INSIDE AND OUT

Interactions between Rome and the Peoples
on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INSIDER AND OUTSIDER SOURCES:
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS
ON LATE ANTIQUE ARABIA

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Abstract

It is common to characterize our sources for the history of pre-Islamic Arabia as either internal—chiefly inscriptions—or external— principally observations in ethnographical and historical writings. But do all the relevant texts fit neatly into one of these two categories or are the lines between them sometimes blurred? Should we always prefer the testimony of an insider to that of an outsider? And do we accord Muslim sources insider status or assume that they are cut off from the pre-Islamic past by the Arab conquests and the rise of an Islamic empire? In the course of this paper I will offer some reflections on these questions via examination of a few pertinent examples.

Introduction

In the introduction to my 2001 book on *Arabia and the Arabs* I made a distinction between writings by insiders and writings by outsiders, on the subject of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and its northern extension, the Syrian desert- and steppe-lands.[1] The former are rare and consist primarily of inscriptions and, from the sixth century, poetry, whereas the latter, though fragmentary and hailing from many different sources in diverse languages, are relatively numerous. But do all the relevant texts fit neatly into one of these two categories, or should we accept that there may be degrees of insider-ness/outsider-ness and that the lines between the two categories may be blurred? And even where the distinction is clear, should we always prefer the testimony of an insider to that of an outsider? Finally, what value should we assign to Muslim sources, which, in their extant form, date no earlier than the ninth century? Do we assume that they tap directly into pre-Islamic Arab traditions and so deserve insider status, or must we posit some rupture in Arab history (occasioned, for instance, by the seventh-century Arab conquests or the

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1. R.G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs. From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London, 2001), pp. 8–10.

eighth-century ʿAbbāsid revolution), which consigns the Muslim tradition to outsider status? In the course of this paper I will select a few pertinent examples and offer some reflections on these questions.

Ghassān and the Jafnids

In an important recent publication on the Arab allies of the empires of the Late Antique Near East C.J. Robin raised the question of the nature of the relationship between the so-called kingdoms of Ghassān, Lakhm, and Kinda and the tribes that go by these names. His own preference was to assume very little relationship: 'Les soi-disant royaumes de Kinda, de Ghassān et de Lakhm ne sont pas des principautés assises sur les tribus de Kinda, Ghassān et de Lakhm, comme on l'affirme fréquemment'.[2] Rather, he says, we should distinguish between the tribes and the princely dynasties to which the empires of Rome, Persia, and Ḥimyar had delegated certain powers and awarded certain subsidies and titles. The most famous of these dynasties were the Ḥujrids of Kinda, the Jafnids of Ghassān, and the Naṣrids of Lakhm. But though they may have originated from the tribes of Kinda, Ghassān, and Lakhm, these Arab dynasts were appointed by the empires to keep control of other tribes and to provide military support from whatever tribes would join them; they were not appointed over their own tribes of origin and did not act as, or derive their support from being, leaders of a single tribe.

F. Millar has accepted this hypothesis, but points out that the surviving contemporary documentation does not support the use of either of the two terms, the tribe or the dynasty. Thus of Ghassān he observes:

> The modern historiography of the most important group allied with Rome in the sixth century begins with a work published by the great Theodor Nöldeke in 1887, *Die ghassānischen Fürsten aus dem Hause Jafna's*—hence the common use ever since of the terms 'Ghassanids' and (more recently) 'Jafnids', to denote this dynasty. But the entire contemporary evidence discussed here, literary and documentary, in Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, from within the [Roman] empire does not contain a single expression which equates to, or could properly be translated as, either 'Ghassanid' or 'Jafnid' … Our capacity to define either a people or a dynasty by these names derives from Arabic sources written several centuries later.[3]

2. C.J. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar, des "Romains" et des Perses (IIIe–VIe siècles de l'ère chrétienne)', *Semitica et Classica* 1 (2008), pp. 167–202 at 193.

3. F. Millar, 'Rome's "Arab" Allies in Late Antiquity. Conceptions and Representations from within the Frontiers of the Empire', in H. Börm and J. Wiesehöfer (eds), *Commutatio et Contentio. Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Zeev Rubin* (Reihe Geschichte 3; Stuttgart, 2010), pp. 199–226 at 200. Robin's

How, then, do contemporary sources make reference to these Arab groups who are evidently playing a substantial role in the political life of the Roman and Persian empires? Well, mostly, they speak only of the individual leaders or else of their immediate familial group; thus Syriac authors often use the terms Beth Ḥarith (*Ḥrt*) and Beth Mundir, literally the 'house of Ḥārith', 'the house of Mundhir', meaning the family of these two leaders, al-Ḥārith ibn Jabala (*c*. 530–69) and his son al-Mundhir ibn al-Ḥārith (570–82).[4] But should we infer from this that Muslim sources, which speak frequently and at great length of the tribe of Ghassān and the clan of Jafna, and posit a close link between the two, have manufactured or at least distorted the sixth-century historical reality?

