for Allāt – reused in the later temple.\textsuperscript{38} The other textual remains are mostly painted or engraved in the wall plaster (fig. 9). A number of illegible Greek letters could also be retrieved, but are unpublished.\textsuperscript{39} Hismāic and Minaic, as well as later Arab inscriptions, mostly containing names or genealogies, were engraved after the abandonment of the temple.\textsuperscript{40}

The statue of a female sitting goddess, found during the excavation in the 1930s, can be regarded as Allāt represented in a Greco-Roman type of Tyche (fig. 10).\textsuperscript{41} In combination with the inscription we can regard her as

---

\textsuperscript{36} For the phases of the building see Tholbecq 1998, 246–247 with figs. 12 and 13.
\textsuperscript{38} Savignac and Horsfield 1935, 265–268, Nabat. no. 1; Zayadine and Farès-Drappeau 1998, 257. The dating of the Aramaic text is discussed controversially: it may stem from the second century CE, see Kirkbride 1960; Tholbecq 1998.
\textsuperscript{39} Savignac and Horsfield 1935, Greek nos. 2, 3. Greek no. 4 is in too bad a condition to be read: Savignac and Horsfield 1935, 263. Since they were inscribed in plaster, their preservation is worse than the rock inscriptions.
\textsuperscript{40} Farès-Drappeau and Zayadine 2001; Farès-Drappeau and Zayadine 2004; Corbett 2012; Ryckmans in Savignac 1934, 590–591 (Minaic).
\textsuperscript{41} Cf. McKenzie et al. 2013, vol. 1, 262–263. It seems to be made from local sandstone. The serpent-like feature at the left foot and the remains of an object between the draped legs do not find any explanation.
the owner of the temple. Probably a standing stone monument was situated at the northern wall of the corridor of the temple, representing the aniconic depiction of this deity (fig. 8, northern colonnade). Hence, visually the temple houses more options than the spring sanctuary, where only aniconic and no anthropomorphic images were sculptured in the rock-face.

All Greek inscriptions use the ‘remembered be’-formula (μνησθῇ); the only longer one is too poorly preserved to make out any detail of the dedication, as is the case with the Nabataean ones. However, the Greek alphabet is used by people with Semitic and Latin names (Abdomanos, Severos, fig. 9). An altar for libations, decorated with leaves along the upper part, bears the only Latin inscription at the entire site and testifies to the presence of people familiar with Latin at the temple. The four lines of the poorly preserved text read ‘Aur(elius) e(o)rum [...] devotissimus Numin(i) [...]um’. The content remains unclear, yet in contrast to the other inscriptions – as usual rather unspecific as regards any possible religious intentions, just pleading for being remembered or mentioning a name – on the altar of Aurelius we find an explicit religious statement.

Yet, the mere presence of the well-written Latin letters, and the Greek and Nabataean records, show that people with different cultural backgrounds and knowledge were present at the sanctuary in Wadi Ramm. In comparison to the grotto up the slope, more variations in scripts and names cluster at the temple. However, a tendency to establish groupings through location of inscriptions or textual references cannot be detected at the temple. A ‘grouping together’ in a religious act might be seen only in the case of the two Greek texts, set one beneath the other, starting at a painted line of the decoration system. Other dedications and wishes merely accumulate at the rear of the temple, probably due to the interface with the surrounding structures, but appear to be executed individually.

2.3 Who and where? Differences in dedicational practices between spring and temple

At Ain esh-Shallâla at Wadi Ramm, the invitation to people from different backgrounds to be religiously active works on different layers. Firstly, two spaces accumulate reminders of activity over time and lie in close proxim-

---

42 See Savignac and Horsfield 1935, fig. 13.
44 Savignac and Horsfield 1935, 265. Greek nos. 2. 3.
45 Here is the access to the western complex that might have played a more important rôle in practical use than the front.
ity to each other and to water facilities. Secondly, their different arrangements – the one is a grotto in the natural rock face up the slope where the wide-spread practice of engravings can be easily employed, the other combines structured architecture and imag(ina)ery in the valley referring to Eastern Mediterranean traditions – invite people of different provenance and identities to pursue their preferred religious practices. The variety of scripts, Ḥismāic, Minaic, Greek, Nabataean and Latin, provides, on the one hand, the evidence for the utmost openness of both these installations for religious practice and their adaptation by a variety of users and passers-by. On the other hand, distinctions are recognisable with respect to who clusters where, using what objects or script.

