

Chapter 7, 'Provincia Arabia: Nabataea, the Emergence of Arabic as a Written Language, and Graeco-Arabica', discusses the Roman province of Arabia and late antique *Palaestina III/Salutaris* through the lens of two of its most important cities, Petra and Ḥegrā (Madā'in Šālīḥ). These two provinces play a key role in much of this volume as a base of Jafnid power, and through their link with numerous developments, including the emergence of the Arabic script. Also covered here is the dialogue between Greek and Arabic, and transitional, 'Nabataeo-Arabic' inscriptions.

Finally, Chapter 8, 'Arabic and Persian Sources for Pre-Islamic Arabia', illustrates how authors, writing mostly after the advent of Islam, explained and presented some of the events, individuals, and themes covered in Chs 1–7. In addition to discussing some well-known authors such as al-Ṭabarī, this section also offers a translation and commentary of an eleventh-century text, the *Manāqib al-Mazyadiyya*, detailing the demise of the final Naṣrid ruler, alongside a consideration of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, medieval Persian sources, and the Qur'ān.

CROSS REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT REQUIREMENTS

One of the goals of this collection is to show how different sources, and different source traditions, could interpret the same phenomena or events in a variety of ways. In order to facilitate easy comparisons between chapters, this book uses a simple cross-referencing system. All quoted sources (or discussions of archaeological sites) are identified in the text by a number that appears next to the quotation in brackets, e.g. [1.2], where the first number indicates the chapter, and the second the sequence within that chapter. (A complete list of quoted sources can be found in the Index of Sources following the Bibliography.) In the text, cross references are offered as, for example, 'see 1.2'.

Finally, due to the requirements of the numerous copyright holders who have kindly granted permission for material to appear in this volume, it is very often not possible (or desirable) to make changes to the translated text. This can lead to variations in spelling and transliteration conventions, especially for Arabic and Persian names (e.g. Khusrau → Chosroes), but also for forms of British and US spelling. In the few instances that such differences are likely to cause confusion, clarification is provided in footnotes.

1

Arabs and Empires before the Sixth Century

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses a selection of sources from a period ranging from the conquest of the Babylonian kingdom by Cyrus the Great to the end of the fifth century AD. These sources demonstrate the immense variability in meaning of the terms 'Arab' and 'Arabia', and the developing complexity, particularly after the second century AD, of the relationship between the Romans and Persians and people whom they called 'Arabs'.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first includes a discussion of inscriptions from North Arabia¹ and the Achaemenid Persian empire, a new edition of the Ruwāfa inscriptions from Saudi Arabia, and a brief selection of Graeco-Roman authors from the Classical, Hellenistic, Seleucid, Republican, and early Roman Imperial periods. This part of the chapter also briefly assesses the very sparse evidence for the relationship between Arabs and the Parthians, and the early years of the Sasanians.

The second section is mostly concerned with literary sources for the fourth and fifth centuries, produced by authors writing in Greek, Latin, and Syriac. The division between the two parts of the chapter reflects several important developments which altered the relationship between Arabs and the Roman and Persian empires. These changes included the emergence of the Sasanian dynasty in Persia after AD 224, the adoption of Christianity by Constantine in the early fourth century, and the progressive dismantling of Rome's client network in the East, which slowly constricted the political (and religious) choices of those in the borderlands between the two late antique superpowers. The combination of these different events helped to intensify the level of

¹ For South Arabian inscriptions, see Chs 2 and 3.

contact between Romans, Persians, and Arabs, and ensured that the latter, along with other frontier peoples, played a more important role in the interstate rivalry between Rome and Persia after the third century.

FROM NABONIDUS TO SEVERUS: THE VIEW FROM INSCRIPTIONS AND LITERARY TEXTS

The literary sources dealing with the Near East in the Achaemenid, Parthian, Sasanian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods were written almost entirely by 'outsiders'. They frequently refer to 'Arabs' and 'Arabia(s)', and yet the term 'Arab' is rarely found in the Semitic inscriptions of this period.² It does not occur at all in the Ancient North Arabian, Nabataean, or Palmyrene inscriptions and occurs only in two very specific senses in the Hatran and Old Syriac texts. This does not necessarily mean that the authors or commissioners of the Ancient North Arabian, Nabataean, or Palmyrene inscriptions were unaware of people(s) called 'Arabs'—let alone that such people(s) did not exist—but simply that either they were not relevant to the subject matter of the texts which have survived or that they were referred to in other ways, such as by their tribal affiliations. Thus, for instance, 1.10 below refers to the 'king of Tanūkh' without it being necessary to specify that he was an 'Arab'.

Some of the inscriptions may well be by people who would have called themselves, or have been described by others as, 'Arabs', but felt no need to use this description in the context in which they were writing. To take just one example, Josephus habitually, and other Graeco-Roman writers sporadically, calls the Nabataeans 'Arabs' and their kingdom 'Arabia'. Yet these terms occur in none of the approximately five thousand Nabataean inscriptions and, indeed, self-identification even as 'a Nabataean' occurs only once within the kingdom,³ apart from the regnal title *mlk nbṭw*, 'king of Nabataea'. It is only in texts outside the kingdom, and in other scripts, that a handful of individuals identify themselves as 'the Nabataean'.⁴ This is perfectly normal since it is usually only when one is abroad that one needs to specify one's group identity.

² For a list of all known ancient examples of self-identification as 'Arab' and identification as such by others, see Macdonald 2009b: 280–94.

³ This is in a text from Jabal Umm Jadhāyidh in north-west Arabia published in al-Dhīyib 2002, no. 77, which reads *mškw nbṭy' šlm mn qdm mntw lht'* 'May Msk the Nabataean be granted security in the presence of the goddess Manāt.' I am most grateful to Laila Nehmé for bringing this text to my attention.

⁴ See the list and discussion in Macdonald et al. 1996: 444–9. The most interesting of these is a Palmyrene dedication (CIS ii, no. 3973) which is dated to AD 132, i.e. twenty-six years after the Romans had annexed the Nabataean kingdom and made it *Provincia Arabia*. Here the author gives his name and genealogy and then describes himself as *nbṭy' rwḥy'* i.e. 'the Nabataean, the Rūḥite [i.e. of the tribe of Rūḥū]'.
⁵ See the very careful assessment by Yon 2002: 87–97. However, this should be read in conjunction with the criticisms of the assumptions that the etymology of personal and divine names can be used to define ethnicity which are set out in Macdonald 2003a: 306–8.
⁶ On this see Macdonald 2003a, 2009a, V; 2009b; see also Macdonald and Nebes n.d.

It has often been assumed that the population of Palmyra was 'Arab', and so it might be thought that it would present an ideal example of 'Arabs between Rome and Persia'. However, in contrast to the Nabataeans, no Greek or Roman writer refers to the Palmyrenes as 'Arabs', and the arguments which have been put forward for regarding them as such are based on false assumptions.⁵ This is not to say that there were *no* people who regarded themselves as Arabs, or were regarded as such by others, in the population of Palmyra, simply that as yet we have no firm evidence for their presence.

The meaning of the term 'Arab' in antiquity has been hotly debated for many decades. One reason for this has been the search for a single definition which could be applied to all the numerous references to 'Arabs' and 'Arabias' in the ancient sources. As noted above, the vast majority of these sources were written by authors looking at the ancient Near East from the outside. Moreover, when one of them called a group of people 'Arabs', or the place where they lived 'Arabia', he did not cross-check what other peoples or places had been given these names and whether there was any possible connection between them. Thus, by the end of the Hellenistic period, populations from eastern Egypt throughout the Fertile Crescent to the Arab-Persian Gulf, around the edges of the Peninsula, and even in central Iran, had been labelled as 'Arabs' and their homelands as 'Arabia' (see for example the section 'Herodotus and Xenophon' later in this chapter). Indeed, it was only at the turn of the era that what we think of as 'the Arabian Peninsula' came to be thought of as 'Arabia' par excellence by outside observers, while at the same time, other 'Arabias' were still dotted about in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent. By the time that Pompey concluded the lengthy Roman campaign against Tigranes and Mithridates VI of Pontus, Graeco-Roman authors had come to understand a variety of 'Arabias' where 'Arabs' might be expected to live (Fig. 1.1).

Yet another layer of complexity was added when the Romans annexed the Nabataean kingdom in AD 106, and called it *Provincia Arabia*, since thereafter an inhabitant of the province—whatever his/her ethnicity—was, administratively at least, an 'Arab'.⁶

We cannot tell whether any of the inhabitants of the Peninsula thought of it as 'Arabia', but it seems probable that they did not. Such massive geopolitical concepts are unlikely to have occurred to peoples living in relatively small groups, conscious of the differences between themselves and their neighbours and (for those who travelled within the Peninsula) of the great variety of landscapes, social groups, polities, and customs they encountered. We certainly

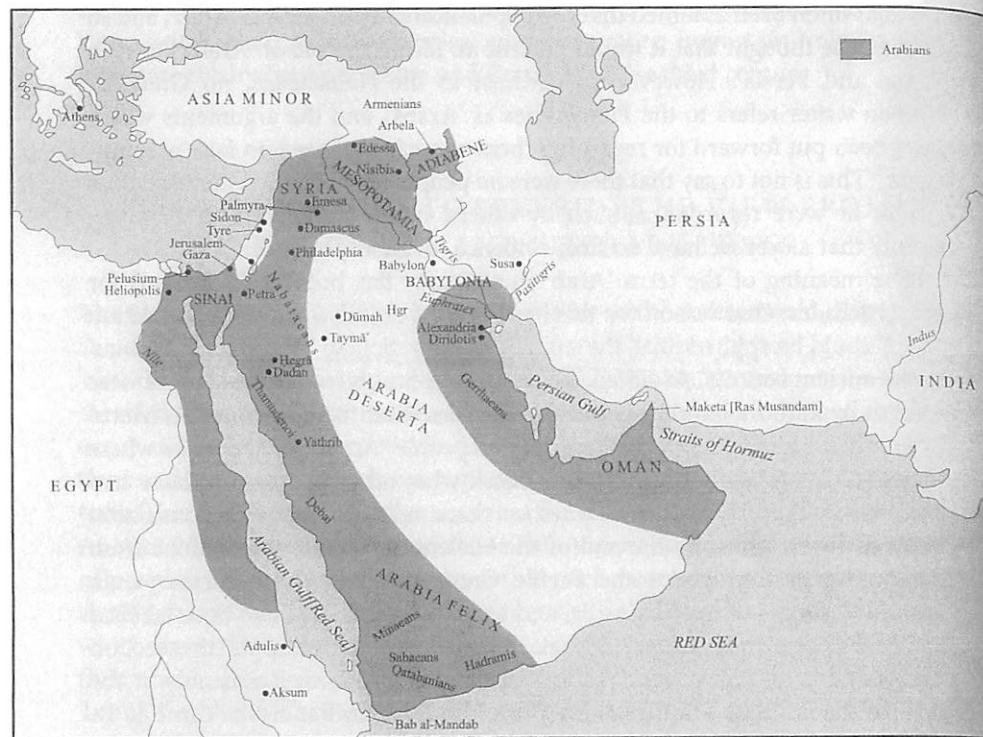


Fig. 1.1. The distribution of peoples described as 'Arabs' by the time of Pompey's conquest of Syria in 63 BC. Map drawn by Aaron Styba.

know that the inhabitants of what is now Yemen (which Greek and Roman writers called *Arabia Eudaimōn*/*Arabia Felix*; see Chs 2 and 3) made a clear distinction between themselves and 'Arabs' and, as far as we know, did not consider themselves to be 'Arabs' until it became politically advantageous to do so in the early Islamic period.

However, regardless of what they were called, or called themselves, the peoples who lived in the areas controlled by, and adjacent to, the great empires of the Achaemenids, Parthians and Sasanians, Seleucids, Ptolemies, Romans, Sabaeans, and the people of Himyar have left us very large numbers of inscriptions, which are the only record we have of the points of view of the inhabitants of these areas at these periods. Unlike the literary sources, they were composed not as historical, geographical, and ethnographic descriptions, but are honorific, legal, religious, or funerary texts, and graffiti, which deal with life and death at the time of writing, rather than providing a considered view for geographically and chronologically distant observers. We therefore have to ask different questions of these various types of material, which to some extent complement each other, though with many broad and deep lacunae.

The section that follows provides examples of Ancient North Arabian, Nabataean, Hatran, and Old Syriac inscriptions. (As explained above, since it is clear that the Palmyrenes were not regarded as Arabs, and do not mention Arabs, their inscriptions will not be included here.)⁷

Ancient North Arabian Inscriptions

The Ancient North Arabian inscriptions⁸ fall into seven groups of texts carved by the inhabitants of two of the oases of northern Arabia, and by groups of nomads who lived throughout the western two-thirds of the Arabian Peninsula, from southern Syria to Yemen. They are difficult to date, but the earliest texts we can identify are already fully formed in the mid-first millennium BC and they do not seem to continue beyond the fourth century AD. Linguistically they are quite diverse, but are grouped together as 'Ancient North Arabian' because the various alphabets they are carved in all belong to the South Semitic alphabet family of which the *musnad*, or Ancient South Arabian alphabet, is the most famous example. This family was one of the two branches of the original alphabet (the other being the Phoenico-Aramaic family from which descend all but one of the traditional alphabets today) and it was used exclusively in pre-Islamic Arabia, southern Syria, and Ethiopia. Its only descendant today is the vocalized alphabet used by several Ethiopian languages.⁹ None of the alphabets of the South Semitic family, except Dadanitic, show any vowels or diphthongs,¹⁰ and there were no ligatures between the letters. The Dadanitic script, like Ancient South Arabian, was written from right to left with the words separated by vertical lines. Word dividers of various sorts are also often used in Taymanitic, but in this script texts can be written in any direction. Most of the graffiti of the nomads run continuously in any direction with no separation of the words.

The languages and scripts of the oases: Taymanitic and Dadanitic

Between the early first millennium BC and the early centuries AD, the oasis of Taymā in north-west Arabia was an extremely important point on the

⁷ In Greek a dot under a letter indicates that the reading is uncertain; in the Semitic texts this is indicated by {}. An editorial addition is indicated by a letter between <>. A restoration is indicated by a letter in [] and one or more letters which are destroyed or unreadable by ----. Word-dividers are indicated by /. For transliteration charts, see the front of this volume. Unless otherwise noted, translations are those of the authors of this chapter.

⁸ For this term and a description of the texts see Macdonald 2000. For a study of the language(s) of these texts see Macdonald 2004.

⁹ See Macdonald 2008a.

¹⁰ For this reason the names in the translations below have been left in their purely consonantal form, since any vocalization would simply be guesswork.



Fig. 1.4. A Taymanitic graffito mentioning Dadan. Photograph by Michael Macdonald.

[1.2] JSTham 513 (Fig. 1.4)

lm rhml / b bs'rt / hl / b-ddn

By Rhml son of Bs'rt. He camped at Dadan.

Dadan (biblical Dedān) was the other major oasis of north-west Arabia and it dominated the route to Egypt and the Mediterranean. The rivalry between Taymā' and Dadan was therefore intense. We know that Nabonidus conquered Dadan and killed its king,¹⁴ and several of the Taymanitic inscriptions state that their authors were fighting against the rival oasis. However, we also know from inscriptions found in the recent excavations at Taymā' that at some point Dadan conquered its rival, since we have inscriptions in Aramaic by governors of the king of Liḥyān (a kingdom in the Dadan oasis). Between these episodes of violence and domination, there must also have been many periods in which individuals travelled between the two centres. The use of *b* rather than *bn* for 'son of' is typical of Taymanitic.

[1.3] HE 31 (Fig. 1.5)

1. *b'rl b klb*

2. *mn s'm' l-šlm ltwy*

B'rl son of Klb. Whoever listens to Šlm, may he bow down.

Šlm is mentioned in many of the inscriptions, both those in Taymanitic and those in Aramaic. The statement in this text is quite common, particularly in those, like this graffito, found at Maṇṭar Banī 'Aṭīyyah, an ancient watchtower outside the oasis.

¹⁴ See Beaulieu 1989: 167–9.



Fig. 1.5. A Taymanitic graffito with a religious statement from a watchtower near Taymā'. Photograph by Michael Macdonald.