If we cast our net a bit wider and look beyond the Roman empire, we do find occasional mention of Ghassān in contemporary writings, though not of the Jafnid dynasty. From the realm of Ḥimyar, in southwest Arabia, we have two Sabaic inscriptions that refer specifically to Ghassān. The first is from the mid-third century, and records the dispatch of an ambassador to 'the kings of the peoples (*ʾšʿb*) of Ghassān, al-Asd, Nizār, and Madhḥij'.[5] The second, also an inscription in Sabaic but from a century later, speaks of campaigning by the Ḥimyarite army 'between the land of Nizār and the land of Ghassān' in north central Arabia.[6] These are still outsider texts, but we do also have some insider references. A Nabataean Aramaic rock inscription from al-Qatiʿa, some 40 miles southeast of Dedan (modern al-ʿUla), dated palaeographically to the third-fourth century, records the request for 'the kinsman/nobleman Ḥārith (*Ḥrtt*) son of Zaydmanāt, king of Ghassān (*mlk ʿsn*), to be remembered'.[7] Although the inscription begins with the standard Nabataean expression *bly dkyr*, initiating a plea for remembrance, the next word, *nšyb*, is likely an Arabism, related to the classical Arabic word *nasīb*, meaning either kinsman or of good lineage (that is, well-born, noble);[8] the phrase *mlk ʿsn* ('king of Ghassān') could also as easily be

hypothesis has also been accepted by G. Fisher, 'Kingdoms or Dynasties? Arabs, History, and Identity in the Last Century before Islam', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4 (2011), pp. 245–67.

4. E.g. John of Ephesus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.4.22 (*CSCO* 105, p. 209; Beth Ḥarith bar Gabala), and 3.2.9 (*CSCO* 105, p. 67; Beth Mundhir bar Ḥarith).

5. Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar', p. 184 ('Inān 75). See on this inscription also the paper of Robin, this volume, p. 40 (n. 13).

6. Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar', p. 172 (n. 30; ʿAbadān 1). See also the paper of Robin, this volume, pp. 37–41, with further references.

7. Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar', p. 183, citing the Saudi epigrapher S. al-Theeb.

8. J.T. Milik, 'Une inscription bilingue nabatéenne et grecque à Pétra', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 21 (1976), pp. 143–52 at 146, mentions an inscription

Arabic as Aramaic. This is true of numerous Nabataean Aramaic graffiti in northwest Arabia and the Sinai, and reflects the fact that a pre-Islamic Arabic dialect (or dialects) was spoken in some parts of the Nabataean kingdom and its later replacement, the Roman province of Arabia.[9]

It is noticeable that these references to kings of Ghassān come from the third and fourth centuries only.[10] Thereafter we hear of individual Arab chiefs/kings, but not of their tribal affiliation.[11] This may just reflect the severely limited nature of our source material, but one might speculate that it is indicative of a new situation. In earlier centuries Ghassān had been, as south Arabian inscriptions say, a *shaʿb*, a large territorial-based grouping, based in west central Arabia, with 'kings' at their head, who would represent the tribe from which they were drawn. However, in the fifth and sixth centuries the attractions of serving the Roman empire had lured some clans, probably not of royal lineage, to head north and seek their fortune in imperial service. As Robin notes, they did not arrive with the whole of Ghassān in tow; but were they even complete clans, as the Muslim sources say (in particular, speaking of the clan of Jafna), or were they just individual families, as the Greek and Syriac sources imply? Something of the distinctiveness of these splinter groups from Ghassān is hinted at by the sixth-century poet al-Akhnas ibn Shihāb when he says that 'their strength lies in others, both lightly armed men and squadrons of cavalry fight on their behalf' (see further below). This presumably means that families like that of al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir, who had risen high in Roman service, drew on professional soldiers from different origins rather than just from their own tribe. Muslim sources[12] imagine a

recorded by Philby at al-Madhbah, between Khaybar and Taymāʾ, which also includes the words *nšyb ḥrtt* and which Milik translates as 'parent d'Arétas', taking it to be a basilophoric name (in reference to one of the Nabataean kings named Ḥaritat).