When comparing the relation of scripts, there is a stronger presence of Greek in the temple (five Nabataean, four Greek, one Ḥismāic, one Latin), while at the spring sanctuary Nabataean is the foremost choice (twenty-five Nabataean, two Greek). Greek appears at the temple as a unifying script, a *scriptura franca*, because it is used for Semitic and Latin names, while Ḥismāic and Aramaic are employed only by individuals with Semitic names. Despite the preferences at the sacred places themselves, we have to be aware that the ‘scribing landscape’ in which these places are embedded is dominated by Ḥismāic script-use (with a little Minaic). These ancient Arabic scripts are interspersed with – second in number – Nabataean inscriptions that form clusters, as for example at the spring of Ain esh-Shallāla, while the temple with Greek and Latin inscriptions emerges as an island of Eastern Mediterranean iconographical and epigraphical traditions along the thoroughfare through Wadi Ramm.

A similar split is recognisable in the divine figures. Allāt is the deity most often addressed: she is the overarching deity for both places. The aniconic representations of Allāt at the spring and the anthropomorphic representation in the temple embrace a spectrum of concepts of divine images, suitable for the variety of people using the (sacred) place.

---

46 See above n. 16.
47 This impression of Wadi Ramm is underpinned by the little evidence of Greek inscriptions from the Ḥismā, cf. Jobling 1993.
3 From ephemerality to recurrence: concentration of religious activities at so-called Paneia in the Arabian Desert of Egypt

A high density of ancient religious activity ‘on the move’ is preserved in the Arabian Desert of Egypt (figs. 1. 11), where the landscape may have appeared barren to people from fertile regions due to the minimal number of permanent settlements and the nomadic indigenous population. Traces of religious practices from all periods are concentrated along routes and thoroughfares between the Nile and the Red Sea coast where water supply was granted, and traffic and transports went back and forth, ever more frequently in Greco-Roman times. The remains consist mostly of rock engravings, inscriptions and graffiti on natural rock formations or abris; only some places possess built features.

I focus on two places with concentrated religious activity: el-Kanayis in Wadi Abad, 45 km east of Apollonopolis magna (Edfu) along the route to the harbour of Marsa Nakaria (and Berenike Trogloodytica); and a sacred place in the central section of Wadi Ḥammāmāt close to Bir Fawakhir along the route from Koptos to Myos Hormos, a harbour north of Berenike (fig. 11). The amassment as well as the chronological and spatial range of the engravings at the sites offer the basis for exploring whether groups among their users are established in terms of a spatial segregation or compilation of remains.

3.1 Space- and time-spanning networks? Intra-site group styles at el-Kanayis

The sacred place of el-Kanayis is one of the few in the Eastern Desert that comprises not only a place of rock-inscriptions, but has also an architectural part: situated on the southern slope of Wadi Abad (shortly before the branching of Wadi Barramiya and Wadi Mia), a temple to Amun was built by Pharaoh Seti I (thirteenth century BCE) for Amun-Re against the jutting rock (figs. 12. 13). At that time, profitable mines fostered the construction of a water reservoir and a temple at a site that was already considered a good place to rest, as demonstrated by many pre-dynastic rock engravings (fig. 13). Later Hieroglyphic panels can be seen not only east of the tem-

48 For indigenous habitations in the Eastern Desert see Sidebotham, Barnard and Pyke 2002; Lassanyi 2012.
49 There is still a lack of overall studies of places with pictorial and textual engravings over-arching periods and scripts. Beside Cuvigny 2003, Mairs 2010 and Espinel 2012, most publications concentrate on philological issues according to the employed script.
ple, but also along the whole wadi system.\textsuperscript{50} The interests of the Ptolemaic kings in trade with India led to a more intensive frequented of the route, followed by an improvement of the whole route system by ὑδρεύματα and praesidia in the Eastern Desert by the Roman administration.\textsuperscript{51} As at many places along the routes, Min, a patron deity of the landscapes east and west of the Nile, paralleled with Pan in Greco-Roman times, is often depicted and addressed at el-Kanayis.\textsuperscript{52} However, on closer inspection, he or other gods are not necessarily invoked in the inscriptions.