As mentioned above, Dadan (modern al-'Ulā) was the other great oasis of north-west Arabia. Strategically placed at the only gap in a huge mountain range blocking the south–north route up the west side of the Peninsula, it dominated the caravan trade from Yemen to Egypt, the Mediterranean, and much of the Levant. As well as the local population, there was a colony of Minaean merchants living in the oasis. The Mīnaeans (Ch. 2) were the most active and adventurous merchants among the ancient South Arabian peoples, and as well as Dadan they had colonies in the capitals of the South Arabian kingdoms, Egypt, and at Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia.¹⁵ Minaean merchants also left inscriptions at Dadan.

Presumably at different periods, there were at least two kingdoms in the oasis, one the kingdom of Dadan about which we know virtually nothing, and the other the kingdom of Liḥyān about which we know a little more. Unfortunately, the chronology of both kingdoms is extremely uncertain, despite certain vain attempts to establish one.¹⁶ Nabonidus conquered the oasis and

¹⁵ On the kingdom of Ma'in see de Maigret: 2002: 221–3, and Ch. 2. The colony at Seleucia-Ctesiphon is attested in a Minaic inscription in bronze set up by a Minaean merchant from there at the great trading emporium of Qaryat al-Fāw, on the north-western edge of the 'Empty Quarter' in southern Saudi Arabia (see Fig 1.2). For the Minaean traders at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, see Robin 2010a.

¹⁶ See for example Caskel 1954: 21–44, who tried to establish a palaeographical sequence—ignoring the fact that his 'early' and 'late' letter forms very often occur in the same inscriptions—and to establish synchronisms with events in other cultures on the slenderest of evidence. See the excellent summary in Farès-Drappeau 2005: 113–26, though her own proposals (116–26) are not without problems.

presumably established a governor. A Dadanitic inscription includes the Persian word for governor, *pht*, which was used by both the Babylonians and the Achaemenids, but, in contrast to Taymā', no monumental inscriptions in Imperial Aramaic have been found there, only a few graffiti.

We know that the principal deity of the oasis was *ḏ-ḡbt*, possibly to be vocalized *Ḍū-Ghābit*, but a number of others were also venerated: *Lāh*, *Lāt*, *Han-'Aktab* (cf. Nabataean *al-Kutbā*), *Ba'l-Shamīn*, *Han-'Uzzā* (cf. Nabataean and Arabic *al-'Uzzā*), among others. There are also a large number of inscriptions recording that men and women had performed a particular ceremony called *h-zll* on behalf of their crops. Unfortunately, no convincing interpretation of the nature of this ceremony has so far been suggested.

The kingdom of Liḥyān seems to have come to an end sometime in the first century BC, possibly when the Nabataeans established the city of Ḥegrā (modern Madā'in Ṣāliḥ; Ch. 7) some 20 km to the north of it.

Examples of Dadanitic inscriptions

[1.4] JSLih 138

khf / kbrl / bn mt' l / mlk ddn / w trw / n' m / b-h / n' rgd

The tomb of Kbr'l son of Mt' l, king of Dadan. And N'rgd became rich in herds because of him.

The interpretation of the second part of the text is uncertain, and there are a number of possible translations. In the one presented here, *N'rgd* is taken to be the name of a tribe or the collective name of the population of Dadan. This is the only text found so far which mentions a king of Dadan. However, in 2012 an inscription was found near the oasis of Tabūk which mentions a Mt' l son of Kbr'l who, given the very common practice of papponymy (i.e. naming a child after his grandfather) was probably the father or son of this king.¹⁷

[1.5] JSLih 49 (Fig. 1.6)

1. *'bdwd*
2. *'fkl / w*
3. *d / w bn-h*
4. *s'lm / w z*
5. *dwd / hw*
6. *dqw / h-ḡ*
7. *lm / s'lm / h-*
8. *[m]lt / l*
9. *ḏḡbt*
10. *frdy ...*

¹⁷ The inscription is at present unpublished. I am most grateful to Professor 'Ali Al-Ghabbān, Vice-President for Antiquities and Museums of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, for this information.



Fig. 1.6. A stela with a dedication in Dadanitic. Photograph by Michael Macdonald.

'bd-Wd, priest of Wd and his two sons, S'lm and Zd-Wd, have offered the young [slave-]boy S'lm as the substitute to *Ḍ-ḡbt*. So may he favour [them] ...

Traces of at least one more line can be seen at the bottom of the stone. This is a very interesting text, which records that a priest of the Minaean god Wd and his two sons made an offering to *Ḍ-ḡbt*, the chief god of the kingdom of Liḥyān at al-'Ulā. The fact that the young slave boy who is offered has the same name as the first-mentioned (and so presumably the elder) son of the priest suggests that there may have been a custom of offering the first fruits, including the first-born male (or a substitute), to the deity, as in ancient Judaism.¹⁸

¹⁸ See Exod. 13:1–2, 11–16; Luke 2:22–4.

[1.6] Sima 1999: no. 'Udayb 18 (Fig. 1.7)

1. 'ms' d / bn k
2. brh / 'zl / h-zl
3. l / l- dgbt / b
4. 'd / m l-h / frd
5. y-h / w s' d-h / w 'h
6. rt-h / w bn-h / {h}rm

'm-s' d son of Kbrh performed the *zll* ceremony for D-Ġbt on behalf of what belongs to him [i.e. 'm-s' d]. So may He [i.e. D-Ġbt] favour him and help him and his descendants, and [particularly] his son Hrm.

This text is very typical of the large numbers which record the performance of this ceremony aimed at persuading the deity to bless the author's property, which, when specified, is always agricultural or horticultural. These inscriptions, which were commissioned by men and by women, religious personnel and lay people, were carved in relief or incised—and sometimes both in the same inscription—and, as can be seen on the photograph, were often squashed close together, sometimes overlapping.

Inscriptions Carved by Nomads

These are in the Ancient North Arabian scripts known as Thamudic B, C, and D, Himaic and Safaitic. Naturally, there is no exclusive relationship between a particular script and a particular way of life and it is perfectly possible that not all of those who carved these inscriptions were nomads. However, their content and the fact that they are found almost entirely in the desert and only very occasionally in settled areas suggest that nomads were responsible for the majority of them.

Why did the nomads of southern Syria and Arabia become literate at this time—the only period in their history before the present day? After all, in the days before paper became cheap and abundant, they would have had little to write on. Papyrus outside Egypt was expensive, leather was needed for more practical uses, and if they carried pottery there was not enough of it to provide a regular supply of sherds as a writing support, as in many settled areas. Thus, the arrival of literacy did not mean that writing replaced memory and oral communication in their society, but it did meet one very important need. Much of nomadic life is spent alone doing endlessly boring jobs such as watching over the animals while they pasture, keeping guard, and so on.¹⁹ Before (and indeed after) the arrival of literacy, they would pass the time by carving drawings on the rocks. Now, they could carve their names and describe what they were doing and were feeling, their hopes and fears, the

¹⁹ See Macdonald 2005: 74–96.

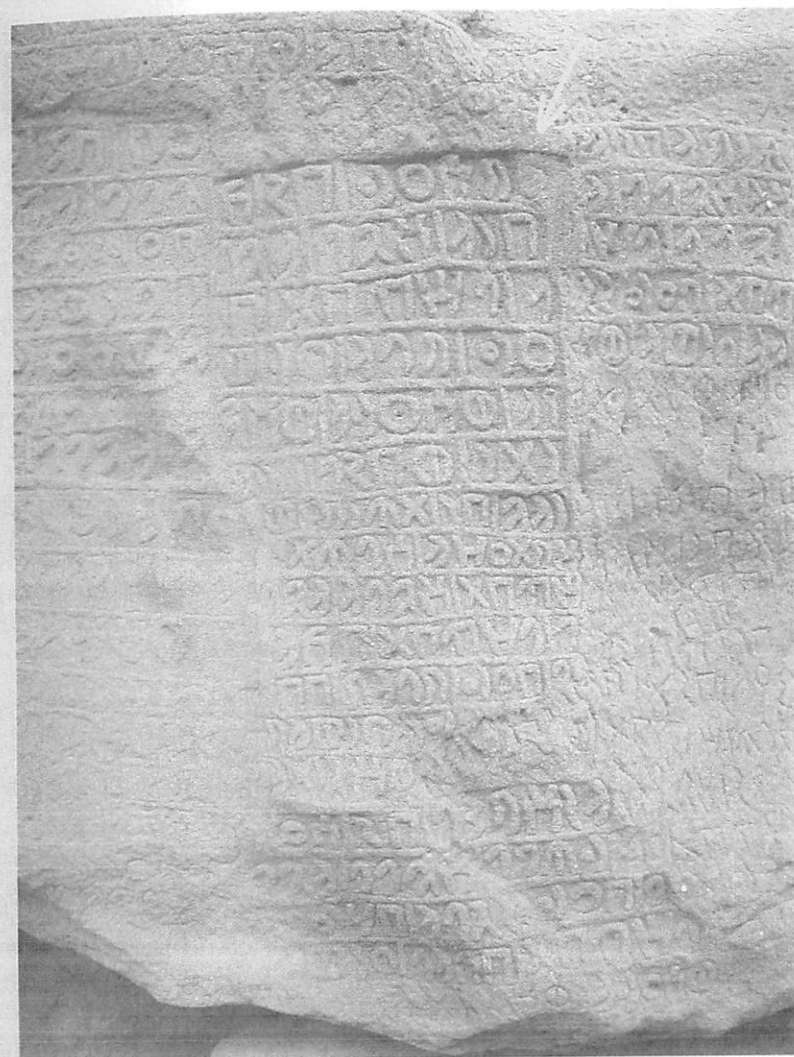


Fig. 1.7. A Dadanitic inscription recording the performance of the *zll* ceremony. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.

latest news, rude remarks about each other, prayers and curses. The resulting tens of thousands of these graffiti are scattered over the deserts from southern Syria across eastern Jordan and in the western two-thirds of Saudi Arabia. From these we can build up a picture of the way of life of these nomads, their social structures, and their relationships with the settled kingdoms and empires beyond the desert.

The most informative of these graffiti are those known as 'Safaitic', which are found in the deserts of southern Syria, north-eastern Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia. Many of them show that the nomads who carved them were well aware of events beyond the desert and in some cases were involved in them. Roman territory and the emperor (*qṣr < καῖσαρ*) are quite often mentioned, as well as the Jewish and Nabataean kingdoms and Palmyra. Two are dated to one or more attacks by the 'Persians' (possibly the Parthians or the Sasanians) on the city of Boṣrā in southern Syria, which was the capital of the last Nabataean king, Rabbel II (AD 70/71–106), and later of the Roman province of Arabia (when, on coins and in texts, it was transliterated as Bostra; for the sake of convenience, the name Boṣrā is used throughout here, and Bostra in Ch. 7, which focuses on the *Provincia Arabia*).²⁰ A good number of the authors seem to have served in units of the Roman army levied from among the nomadic tribes, and others say they rebelled against the Roman authorities, or were on the run from them. At the same time, they mention incursions by tribes from beyond the area in which they lived, such as Liḥyān, Ḥwlt, and Ṭayyi'. In the early centuries AD, the tribe of Ṭayyi' was known to be moving from Arabia into Syria and Mesopotamia and, in the form Ṭayyāyē, its name was used in Syriac as a label for all nomadic Arabs, equivalent to the Latin and Greek 'Saracen' (see the section 'Ammianus and the Saracens').

Examples of Safaitic Inscriptions

[1.7] A previously unpublished graffito from north-eastern Jordan²¹ (Fig. 1.8)
*l zd bn rgl w r'y h-bl h-rd s'nt myt bn qṣr w s'm' 'n myt flfṣ f s'ḥr w h-bkrt w h
 gddfl'n d' y' wr m yhn' w ḡnmt l-d' d'y h-tll*

By Zd son of Rgl: and he pastured the camels in this valley the year Caesar's son died. And he heard that Philippus had died, but he did not believe [it]. And the [drawing of the] young she-camel [is by him]. And O Gd-Ḍayf curse whoever may scratch out that which gives pleasure and [grant] booty to whoever leaves the carving untouched.

The disjointed structure of this graffito is typical, since the author was simply recording his thoughts as they came to him. It seems possible that 'Caesar's son' here refers to Germanicus, the adopted son of the emperor Tiberius, who is mentioned by name in another Safaitic inscription. In his tour of Syria in AD 19 he achieved a great deal and made a very favourable impression, before dying suddenly in suspicious circumstances near Antioch. The widespread mourning and the speculation about the circumstances of his death ensured that the news quickly spread throughout Syria, and indeed the rest of the empire. Philippus, here, probably refers to Herod the Great's son Philip the

²⁰ See 1.9.

²¹ Although it has not been fully published before, part of it has been discussed in Macdonald 1995: 286–8.

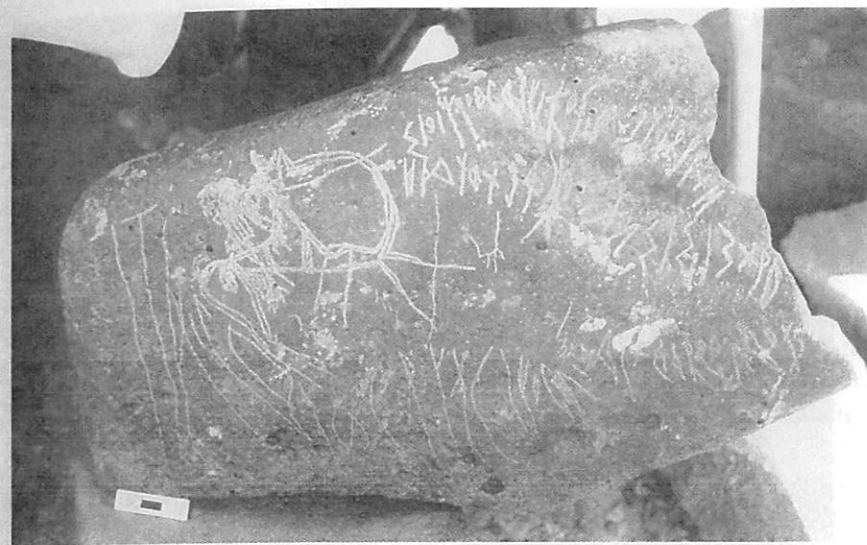


Fig. 1.8. A Safaitic graffito and drawing from north-eastern Jordan. Photograph by Alison Betts.

Tetrarch, who reigned from 4 BC to AD 33/4 over the northern part of his father's kingdom: Batanaea (the fertile parts of northern Jordan), Trachonitis (the Lejā), Auranitis (the Ḥawrān), Gaulanitis (the Golan), and Panias (around the sources of the Jordan river). He was therefore the ruler of the settled area (the Ḥawrān) nearest to the deserts in which the Safaitic inscriptions were carved. If this identification is correct, the author was of course right to dismiss reports of Philip's death in AD 19. The name of the deity to whom he prays, Gd-Ḍayf, is made of up the word *gd* 'fortune, tutelary deity' equivalent to Greek *Tyche*, and *Ḍayf*, the name of one of the two great tribal groups mentioned in these inscriptions. Unusually, in this case, we know the vocalization since the name of this group is found in a Greek graffito by one of its members.²² It is very common for those who carved drawings to use their literacy to 'sign' them, as here, and to call down curses on anyone who might vandalize their work.

[1.8] A previously unpublished graffito from north-eastern Jordan.²³ (Fig. 1.9)
l 'qrb bn 'bgr b-ms'rt l' mrt frs' s'nt ngy ḡwt bn rdwt

By 'qrb son of 'bgr, a horseman in the military unit of the 'l' mrt, in the year Ḡwt son of Rḏwt was appointed [commander].

²² See Macdonald et al. 1996: 483–4.

²³ Although it has not been fully published, it has been discussed a number of times by this author. See Macdonald 2009a, II: 374; IV: 189; VIII: 11; and Macdonald 2014: 157.

