NOTES ON THE DIALECTS OF THE ‘LĒGĀT AND ḤAMĀḌAH OF SOUTHERN SINAI

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1. Introduction

The subject of this contribution1 is the dialect of the ‘Lēgāt (or ‘Ulayqāt), a bedouin tribe who live in the western central part of southern Sinai (see map below).2 In addition, notes on the dialect of the Ḥamāḍah have been included. Some texts recorded among the ‘Lēgāt—with additional information in footnotes—may serve for further illustration.

The Ḥamāḍah are only few, and are often regarded as a clan (or ‘family’) of the ‘Lēgāt, although various sources claim that they were present in Sinai before the ‘Lēgāt.3 We shall see that there are some notable differences between these two varieties of speech.

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1 With great pleasure I dedicate this contribution to Kees Versteegh. My dedication is with deep respect for his stature in our field of Arabic Studies, with gratitude for the inspiring thoughts he has shared with our community and with fond memories of the (too few) occasions I had the honor to work with him.
2 The material used for this article was collected in the framework of my own research into the bedouin dialects of southern Sinai. This project is funded and supported by The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (abbreviated in Dutch as NWO) and the Amsterdam Center for Linguistics and Communication (ACLC) at the University of Amsterdam. I am sincerely grateful to both organizations, as I am thankful also to Manfred Woidich for his advice and support during my researches. I am no less grateful to my desert guide—and now dear friend—‘Id Abuw Silīm (al-Atras at-Turbumiy), who has been my ‘ally’ in this project and without whose contributions this research would not have been possible.
3 Murray (1935, 291), for instance, writes that the Ḥamāḍah “…are now only about twelve tents strong, and live mostly near Serabit el-Khadim and Bir Nasb, where they are reckoned as part of the ‘Aleiqat.” For the location of Sarābīt al-Xādim, see Google Earth at (appr.) 29° 00’ 05” N–33° 28’ 01”E.
4 At-Ṭayyib (1997, 480–481) mentions that the Ḥamāḍah ‘joined’ the ‘Lēgāt under the ‘Lēgiy šēx at that time (A.D. 1914) Mdaxxal Slēmān of the ‘Lēgiy clan named Awlād Silmiy. Von Oppenheim (1943, 162, 164) writes that the Ḥamāḍah were ‘angegliedert’ to the ‘Olekāt (in his transcription).
5 On the webpage http://members.nova.org/~lroeder/alegat.htm (authored by Larry Roeder), under “History of Hamada”, it is reported that the Ḥamāḍah “[…] probably [joined the Alegat] shortly after the capture of Nuweiba. We do know that from then until the 1880’s this was a sub-tribe (or section) of the Alegat. Then in 1880 internal
Reported to have arrived in Sinai at some time in the fourteenth century, the 'Légät today number around 1,000, and are found predominantly in an area named ar-Ramlah, near where Jabal Sarābiţ al-Xādim stands, situated just south-west of the Tīh escarpment, and north of Wādiy Fērān and in and to the east of the town of Aḥuw Znēmah. Also farther north, to the south of Rās Ṣadr and in Wādiy Ġarandal (not far north of Hammām Far‘awn) families of the 'Légät are said to reside, as well as farther south, near the town of at-Ṭār.

Approximate distribution of bedouin tribes in southern Sinai

 politics forced a split when the Hamada requested permission to live under the protection of the Muzeina. By 1935, they had become integrated enough in Muzeina affairs to be considered an integral part of that tribe."

See Bailey 1985, 48. For more information on subdivisions of this tribe, their šēxs, history, territories, etc., see at-Ṭayyib 1997, Part 2, 475–489.

Such numbers are of course approximations.

5 Sarābiţ al-Xādim, some 40 kilometres east of Aḥuw Znēmah (on maps usually spelled as Abu Zinima), is famous as the site of turquoise mines operated since early pharaonic times, and the temple of Hathor, which is the only pharaonic temple built outside Egypt proper. See also the webpage about the Sinai at http://www.arcl.ed.ac.uk/arx/remotesense/sinai/.

6 Also in Wādiy Isla. The 'Légät are reported to form an alliance in Sinai with the Hamādah and Mżēnah, see At-Ṭayyib (1993, 705) and Bailey (1991, 5). At-Ṭayyib (1993, 706) reports that their territory stretches from ar-Ramalah to Wādiy Garandal. One of my own 'Légiy informants mentioned these areas too, but said their dirah stretches up until the area named ar-Ryēnih, north of Rās Ṣadr. For a map locating their (there transcribed as Alēgāt) dirah, see Bailey (1991, 4).

Wādiy ġāṢāhaw, māntīgit Mbaįjmah, Bīr anNașb and Wādiy Libyān were mentioned to me by a 'Légiy informant as parts of the Hamādiy dirah.

Abbreviations: Ah = Ahaywāt, Tr = Tarābīn, Ḥw = Ḥweṭāt, Db = Dbūr (see remark below), Ty = Tayāhah, 'Lg = 'Légät, Bd = Badārāh, Jr = Jarājrah (see remark below),