9. Most recently see M.C.A. Macdonald, 'Ancient Arabia and the Written World', in idem (ed.), *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language* (Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 40; Oxford, 2010), pp. 5–27 at 19–20.

10. Possibly relevant here is the reference by Ammianus Marcellinus (24.2.4) to King Podosaces, chief of the Assanite Saracens (*phylarchus Saracenorum Assanitarum*); reference and discussion given in Millar, 'Rome's "Arab" Allies', p. 202, who does not, however, mention that 'Assanite' would correctly represent the Aramaic form of the name Ghassān, as in the aforementioned Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions.

11. There is one apparent reference to a king of Ghassān in a letter attributed to Simeon of Beth Arshām (died *c.* 540), but F. Millar points out that it is of dubious authenticity in 'A Syriac Codex from Near Palmyra and the "Ghassanid" Abokarib', *Hugoye* 16 (2013), pp. 15–35 at 27–32. One might note, however, that the founder of the ruling dynasty of Kinda, Ḥujr, does call himself 'king of Kinda' on a mid-fifth-century graffito (Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar ', p. 176).

12. One should probably include in this category panegyric poetry dedicated to Ghassān and Lakhm, such as that by Ḥassān ibn Thābit and al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, which is likely to have been reworked in the Islamic period. But for an indication of the

clear-cut situation of clans and tribes, and chiefs who depend on their tribal followings. However, it is likely that service in the imperial army changed the nature and composition of social groupings. In the context of real war between superpowers, and not just intertribal feuds and raids, it was often loyalty to a militarily competent and experienced leader that mattered, and so the Greek and Syriac sources may well be right to focus simply on these individuals.[13]

Lakhm and the Naṣrids

The same question arises with respect to the Arab allies of the Persian Empire, based in the Iraqi city of al-Ḥīrah, southeast of Baghdad. Muslim sources refer to their tribal group as Lakhm and the ruling dynasty as the clan of Naṣr. They assume that the latter served as the chiefs of Lakhm and the principal Arab ally of the Persians for over half a millennium. According to one early estimate, 'the total number of the kings of the clan of Naṣr, including the ʿIbād and Persians who substituted for them, was twenty and the total length of their rule was five hundred and twenty-two years and eight months'.[14] But is it plausible that the position of preferred ally of the Persians remained in the hands of one dynasty for such a long period?

Unfortunately we have no Persian historical sources at all from the pre-Islamic period. The only narrative historical texts to come out of the Persian realm during this time are a small number of Syriac Christian chronicles, which do take occasional interest in Arab affairs. That attributed to Joshua the Stylite notes the involvement of the Arabs (ṭayyāyē) in the Roman-Persian war of 502-503 and refers in particular to the actions of al-Nuʿmān (died 503), whom he calls 'the king of the Arabs' or 'the king of the Persian Arabs'.[15] A mid-seventh-century Christian author from Khuzistan in southwest Iran preserves for us a notice about the journey of Ishoʿyahb, patriarch of the Church of the East (582-95), to meet a later al-Nuʿmān (died c. 602), who is also described as 'the king of the Arabs (ṭayyāyē)'. Ishoʿyahb had angered Khusrau II (590-628)

possible contemporary information that they might contain see L.I. Conrad, 'Epidemic Disease in Central Syria in the Late Sixth Century: Some Insights from the Verse of Hassan ibn Thabit', *BMGS* 18 (1994), pp. 12–58.

13. For some discussion along these lines see my 'Arab Kings, Arab Tribes and the Beginnings of Arab Historical Memory in Late Roman Epigraphy', in H. Cotton *et al.* (eds), *From Hellenism to Islam. Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 374–400 at 380–84, 390–91, and 393–96.

14. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p. 361 Lichtenstadter.

15. Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* 51 (*CSCO* 91, p. 277) and 57 (*CSCO* 91, p. 283).

by not accompanying him on his flight to the Roman empire in 590, when he requested the aid of the Roman Emperor Maurice against his rival Bahram Chobin. Ishoʿyahb was, therefore, seeking support from al-Nuʿmān, 'who had been baptized and become a Christian'.[16] Al-Nuʿmān had also refused to accompany Khusrau to Byzantium and for this reason, as well as for his refusal to let the emperor marry his daughter, he was later poisoned at the imperial court. In all these accounts there is never any reference to the tribal or clan affiliation of these 'kings of the Arabs', and so we have no evidence to confirm the claim of Muslim sources that they were of the Naṣrid clan of the tribe of Lakhm.[17]

There is, however, one minor detail that gives a little support to the testimony of the Muslim sources and suggests that they might, in some aspects, depend on pre-Islamic material. The aforementioned Khuzistani chronicle says of al-Ḥīrah that it 'was settled by King Mundhir, surnamed the "warrior", who was sixth in the line of the Ishmaelite kings'.[18] This seems most likely to refer to the al-Mundhir who was entrusted for a time with rearing the Persian prince and future Emperor Bahram Gur (421–38). Interestingly, the antiquarian Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (died 819) also places this al-Mundhir sixth in the line of the Naṣrid kings of Lakhm. He maintains that he 'took the accounts of the Arabs and the genealogies of the clan of Naṣr ibn Rabīʿa and the lifespans of those who acted as agents for the Persian imperial family and the history of their times from the monasteries of al-Ḥīrah.[19] It was common for major monasteries to keep a record of historical events relevant to the Church, and so it is certainly plausible that this was practised at al-Ḥīrah too. It is plausible, as well, that the mid-seventh-century Khuzistani chronicler would have had access to these same records. He is able to recount in detail some events that occurred at that city. For example, he describes the death of the patriarch Ishoʿyahb at the village of Beth Qushay, near al-Ḥīrah, and he knows that 'when al-Nuʿmān's sister Hind heard (of this), she went out with the priests and faithful of al-Ḥīrah,

16. *Chronicon anonymum* (*CSCO* 1, p. 17).

17. We do have one early piece of evidence for the existence of a tribe called Lakhm, namely a bilingual Persian-Parthian inscription from Paikuli in northeast Iraq (H. Humbach and P.O. Skjaervo, *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli* 3.1 [Wiesbaden, 1983], line 92), which lists among the vassals of the Sasanian Emperor Narseh (293–302) an ''Amru king of the Lakhmids' (ʿmrw lhmʾdyn MLK').

18. *Chronicon anonymum* (*CSCO* 1, p. 39).

19. E.g. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, vol. 1, p. 1039 De Goeje (excepting Aws ibn Qallām, who was not a Lakmhid). See G. Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Lahmiden in al-Hira. Ein Versuch zur arabisch-persischen Geschichte zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Berlin, 1899), pp. 5–60, for discussion of Lakhmid king lists and chronology.

brought back the holy man's body in great state and placed it in a new monastery that she had built'.[20]

A possible alternative scenario would be that the records at al-Ḥīrah were incorporated into a history of the Sasanian emperors composed in the early seventh century. That such a historical work did indeed exist is suggested by the loosely similar narrative of the rise and fall of the Sasanian empire that is found in numerous Muslim histories.[21] This would then explain why we find some correspondences between Muslim and Christian sources on matters of Persian history, for example:

> They (the Persians) entered it (Jerusalem), seizing the bishop and the city officials, torturing them for (information on) the wood of the Cross and the contents of the treasury … They revealed to them the wood of the Cross, which lay hidden in a vegetable garden.[22]
> They (the Persians) came to Jerusalem and seized its bishop, the clergy in it and the rest of the Christians for (information on) the wood of the Cross, which had been put in a golden casket and buried in a garden with vegetables planted over it.[23]

This would then mean that Muslim histories of the ninth and tenth centuries, though they may not be insider sources, might have had at least some access to Late Antique Arabian perspectives.

The Persian Conquest of Yemen

In the aftermath of the victory of the Ethiopian sovereign Kaleb over Ḥimyar in the 520s an Ethiopian general named Abraha managed to gain control of this corner of southwest Arabia. By around 540 he had revived the power of Ḥimyar, and established himself at its helm. He now began to launch raids northwards and eastwards and over the course of the next 15–20 years he managed to extend his sway over most of the Arabian Peninsula.[24] However, Abraha's two sons, Yaksūm and Masrūq, squabbled over control of this vast domain. The latter won out, but he did not

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20. *Chronicon anonymum* (*CSCO* 1, p. 17).

21. This is an old historiographical question; for new perspectives on it see M.R. Jackson-Bonner, *Three Neglected Sources of Sasanian History in the Reign of Khusraw Anushirvan* (Studia Iranica 46; Paris, 2011), and his recently completed doctoral thesis *An Historiographical Study of Abu Hanifa Ahmad ibn Dawud al-Dinawari's Kitab al-akhbar al-tiwal* (Oxford, 2013).