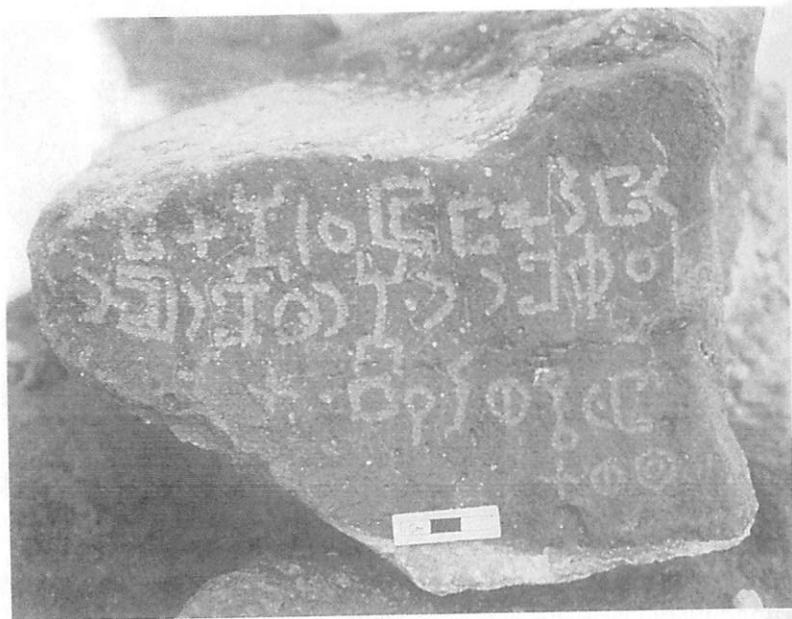


Fig. 1.9. A Safaitic graffito by a man who identifies himself as a member of a military unit drawn from his tribe. Photograph by Alison Betts.

The way this author identifies himself is at present unique, even though the elements he uses are familiar from other texts. While the camel provides the nomad's capital, his principal food source (through its milk), and both the reason for and the means of pursuing his nomadic way of life, the horse was (and still is) a pampered pet and the means of achieving honour in battle and the hunt. This can be seen in numerous rock drawings where an individual horseman is seen in a 'heroic' pose, spearing lions, ibex, and other large game, or charging into battle, just as Assyrian kings were shown in their reliefs. Normally, the authors of the Safaitic inscriptions will express their group identity by reference to their *l*, a word which covers all social groups from immediate family to tribal confederations, and even states like the Romans (*l rm*). We know that the Romans raised army units from among the nomads on the edges of their provinces of Syria and Arabia, though we have very little detailed information about them. However, from various inscriptions, it seems that they raised these units (for which the Safaitic word is *ms'rt*) from particular tribes (here, the well-known tribe of *'mrt*) and put them under the command of nomad leaders. The appointment of such leaders was often used by others as a fixed point by which to date their inscriptions, as here. The way this text is phrased would suggest that the author could express his group identity not only as a member of the *l 'mrt* but specifically as a member of the

army unit raised from it.²⁴ It is perfectly possible that the practice of raising military units from among the nomads had been pursued under the Herodians and the Nabataeans, but alas we know next to nothing of the make-up of their armies.²⁵

[1.9] CIS v 4448²⁶

*l mḥwr bn ḡṭfn bn 'dnt w syr b-ḡnmt-h s'nt ḥrb h-mḍy 'l rm b-bšr{y} ...*²⁷

By Mḥwr son of ḡṭfn son of 'dnt and he remained with his small flock of sheep at a place of permanent water the year the Persians and the Romans waged war at Bošrā ...

In years when there is little or no rainfall during the winter months, the nomads have to stay near the few places in the desert where there is water all the year round and feed their flocks and herds on dry fodder. This is a source of great hardship since there is considerable competition for the water, and the dry fodder is expensive. The word *ḡnmt* (cf. Arabic *ḡnaymah*) can mean a small flock of sheep, a small herd of goats, or a small mixed herd containing both. The implication may be that the herd had diminished because of the drought.

The word *mḍy* seems always to be used to denote the Persians in the Safaitic inscriptions. It is also found in the South Arabian language, Minaic, with the same meaning.²⁸ It is thought to have come originally from Old Persian *Māda* 'Medes' and then to have been used of Persians in general. As noted above, it is impossible to be sure to which of the Persian invasions of Roman territory west of the Euphrates this dating formula is referring.²⁹ The surviving sources do not mention a battle between the Romans and Persians at Bošrā until the invasion of AD 614, but this would be far too late for the Safaitic inscriptions, which do not seem to continue after the fourth century AD. Bošrā never seems to have been included in the Roman province of Syria, which was created in 63 BC, and remained part of the Nabataean kingdom until it in turn was annexed by Rome in AD 106. Thus, even if Bošrā had been attacked during the second Parthian invasion of 41–38 BC—which is the only occasion we know

²⁴ Compare the *Θαμουνδωνών ἔθνος/šrkt tmwdw* in the Ruwāfa inscription I as against *Θαμουνδωνών φυλή* in Ruwāfa inscription IV discussed later.

²⁵ On military terminology in the Safaitic inscriptions and the possibility that they provide evidence of nomads serving in the armies of settled kingdoms and Rome see Macdonald 2014.

²⁶ This inscription was copied in 1901 by René Dussaud between al-Namāra and Ghadir al-Darb in southern Syria but unfortunately no photograph was taken. See Dussaud and Macler 1903: no. 554. It was republished in 1950 as CIS v 4448.

²⁷ There are four letters (*qtrz*) at the end of the text which are not understood.

²⁸ M 247 [= RES 3022] in DASI, which refers to *mrd kwn byn Mḍy w-Msr* 'the conflict which occurred between the Persians and Egypt'. See the 'cultural remarks' on this text in DASI for a summary of the different dates proposed for this conflict.

²⁹ For a useful list of the wars between Rome and Parthia from the first century BC to the early third century AD see Isaac 2000: 28–30. For a discussion of the defences of Bošrā see Sartre 1985: 88–90.

for certain that Persian armies came as far south as this—the Romans would have had no reason to defend it.

There is a Latin inscription from Qal'at al-Zarqa in northern Jordan possibly from AD 259 which mentions the transfer of troops from the province of Palestine to that of Arabia, the capital of which was Boṣrā (Bostra), and this may be related to the Sasanian raids into Syria from 252 onwards and the preparations for the full-scale invasion in 260.³⁰ However, we have no indication that on this occasion the Persians came as far south as Boṣrā and it seems more likely that the Latin inscription is simply describing precautionary measures which were being taken.

Inscriptions in Varieties of the Aramaic Script

Nabataean Inscriptions

There is fragmentary evidence that at least some of the Nabataeans spoke a dialect of Arabic. However, their written language was a dialect of Aramaic expressed in a script which had developed during the Hellenistic period from the Official Aramaic used in the Babylonian and Achaemenid empires.³¹

At its fullest extent in the first century AD, the Nabataean kingdom stretched from southern Syria to north-west Arabia and included Sinai and much of the Negev. In AD 106 these areas were taken over by Rome to form *Provincia Arabia* (see Ch. 7 and Figs 7.1, 7.2).

Examples of Nabataean Inscriptions

[1.10] LPNab 41 and PUAES IIIA no. 238¹ (Figs 1.10a, 1.10b)

1. *dnh nṣw fhrw*
2. *br šly rbw gdymt*
3. *mlk tnh*
1. 'Η στήλη αὐτῆς Φε-
2. ρου Σολλεου,
3. τροφὸς Γαδι-
4. μαθου Βασιλεὺς
5. Θα[two large holes in the stone] γουηνῶν

This is the memorial of Fihir son of Sullay, tutor of Gadhīmat king of Tanūkh.

³⁰ The inscription is PUAES IIIA no. 10. For a translation see Dodgeon and Lieu 1991: 56 § 3.2.5. Knauf (1984) argues, on the basis of this fragmentary Latin text, that the Safaitic reference to 'the year the Persians came to Boṣrā' must refer to an event in AD 256, even though there is no evidence that the Persian army ever actually entered *Provincia Arabia*, or indeed came further south than Arethusa (modern al-Rastan, halfway between Ḥamā and Ḥims/Emesa).

³¹ On the question of the spoken language, see the discussion in Macdonald 2003b: 48–51, and on the script Macdonald 2003b: 51–6.



Fig. 1.10a. The bilingual tomb inscription of the tutor of Gadhīmat king of Tanūkh, at Umm al-Jimāl, northern Jordan. The Nabataean version. Photograph by Michael Macdonald.



Fig. 1.10b. The bilingual tomb inscription of the tutor of Gadhīmat king of Tanūkh. The Greek version. Photograph from the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–5 and 1909, courtesy of Princeton University Library, no. U928–28.

This bilingual memorial was found at the Nabataean-Roman-Late Roman site of Umm al-Jimāl in northern Jordan. The 'Gadhīmat king of Tanūkh' here is generally considered to be Jadhīma al-Abrash, who, according to Arab-Islamic tradition, was an early king of the city of al-Ḥīra in southern 'Irāq.³² On the other hand, Jadhīma al-Abrash is said to have belonged to the tribe of al-Azd in the south-west of Arabia, and Jadhīma is a fairly common name, so this is by no means certain.³³ The usual dating of the text to c.AD 250 is insecure since it is based solely on an association, in Arab traditions written down in the early Islamic centuries,³⁴ of Jadhīma al-Abrash (who may or may not be the Gadhīmat in this inscription) with a certain al-Zabbā', who has been identified as a folk memory of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra.

There are mistakes in both the Nabataean and the Greek. A large number of personal names in Nabataean have the suffix *-w*, but here this has been incorrectly applied to common nouns (*npš-w*, *rb-w*). In the Greek the words *τροφεὺς* and *Βασιλεὺς* are in the nominative when they should be in the genitive.

Unfortunately, we have no idea what the tutor of Gadhīmat was doing in Umm al-Jimāl.

[1.11] JSNab 39 (Figs 1.11a, 1.11b)

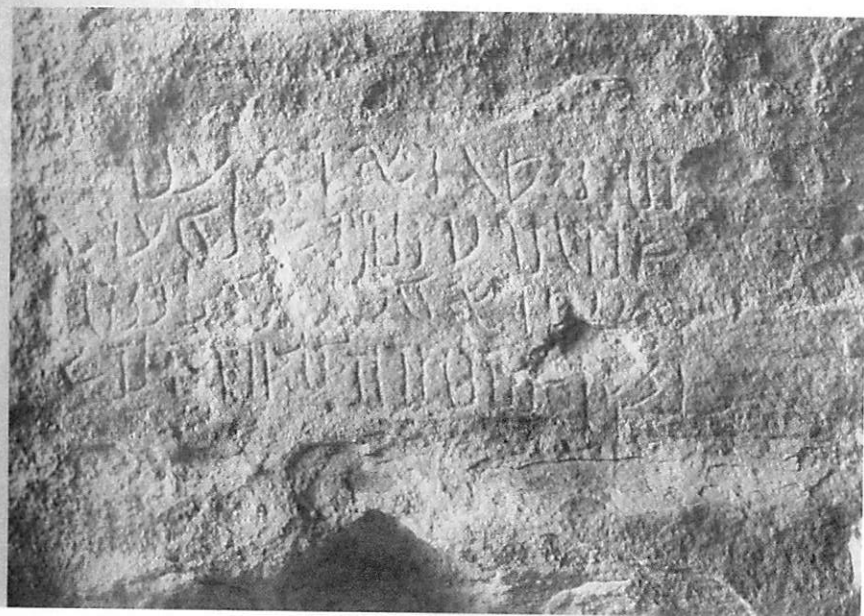
1. *dnh msgd' dy 'bd*
2. *škwḥw br twr' l-'r'*
3. *dy b-bšr' lh rb'l b-yrḥ*
4. *nysn šnt ḥdh l-mnk'w mlk'*

This is the baetyl which Škwḥw son of Twr' made for 'r', who is in Bošrā, the god of Rb'l. In the month of Nīsān of year one of Mnkw the king.

This inscription is carved above a niche containing a pillar-like b(a)etyl or aniconic image of a deity (Fig. 1.11a).³⁵ It is in the passage through the mountain by which one enters Jabal Ithlib, the sanctuary area of ancient Ḥegrā (modern Madā'in Šālīḥ in north-west Arabia). Ḥegrā, which lies some 20 km north of the large oasis of al-'Ulā (ancient Dadan, see 1.2) was the southernmost city of the Nabataean kingdom (and later of *Provincia Arabia*) whereas Bošrā, some 900 km away, was the northernmost. The last king of Nabataea, Rabbel II (AD 70/1–106), had moved his capital from Petra



Fig. 1.11a. The niche and baetyl mentioned in JSNab 39. In the passage through the mountain leading to the sanctuary area of Jabal Ithlib at Ḥegrā (modern Madā'in Šālīḥ) in north-west Arabia.



³² For a summary of this traditional view see Hackl, Janni, and Schneider 2003: 197–8.

³³ See Rothstein 1899: 38–40 and Robin 2008a: 181–8, both of whom, however, accept the identification, along with most scholars. For an attempt to reconcile these inconsistencies see *El²* s.v. 'Tanūkh' (I. Shahid), 191.

³⁴ See the references in Rothstein 1899: 38–9.

³⁵ The Nabataeans commonly represented their deities as blocks of stone, rather than anthropomorphically like the Greeks and Romans, though under Hellenistic influence there are some examples of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images. See Patrich 1990.

to Boṣrā, which is possibly why the Romans retained it as the capital of the province.³⁶

Although the deity 'r' was worshipped throughout the Nabataean kingdom, the association with Boṣrā and/or with Rabbel II is almost always mentioned.³⁷ Since 'Mnkw the king' in this inscription must be contemporary with or later than Rabbel II, after whose death the Romans annexed the kingdom, it has been suggested that here in Ḥegrā, at the opposite end of the kingdom from Boṣrā, this Mnkw (III),³⁸ a would-be successor to Rabbel II, claimed the throne briefly before being ousted by the Romans.³⁹

[1.12] Stiehl⁴⁰ (Fig. 1.12)

1. *dnh* [*np*š] 'w-q][b]{r}{t} dy ['bd]
2. 'dy ——— br ḥny br šmw'l ry[š]
3. ḥgr' 'l mwyh 'tt-h brt
4. 'mr[w] br 'dywn br šmw'l
5. ryš tym' dy mytt b-yrḥ
6. 'b šnt m'tyn w-ḥmšyn
7. w-'ḥdy brt šnyn tlyn
8. w-tmny

This is [the memorial and tomb] which 'dy[wn?] son of Ḥny son of Šmw'l, Chief [citizen?] of Ḥegrā, [made] for Mwyh his wife, daughter of 'mrw son of 'dywn son of Šmw'l, Chief [citizen?] of Taymā, who died in the month of Ab in the year 251 at the age of thirty-eight.

The inscription is almost certainly dated according to the era of the Roman province of Arabia, in which the month of Ab in the year 251 would be equivalent to August AD 356.⁴¹ This era continued to be used up to the Islamic conquests of the mid-seventh century in much of the area originally covered by the Nabataean kingdom, even in places which, after the alterations to the borders of the province under Diocletian and his successors, were included in other provinces (*Palaestina Salutaris*, and then *Palaestina III*) or which, like north-west Arabia, were to all intents and purposes abandoned by Rome from the end of the third century onwards.

³⁶ This means that it is almost certain that the *rb'l* in this inscription is Rabbel II, not Rabbel I who reigned sometime around 85 BC and is known only from one inscription (CIS ii 349). See Hackl, Janni, and Schneider 2003: 244–7.

³⁷ See Healey 2001: 97–100.

³⁸ Note that, although in Greek and Latin transliteration the name *Mnkw* appears as Malichus, it is actually spelt with a *n* in Nabataean.

³⁹ For an excellent discussion of the evidence for and against this interpretation see Nehmé 2009: 42–4.

⁴⁰ For the reading and interpretation see Al-Najem and Macdonald 2009: 213–15 and Fig. 2.

⁴¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the era of the province of Arabia (or the era of Boṣrā, as it was also known), see Meimarīs 1992: 146–61, and Ch. 7.

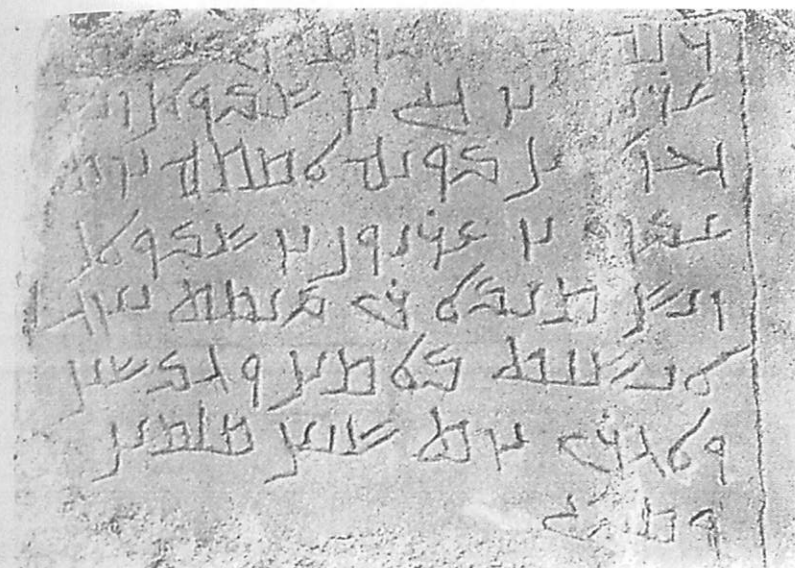


Fig. 1.12. The gravestone of Mwyh dated to August AD 356. The latest monumental inscription in Nabataean Aramaic. Photograph by Ruth Altheim-Stiehl.