Of the ninety Greek inscriptions, twelve are in the hypostyle hall, fifteen in the pronaos, two on the flanking terraces, and the remaining cover the rock face east and west of the temple. Most of them can be dated to Ptolemaic times.\textsuperscript{53} Later Arabic and European travellers added theirs.\textsuperscript{54} Among this number, we can figure out connections between some inscriptions, since location and contents reflect the ‘style’ of the writer, since he (there are no traces of female visitors) chooses to which texts (and people) he wants to refer. In Ptolemaic times people emphasise the wilderness and the threats posed by the indigenous people of the Eastern Desert (τρωγλοδύται) they are exposed to.\textsuperscript{55} The real or imagined fear expressed in their graffiti offers clues to group-internal expectations, experiences and knowledge addressed to their successors. Through repeated references, the Greek-writing individuals emerge as a group that knows, or at least pretends to know, about negative experience with indigenous people. They refer to them rather as a sign of a certain παιδεία which can be understood and taken up only by certain other individuals: a ‘bond’ and ‘boundary’ at the same time. Three of these

\textsuperscript{50} The inscriptions calls the place ‘hnw’, ‘water reservoir of Men-Maat-Re’ (=Seti), combined with ‘hn.t’, ‘stopping place’: Schott 1961, 135. 142–146. 168–174. For earlier iconic engravings see Lancaster 2012. There are no Demotic and Hieratic graffiti close to the temple, contrary to the findings in Wadi Ḥammāmāt (cf. Mairs 2010, 155–156; Schott 1961). The well and its maintenance in Ptolemaic times are referred to in I.Kanais 12.

\textsuperscript{51} A Greco-Roman station lies close to the temple, Bernard 1972a, pl. 15; Weigall 1913, 162–163.


\textsuperscript{54} Chronological sequences are not traceable because of the little overlaps of the inscriptions.

\textsuperscript{55} Adams 2007, 217–218. I.Kanais 13 (pronaos southern wall, on the leg of Osiris), 3 (painted, north wall of the niches west of the temple), 8 (unknown), 18 (rock east of the temple), 43 (niche west of the temple), 47 (unknown), 60 (on a capital in the pronaos), 61 (on the relief of Amon at the rear wall of the pronaos), 62 (pronaos rear wall, on the leg of Osiris), 82 (rock west of the temple), 90 (north wall of the niches west of temple). 8 is a very long inscription in elegiac verses, referring to the πόνοι (l. 2), the troubles of the travel. 43 has an engraving of an animal above and a person (with helmet?) in profile below. 6, loc. unknown, emphasises the status of the writer as ξένος, foreigner.
graffiti are placed in a niche in the rock face east of the temple (I.Kanais 3. 43. 90), related to each other through location. Other inscribers used the pronaos and the high reliefs there to leave their texts (I.Kanais 13. 61), but in contrast to the above mentioned ones, they are not visible (or readable) as an entity.56

Groups as such appear at el-Kanayis also due to the military character of the exploitation of the desert (I.Kanais 10. 44, fig. 14). Soldiers formed units moving around together. Some graffiti represent collaborative dedications with names of different individuals, where the cohesion is not clear, as for example I.Kanais 48, 49 and 58. Others seem to repeat their ‘entries’ on the rock-face close to their fellows’ names, as in the case of four graffiti east of the temple (I.Kanais 26–29) where the dedicants’ names appear with Pan and an Epitheton. When a certain Chresimos repeats his name three times in different forms – inverted, abbreviated and normal –, he spent considerable time thinking about the various letters and etching them in (I.Kanais 59). He can be regarded as forming a group with himself. A little to the east of the reservoir, a person speaks about coming with a friend, thus being a basic group from the beginning (I. Kanais 80). Four names together close-by also attest to a group resting at el-Kanayis. Several people group through the location of their graffiti, by adding follow-ups. Two people add their names to the text left by a detachment of soldiers (I.Kanais 10): one uses only his and his father’s name (I.Kanais 20), the other, in a third act, explains that he came to this place, too (I.Kanais 4, fig. 14). The authors want to be seen with their predecessors and attempt to establish links by text-location and content.57 A virtual networking takes place.

Provenance is also a criterion to which one can subscribe. At el-Kanayis some Cyreneans express their ‘belonging together’ through the location of their inscriptions in relation to architectural structures: five of them who deliberately included their provenance in their dedicational graffiti cluster in two compartments of the temple (fig. 15).58 Three others are found on the columns in the hypostyle hall (I.Kanais 15. 16. 17); one more is engraved in the pronaos (I.Kanais 14 close to Pharao and his cartouche). While this grouping-strategy of compatriots is true for the Cyreneans, three graffiti left by Cretans do not show such patterns (I.Kanais 1. 5. 13 east and west of, as

56 Subsequent visitors and writers do not underline the threats of the area and its inhabitants. In Roman times, the dangers, either real or imagined, are no longer a topic to communicate to other passers-by. People coming for the second or third time do not group at certain spots as one would expect (I.Kanais 24. 49. 73. 67. 68. 70. 87. 89. 90).