22. *Chronicon anonymum* (*CSCO* 1, p. 25).

23. al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 1, p. 1002 De Goeje.

24. On Abraha's career see C.J. Robin, 'L'Arabie à la veille de l'Islam: la campagne d'Abraha contre la Mecque', in J. de la Genière *et al.* (eds), *Les sanctuaires et leur rayonnement dans le monde méditerranéen de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne* (Cahiers de la villa 'Kérylos' 21; Paris, 2010), pp. 213–42.

enjoy the support of his subjects and this gave the Persians the opportunity to intervene. The tale of their intervention is recounted, in a very different vein, by a late sixth-century Roman author, Theophanes of Byzantium, and by the ninth-century Muslim tradition:

> Khusrau thereupon marched against the Ethiopians (formerly called Macrobioi and at that time Ḥimyarites), who were on friendly terms with the Romans; with the aid of Miranos, the Persian general, he captured Sanatources, king of the Ḥimyarites, sacked their city and enslaved the inhabitants.[25]
>
> When the people of Yemen had long endured oppression, Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan the Ḥimyarite went … to al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir, who … took him with him and introduced him to Khusrau … When Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan entered his presence he fell to his knees and said: 'O king, ravens (meaning the Ethiopians) have taken possession of our country … and I have come to you for help and that you may assume the kingship of my country' … So Khusrau dispatched (to him) the inmates of his prisons, numbering 800 men. He put in command of them a man called Wahriz who was of mature age and of excellent family and lineage. They set out in eight ships, two of which foundered, so that only six reached the shores of Aden. Sayf met Wahriz with all the people that he could muster, saying: 'My foot is with your foot, we die or conquer together'. 'Right!', said Wahriz. Masrūq ibn Abraha, the king of Yemen, came out against him with his army … Wahriz bent his bow—the story goes that it was so tough that no one but he could bend it—and ordered that his eyebrows be fastened back. Then he shot Masrūq and split the ruby in his forehead, and the arrow pierced his head and came out at the back of his neck. He fell off his mount and the Ethiopians gathered round him. When the Persians fell upon them, they fled and were killed as they bolted in all directions. Wahriz advanced to enter Sanʿa, and when he reached its gate he said that his standard should never be lowered.[26]

The *Historika* of Theophanes of Byzantium covered the period 566–81, and since he was writing in the tradition of classicizing history, which was—ideally at least—based on the author's experience on the battlefield or in office, he is likely to have been a contemporary of the events he narrates. What about the Arabic account—how reliable is it? It is a quite polished literary piece; for example, Wahriz is built up as a heroic figure and a degree of drama is imparted to the tale. Also, the Ḥimyarites are

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25. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 64; trans. J.H. Freese, *The Library of Photius* 1 (Translations of Christian Literature 1; New York, 1920), p. 74 (slightly adapted).

26. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, pp. 41–43 Wüstenfeld; cf. Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 1, p. 149, from 'the books of the Persians'. There are numerous versions of this tale with many minor variations, such as in the number of Persian participants in the army (up to 7500), and the identity of the reigning Persian emperor (Khusrau I or his son Hormizd).

granted greater agency in the initiation and prosecution of the invasion of Yemen than in Theophanes' version, where it would appear that Khusrau gives the go-ahead. This may be a result of a difference in their ultimate sources: perhaps Persian informants in Theophanes' case, and maybe Yemeni informants in the case of the Muslim tradition.

The difference in names in the two accounts is interesting. Theophanes' Miranos is presumably the well-known Persian name Mihran (the soft 'h' is not usually transliterated in the Greek). If he were of the noble family of Mihran, this would make sense with the assertion in the Arabic text that he was 'of excellent family and lineage' (*afḍaluhu ḥasaban wa-baytan*).[27] This all sounds plausible—so how did the Muslim tradition come up with Wahriz? It may be a proper name or title (from Middle Persian *vēhrēz*), or, if we posited a Syriac intermediary, it could be a corruption of Mihran (Syriac 'w' is identical to an Arabic 'm' and Syriac 'z' is a downward stroke, which resembles Arabic final 'n'). In this view we would not have Yemeni informants, but Yemeni re-shapers, transforming an earlier historical notice to give it a pro-Yemeni spin.