After Rome withdrew from north-west Arabia, it seems that local forms of government sprang up in the major oases. According to Islamic sources,⁴² Taymā was ruled by Jewish families for an unspecified period before and after the coming of Islam. If the titles *ryš ḥgr*' and *ryš tym*' mean 'ruler' or 'chief citizen' of Ḥegrā and Taymā respectively, then it is possible that both places were ruled by men with the Jewish name Šmw'l (i.e. Samuel) two generations before this inscription was carved.⁴³ However, the name was also used by Christians⁴⁴ and all the other names in this text have North Arabian (i.e. Arabic or Ancient North Arabian) rather than Jewish etymologies.⁴⁵ Indeed, the name of the deceased, Mwyh (Mavia), was popular among the ruling families of the Arabs in the fourth and fifth centuries and a Mavia 'queen of the Saracens' defeated the Roman armies in AD 377/8 (see section 'Queen Mavia').⁴⁶

⁴² For a convenient description of these see Musil 1928a: 226–8.

⁴³ See the discussion in Al-Najem and Macdonald 2009: 213–15. It is less likely that Šmw'l was the grandfather of both 'dy[wn] and Mwyh since that would make him chief of both Ḥegrā and Taymā, in which case one would expect 'ryš ḥgr' w-tym' at the end of both genealogies, rather than ḥgr' at the end of one and tym' at the end of the other.

⁴⁴ See al-Najem and Macdonald 2009: 214.

⁴⁵ This is an example of the dangers of drawing conclusions about ethnicity from onomastics. See Macdonald 1998: 187–9 and the references at n. 28 there.

⁴⁶ See Bowersock 1980.

Ḥaṭrā

The city of Ḥaṭrā lies some 85 km south-west of Mosul and 50 km west of the Tigris, in the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates known as the Jazīra (see Fig. 1.2).⁴⁷ Although it is surrounded by desert, the city is situated in one of the few places in this area where it could expect to have sufficient water.⁴⁸

Ḥaṭrā (apparently from Arabic *al-ḥaḍr* < *ḥaḍara* 'to camp near perennial water') may have begun as a semi-permanent encampment possibly of some of the 'tent-dwelling [i.e. nomadic] Arabs' whom Strabo locates in the northern Jazīra.⁴⁹ Later, mud-brick buildings appeared, followed eventually by magnificent stone edifices and an almost circular city wall.⁵⁰ Ḥaṭrā appears to have flourished between AD 90 and 240 and despite being 'in the firing line' between the Roman and Parthian empires, it seems to have maintained its independence throughout the second century, successfully fighting off attacks by both Trajan (AD 115–16) and Septimius Severus (AD 198 and 200; see section 'Trajan and Septimius Severus'). However, Latin dedications on an altar and two statue bases found in one of the temples show that at least by AD 235 there was a Roman presence in the city, and that at some time between 238 and 240 the IX *Cohors Maurorum Gordianae*, a Roman auxiliary unit raised in North Africa, was based there.⁵¹ Finally, in April 240, the city was destroyed either by the first Sasanian king Ardashir I (224–40) or by his son and co-ruler Shapur I (240–73), and it does not seem to have been rebuilt. In 363 Ammianus Marcellinus described it as deserted.⁵² Its fame, however, continued in popular memory, and more than half a millennium later historians in the Islamic period were still aware of the existence of Ḥaṭrā and of its capture.⁵³

⁴⁷ See Ibrahim 1986: 89–140; Hauser 1998; Sommer 2003; Drijvers 1977: 803–37; Segal 1986: 57–80; Dijkstra 1990: 94–8.

⁴⁸ However, whether this would have been sufficient to provide enough irrigation for agriculture to support a city is something which has yet to be explored and we simply do not know from where Ḥaṭrā sourced its food.

⁴⁹ Strabo 16.1.26. Note, however, that there is little archaeological evidence for this encampment at Ḥaṭrā apart from some ash layers immediately above virgin soil. See Ibrahim 1986: 93–4.

⁵⁰ See Ibrahim 1986: 93–4.

⁵¹ See Oates 1955 and for photographs Aggoula 1991: pl. XXXIII. The dedication on the altar provides the date 235 and, as Oates points out, the title 'Gordiana' dates the two inscriptions on the statue bases to the reign of Gordian III (238–44). For the later history of Ḥaṭrā, see Sartre 2005: 344–8.

⁵² Amm. Marc. 25.8.5: 'we approached Hatra, an old city lying in the midst of a desert and long since abandoned' (trans. Rolfe).

⁵³ See *El*² s.v. 'al-Ḥaḍr' (C. Pellat). Pellat points out that by this time the city was the stuff of legends and that while some writers attributed its destruction to Ardashir I others credited it to Shapur I, or even to Shapur II in the following century. It is nevertheless remarkable that memory of its very existence should have survived so long.

Over 400 inscriptions in a dialect of Aramaic have been found at Ḥaṭrā, and elsewhere in the region. These mention one series of rulers referred to as 'lord' (*mr'*) and another (apparently subsequent) series with the title 'king' (*mlk*).⁵⁴ While the subjects of the 'lords' are not specified,⁵⁵ those of the king are, and in this case the phrase is always 'king of *'rb*' (a place) or 'king of *'rby*' (its inhabitants).⁵⁶ The word *'rb* is usually taken to be the name of the region in which Ḥaṭrā is located and its inhabitants are referred to in the inscriptions as *'rby*'. By a common error, many scholars have confused the ethnonym 'Arab' with a description of a way of life, 'nomad'⁵⁷—as if all those called 'Arabs' had to be nomads—and so have assumed that the *'rby*' must have been nomads. Given that Ḥaṭrā is surrounded by desert, it is quite possible, even probable, that some were, but they were not called 'Arabs' because of this way of life. The Greek writers make a clear distinction between 'tent dwellers' (*σκηνῖται*) who were Arabs, tent dwellers of other 'ethnicities', and Arabs who pursued other ways of life, such as those 'Arabs' whom Cassius Dio describes as the inhabitants of Ḥaṭrā.⁵⁸ It is also clear from archaeological surveys that in the Parthian period the hinterland of Ḥaṭrā, far from being occupied only by nomads, saw a far greater number of settlements than at any other time.⁵⁹

It appears from a phrase in two inscriptions (H336b, 343) that 'Hatrans' (*ḥṭry*) and 'Arabs' (*'rby*) were regarded as separate populations acting together,⁶⁰ possibly in the same way that the Nabataeans and Salamians are thought to have been in Hegra.⁶¹ Since the kings are never said to be kings of Ḥaṭrā but always of *'rb*, one is tempted to wonder whether the change of title from 'lord' to 'king of *'rb*' marks an extension of power beyond the city to at least part of the region surrounding it.⁶²

Ḥaṭrā was a centre of the worship of the Sun god Shamash, though other deities were also worshipped there.

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the implications of these titles see Hauser 1998: 510–14.

⁵⁵ Apart from in the phrase *mr'-n*, 'our lord'.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the different interpretations of this title see Hauser 1998: 512–14.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the habit of assuming that 'Arab' equals 'nomad' see Macdonald 2003a: 308–9. For the wide variety of ways of life pursued by those called 'Arabs' in antiquity see Macdonald 2009a, V, and 2009b: 280–97.

⁵⁸ Cass. Dio 76.10.1, 11.1. ⁵⁹ Hauser 1998: 513.

⁶⁰ The phrase is *ḥṭry' qšys' w-drđq' w-'rby' kl-hwn*... 'the Hatrans, old and young, and the Arabs, all of them'.

⁶¹ See Healey 1993: 73.

⁶² An alternative scenario by which the city was absorbed into a pre-existing kingdom of *'rb* would seem to be excluded by the fact that the first kings, either Vologases (*wlgš*) or Sanatruq I, were the sons of the last 'lord' Našrū, and each is called 'lord' in one inscription and 'king' in another (see Hauser 1998: 502). The change from 'lord' to 'king' seems to have taken place between AD 161/2 and 176/7 (Hauser 1998: 503).

Examples of Hatran Inscriptions

Many of the most important inscriptions have been beautifully presented in Healey 2009: 276–310.⁶³ The readings, translations, and brief commentaries given here are based on that edition, with only very minor changes.

[1.13] H79 [see Healey 2009: 289–92, no. 70] (Fig. 1.13)

I. [slm' dy] sn[trwq mlk' dy 'rb]

II.

1. zky' d-gnd-h 'm
2. 'lh' br 'bdsmy'
3. mlk' d-yqmw l-h b-byld-h
4. d-gnd' dy hdyb b-h dyl-hwn
5. yhbrmryn w 'lkwd bn' šmšbrk
6. br 'lkwd br šmšbrk br
7. 'lkwd w 'hr-h<wn> w yhbrmryn
8. w 'lkwd w bny-hwn w nk<d>y-hwn d-lbr
9. w lgw b-mrn nšr' w b-mlkwt-h w b-gnd'
10. d-rb w b-sm'y d-mškn' w b-gnd-hwn
11. d-sntrwq mlk' w zr'-h w bny-hy kl-hwn
12. d-l'lm l' l-dbrhn w nš mn bn' dr-hwn
13. b-qtyr' m'n' br sntrwq mlk'
14. dkyryn l'lm b-htr' w 'rb w'l

[The statue of] the victorious [king of 'rb,] San[aṭrūq]—whose Protective Deity is among the gods—son of king 'Abdsamiya, which Yahbarmārēn and Alkūd, sons of Shamashbarak, son of Alkūd, son of Shamashbarak, son of Alkūd, and their descendants, set up for him on the birthday of his Protective Deity, on which their households [lit. 'those belonging to them'] rejoice. And Yahbarmārēn and Alkūd and their children and their progeny, whether inside or outside [the city], [swear?] by our Lord the Eagle, and by his Majesty, and by the Protective Deity of 'rb, and by the Standards of the Dwelling [temple?], and by the Protective Deity of both king Sanaṭrūq and of his posterity and his children, [that?] Ma'na, son of king Sanaṭrūq, shall never do violence to them and anyone belonging to them. May they [the dedicators] be remembered for ever in Ḥatrā and 'rb and beyond.

As Healey notes, 'there are many unresolved problems with this inscription',⁶⁴ but it contains so much information that it is worth including here. King

⁶³ For the corpus of inscriptions see Vattioni 1981 for texts published up to 1978, and Beyer 1998 for all those published by that date. However, neither of these has any photographs or facsimiles. For a well-illustrated corpus see Aggoula 1991, where, however, the readings and interpretations should be treated with considerable caution. Note that, thanks to the Iraqi archaeologist and epigraphist Fuad Safar who conducted the first major excavations at the site from the 1950s onwards, the Hatran inscriptions have been numbered consecutively as H1, H2, etc., a system which has been continued in all subsequent editions.

⁶⁴ Healey 2009: 290. For a detailed study of the text see Dijkstra 1990.



Fig. 1.13. Hatran inscription 79. From Safar 1961: pl. I.

Sanaṭrūq, son of King 'Abdsamiya, was Sanaṭrūq II who reigned c.AD 200–40. The word translated as 'Protective Deity' is *gnd'* which, in the form *gd*, is also found in Safaitic⁶⁵ and Palmyrene as the supernatural being which protects individuals, groups, and places.⁶⁶ It is possible that the *gnd'* was so closely identified with the person, place, or thing it was protecting that it came to represent him, her, or it, so that 'the birthday of his *gnd'*' is an elaborate way

⁶⁵ See 1.7.

⁶⁶ See Teixidor 1979: 88–100 and Kaizer 1998, and in relation to H79 at pp. 52–3.

of saying 'his [i.e. the king's] birthday',⁶⁷ almost as one would say 'his majesty's birthday' where the abstract quality 'majesty' has come to be used as an honorific periphrasis for 'the king'. The eagle was the symbol of the Sun god, Shamash. The next word, *mlkwt*, means literally 'the quality of kingship' or 'the kingdom'. The word *sm̄y*, usually translated as *semeion* or 'standard', was clearly a religious object or identity symbol, the exact significance of which is unclear.⁶⁸ The implication of the end of the inscription appears to be that Ma'na, the king's son, was in some way a threat either to the king or to the dedicators. Whether this perceived threat is related to the conquest and destruction of Ḥaṭrā by the Persians at the end of Sanaṭrūq's reign remains a mystery.

[1.14] H343 (see Healey 2009: 307–9, no. 79) On the eastern gate of Ḥaṭrā below a relief of an eagle (Fig. 1.14)

1. *b-yrh knwn d-4 x 100 + 20 + 20 + 20 + 1 + 1 + 1 b-mlk' dy*
2. *'lh' 'štbw šmšbrk rbyt'*
3. *w ḥtry' qšyš' w drdq' w 'rby'*
4. *kl-hwn w kwl dy 'mr b-ḥtr' w hkyn psq[w]*
5. *dy kwl d-l-gnwb lgw mn ml' hdyn*

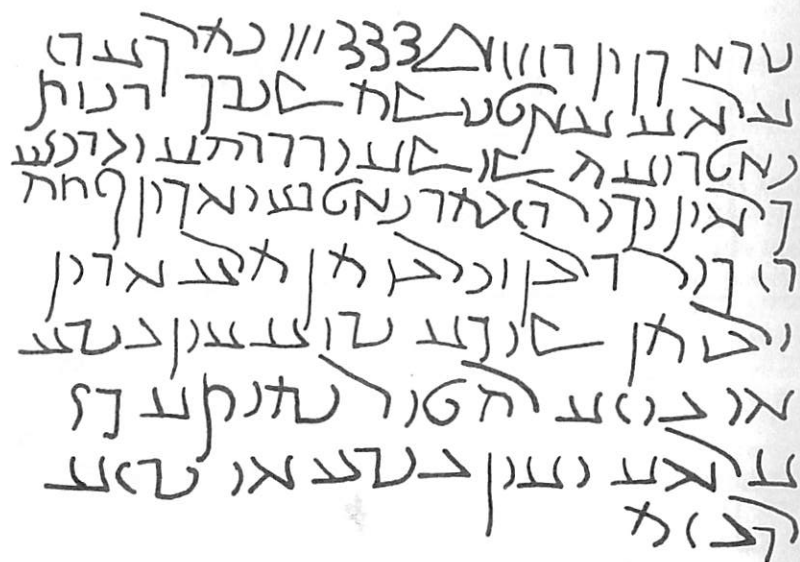


Fig. 1.14. Hatran inscription 343. From Ibrahim 1982: 123.

⁶⁷ See Dijkstra 1990: 88.

⁶⁸ It occurs as the symbol or patron of a family or larger social group (H3), a professional group (H280), as a symbol related to a deity (H209, H1010), and in a list of deities (H52, H74, H75, H151). For attempts at explanation, none of which is very satisfactory, see Homès-Fredericq 1963: 39–42 and pls IV/2, VIII/2, 4.

6. *w lgw mn šwr' bry' 'yn gbr'*
7. *hw gwy' l-qtyl b-mwt' dy*
8. *'lh' w 'yn gbr' hw bry'*
9. *l-rgym*

In the month of Kānūn of 463, on the advice of the gods, Shamashbarak the administrator and the Hatrans old and young, and all the inhabitants of 'rb, and all who live in Ḥaṭrā, agreed and thus decided that anyone who steals within this entrance ramp [?] and within the outer wall, if he is a resident he will be killed by the death of the gods and if he is an outsider he will be stoned.