58 Cf. Bingen 1973. I.Kanais 60 is too badly preserved to count in this series.
well as in, the temple). The reference to topologically existent places creates a conceptual space as a group bond and boundary.

Jewish or Judaean people are attested in two inscriptions (fig. 16) that are both situated west of the temple on a comfortably accessible rock wall, where many people came and left inscriptions (seventeen graffiti, e.g., I.Kanais 39 close to 42). This location renders Bernard’s opinion arguable that they ‘s’isolant des autres’ (having in mind the monotheistic Judeans that do not want to intermingle with others). Since one of them (I.Kanais 34), whatever he addresses, uses an imperative formula (εὐλόγει), he calls his reader to join him – which also belies the supposed ‘distinction’ from others.

We do not know to what extent the act of engraving names was religiously inspired and a religious motivation is rarely expressed by words. Considering all the Greek graffiti, there appears to be no strong need to mention a god, since only a third of the writers address one. Amongst the divine names, Pan is predominant (often as Εὔοδος); next to him appear Apollon, Kronos and Arsinoe.60 As a general trend, reference to a religious motivation decreases from Ptolemaic to Roman times.61 Only in thirteen cases, a religious act or object is referred to (e.g., ἔθυσαν I.Kanais 72; εὐχόμενος I.Kanais 55, probably an altar; εὐτυχέω I.Kanais 12, and ἁιρέω I.Kanais 66).62 Seven, more elaborate, inscriptions start with the formula προσκύνημα, which might refer to the act of prostrating before the god(s), with no chronological preference.63 Two more tell us that the γράμμα itself was a dedication (ἀνέθηκεν I.Kanais 1. 7). Without a clarification by words, we are not able to detect whether the scratching of one’s name64 at el-Kanayis was religiously induced.

El-Kanayis is not only suitable for a shadowy rest close to the cistern. In addition to the temple, the remains of many former visitors and their rituals, reflected in the graffiti,65 reaffirm the credibility of the place and tempts

60 Epitheta of Pan, e.g., I.Kanais 25. 39. 43. Serapis, mentioned in I.Kanais 59bis, with uncertain find spot can now be attributed to Didymoi, cf. Cuvigny 2001. Figural depictions, whether gods, humans or animals, are rare at el-Kanayis.
61 See Gates-Foster 2012, 214, emphasising the position of the pieces being as telling as the contents.
62 Images of vessels are recorded opposite of the temple, together with stone markers (alat-mat) and pottery, and could also reflect practical use, Weigall 1913. Niches, allowing for practices or images, are cut into the rock-face behind the reservoir, Bernard 1972a, 24.
63 I.Kanais 13. 14. 55. 60. 76. 80. 86. For the religious implications of προσκύνημα see Tallet 2012; Cuvigny 1997.
64 Cf. Mairs 2010, 155 for the percentage.
65 Adams 2007, 220. That ‘graffiti reflect a ritual’ is plausible at least for the προσκύνημα, because this formula may refer to a performed prostration (cf. n. 6 and 63); cf. Stern 2013.
individuals to add their own entries. The inscribers, then, chose a way of doing their thanksgiving or dedication – some with specific reference to others, by content, design, personal background, deity, or by the physical location. In rare cases we can grasp stronger bonds (provenance, companions) among the texts of that place. The main aim of people leaving their graffiti seems to be to draw a boundary to the outside through amassment of records.

3.2 Intra- and inter-site relations at Wadi Ḥammāmāt

While el-Kanayis could be investigated under the aspect of intra-site groupings with some relations to virtually evoked places, a stretch of Wadi Ḥammāmāt further north offers insights into a different aspect of spatial relations. Along the wadi, a natural thoroughfare from Koptos in the Nile Valley to Quseir at the Red Sea coast, famous emerald and gold mines as well as quarries were exploited since Pharaonic times and led people from the Nile to this desert environment (figs. 1. 11. 17). Signs of dense activity of people involved in this business cluster on a stretch between Bir Ḥammāmāt and Bir Fawakhir and cover all periods of time. At the latter, mining settlements and a military station are located. A concentration of Greco-Roman engravings, due to intensified exploitation of the area in this time, can be found at a rock shelter close to Bir Ḥammāmāt.66 Here, the valley narrows, shortly before the embouchure of Wadi Fawakhir. For the people travelling through the wadi, Bir Ḥammāmāt meant being halfway between the Nile and the Red Sea, whereas to mining workers or military personnel it was a point close to their living quarters, an hour’s walk away. Moreover, as the habitations at the niche-shrine on the northern slope show, there had apparently been guards at the quarries along this stretch of the wadi for at least a few years (fig. 17).