Theophanes' name for the Ḥimyarite ruler, Sanatources, or rather Sanatrouces (Parthian Sanatruk), is also interesting. It is used by a number of kings in the Persian sphere at various points and places in history (e.g. second-century Armenia and third-century Hatra and Bahrain) and would seem to have served as a royal epithet or title.[28] Perhaps the civil war between Abraha's sons had attracted the attention of the superpowers, with the Roman empire backing Yaksūm, and Persia taking the side of Masrūq. The latter was awarded or adopted the Persian title of Sanatruk, but either lost the faith of his imperial backers or aroused their ire, thus incurring the invasion of his realm and his own demise. But where does this leave Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan, who is lionized in the Muslim tradition as the last great Arabian king? Is he a fabrication of the Arabic sources, a device to give an Arabian lustre to the narrative, or is he simply omitted from the Roman tradition as an irrelevance?

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27. Cf. al-Dīnawarī, *Al-akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, p. 65 Guirgass: *min ahl al-buyūtāt wa-l-sharaf.*

28. F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895), pp. 282–83. It has been explained as an Iranicized form of Aramaic *sanṭū* / Greek *senatōr* or as Middle Iranian *sana-taru-ka* / 'enemy-conquering', see W. Eilers, 'Iran and Mesopotamia', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3.1 (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 481–504 at 491 (n. 3).

Maʿadd

We have a surprisingly large number of references to the people of Late Antique Arabia called Maʾadd, in a broad array of outsider sources.[29] They would seem to have ranged across central and north Arabia, and were subject to attempts by various powers to assert control over them. In the Namārah inscription of 328 they are described as being under the suzerainty of Shammar Yuharʿish, king of Ḥimyar,[30] who had recently united the whole of south Arabia. For the next couple of centuries, as we are told in a number of south Arabian inscriptions, Ḥimyar sought to extend and deepen their rule over all of Arabia, and Maʿadd evidently featured prominently in their plans. One inscription of *c.* 430 speaks of the 'land of Maʿadd'[31] and narrates how the Ḥimyarite king Abikarib Asʿad and his son Ḥassan Yuhaʾmin campaigned there and established their favoured Arab allies, Kinda, as their deputies over Maʿadd.

Matters become more complicated in the sixth century when the empires of Rome and Persia entered into the fray in their bid for greater influence in Arabia. The struggle between Ethiopia and Ḥimyar in the first decades of that century distracted the latter from its northern concerns, and its Arab ally Kinda looked to the north for advancement. Under the leadership of their leader al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr, a treaty was signed with the Roman empire in 502 and for a brief time, during the last years of the reign of the Persian Emperor Kavad (488–531), al-Ḥārith replaced the Lakhmids as the Persians' chief Arab ally, installed himself in al-Ḥīrah, and asserted his sway over Maʿadd. However, al-Ḥārith angered the military governor of Palestine and was forced to take flight, in the course of which he was assassinated by the Lakhmid al-Mundhir or one of his allies. Nevertheless, al-Ḥārith's successor and grandson, Qays, was still well regarded by the Romans, who described him as ruler of 'two of the most prominent peoples (γένοι) of the Saracens, Kinda and

29. For a thorough study of their history and references to all the primary sources that underlie my account here see M. Zwettler, 'Maʿadd in Late-Ancient Arabian Epigraphy and other Pre-Islamic Sources', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 90 (2000), pp. 223–309.

30. Line 3 of the Namārah inscription has 'the city of Shammar *wmlkmʿd*'; the last phrase is sometimes read as 'and he (Imruʾ al-Qays) ruled Maʿadd', but it is usual in Nabataean inscriptions for proper names to end in *waw*, and so we should read 'the city of Shammaru, king of Maʿadd'. For more information on the Nemāra inscription see Hoyland, 'Arab Kings', 377–78 and n. 20 thereto.

31. Ry 509: *ḫllw ʾrḍ mʿd*; cf. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p. 368 Lichtenstadter: *nazala bi-ard Maʿadd*.