The Hatran inscriptions are dated according to the Seleucid era, which began in 312/11 BC.⁶⁹ Kānūn 463 is therefore November/December AD 151. Here the legal formula gives us a glimpse of the make-up of the population of the city and the area under its control since it distinguishes between (1) Hatrans, (2) the inhabitants of 'rb, and (3) those 'who live in Ḥaṭrā' (presumably long-term residents who, by some unknown criterion, were not considered as Hatrans). The almost identical inscription (H336), of the same date, found on the northern gate, adds a fourth category, (4) 'and all who enter or leave Ḥaṭrā', presumably referring to short-term visitors. The phrase translated as 'if he is a resident' literally means 'if the man is inside' as opposed to 'if the man is outside'. This has been taken, unjustifiably, as referring to a 'dimorphic society' in which the 'insiders' were urban sedentaries and the 'outsiders' were the inhabitants of 'rb who are assumed to have been nomads.⁷⁰ However, the structure of the inscription surely suggests that the distinction is between the local population (both Hatran and the inhabitants of 'rb) and foreigners. It is not known what the 'death of the gods' entailed, but it may mean that the exact form of execution was dependent on an oracle.⁷¹

Old Syriac of Edessa and its Surroundings

Unfortunately, we know relatively little about the early history of the kingdom of Edessa, modern Urfa in south-eastern Turkey.⁷² The city, which was also known as Antioch-Kallirhoē, was founded by the Seleucid king, Seleucus I Nicator, in c.303/2 BC, probably on the site of an earlier city called Adme. In the late second century BC it became independent of Seleucid rule as the capital of the kingdom of Osroëne in the north-west of the Jazīra. Osroëne

⁶⁹ See Meimaris 1992: 53–5.

⁷⁰ For instance by Dijkstra 1990: 90–7. For a caution against such assumptions see Macdonald 2003a: 308–11.

⁷¹ See Kaizer 2006: 149–50.

⁷² On Edessa, see Segal 1970; Drijvers 1977: 863–96; Drijvers and Healey 1999: 34–41. For Edessa between Rome and Persia from the reigns of Trajan to Caracalla, see Sartre 2001: 630–7 and Bertinelli 1976.

became a buffer state between Rome and the Parthian empire until it was brought under Roman control following a campaign by Lucius Verus (AD 163–6) and was eventually made a province in AD 195. However, Edessa remained a client state until 212–13.⁷³ Despite being conquered more than once by the Sasanians, it remained in Roman hands until the Arab conquest in AD 638.

In AD 161–2 the Parthian monarch Vologeses IV (AD 148–93) conquered Edessa, and its king, Ma'nū VIII son of Ma'nū (AD 139–63 and 165–77), fled to the Romans. The Parthians installed a former governor of 'rb, Wa'el son of Sahrū, as a puppet king and replaced him as governor of 'rb by a man with a Parthian name, Tiridates, who set up an altar and baetyl for the life of the new king in 165. However, in the same year, the Romans, under Avidius Cassius, reconquered Edessa, restored Ma'nū VIII as king, and replaced Tiridates with a new governor named Abgar, who may well have been the future king Abgar VIII 'the Great', son of Ma'nu (AD 176–211). From the restoration of Ma'nū VIII, who styled himself on his coins as *Philorhōmaios* ('Friend to the Romans'), Edessa and Osroëne became client states of Rome.⁷⁴

The Semitic name for the city was Urhay, which is reflected in Greek Ὀρροηνή and Latin Orr(h)ei. It was in an area referred to as 'Arabia' by Greek and Roman writers,⁷⁵ which may have been part of the same 'rb which is mentioned in the Hatran inscriptions, though there is nothing beyond the name to suggest this. As at Ḥaṭṭrā, the references in the inscriptions and the Classical writers give no indication that the inhabitants of 'rb were nomadic, or semi-nomadic, though this is assumed by most modern writers. While at Ḥaṭṭrā, we find the title *mlk' d(y) 'rb* 'king of 'rb', in the Old Syriac inscriptions it is *šlyt' d-'rb* 'governor of 'rb', under the king of Edessa.⁷⁶ However, the latter are as uninformative about the nature of 'rb as the former.

The Old Syriac inscriptions have been beautifully presented by Drijvers and Healey (1999) and again by Healey (2009: 223–75). The presentation of the examples here is almost entirely reliant on the latter.

[1.15] As47 (after Healey 2009: 232–4, no. 50) (Fig. 1.15)

1. *hlyn šlm' d-'bd*
2. *w'l br mwtrw [nwhd]r'*
3. *d-prr l-w'l šlyt' d-'rb*
4. *br w'l w l-w'l br-h*
5. *nwhdr' d-šwr mr-why*
6. *w 'bdy tbt-h*

⁷³ For the problems with the exact chronology of these events see Bertinelli 1976: 39–41.

⁷⁴ See Drijvers and Healey 1999: 37–8, and Drijvers 1977: 875–6.

⁷⁵ See Pliny, *HN* 5.85, 5.86; see also 6.25, 6.117, 6.129.

⁷⁶ For useful discussions of what is known of the title *šlyt' d-'rb* see Segal 1954: 25, and Drijvers and Healey 1999: 105–6.

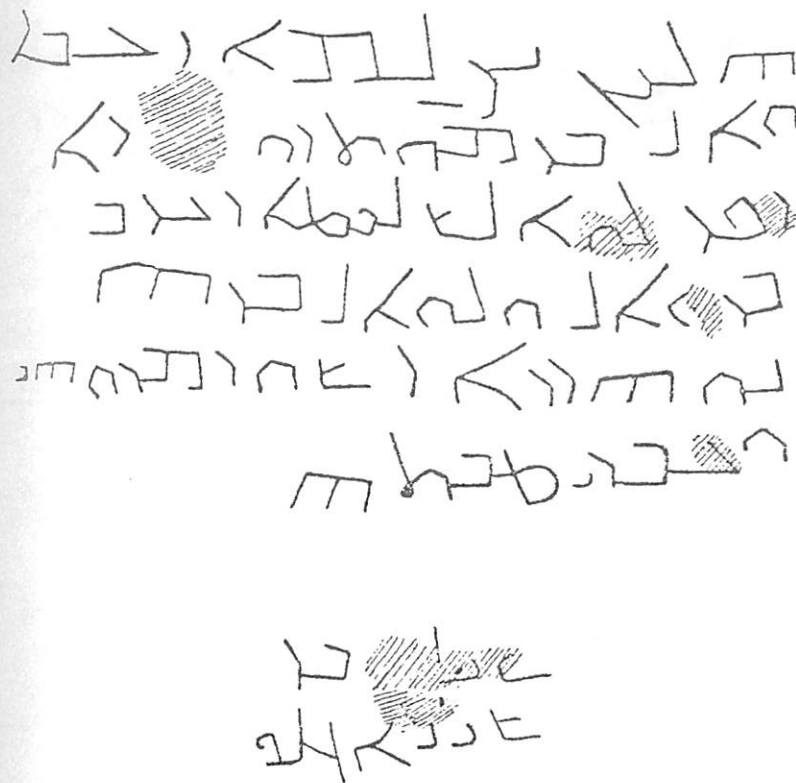


Fig. 1.15. Old Syriac inscription As47. From Pognon 1907: Pl. XIV, no. 5.

7. [...] *br*

8. *šyl' glp*

These are the images which Wa'el son of Mūtrū, the [commanda]nt of *Prr*, made for Wa'el, governor of 'rb, son of Wa'el, and for Wa'el his son, commandant of Shūr, his lords and benefactors... son of Shīla carved [them].

This is the dedication mentioned above, of a statue of Wa'el the governor of 'rb who was briefly to become a puppet king of Edessa under the Parthians. The word *nwhdr'* is a title borrowed from Parthian and means a high-ranking military official for which Drijvers and Healey have suggested the translation 'commandant'.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Drijvers and Healey 1999: 128. Since *r* and *d* have identical shapes the following word, read here as *prr*, could equally well be *pdd*, *pdr*, or *prd* but unfortunately none of these has been identified. It has been suggested that *šwr* refers to a town in northern Mesopotamia known as *šūra* in the cuneiform sources.



Fig. 1.16. Old Syriac inscription As36. From Segal 1954: 24. © Cambridge University Press.

[1.16] As36 (after Healey 2009: 228–30, no. 48) Dedication of an altar and baetyl⁷⁸ found at Sumatar Harabesi⁷⁹ (Fig. 1.16)

1. *b-yrh šbt šnt 4 x100 + 20 + 20 + 20 + 10 + 6*
2. *'n' tyrdt br 'dwn' šlyt d-'rb*
3. *bnyt 'lt' hd' w šmt nšbt l-mrlh*
4. *'l hyy mr-y mlk' w bn-why w 'l hyy 'dwn*
5. *'b-y w 'l hyy dyl-y w d-'hy w d-bnyn*

In the month of Shebāt of the year 476, I, Tiridates son of Adōna, governor of 'rb, built this altar and set up this baetyl to Māralāhē [or 'the Lord of the gods] for the life of my lord the king and his children and for the life of 'Adōna my father and for my own life and that of my brothers and our children.

The month of Shebāt is January/February and the year, given according to the Seleucid era, is equivalent to AD 165. The title *šlyt d-'rb* occurs in other inscriptions at Sumatar Harabesi but unfortunately none of them gives clues as to the whereabouts of 'rb or the exact functions of the *šlyt*, though it was clear that he was an officer of the king. The expression *'l hyy* 'for the life of' is common in Nabataean, Palmyrene, Hatran, and Old Syriac dedicatory inscriptions.⁸⁰

[1.17] As49 (after Healey 2009: 234–35, no. 51) (Fig. 1.17)

1. *d-'bd brnhr*
2. *br dyny šlyt*
3. *d-'rb l-'wrylws*

⁷⁸ Drijvers and Healey 1999: 104, no. As36/3 (= Healey 2009: 229, no. 48/3), translate *nšbt* as 'pillar'. However, in the context, 'b(a)etyl', i.e. an aniconic standing stone, or stela carved in relief, representing the god, would seem to be more appropriate. This is the meaning this word and others from the same root have in other Semitic languages, as pointed out in Drijvers and Healey 1999: 106.

⁷⁹ Sumatar Harabesi lies some 60 km south-east of Edessa and about 40 km north-east of Harran. It has numerous wells, a small rocky hill, and many caves. It appears to have been a sanctuary of the moon-god Sin. For a description of the place and the inscriptions found there see Segal 1953: 97–119 and Drijvers 1980: 122–45.

⁸⁰ See Dijkstra 1995.



Fig. 1.17. Old Syriac inscription As49. Photograph by John Healey.

4. *hpsy br*
5. *br[klb] 'plwtr*
6. *[d- n]twnyns*
7. *[qs]r mr-h w 'bd*
8. *[tb]t-h*

(Image) which Barnahar son of Dinī, governor of 'rb, made for Aurelius Ḥapṣay son of Bar[kalb]a, freedman of Antoninus Caesar, his lord and benefactor.

It is possible to restore the name of Aurelius Ḥapṣay's father because it occurs in another inscription (As48).⁸¹ Drijvers argues convincingly that Aurelius

⁸¹ The seemingly rather strange personal name *br-klb*, meaning 'Son of the Dog', is thought to refer to the Babylonian god Nergal and is found at Ḥaṭrā and in early Syriac literature. See Drijvers and Healey 1999: 131.

Hapsay (or his father) is most likely to have been a freedman of Marcus Aurelius (r. AD 161–80), 'during whose reign the pro-Parthian king Wa'el was expelled from Edessa and Ma'nu VIII restored'.⁸²

The Ruwāfa Inscriptions

One of the central themes in this volume is the development of the relationship between the Roman empire and the Arabs; an early glimpse into this process is provided by the second-century Ruwāfa inscriptions.⁸³

In a remote part of the Ḥismā sand desert in north-west Arabia, on the edge of the broken up lava flows known as the Ḥarrat al-Raḥā, lies the isolated temple of al-Ruwāfa (Plate 1).⁸⁴ It is small (13.20 × 11.20 m) but built of well-cut and dressed ashlar, and when it was surveyed (1968) the highest surviving wall was 4.60 m (Fig. 1.18).⁸⁵ There is no other building in the vicinity, and the only other structures are what may have been a cistern 35 m north of the temple, and a rough circle of masonry c.1.50 m in diameter to the east of it. The survey did not find any surface sherds and concluded that there was 'no evidence for a proper settlement' there, even though there would seem to be a perennial supply of water in nearby caves.⁸⁶

Remarkable as it is to find a temple of this sort in such an isolated spot, it is even more surprising to find at least five monumental inscriptions in Greek

⁸² Drijvers 1980: 131.

⁸³ I am most grateful to Laila Nehmé for allowing me to use some of her magnificent photographs of the Ruwāfa temple and inscriptions I, II, and IV. I am also very grateful to Ruth Altheim-Siehl and Peter J. Parr for giving me access to their photographs of the inscriptions, and to Christian Julien Robin for kindly giving me the only known photograph of capital B (Fig. 1.22), taken by Jacques Ryckmans outside the Jeddah Museum in 1951.

⁸⁴ The transliteration of the name varies and is also found as Rawwafa(h) and Ruwwafa(h). However, according to Hay' at al-misāḥah al-jiyulūjiyyah al-sa'ūdiyyah 2003, 3: 48, al-Ruwāfa(h) is the correct spelling. It is at 27° 45' 05" N 36° 13' 30" E, approximately 75 km south-west of Tabūk.

⁸⁵ The only archaeological survey of the monuments of Ruwāfa was undertaken by Parr, Harding, and Dayton (1968–9: 215–19, pls 14–20), though Philby gives a detailed description of the site and the monuments (1957: 143–55, and the plates opposite pp. 140 and 141). Note that Parr, Harding, and Dayton were not aware of Stiehl's visit in 1966; see Altheim and Stiehl 1969: 24–5. On the earlier visits of Musil and Philby see Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–9: 215; Milik 1971: 54–5, and Bowersock 1975: 513.

⁸⁶ For all this information and the plan of the building in Fig. 1.18, see Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–9: 215–19, pls 14–20. Note, however, that nearby in the Hawatif valley Philby 'found signs of cultivation, with fairly extensive patches cleared for barley and wheat crops on the floods resulting from the autumn and later rains. Slender fences of brushwood surrounded these tracts, and even served as temporary barriers to delay the passage of the flood-water' (1957: 147). This was clearly contemporary opportunist agriculture by the local Bedouin, but it suggests that some small settlement might have been possible there in antiquity.

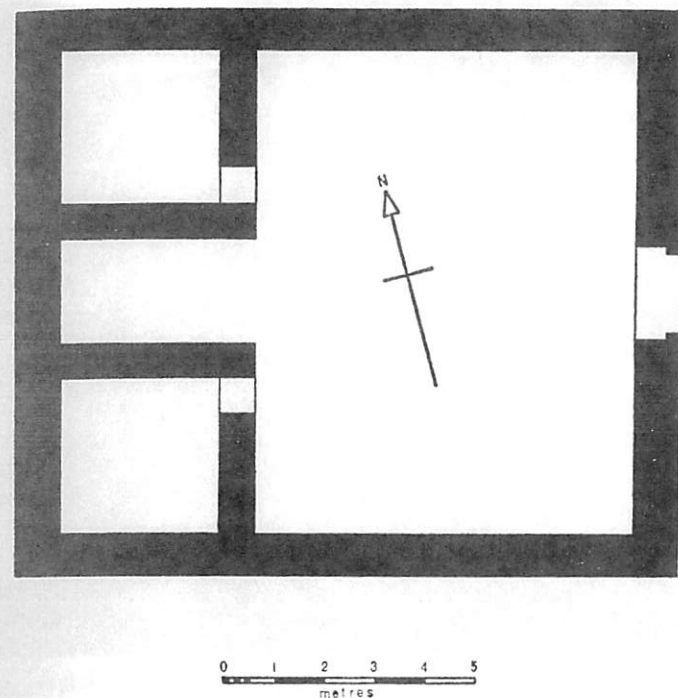


Fig. 1.18. A plan of the temple at al-Ruwāfa. From Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–9: 216, fig. 8. © Institute of Archaeology.

and Nabataean associated with it,⁸⁷ including two long texts which describe the building as a temple and date its construction to the reign of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. These inscriptions say that this temple was set up by the *Θαμουνδηνῶν ἔθνος* or *šrkt tmwdw* (Fig. 1.19).

The Thamūd were a (probably nomadic) tribe, already encountered by the Assyrians in northern Arabia at the end of the eighth century BC.⁸⁸ They are next mentioned by Agatharchides of Cnidus in the second century BC as

⁸⁷ Richard Burton, who camped not far from Ruwāfa but was not able to visit the site, was shown 'a fragment of a Nabathæan inscription, finely cut in soft white sandstone: it had been barbarously broken, and two other pieces were en route. The stone is said to be ten feet long (?), all covered with "writings", from which annalistic information might be expected: it lies, or is said to lie, about two hours' ride north of our camp, and beyond the Jils el-Rawiyān.' The stone he saw 'was afterwards exhibited at the Hippodrome, Cairo, and was carefully photographed by M. Lacaze. Others said that it came from the east of our camp, near the Jils el-Dáim' (1879, I: 239). The reference to the ten-foot long inscription makes it likely that these pieces came from Ruwāfa, even though they were not cut from the lintel, which is actually 2.30 m, i.e. 7' 6", long and appears to be complete at each end. Alas, the pieces he mentions have disappeared and the whereabouts of M. Lacaze's photographs are unknown.