On the southern steep slope of the wadi, a terrace is situated in front of a rock wall c. 5 m from the ground. This place is marked by an engraved panel with different images, one from the thirtieth dynasty (Nektanebo II, 360–343 BCE) showing an ithyphallic Min in front of a chapel with a statue of Osiris. Another panel shows Pharao Amyrtaios (twenty-third dynasty) offering in front of a triad of gods (Isis-Hathor, Min-Amon and Harpokrates), with additional other chapels and more roughly incised animals, images of gods or humans, symbols, and objects (fig. 18).67 Apart from this rock-face,

---

66 See Bernand 1972b, 59–213.
67 For the hieroglyphic inscriptions of Wadi Ḥammāmāt see Goyon 1957; Peden 2001.
inscriptions and images from earlier periods are numerous, especially on the southern stretch of the passage.

The graffiti, taken into closer consideration, can be dated mainly to Roman Imperial times, hence later than the majority of the ones at el-Kanayis. They differ from the ones at el-Kanayis because they rarely mention Pan with an Epitheton, as ἕυοδος or the like (twelve times, e.g., I.KoKo 38–40). The god is addressed more generally, because the dangers of the landscape one was passing through were not deemed worth mentioning, unlike the case at el-Kanayis. A togetherness in terms of marking similar experiences or being in comparable situations is not communicated. However, many passers-by still wish to add their mark close to the earlier signs and engravings: some are looking for a close connection to the Pharaonic engravings. Two wrote their graffito above and in front of the phallus of Min (I.KoKo 93, 94, fig. 19), while one person writes so that it looks as if coming out of the mouth of Isis (I.KoKo 78). Two more (I.KoKo 76, 77) are set in front of Isis, followed by a Demotic one, to name only the most prominent ones (fig. 20). Two other graffiti play with the snake ornament of the crowning of the shrine with the divine triad, through putting their letters in the interstices (I.KoKo 42, 74, fig. 21). They form a group which is made visible by choosing this particular location. The upper one comprises four individuals, a group in itself. Another group of four is attested at the rock-face (I.KoKo 43, 107). There, a group of three fellows set their names one below the other (I.KoKo 96, fig. 22), and a Demotic one is (later?) interspersed among them.

Using the προσκύνημα-formula is a well-accepted epigraphic habit at this site (58 out of 93 inscriptions), thus adding to the religious character of the graffiti. Scratched images, of a libation on an altar or the vessels, a trumpeter, and a dancer may point to religious practices at the site (I.KoKo 43), while hunting scenes were only found on the opposite slope (I.KoKo 129).

---

68 Cf. Adams 2007, 218; Bernand 1972b, 14–15. Beside some Greek graffiti from Ptolemaic times, many of the Demotic ones are written from Persian to Ptolemaic times, see Cruz-Uribe 2001, 27; Thissen 1979, 89–90.

69 See above p. 26 and fig. 18.

70 Thissen 1979, no. 10. Another group of fellows appear on the northern slope of the wadi, where a tributary branches off (I.KoKo 130).

71 I.KoKo 38–140, apart from 41, 45, 131–138 (different find spots). For comparison, in the Paneion at el-Buwayb only a third of the inscriptions contains προσκύνημα. Other references to religious practices through wording cannot be found (I.KoKo 134, unknown provenance).

72 Their status as institutionalised sacred places is unclear. No permanent priesthood can be assumed (προστάτης, I.KoKo 44 and 74, is not necessarily a religious office). Only at el-Buwayb (I.KoKo 145) the προστάτης του θεού could mean an official.
The professional status of inscribers (and hence also the reason why they are there), which is often referred to in Hieratic and Demotic graffiti (stone workers), does not play any role in the Greek ones at this site.\(^{73}\) Was it too self-evident to be mentioned – in contrast to Wadi Ramm, where a worker was not the common passer-by? Also provenance is not a point to make. Two people from Syene (I.KoKo 49. 91), for example, do not try to meet each other on the rock-face.