Maʿadd (Χινδηνῶν καὶ Μααδηνῶν)'.[32] The Roman diplomat Abraham met him twice, once to make a treaty with Rome and a second time to bring him to Constantinople where 'he personally received from the emperor control of Palestine' (*c.* 530). Shortly thereafter Kinda fell out of favour. Kavad's successor, Khusrau I (531-79), reinstated the Lakhmids as their principal agents in Arabia, and Justinian decided to rely on the family of al-Ḥārith ibn Jabala of Ghassān. Meanwhile, in south Arabia, the victor Abraha, once he had established himself firmly on the Ḥimyarite throne, turned his attention to south Arabia's traditional concern with its northern territories and between 535 and 560 fought to extend his authority over the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, and to retake control over Maʿadd from the Lakhmids.[33] This Arabia-wide polity devolved to Persia once they had conquered Yemen and responsibility for Maʿadd fell once more to the Lakhmids, a debt that was called upon by the last Lakhmid chief al-Nuʿmān when he was threatened by the emperor Khusrau II at the close of the sixth century.[34]

Yet despite all these references to Maʿadd in these various outsider sources, we are given precious little indication of what sort of an entity it was. There is a hint that many of its members were 'pagan' in a remark by the aforementioned missionary and controversialist Simeon, a native of Beth Arshām in southern Iraq. He was returning from Yemen to Iraq and passed by a camp of the Lakhmid King al-Mundhir, where there were 'pagan Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*) and Maʿaddites'.[35] They taunted him about the powerlessness of Jesus to save the Christians of Najrān massacred by

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32. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 3. See on this passage also the paper of Elton, this volume, p. 245.

33. Abraha's triumph over the Lakhmid ruler al-Mundhir and his son ʿAmr is narrated in the inscriptions Murayghān 1 = Ry 506 (dated September 552) and Murayghān 2; for recent discussion of these two texts see C.J. Robin, 'Abraha et la reconquête de l'Arabie déserte: un réexamen de l'inscription Ryckmans 506 = Murayghan 1', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012), pp. 1–93, and the paper of Robin, this volume, pp. 67–68.

34. *Chronicon anonymum* (*CSCO* 1, p. 20): 'He sent word to his fellow tribesmen, Maʿadd, and they took captives from and ravaged many districts belonging to Khusrau, even reaching the (region of) *ʿArab*'.

35. Cited by Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar', p. 174. On the complexities of the material ascribed to Simeon see F. Briquel-Chatonnet, 'La tradition textuelle et manuscrite de la Lettre de Siméon de Bet Arsham', and D. Taylor, 'A Stylistic Comparison of the Syriac Himyarite Martyr Texts Attributed to Simeon of Beth Arsham', in J. Beaucamp, F. Briquel-Chatonnet, and C.J. Robin (eds), *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux Vᵉ et VIᵉ siècles. Regards croisés sur les sources* (Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance Monographies 32; Paris, 2010), pp. 123–41 and pp. 143–76.

the Jewish king of Yemen, Yūsuf Asʾar.[36] Many of Maʿadd would also seem to have been camel-breeders, since considerable numbers of this beast were captured in the course of raids against Maʿadd by Ḥimyar, according to south Arabian inscriptions.[37]

The social makeup of Maʿadd receives little attention. Among outsider sources there is a mid-fourth-century Sabaic inscription[38] that qualifies it with the term ʿshr (plural of ʿshrt), usually translated as 'nomadic tribes' and assumed to be genealogically structured, in contrast to ʾshʿb (plural of shʿb), which are regarded as groups 'organized on a territorial and not a genealogical basis'.[39] Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is the only source that could be said to be insider, and in this category the most substantial witness is a composition of the mentioned sixth-century poet al-Akhnas ibn Shihāb, of the tribe of Taghlib. He lists a number of tribes, including his own, which he regarded as belonging to Maʿadd, and which we could equate with the ʿshr of the Sabaic inscription:[40]

> Each people of Maʿadd has an abode, a safe place of refuge and a surround-ing territory.
> Lukayz have al-Bahrayn and the whole of the coast, and if there should come against them some force from India threatening disaster
> They fly away on the rumps of untrained camels as though they are wisps of cloud that had shed their rain and were returning [to on high].
> Bakr have wide tracts of land in Iraq but, if they wish, a barrier, al-Yamama, intervenes as a defence.
> Tamim have settled between rugged ground and sand tracts; they have a retreat and refuge in extended stretches of sand.
> Kalb has the Khabt and the sands of ʿAlij and [can move] to the rugged lava beds, there to fight.
> Ghassān is a tribe whose strength lies in others—both lightly armed men and squadrons of cavalry fight on their behalf.[41]

36. The articles in Beaucamp, Briquel-Chatonnet, and Robin, *Juifs et chrétiens* give an up-to-date overview of the scholarship on the martyrdom of the Christians of Najrān in the 520s.