⁸⁸ The Assyrian king, Sargon II, claims to have defeated the *luTa-mu-di* and deported their 'remnants' to Samaria. See Eph'al 1982: 36, 89–91, 230.

army drawn from subject peoples.¹⁰³ It is interesting to note that Ps.-Hyginus was writing at exactly the same period as the Ruwāfa inscriptions were being set up.¹⁰⁴

The Greek word *ἔθνος* is used of 'a group of people united in some way' and does not necessarily mean 'ethnic group' or 'tribe'. It is used of trade associations, orders of priests, and so forth, and is, of course, the natural translation of Latin *natio*.

In the Safaitic inscriptions a military unit of this kind was referred to by the loan-word from Aramaic, *ms'rt*.¹⁰⁵ However, here we find *šrkt*, a loan-word, from Arabic which may have been the native language of the Thamūd. One might ask why the Aramaic term *mašrītā* was not used here. It occurs in a Nabataean inscription from al-Jawf¹⁰⁶ in the phrase *rb mšryt*, 'commander of the camp/regiment', and it is possible that a different term was used here to avoid the ambiguity inherent in *mšryt*.¹⁰⁷ Alternatively, it may be that the members of the Thamūd who had joined the unit already had their own (Arabic) word for this type of organization.

The *Θαμουνδηνῶν ἔθνος* or *šrkt tmwdw* would, I suggest, be a *natio* or indigenous unit raised, in this case, from the tribe of Thamūd. We saw in a Safaitic inscription (I.8) that a nomad could express his identity through his membership of such a military unit drawn from his tribe, and it seems that this is a similar case.¹⁰⁸ The temple with its dedication to the emperors, in what to us looks like the back of beyond but which was presumably a significant place in the territory of the Thamūd, was thus a symbol of their integration into the Roman empire and, specifically, the Roman army. The inscriptions are in Greek for the Roman side¹⁰⁹ and in Nabataean Aramaic for the local side. This does not imply that the members of the Thamūd tribe could read Nabataean or Greek, but simply that Nabataean was the local written language, as it continued to be in north-west Arabia until the Nabataean Aramaic language gradually fell out of use and its script came to be used to write Arabic.¹¹⁰ Inscriptions of this sort are records and symbols and are not necessarily aimed at a particular readership.¹¹¹

In the past, it has been assumed that the lintel over the entrance to the temple and the two capitals which supported it bear one inscription, albeit in three parts,¹¹² dated to between AD 166 and 169. However, a closer

¹⁰³ Pseudo-Hyginus §29, see also §§19 and 43. See also Speidel 1975: 206–8.

¹⁰⁴ See Macdonald 2009c: 9, n. 52 for a discussion of this.

¹⁰⁵ See I.8 and Macdonald 2014: 157–8.

¹⁰⁶ See Savignac and Starcky 1957.

¹⁰⁷ See Savignac and Starcky 1957: 200, where it is pointed out that the same ambiguity exists in the Greek equivalent to *rb mšryt*, *στρατόπεδον*.

¹⁰⁸ For a more detailed argument, see Macdonald 2009c: 9–11.

¹⁰⁹ See the discussion of why it is in Greek rather than Latin in Macdonald 2009c: 13–14.

¹¹⁰ See Macdonald 2010b: 20–2; Nehmé 2010; Nehmé forthcoming (a).

¹¹¹ See Macdonald 2009d: 83 and n. 109.

¹¹² See Milik 1971: 55, who treats it as one text with two Greek sections and one Nabataean, and this has been followed by all subsequent treatments.



Fig. 1.20. The complete lintel from al-Ruwāfa with inscription I and the first one and a half lines of inscription II. Photograph by Laila Nehmé.

examination of the layout of the texts and the titulature of the emperors suggests that we have here two consecutive inscriptions:

Inscription I (1.18): The Greek/Nabataean bilingual, consisting of lines 1–3 and 4–5a, is carved across the upper part and centre of the lintel, that is, the most prominent area of the stone. It records the building of the temple probably under Quintus Antistius Adventus, governor of *Provincia Arabia*.¹¹³

Inscription II (1.19): The Greek inscription, consisting of lines 5b–10, which starts in the left half of line 5, in which the Nabataean part of text I ends, runs along the lowest part of the lintel and onto the two capitals supporting it. This records the *completion* of the temple and the consecration of the *temenos* (sacred precinct) under Adventus' (presumed) successor [L. Cl.] audius Modestus.¹¹⁴

Lucius Verus took the title *Armeniacus* in AD 163 and Marcus Aurelius a year later. In inscription I the emperors are called simply *Armeniacy*, and so this would date this text to 164.¹¹⁵ In inscription II they are called not only *Armeniacy*, but *Parthici Maximi*, a title which they both assumed in 165, and possibly *Medici*,¹¹⁶ which they took in 166.¹¹⁷ If correct, this suggests that inscription I was carved in AD 164 and inscription II between 166 and the death of Lucius Verus in 169.

The Lintel Inscriptions

[1.18] Inscription I¹¹⁸

A Graeco-Nabataean bilingual on the upper part of the lintel over the entrance to the temple. There are three lines of Greek (lines 1–3), which run across the upper part of the lintel in letters which decrease in size in each line. Below this,

¹¹³ See Sartre 1982: 84, §11; and Bowersock 1975: 516–17.

¹¹⁴ This is the only epigraphic record we have of Modestus as governor of Arabia. See Sartre 1982: 84, §12.

¹¹⁵ If this is right, Milik's restoration of *π* [ατέρων πατρίδος] in inscription I line 2 would be incorrect since the emperors did not assume the title *Patres Patriae* until AD 166.

¹¹⁶ Only [Μηδ] κῶν survives.

¹¹⁷ See Birley 1996: 220.

¹¹⁸ I am most grateful to François Villeneuve for discussing these inscriptions with me at some length and for his extremely helpful comments, which have saved me from many errors. He is not, of course, responsible for any that remain.

there are the one and a half lines of the Nabataean text (lines 4 and 5a)¹¹⁹ which, of course, run in the opposite direction. (For the editorial conventions used here, see n. 7 in this chapter.)

1. Ὑπὲρ αἰωνίου διαμονῆς κρατήσεως τῶν θειοτάτων κοσμοκρατόρων Σεβαστῶν μεγίστων Ἀρμενιακῶν Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου Αντωνείνου καὶ Λουκίου
2. [Aῦ]ρηλίου Οὐήρου π [lacuna of approximately 14 letters] ν [Θ]αμουδηνῶν [lacuna of approximately 60 letters] ΣΤΑ καθείδρυσεν μετὰ προτροπῆς
3. [lacuna of approximately 5 letters?]¹²⁰ καὶ ἐκ περὶ¹²¹ [lacuna of approximately 25 letters] Κοί[ν]το [ν lacuna]
4. 'l šlm' dy ml [lacuna of approximately 30 letters] mqrq' wrlys n'wnyns w-lwqys 'wrlys [wr]s dy '...'¹²² [lacuna] dnh nws' dy 'bdt {š}rkt tmwdw qdmy šrk[t]-h l-mhw' [š]{w}h mn yd-hm w-mšmš-{h}{m l-'l}m
- 5a. [lacuna] w-hf[y]t [lacuna of approximately 12 letters]¹²³ [']dw}ntš [']d/r/w} {'}ty¹²⁴ [lacuna of approximately 10 letters] w-{r}mš-hm

Translation: Greek (lines 1–3)

¹ For the eternal duration of the power of the most divine rulers of the world, the great Augusti, Armeniaci, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius ² [Au]relius Verus, [...] n[atio]¹²⁵ of the [T]hamud [...] has founded [...] with the encouragement ³ [...] and through [...] Qu]intus [?][...].

Translation: Nabataean (lines 4–5a)

⁴ For the well-being of [...] Marcus] Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius [Verus] who [...]. This is the temple which the {natio} of Thamūd made, (that is)

¹¹⁹ Note that Milik rather confusingly calls the end of the Nabataean text '5b' and the beginning of the second Greek text '5a', which means that his 5b precedes 5a. I have reversed this so that line 4 runs naturally into line 5a.

¹²⁰ Milik does not show that the first letters he reads in this line do not start at the left margin where lines 1 and 2 (and even 5b and 6 of inscription II) are all aligned.

¹²¹ Bowersock (1975: 516) suggests that ἐκ περὶ [νοίας] 'through the efforts of' would be preferable to Milik's ἐκ περὶ [θεού], citing this phrase in a third-century inscription in Bosrā (Sartre 1973: 228–9). However, it has to be said that, on the photographs, the traces of the first three letters fit the reconstruction περὶ better than περὶ.

¹²² Apart from the initial 'l, only the lower halves of the letters survive and it is difficult to see how these could represent rmny, as restored by Milik. It is possible that the first two letters after the initial ' could be rm but then the space between the m and the following letter is wider than one would expect if the latter were n. Moreover, the letter following this cannot possibly be the lower part of a y, as required by Milik's restoration. There is then a space between this and the final ' which could not have been filled by a y since in this text the tail of medial (as well as final) y reaches the baseline (cf. wrlys and lwqys earlier in the line). Unfortunately, I am unable to suggest an alternative restoration.

¹²³ Milik reads ntšys here but apart from the fact that nothing is visible on any of the photographs except the traces of two šs a long way apart, the space is too long to contain only this name.

¹²⁴ Milik reads hgm{wn'} here but it is difficult to see how this can be justified on the photographs where the first letter appears to be a ' and the last two visible letters appear to be ty.

¹²⁵ See also line 6 of the Greek and line 4 of the Nabataean. Milik translated Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος as 'nation des Thamoudéens' in the Greek and šrkt tmwdw as 'fédération des Thamoudéens' in the Nabataean (where his italics mark a doubtful reading). For a very different interpretation see Macdonald 2009c: 8–11, 16–18.

the commanders of their natio, for the existence {of which it was set in place} by their hand and the[ir] worship [will be there] [for ever].

^{5a} And with the {encouragement} of [...] t [...] A]dventus [...] and at their [i.e. the Thamūd's or their leaders'] {request}.¹²⁶

Milik restores the name of the Roman governor Quintus Antistius Adventus at the end of line 3 on the basis of ντο in line 3 and [']dw}ntš in line 5a. Milik confidently reads ntšys between the first word in line 5a (w-hf[y]t) and [']dw}ntš, but in fact nothing can be seen in this part of the stone except possibly two examples of t separated by a large space. This gap is far too long for the single s between the two appearances of t in the name ntšys. However, the total space of approximately 13 letters between w-hf[y]t and {dw}ntš would be exactly sufficient for qwnntš ntšys.¹²⁷ So, the restoration of this governor's name is possible, though based on slender epigraphic grounds.

[1.19] Inscription II

A Greek inscription added later. It starts in line 5, the right half of which was already occupied by the end of the Nabataean section of inscription I, and it continues along the bottom of the lintel face (line 6), then onto capital A, which would have been on the left of the entrance (lines 7–8; see Fig. 1.21), finally ending on capital B, which would have been on the right (lines 9–10; see Fig. 1.22). The letters in line 6 are smaller than those in line 5b, but those on the capitals are large, though less carefully carved.

- 5b. Ἐπὶ νείκη καὶ αἰωνίῳ διαμονῇ αὐτοκρατόρων Καيسάρων [Μ]άρκου [Αὐ]ρηλίου Αντωνείνου
6. καὶ Λουκίου Αὐρηλίου Οὐήρου Σεβ(αστῶν) Ἀρμενιακῶν [Μηδ]ικῶν Παρθικῶν μεγ[ί]στων καὶ τοῦ παντὸς οἱ[κου α]ὐτῶν τὸ τῶν Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος [lacuna]

[Text on capital A, on the left of the entrance; see Fig. 1.21]¹²⁸

7. τὸν νεώ¹²⁹ συνετέλεσεν
8. καὶ τὸ ἱερὸν καθεῖρυσεν

[Text on capital B, on the right of the entrance; see Fig. 1.22]¹³⁰

9. [...] Κλ] αὐδίου Μοδέστου
10. [...] β] ἀντιστρατ (ήγου).

¹²⁶ Milik translated w-{r}mš-hm as 'et a mis paix entre eux', which is philologically impossible. For an explanation of the translation proposed here see Macdonald 2009c: 11–12.

¹²⁷ To the best of my knowledge, neither of these names has been found in a Nabataean transliteration and so while these spellings are likely, they are not certain.

¹²⁸ This can be seen in Harding 1971: pl. 29, which should have the caption which is on pl. 30.

¹²⁹ Milik reads νεώ<v>, but Bowersock (1975: 516) points out that the <v> is unnecessary.

¹³⁰ This was known to Milik (1971: 56, no. 3) only from a hand copy made by Philby and published in Seyrig 1957: 260, fig. 2. However, thanks to the kindness of Christian Julien Robin, a photograph of it is published here for the first time.

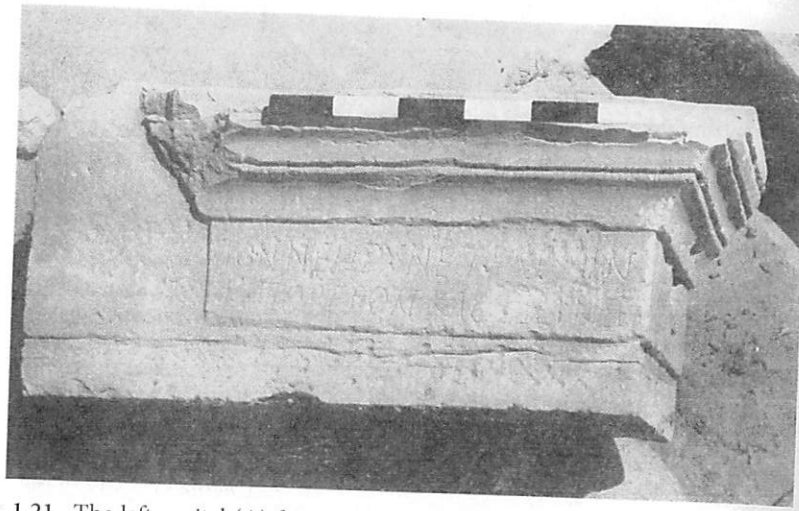


Fig. 1.21. The left capital (A) from al-Ruwāfa with lines 7–8. Photograph from Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1986–9: pl. 18. © Institute of Archaeology.



Fig. 1.22. The right capital (B) from al-Ruwāfa with lines 9–10. A previously unpublished photograph taken by Jacques Ryckmans in 1951 and kindly provided by Christian Robin. '19' refers to the stone's number in the inventory of the Jeddah Museum at that time.

^{5b} For the victory and the perpetual continuance of the emperors, the Caesars [M]arcus [Au]relius Antoninus ⁶ and Lucius Aurelius Verus, Aug(usti), *Armeni*aci, [Med]ici, *Parthici Maximi*, and their whole hou[se], the *natio* of the Thamūd... ⁷ have completed the temple ⁸ and consecrated the sanctuary ⁹ [... of Cl]audius Modestus ¹⁰ [...] Proprae(tor).