A certain Lucius Vettius repeats his name three times, of which the last one stands on the architrave of the chapel with the figure of Min/Ptah, imitating or imitated by other (also Demotic) ones (fig. 22).\(^{74}\) Gaius Peticius offers two options to be read, when he uses Latin and Greek, close to each other, to inscribe his name (I.KoKo 120. 121). Whether this was meant as an offer to a Latin readership to join him virtually, remains open. Only two Aramaic inscriptions were retrieved here, whereas they are numerous others at the settlement of Bir Umm Fawakhir to the east. This points either to fewer Aramaic-writing people travelling along the route, or to their preference for a different location.\(^{75}\)

With the installation of guards at the quarry opposite the rock with the engravings, a shrine was built during Tiberius’ reign (I.KoKo 41, figs. 17. 23), where also habitations were constructed. An inscription (I.KoKo 109) speaking of ‘the area of the camp’ might refer to this small settlement (or to the station at Bir Ḥammāmāt).\(^{76}\) The inscription on a lintel and the monolithic naos of the shrine contains a series of προσκύνηματα by the soldiers and workers detached there. Besides the inscriptions on the door frame, people also left other graffiti (and ostraka) in the habitations (Kayser 1993, no. 18).\(^{77}\) An Augustan graffito represents the first marker at this place; the last was carved in the time of Nero.\(^{78}\) Thus, we have a very short period of condensed activity (that coincides with the small habitations found there) at the niche, while the rock face on the southern slope is continually interesting for addressing the gods.

---

73 See Thissen 1979, 64 n. 1.
74 Cf. I.KoKo 86–90. 102. 103. Hephaistos, who writes his name on the architrave of the niche, acts as being the divine owner of it. Thissen 1979, nos. 8. 9.
75 Durand 2012, 87 and fig. 10:1. An Aramaic-Demotic inscription and an alphabet are engraved to the east of the main concentration of graffiti, Cruz-Uribe 2001, 49. 51–54.
76 Many Ostraka attest to its character as a settlement, Kayser 1993, nos. 20–60.
77 The place seems to have a priest of Pan, Cuvigny and Bülow-Jacobsen 2000, 246: προστάται, I.KoKo 44 and 74, when we assume προστάτης to be the head of a place, cf. n. 72. This indicates a level of organised cultic activities at these places – a question that needs further study.
78 Kayser 1993, 114.
The inscription on the naos (I.KoKo 41, fig. 23) is a compilation of names and dedications as well as simple graffiti. Mersis signed two times, Mam-
mogais and Haryothes give προσκύνηματα, while Publius Iuventius Agath-
opous, in the upper part, might be the dedicator of the shrine. The long
rectangular slab found close to the shrine contains the inscriptions of twelve
individuals, some of them known already from the naos. They added their
texts on the slab in close sequence (fig. 24). Most are προσκύνηματα; Pan is
addressed two times (Kayser 1993, nos. 9, 10). They are, in comparison to
the rock-chapel at the opposite slope, more explicit with respect to the pro-
fessions of the inscribing persons, so that a grouping takes place according
to the functions of people coming along or living in the wadi. Due to the
layout and function of the place as a habitation, and the present individu-
als, a togetherness is strongly expressed in the general location and the close
spatial relation of their graffiti.

The grouping tendencies on the rock-face are characterised by allusions,
by weak bonds and no clear-cut boundaries. Egyptian writing (Hieroglyphic
and Demotic) intermingles with Greek graffiti on the rock-face, thus do
people. Expressing closeness to former religious acts (represented in an
image or reflected in words) is the main aim, as the deliberate locating of
inscriptions shows.

In a broader perspective, we also have to take into account that (not
only) in Roman times, the mining settlements and the praesidia along the
wadi possessed religious institutions and shrines. Hence, the interrelation
between institutionalised sacred places in the larger settlements and the rock
shelters along the routes could reveal other strategies of grouping, prefer-
ences or exclusive places.

---

79 See Kayser 1993, 113 and Bernand 1972b, 86–92 for relations of Agathopous, who also left
an inscription at the southern rock-face (I. KoKo 39), to other places in the Eastern Desert.
81 Religious practices of indigenous inhabitants should also be taken into account as form-
ing these places, cf. Lassanyi 2012, 265–267, with figs. 18, 16 (sandstone tables from Bir
Minayh).
82 I.KoKo 45 and Kayser 1993, no. 3, fig. 44, are written by the same person on the same day,
but one at the shrine, one in the mining area.
83 Wadi Minyah with religious facilities at the praesidia (Bülow-Jacobsen, Cuvigny and Four-
net 1995; De Romanis 1996; Cuvigny and Bülow-Jacobsen 2000) or Bir Umm Fawakhir
with the temple to Zeus Megas Helios Serapis (Cuvigny et al. 2003).
Fig. 1. The Eastern Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula with major trade routes of Greco-Roman times. The arrows indicate the places dealt with in the text (Ain esh-Shallāla in Wadi Ramm on the Arabian Peninsula, el-Kanayis in Wadi Abad, and a stretch of Wadi Ḥammāmāt). (Dentzer 1999, fig. 1, with alterations by the author).
Fig. 2. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallāla area. Structures and inscriptions can be roughly dated to between the first century BCE and the second century CE. (Savignac 1934, pl. 35; Farès-Drappeau and Zayadine 2001, fig. 1).
Fig. 3. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallāla. View from the east on the central part of the temple of Allāt with the Jebel Ramm in the background. (Corbett 2012, fig. 3).
Fig. 4. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallâla. The abri with location of reliefs and inscriptions. Numbers along the cliff correspond to the inscriptions’ numbers in Savignac 1933 and Savignac 1934. (Savignac 1934, fig. 1 with author’s alterations).
Fig. 5. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallâla. Inscriptions and reliefs on the western side, cf. the numbers on fig. 4 (Savignac 1934, Pl. 38, from top left clockwise): Greek inscription to a goddess (Savignac 1933, Greek no. 2, fig. 1; Savignac 1934, fig. 8). Nabataean inscription to Allât of Bosra above the relief of Allât? (Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 2, fig. 2). Inscription to Allât to the right of the relief of Allât (?) (Savignac 1934, Nabat. no. 16, fig. 2). Relief of standing stones with inscription to el-Kutba and el-Uzza (Savignac 1934, Nabat. no. 19, fig. 10). Inscription to Dushara and Baalshamin (Savignac 1934, Nabat. no. 19).