37. E.g. 3200 camels captured from Maʿadd in a campaign recorded in the mid-fourth-century Sabaic inscription ʿAbadān 1, as opposed to only 300 from the highlands immediately to the north of Ḥimyar (Zwettler, 'Maʿadd', pp. 234–38).

38. ʿAbadān 1.

39. Pointed out by A.F.L. Beeston, 'Notes on Old South Arabian Lexicography VII', *Muséon* 85 (1972), pp. 535–44 at 543.

40. I cite here the translation of A. Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry. Select Odes* (Oxford Oriental Institute Monographs 14; Oxford, 1992), pp. 92–99, with minor modifications. The poem is also translated by C. Lyall in his *The Mufaḍḍaliyāt. An Anthology of Ancient Arabian Odes* 2 (E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series 3; Oxford, 1918), pp. 149–52.

41. In the third-century Sabaic inscription ʿInān 75 (see n. 5 above) Ghassān is called a shʿb, so either Ghassān has substantially changed its makeup in the intervening two centuries or else the terms shʿb and ʿshrt are not so distinct as is usually assumed.

> Bahrāʾ is a tribe whose place we all know, and they have clear roads round al-Rusafa [to their place of refuge].
> Iyād have moved to the low-lying Sawad (southern Iraq); on their side are Persian lancers, seeking out any who would fight them.
> Lakhm are the kings of people, for whom taxes are collected; when one of them speaks, his word is binding.
> We (the tribe of Taghlib) are a people with no barrier in our land; we are to be found with the rain and we are a people who are victorious.

In al-Akhnas' reckoning, then, Maʿadd was a coalition of tribes. This accords with the later Muslim tradition, but there are two major discrepancies. Firstly, Muslim tradition also knows many other members of Maʿadd. One can explain this simply enough, however, by assuming that al-Akhnas was only mentioning the tribes of greatest interest to him. Secondly, and more problematically, Muslim tradition has different views on Maʿadd's constituent parts. Lukayz (of ʿAbd al-Qays), Bakr, Tamim, Iyād, and Taghlib were counted as members,[42] but the other four were assigned to other coalitions: Kalb and Bahrāʾ to Quḍāʿa, and Ghassān and Lakhm to Qaḥṭān. In part, this is attributable to the fact that later Muslim genealogists massively simplified (and probably obscured) the situation by cramming everyone into just two major blocks: northerners (including Muḍar and Maʿadd) and southerners (including Qaḥṭān and Quḍāʿa). But the shifts in membership of Maʿadd must also reflect changed political realities. In the case of Kalb and Bahrāʾ this is openly admitted by Muslim authors, who were aware that Quḍāʿa had originally been aligned with Maʿadd, but had joined Qaḥṭān in the course of the second Arab civil war (683-92).[43] It is difficult to be certain of the situation at the time of the poem's composition. The fact that no Arab allies of Ḥimyar are mentioned, such as Kinda and Madhḥij, suggests either that Ḥimyar has fallen (so after c. 570) or that they are flourishing and are considered the enemy. The latter seems the more likely scenario, and we may assume that the tribes of Maʿadd were in a loose coalition against Abraha's encroaching ambitions.

42. That Bakr and Taghlib belonged to Maʿadd is noted by the poet al-Musayyib ibn al-Rafall, quoted by M.J. Kister, 'Mecca and the Tribes of Arabia: Some Notes on Their Relations', in M. Sharon (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 33–57 at 46.

43. M.J. Kister and M. Plessner, 'Notes on Caskel's *Gamharat al-Nasab*', *Oriens* 25–26 (1976), pp. 48–68 at 56–57. See also P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses. The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 34–35.

Conclusion

This paper does not pretend to any grand conclusions, but is only meant to highlight the problems of advancing any firm historiographical claims about the value of one set of sources on Arabia over another. Muslim Arab authors tend to be regarded as insider sources, but the seismic changes in Middle East politics that followed on from the Arab conquests and the ʿAbbāsid revolution mean that they have to be placed in the category of outsider sources. Yet that does not mean that they did not have access to earlier materials, and it does look as if the annals of the monasteries of al-Ḥīrah were available to them in some form or other. For the tribes of Late Antique Arabia, pre-Islamic poetry ought to be a major insider source, but somehow, even though much of it has been translated, it has not really impinged on the consciousness of historians. It does only give a snapshot through a rather narrow lens, but it is no less valuable for that. Our other principal resource is the epigraphic record, and though this is difficult material to work with, on the plus side it is still being added to and there are many questions left to ask of it regarding such topics as identity, social structure, and religious practices.