It would seem that this inscription was added to mark the completion and consecration of the temple under the aegis of the next governor of *Provincia Arabia*, Lucius Claudius Modestus. The fact that the text starts in a line (5) half of which was already occupied and spills onto the capitals which presumably

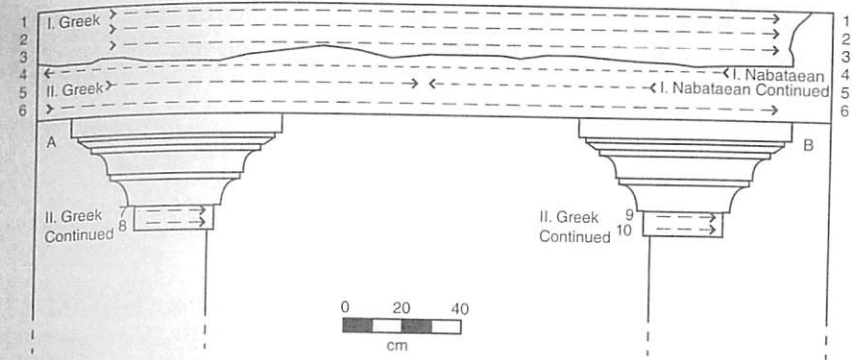


Fig. 1.23. A reconstruction of the original layout of the inscriptions on the lintel and capitals from al-Ruwāfa. Drawing by Aaron Styba.

supported the lintel strongly suggests that it was not part of the original epigraphic schema. As explained above, the titles of the emperors date this text to between AD 166, when they assumed the title *Medicus*, and the death of Lucius Verus in 169. It is perhaps worth noting that by 168 the previous governor, Quintus Antistius Adventus, was already in western Pannonia.¹³¹

Despite their fragmentary state, these inscriptions have important implications. While Ruwāfa was presumably a site of significance to the Thamūd, to the outside world it is in the middle of nowhere, and apparently not even on a major route. It is some 900 km from the provincial capital, Boṣrā, the headquarters of the *Legio III Cyrenaica*. Thus, the involvement, if only nominally, of two successive provincial governors in the recruitment of a military unit from a local tribe in this area, and their 'encouragement' of the building of a temple to symbolize the unit's inclusion in the Roman military establishment and its loyalty to the emperors,¹³² demonstrate that Rome was still very much involved in north-west Arabia at this time. A Latin inscription from the following decade, recently discovered at Madā'in Ṣāliḥ (ancient Hegrā), confirms this.¹³³

[1.20] Inscription III

A fragment of a Greek inscription within a *tabula ansata*. Philby¹³⁴ apparently found it in the temple and copied it. His copy was then published by Seyrig

¹³¹ See Birley 1996: 220.

¹³² See Macdonald 2009c: 12–13.

¹³³ See al-Talhi and al-Daire 2005 and the excellent discussion in Villeneuve 2010. The inscription is dated to AD 175–7 and deals with restoration work in the city by the 'chief citizen' with the aid of two Roman centurions from the *Legio III Cyrenaica*, the legion occupying *Provincia Arabia*, which was based at Boṣrā.

¹³⁴ Philby 1957: 146, where he discusses it, and 154 where he notes that despite attempts to 'reduce it to portable dimensions... its essential contents [which he then quotes] had survived the act of vandalism'.

and republished by Milik.¹³⁵ In 2011 it was photographed at Ruwāfa by Greg Fisher and the reading below is based on his photograph which is published here for the first time (Plate 2).

... [?]

1. ε/ζυρθαι/τοϋ Θ[αμ]ουδηνῶν

2. ν φυλῆς Ροβαθου οἰκοδό-

3. μῆσα<ν> τὸ εἶερόν τοῦτο

... of the tribe of Thamūd of Rbtw they built this sanctuary.

It is not known how much has been lost at the beginning or end of the inscription. The relationship of the lines to the 'ears' of the *tabula ansata* suggests that there could have been at most one more line at the beginning but that possibly two lines have been lost at the end. As can be seen in inscription IV (1.21), it is clear that *Rbtw/Poβαθου* is a place not a tribe and therefore that the word φυλῆς in the present text refers to Θ[αμ]ουδηνῶν, thus '... of the tribe of Thamūd of Robathū', that is, that Robathū is either the region where the tribe (or this section of the tribe) of Thamūd lived, or, perhaps more likely, was the ancient name of Ruwāfa.¹³⁶ In any case, this shows that there is a clear distinction between Θαμουδηνῶν φυλή 'the tribe of Thamūd' and Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος 'the military unit [*natio*] of the Thamūd'.¹³⁷

It is worth noting that the lunate sigma, C, is used in this inscription, as opposed to the Σ which is found in inscriptions I and II (1.18 and 1.19).

The first surviving eight letters, which appear as CICΘAIOI on Philby's copy but which can now be seen to read ε/ζυρθαι/τοϋ, have not yet been satisfactorily explained.¹³⁸ It is not certain whether any of them—and if so, how many—belong to the end of a word in the line above, if there was one. The ending -οι on Philby's copy suggested that it was a masculine noun in the nominative plural and this is presumably why Milik inserted the final ν on the verb οἰκοδόμησα<ν> to turn it from a first-person singular¹³⁹ to a third-person plural.

¹³⁵ Seyrig 1957: 260; Milik 1971 [1972]: 58.

¹³⁶ However, this is not to endorse Philby's derivation of the modern name Ruwāfa from *Rbtw/Poβαθου*, simply to suggest that the latter may have been the name of the place in antiquity. See the interesting discussion of *Rbtw/Poβαθου* in Beaucamp 1979: 1472–3, where Philby's arguments are summarized.

¹³⁷ I am most grateful to Pierre-Louis Gatier for correcting my reading in the last line of this text and for pointing out an error in the translation. However, he is in no way responsible for my conclusions, with which he almost certainly disagrees.

¹³⁸ Van den Branden's attempt to explain them by reading the Θ as an O and relating the resulting combination of letters to the word σισση, which he translates as 'manière de couper les cheveux en rond' (1958: 9, n. 24bis), is far-fetched and fits neither the context nor what can now be read on the stone.

¹³⁹ This was noted by Seyrig (1957: 260) and would be extremely unusual in a text of this sort.



Fig. 1.24. Inscription IV from al-Ruwāfa. Photograph by Laila Nehmé.

[1.21] Inscription IV (Fig. 1.24)

This is a Nabataean inscription of at least five lines carved within a *tabula ansata* on a large ashlar. A stick-figure drawing of a horseman holding a spear above his head has been hammered over the centre of the inscription and a *wasṣm* hammered into each of the 'ears' of the *tabula ansata*. Two large chips have removed most of the last two lines and any others which may have been below them. It was found by Philby in the temple,¹⁴⁰ but its original position is unknown.

1. {d}nh {b}{y}t' dy [']bd {š}dt 'pkl
2. {}[l]{h}' br {m}{g}yd{w} dy mn rbtw
3. l-l{h}{'} 'lh [...] {m} [...] {k} [...] {h}{p}yt
4. mr' {n}{'} {} [...] {h}gmwn'
5. {} [...] {}'mnw

¹ [This] is the {temple} which {š}dt, the priest of ² {'lh'}, son of {Mgydw} who is from Rbtw ³ {made} for {'lh'} the god of ... [with?] the {encouragement} ⁴ of {our} lord {} ... the {governor} ⁵ ... 'mnw.

The reference to 'our lord ... the governor' makes it virtually certain that the temple referred to in this text is that mentioned in inscriptions I and II. This means that the temple signifying the loyalty to the emperors of the unit drawn from the Thamūd was dedicated to 'lh', who was presumably the tribe's chief deity, in the same way that, for example, the temple to 'the gods of their

¹⁴⁰ See Philby 1957: 146, which implies that it was found with the other inscriptions in the temple, and p. 154, where he includes it among 'the four great inscriptions which we had found lying among the tumbled ruins of the sanctuary'. Altheim and Stiehl 1969: 25 say that it was found in the smaller structure north of the temple, but the basis for this is unknown. Philby 1957 says that when he returned to Ruwāfa (in 1953) 'the Nabataean inscription had disappeared'. However, it was photographed at the site by Stiehl in 1966, though it does not seem to have been seen by Parr, Harding, and Dayton in 1968. There is a magnificent photograph of it in Anon 1975: 92, and it is now in the National Museum, Riyadh, where it is incorrectly displayed as a support to the lintel.

fatherland' was restored, with an appropriate dedication to the emperors, by the ethnic unit of Mauri Micienses at Micia/Dacia Apulensis.¹⁴¹ One would assume that the lacuna in line 3 contained the name of the people for whom 'lh' was their god, presumably the Thamūd or a section of them.

The term 'pkl/fkl is commonly used for a religious functionary in Nabataean, Palmyrene, and Hatran, as well as Dadanitic, Ancient South Arabian, and Arabic. It is thought to derive ultimately from Sumerian, though its exact passage to these other languages is disputed.

The Nabataean expression *dy mn* 'who is from' refers to a person's place of origin or residence, rather than their tribe.¹⁴² This means that *Rbtw* is a place and so, as pointed out above, in inscription III (1.20) we should interpret the word *φυλῆς* as referring to the preceding *Θ[αμ]οῦδηνών* rather than to *Ροβαθου*.

At the end of line 3, the *p* of *hpyt* should have a tail like the example in 'pkl in line 1. On the other hand, it is unlike the examples of *w* in this text (though admittedly these are all in final position) and, in the context, it is difficult to see how else the word should be read.

In the damaged part of line 4, one would expect the name of the governor of *Provincia Arabia*, which, as we have seen, could be either Quintus Antistius Adventus or Lucius Claudius Modestus. The tail of a ' immediately following *mr'n* might suggest '[ntstys 'dwntš], but this can be no more than speculation. It is difficult to read the damaged first letter of the last surviving word in line 4 as a *h*, but given that the rest of the word is clear, there seems no alternative.

At the end of line 5, Milik, who was working from two copies and a rubbing by Philby but no photograph, read the penultimate letter as *r*, but it clear from the photographs that it is *n*.

[1.22] Inscription V

'A flat slab of stone, some 0.75 m square and 0.20 m thick, with a square depression carved in its underside and a round hole pierced completely through the centre. [It] bears on its upper surface two *tabulae ansatae*, in the lower of which a few letters of a Nabataean text can be made out.'¹⁴³ Unfortunately, the surface is too damaged to permit a coherent reading from the photographs. Its present whereabouts are unknown.

Michael C. A. Macdonald

¹⁴¹ See Speidel 1975: 209 and Macdonald 2009c: 12–13.

¹⁴² Thus, for instance, JSNab 226 *dy mn šlhdw* 'who is from Salhad [a town in the Hawrān]', Al-Dhiyib 2002: no. 163 *dy mn ytrb* [Yathrib, modern al-Madinah], etc. Tribal affiliation is expressed by *dy mn* 'l' 'who is of the lineage of', for instance in Littmann 1914b: no. 44 *dy mn* 'l *šlmw* 'who is of the lineage of Šlmw', Milik 1958: no. 6 *dy mn* 'l 'mrt' 'who is of the lineage of 'mrt'; Milik and Starcky 1970: no. 130 *dy mn* 'l *qmyrw* 'who is of the lineage of Qmyrw', etc.

¹⁴³ Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–9: 217, pl. 20 and Milik 1971 [1972]: 57, pl. 31. See also Anon 1975: 93 (top right) where the missing pieces have been retrieved and replaced.

Persian Sources for the Arabs in the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Early Sasanian Periods

People called 'Arabs' appear in Assyrian and Babylonian cuneiform sources as far back as the beginning of the first millennium BC: a queen of *a-ri-bi*, for example, is included in a list of tribute payers to the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser III (745–727 BC). Arabs also appear in sources for the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–c.627), and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562) recorded successful campaigns against people called *a-ri-bi* at the beginning of the sixth century BC.¹⁴⁴

As noted above, the final Babylonian king, Nabonidus, temporarily re-located his court to Taymā' in north-western Arabia, before he was toppled by Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty. (Nabonidus had enlisted troops from a number of areas, including 'Arabia', in his unsuccessful attempt to defend himself against Cyrus.¹⁴⁵) The subsequent rise of the Achaemenid Persian empire under Cyrus and his successors triggered profound changes throughout a very broad region formerly under the control (or influence) of the Assyrian and Babylonian states. An area ranging from the First Cataract in the south of Egypt, to the Aegean coast, and on through to India, was now claimed under the hegemony of the Achaemenid kings, who ruled until the defeat of Darius III by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.¹⁴⁶

'Arabs' and 'Arabia' appear in lists of peoples and territories under Achaemenid control on a number of Persian royal inscriptions and reliefs.¹⁴⁷ The tomb of Darius I (r. 522–486) at Naqsh-e Rostam, for example, includes a tribute bearer from *Arabāya*, seemingly located between Egypt and Assyria. Earlier, Darius had claimed the fealty of Arabia, alongside many other regions of the Near East, in the famous trilingual Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian inscription from Bisitun (Behistun) in north-western Iran, completed in 519/18.¹⁴⁸ During his reign, Darius had also dispatched the Greek explorer Scylax of Caryanda to attempt a circumnavigation of the Arabian Peninsula, anticipating the similarly ambitious plans of Alexander the Great, two centuries later.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ See the excellent overview of the cuneiform sources in Retsö 2003: 119–84, sc. 131 (Tiglath Pileser); Ashurbanipal 161–5; and 176 (Nebuchadnezzar II).

¹⁴⁵ For the Achaemenids see Briant 2002; Curtis and Simpson 2010; Wiesehöfer 1996; Shahbazi 2012; and the numerous publications of the *Achaemenid History Workshop* (Groningen). See Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 14–15, on Cyrus.

¹⁴⁶ On the latter, see now Briant 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Darius I: DB, DPe, DSe, DSm, DNā; Xerxes: XPh. See Retsö 2003: 237–9; Bosworth 1983: 593, and EI³ s.v. 'Arabian Peninsula' (R. G. Hoyland) for further discussion. Greek observers, such as Herodotus and Xenophon (see section 'Herodotus and Xenophon') complement the picture provided by Persian epigraphic evidence.

¹⁴⁸ DB §6 = Kuhrt 2010: 141–57. Wiesehöfer 1996: 14–19 offers a concise summary. Skylax's mission is reported by Hdt. 4.44.

¹⁴⁹ Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 4.

Persian sovereignty over 'Arabs' and 'Arabia' was reinforced again by Xerxes (r. 519–465). A relief on the eastern stairway of the Apadana hall at Persepolis shows a delegation of people, sometimes identified as Arabs (Fig. 1.25).

The so-called 'Daiva' inscription (XPh), a trilingual Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian text, found at Persepolis, incorporates Arabia, as at Bisitun, in a list of those ruled by Xerxes. The inclusion of 'Arabia' likely again refers to *Arabāya*, and not the Peninsula.¹⁵⁰

Alexander the Great's defeat of Darius III at Gaugamela, and Darius' subsequent murder, ended the Achaemenid dynasty. Following his expedition into India (modern-day Pakistan), Alexander ordered an exploration of Arabia (see section 'Arrian and Diodorus') and after his death in 323 BC, his generals fought for control of the vast territory that he had ruled. Several of these generals, including Seleucus, who won a large area that included much of the former heartland of the Achaemenid empire, showed interest in Arabia.

Just over a century later, the rise of the 'Arsacid' Parthian state signalled the emergence of a new non-Greek power in the Near East which would eventually regain much of the territory once ruled by the Achaemenids. Arsaces, leader of the Parni, a group of people living to the south of the Caspian Sea, had defeated and killed the Seleucid-appointed governor of the satrapy of Parthia in 238 BC, and, together with his own brother, had assumed control of the region. Over the next two centuries, the Arsacid kings took advantage of political uncertainties in

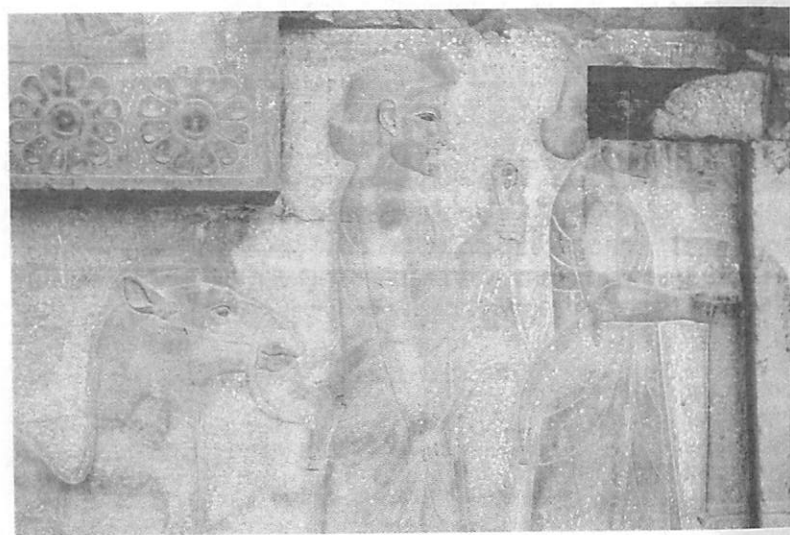


Fig. 1.25. The delegation of 'Arabs' from the Apadana, Persepolis. Photograph by Matthew Canepa.