Fig. 6. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallâla. Relief of two sacred stones, cf. the numbers on fig. 4, with Nabataean inscription to el-Uzza and the 'Master of the House', made by two artists (Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 4), and to Allât (Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 3). Adjoining to the west an inscription of a group of workmen to Allât (Savignac 1933, Nabat. no. 5). (Kieler Datenbank Naher Osten: kibidano_kibpic_00015365; Savignac 1933, fig. 4. 5. 6).
Fig. 7. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallāla. Nabataean inscriptions of masons in *tabulae ansatae*. Adjoining to the west: Inscription where a second and third writer continues the lines to Allāt written before by another individual (nos. 9–12). (Kieler Datenbank Naher Osten: kibidano_kibpic_00015366; Savignac 1933, Fig. 8–9, 10–12).

Fig. 8. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallāla. Temple of Allāt with adjoining structures to the west. (Tholbecq 1998, combination of fig. 1 and 10).
Fig. 9. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallāla. Nabataean inscription to the Great Goddess of Ramm on wall plaster of the temple. Greek inscription of Abdomanos with Nabataean of Hani'allah on the decorated plaster from the corridor walls. Ḥismāic building inscription for the 'house of Allāt'. (Savignac and Horsfield 1935, Pl. 10. 18; Zayadine and Farès-Drappeau 1998, fig. 3. 4).
Fig. 10. Wadi Ramm, Ain esh-Shallāla. Statue of sitting female deity (Allāt?). (McKenzie et al. 2013, fig. 415).

Fig. 11. The Arabian Desert of Egypt (Eastern Desert) with main routes between Nile and the Red Sea Coast, showing the sacred places of Bi'r el-Ḥammāmāt and el-Γanayis. (Cuvigny 2003, Pl. 1).
Fig. 12. Wadi Abad, el-Kanayis. View of the southern slope at with the temple of Seti I (thirteenth century BCE). (http://www.eastern-desert.com/kanais_temple_.html, image 1, Francis Lankester).

Fig. 13. Wadi Abad, el-Kanayis. Schematic map of the site, showing the setting of the temple and the clusters of engravings and inscriptions. The Greek graffiti can be dated mainly to Ptolemaic times. (Lankester http://www.eastern-desert.com/kanais_temple_.html, image 7, Francis Lankester, with author’s alterations).

Fig. 14. Wadi Abad, el-Kanayis. Graffiti of people adding their texts directly to previous ones (Bernand 1972a, Pl. 20.1).
Fig. 15. Wadi Abad, el-Kanayis. Graffiti of Cyreneans in the temple. (Bernand 1972a, Pl. 26.1; Morales 2010, fig. 1).

Fig. 16. Wadi Abad, el-Kanayis. Graffiti of Jewish or Iudaean people, located at one of the preferred rock walls west of the temple. (Bernand 1972a, Pl. 34.1. 37.1).
Fig. 17. Wadi Ḥammāmāt. Central stretch at Bīr el-Ḥammāmāt with the location of graffiti, using various scripts from Pharaonic to Byzantine and Islamic times, along the southern (A–Z) and northern (AA–AO) slope. (Goyon 1957, map after p. 187).
Fig. 18. Wadi Ḥammāmāt, Biʾr el-Ḥammāmāt. The rock wall with engravings of Nectanebo I. and Amyrtaios (fourth century BCE). The Greek graffiti can be dated to Roman Imperial times. (Adams 2007, fig. 5).

Fig. 19. Wadi Ḥammāmāt, Biʾr el-Ḥammāmāt. Graffiti above and in front of the phallus of Min/Ptah. (Bernand 1972b, Pl. 19.1).
Fig. 20. Wadi Hammāmāt, Bi‘r el-Ḥammāmāt. Graffiti aligned in front of Isis. (Bernand 1972b, Pl. 15.1).

Fig. 21. Wadi Hammāmāt, Bi‘r el-Ḥammāmāt. Προσκύνημα using the decoration of the Pharaonic shrine for the triad, by a προστάτης and four people honouring the gods of the place. (Bernand 1972b, Pl. 17.1).
Fig. 22. Wadi Ḥammāmat, Bi'r el-Ḥammāmat. Lucius Vettius, repeating his name above and on the shrine of Min/Ptah. Three individuals writing their names in Greek interspersed by a Demotic one. (Bernand 1972b, Pl. 18.1).

Fig. 23. Wadi Ḥammāmat, Bi'r el-Ḥammāmat. The monolithic niche bearing graffiti on its frame from a short period in the first century CE. (Bernand 1972b, Pl. 32.2).
Fig. 24. Wadi Ḥammāmat, Biʿr el-Ḥammāmat. Slab, presumably from the temenos-entrance bearing ten προσκύνημα-graffiti on the front and two on the sides, added in a short span of time. (Kayser 1993, no. 1–12, Taf. III).
4 Conclusion: Ephemeral groups, loose bonds and porous boundaries in road-side sacred places

The continuous frequentation of stop-overs along routes in the Arabian Desert in antiquity led to an accumulation of remains of religious activities that enables us to explore interrelations of objects, texts and people over longer time spans. This is due to the general tendency of individuals ‘on the move’ to look for places where co-travellers searched for divine support and left traces of their practices. Certain supply reliability concentrates at these places and hence, people meet there in the long durée. Dedications or invocations, their content and formulation, objects or their depiction and the choice of their location at three sacred places (in Wadi Ramm, Wadi Abad, and Wadi Ḥammāmāt) gave insight into whether and how agents looked for or expressed togetherness and cohesion. Yet, groupings for religious acts seem to be rather transient in the literal sense of the word, physically ephemeral, and only virtually long-lasting. Only fellows and groups travelling or working together seem to be interested in appearing as such.

At Wadi Ramm, the water availability, the grotto at the spring, as well as the temple in the valley provided an attractive proposition to be taken up by travellers as well as indigenous people. They appropriate the places with spatial differentiation through architectural structures, varying divine representations, and inscriptions with varying script-use. The chosen script (Ḥismāic, Aramaic, Greek, Latin) – even if not necessarily reflecting any ethnic identity – sheds light on either integration or distinction, on ‘bonds’ and ‘boundaries’, intended by the inscriber, while other inscribers establish affiliations according to profession, or through lining up with the graffiti of others.

People passing through the Arabian Desert along the highly developed route network, at least from Roman times onwards, often chose places for religious activity that were already marked by prehistoric or Pharaonic rock engravings (Wadi Ḥammāmāt) or structures (el-Kanayis), located next to indispensable water supplies or shelter. Beyond the general clustering, the passers-by of the same provenance, with the same experiences or with friendship relations seem to deliberately group their dedications (Wadi Abad). Another strategy, reflected in the archaeological and epigraphical evidence, consists in references to former images or texts, expressed through position or content of a graffito (Wadi Ḥammāmāt). When arriving as a group (soldiers, workers), this often results in a concerted act of scribbling on the wall.

Typical to all places is the low organisational level – religious personnel or specialists are not, or scarcely, mentioned. Everyone is his (according to only
male authors) own specialist of religious practices. At the same time, rather loose bonds and porous boundaries prevail among people on the move.

Bibliography


Cuvigny, Hélène et al. (eds.) 2003. La route de Myos Hormos – L’armée romaine dans le désert Oriental d’Egypte. 2 vol. Cairo: Presses de IFAO.


Savignac, Raphael 1933. ‘Le sanctuaire d’Allat à Iram’, Revue Biblique 42. 405–422.


Yasin, Ann Marie 2015. ‘Prayers on Site. The Materiality of Devotional Graffiti and the Production of Early Christian Sacred Space.’ In Viewing Inscriptions in the Late


Anna-Katharina Rieger
Max-Weber-Kolleg für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien
Universität Erfurt
Postfach 900221
99105 Erfurt
anna-katharina.rieger@uni-erfurt.de