¹⁵⁰ XPh §3 = Kuhrt 2010: 305.

the Seleucid kingdom—beset by internal rivalries and dynastic squabbles, and under pressure from its neighbours—to extend their rule westwards, claiming Iran and Mesopotamia by 139 BC, and establishing Ctesiphon as the Parthian centre by the turn of the first century. Expansion to the west also brought Parthia and Rome into contact, and Parthia came under pressure to become involved in the long war between Rome and Mithridates VI. While Lucullus and Pompey had respected Parthia's refusal to be drawn into the Mithridatic war, the relationship with Rome quickly turned sour, especially after the largely unprompted assault (and defeat) of Crassus in 55 BC and, in the first and second centuries AD, over continued competition by both Rome and Parthia for influence in Armenia. After Trajan's famous campaigns against Parthia between AD 115 and 117, the Romans once again gained the upper hand under Marcus Aurelius (161) and Septimius Severus (197), and shortly afterwards the enfeebled Arsacids were displaced by the Sasanians, in 224.¹⁵¹

Literary sources for Parthian history are limited, and all extant narrative sources were produced by external observers, such as Polybius, Strabo, and Pliny the Elder.¹⁵² Consequently, there is little information about the relationship between the Arsacid rulers and Arabs, although there are some clues from a series of texts known as *The Astronomical Diaries* produced in the temples of Mesopotamia. These texts logged astronomical events, but also recorded noteworthy incidents, weather, the prices of food, and other material deemed important to their authors.¹⁵³ Only recently translated, these diaries make numerous references to Arabs, and particularly to Arab raiding—a common problem which appears repeatedly in Graeco-Roman, Syriac, and Arabic texts, as well as in a number of inscriptions, discussed at various points throughout this volume.

Several entries record four separate incursions of Arabs into Mesopotamia and Babylonia between 126 and 90 BC. It is not clear whether such raids were carried out by politically independent groups, or by those allied with enemies of the Parthian kings.¹⁵⁴ One entry, for 91/90, reads, 'That month, the Arabs from above the wind attacked', noting as well that they 'broke a hole into the wall of Babylon'.¹⁵⁵ Later entries record further plundering, which resulted in the killing of the 'chief of the guard in Babylon', necessitating a stern military response. One part of this text also mentions that 'as before they [i.e. local officials] gave presents to the Arabs', perhaps reflecting a system of payment, or protection money, a common feature of Roman attempts to manage Arab allies and enemies in the sixth century AD (Ch. 5).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Curtis 2007: 7–14 and Dabrowa 2012: 168–78 offer concise summaries; see Millar 1993a: 1–141.

¹⁵² Dabrowa 2012: 164–7.

¹⁵³ Dabrowa 2012: 167.

¹⁵⁴ Shayegan 2011: 206.

¹⁵⁵ *Astronomical Diaries*, vol. 3, no. 124 (Shayegan 2011: 206).

¹⁵⁶ *Astronomical Diaries*, vol. 3, nos 123 and 124 discussed in Shayegan 2011: 206.

It is only with the emergence of the Sasanian empire after AD 224 that Arabs once again appear in Persian epigraphy, in the inscription from Paikuli in Kurdistan.¹⁵⁷ In general, however, sources for the Sasanian–Arab relationship that were produced in Persia are very scarce. Zoroastrian sources in Middle Persian preserve some contemporary or near-contemporary records, and the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (written sometime after AD 660; see *Khuzistan* 5.35, 6.43) offers a valuable near-contemporary witness to the last days of the final Persian-allied Arab ‘king’ of al-Hira, but the majority of our information is once again derived from sources produced outside the Persian empire, such as Procopius, Menander, and Ps.-Joshua the Stylite. These are all fifth- and sixth-century sources, however, and the literary record for the earlier period is particularly poor. Nevertheless, there are a number of indications for the approach taken by the Sasanian rulers towards Arabia prior to the sixth century.

Ardashir (224–40), the founder of the Sasanian empire, embarked on an expansionist strategy at the expense of both the Roman empire and the remnants of the former Parthian state. One of Ardashir’s aims was to control the coast of the Persian Gulf, perhaps to create what might be called a *mare nostrum* of the Sasanians, and this brought him into conflict with Arab tribes.¹⁵⁸ Echoing the style of the Achaemenid inscriptions, Ardashir’s successor Shapur I (240–73) claimed ‘Arabia’ as a tributary region alongside a list of others on the so-called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, inscribed in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek on the side of the Ka’ba of Zoroaster at Naqsh-e Rostam.¹⁵⁹

Evidence from the late third century also suggests that links between Sasanian Persia and Arabia continued to be relevant. A relief of Bahram II (r. 276–93) from Bishapur (Fig. 1.26) shows a delegation acknowledging Persian power, although it is not clear if the envoys are Arabs of the desert, or from the kingdom of Himyar:¹⁶⁰ it is possible that this relief might be a Persian record of a Himyarite embassy known from a bronze slab from the Great Temple of Marib (see 3.9).¹⁶¹

Not long afterwards, the bilingual Middle Persian and Parthian Paikuli inscription (NPI), from Kurdistan, which explained and legitimized how Narseh, the youngest son of Shapur I, gained the Sasanian throne, suggests continued Persian dominance over at least some Arab groups.¹⁶² One part of

¹⁵⁷ On the Sasanians see Daryaee 2013; Curtis and Stewart 2008.

¹⁵⁸ See Daryaee 2013: 2–6; Piacentini 1985.

¹⁵⁹ Sprengling 1940 and 1953; Maricq 1958 (focusing on the Greek text); Honigsmann 1953b. An English translation of the Parthian and MP texts can be found at sasanika.org (UC Irvine).

¹⁶⁰ Herrmann and Howell 1980–83; Canepa 2013.

¹⁶¹ Overlaet 2009; Robin 2012b: 295.

¹⁶² For a recent discussion of this text in the context of Narseh’s attempt at legitimization, see Shayegan 2012: 109–38; the introduction to and discussions throughout Humbach and Skjærvø’s text remain invaluable.

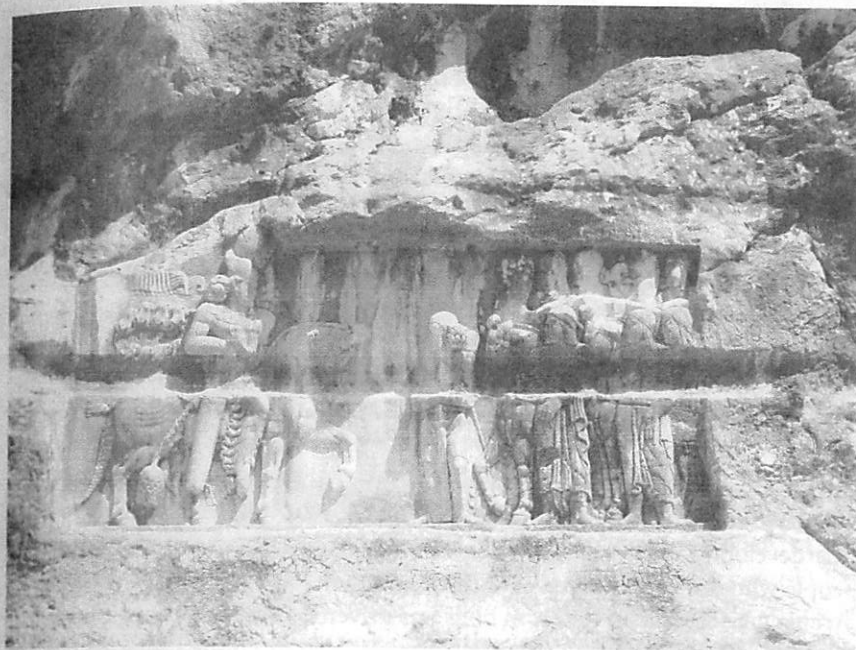


Fig. 1.26. The Bishapur IV relief, believed to show Bahram II (r. AD 276–93) receiving a delegation from Arabia. Photograph by Milad Vandaei.

the inscription details a list of vassals acknowledging Narseh’s authority, and includes a certain ‘Amru King of the Lahmids’.¹⁶³ ‘Amr(u) is sometimes identified as one of the leaders of the La(k)hmids (Naṣrids, or ‘Persian Arabs’), known predominantly from later Graeco-Roman and Arabic sources and later associated with al-Hira in Iraq. The Paikuli inscription makes no mention of al-Hira, and the gulf in contemporary evidence for the ‘Persian Arabs’ between this ‘Amr(u) and the fifth century makes it particularly hard to link ‘Amr(u) with the figures known from later narrative sources.¹⁶⁴

The Paikuli inscription does, though, suggest that the Sasanians, like their Achaemenid predecessors, were interested in co-opting Arab leaders, presumably to serve the state as vassals. The relationship between the two parties appears to have been uneven: Shapur II (309–79) campaigned vigorously against Arab tribes and extended Sasanian rule into the Arabian Peninsula, events that lived long in the memory of both Middle Persian (8.41), Persian (8.42), and Arabic sources (8.20–1). Shapur apparently ordered a large

¹⁶³ NPI §91 (trans. Humbach and Skjærvø, vol. 3/1: 71).

¹⁶⁴ See Fisher and Wood forthcoming for a detailed discussion.

defensive ditch (the *Khandaq Sāpūr*) to be excavated in south-west Mesopotamia as part of his efforts against the Arabs.¹⁶⁵ The Roman author Socrates Scholasticus reported an Arab leader fighting for the Persians in the fifth century (see section 'The Fifth Century: Theodosius, Bahram V, and Leo'), and in the sixth, the Persian monarchs increasingly made use of Arab leaders at al-Ḥira in Iraq, the most famous of whom would be al-Mundhir (see Chs 5 and 6). For these later events, however, we are largely dependent on Graeco-Roman, Syriac, and Arabic sources, or Persian sources written after the Islamic conquest of the Sasanian empire.

Touraj Daryaee, Greg Fisher, and Matt Gibbs

Arabs and Arabias from Herodotus to Cassius Dio

Between the fifth century BC and the third century AD, geographers, historians, botanists, soldiers, and explorers from the Graeco-Roman world contributed to a developing pool of knowledge, opinion, speculation, and hearsay about people whom they described as 'Arabs', and the region which they labelled as 'Arabia'. A deepening interest in both was driven by economic considerations, imperial ambition, the desire to explore, and interstate conflict. The discussion below illustrates the diversity of opinion about 'Arabs' and 'Arabias' found throughout ancient accounts. The events that these authors describe also illustrate the developing complexity of the relationship between Arabs and empires, which would reach its zenith in late antiquity (see Chs 5 and 6).

Herodotus and Xenophon

One of the interests of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who is likely to have written the final version of his work in Athens around 430 BC, was the ethnography of the different communities of the Near East.¹⁶⁶ A thorough and detailed analysis of Herodotus' statements on Arabs can be found in Retsö's *The Arabs in Antiquity*, but we may note here some specific points of interest.¹⁶⁷ Some passages show that Herodotus' Arabia is, essentially, the land between the eastern Nile Delta and Palestine.¹⁶⁸ Its Mediterranean shore is inhabited by people called Syrians, apart from the region around Kadytis/Gaza, which belongs to the Arabs themselves.¹⁶⁹ Its southern border is

¹⁶⁵ See Bowersock 2004; Schiettecatte and Robin 2009; Robin 2012b: 295.

¹⁶⁶ The literature on Herodotus is extensive. For a detailed examination of the author see Munson 2013; essays in Marincola and Dewald 2007; Marincola 2011; Hartog 1988; Luce 1997: 11–42.

¹⁶⁷ Retsö 2003: 235–50.

¹⁶⁸ E.g. Hdt. 2.8, 3.5, and 4.39; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 5–8.

¹⁶⁹ Hdt. 2.12.2 and 3.5.

marked by the 'Red Sea', that is, the Indian Ocean, which penetrates into the region forming the 'Arabian Gulf'—that is, the Red Sea.¹⁷⁰ The northern part of this region, of which Herodotus had a more direct knowledge, appears to have been a political entity, governed by a king and corresponding, perhaps, to the *Arabāya* of the Achaemenid inscriptions (see section 'Persian Sources for the Arabs in the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Early Sasanian periods').

In one part of his work (Hdt. 3.4–9) Herodotus tells how the Achaemenid king, Cambyses II (d. 522 BC), made an alliance with the king of these 'Arabs', perhaps the king of Liḥyān, who assisted him in conquering Egypt in 525.¹⁷¹ This narrative provides an opportunity to describe the particular kinds of pledges in use among the Arabs, as well as to tell the reader about the deities whom they worship, such as Orotalt (Dionysus) and Alilat (Aphrodite Ourania).¹⁷² As a consequence of the alliance between Cambyses and the Arabs, the latter won a favourable, autonomous status within the Persian empire, to the effect that under Darius they paid no tribute. Instead, they gave a voluntary gift of a thousand talents of frankincense every year.¹⁷³ The autonomy of the Arabs might thus be connected to their strategic role as 'guardians of the Egyptians'.¹⁷⁴ In the course of Xerxes' war against Greece, Arabs contributed infantry and camel-mounted troops.¹⁷⁵ The frankincense given by Arabs to the Persian king was in fact a product of the caravan trade with the areas on both sides of the Red Sea down to the Indian Ocean (South Arabia, Eritrea, Somaliland). This area, too, in a wider sense, is also called 'Arabia' by Herodotus: it is the 'most southern among the inhabited regions', about which the historian can only provide wonderful stories, rich in folktale-like details about perfumes, winged snakes, and the bird called the *phoenix*.¹⁷⁶

Another 'Arabia' was known to Xenophon, born in Athens while Herodotus was completing his *Histories*. Xenophon's most celebrated work is perhaps the *Anabasis*, a dramatic account of the failed rebellion of Cyrus the Younger against his brother Artaxerxes, and Xenophon's part in it.¹⁷⁷ Marching on this campaign towards Babylon in 401 BC, Cyrus' army passed through a region that Xenophon calls 'Arabia', located in the central part of Mesopotamia, on the left bank of the Euphrates between the rivers Araxes and Maskas (to be identified with the Balikh and the Khabur respectively).¹⁷⁸ Xenophon apparently also refers to an 'Arabia' in Mesopotamia in his *Cyropaedia*.¹⁷⁹ The accuracy of Xenophon's view has been questioned by some scholars, especially

¹⁷⁰ On these somehow ambiguous geographical terms see Lloyd 1976: 49–50.

¹⁷¹ Bosworth 1983: 593 makes this identification; cf. Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 8.

¹⁷² On the identification of this god, possibly A'arrā and al-Ilāhāt, see Asheri et al. 2007: 407–8.

¹⁷³ Hdt. 3.88.1, 99.1, 97.5; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 8–9.

¹⁷⁴ Retsö 2003: 246–7. ¹⁷⁵ Hdt. 7.69, 86–8. ¹⁷⁶ Hdt. 2.75; 3.107–13.

¹⁷⁷ See Gray 2010; Azoulay 2004; Nadon 2001; Luce 1997: 70–5.

¹⁷⁸ Xen. An. 1.4.19–5.5. See Lendle 1995: 43–7. ¹⁷⁹ Xen. Cyr. 4.2.31; 7.4.16.

Donner, according to whom Xenophon had misunderstood geographical information derived from earlier authors.¹⁸⁰ Retsö, however, has showed persuasively that Xenophon's understanding of 'Arabia' is likely to depend on personal experience.¹⁸¹ In any case, as Retsö also notes, 'these Mesopotamian Arabs do not have any documented connections with those between Palestine and Egypt, and there is no evidence that they stood under the same administration'.¹⁸² As for the list of Persian governors provided by Xenophon,¹⁸³ where one Dernes, 'archon of Phoenice and Arabia' is mentioned, it is likely to be a later addition to Xenophon's text, perhaps reflecting a situation in the latter half of the fourth century BC.¹⁸⁴

Aldo Corcella

Arrian and Diodorus

In 331–330 BC, Darius III, the final king of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty, suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of Alexander the Great, and was subsequently murdered. As the new master of this vast territory until his death in 323, Alexander conceived a number of ambitious projects, one of which was a plan to explore, and perhaps colonize, the Arabian Peninsula. The story is recounted by Arrian (AD 86–c.160), who implies that reports of exotic riches motivated Alexander to plan the Arabian expedition.¹⁸⁵ Arrian also suggests that the king's increasing megalomania was a factor, and Alexander may also have been angered by a diplomatic snub—'Arab' ambassadors did not number amongst the delegations of people who came to see him in Babylon in the spring of 323, shortly before he died, and this might have further galvanized his desire to reduce Arabia. Retsö suggests that Arrian's report that Alexander intended to be a 'third god' to the Arabs should be discarded, seeing it as a reflection, perhaps, of an early legend about Alexander's divinity; colonization, conquest, and the economic lure of Arabia's resources are the preferred reasons for this grand expedition, which never found its full realization.¹⁸⁶

It seems that a preliminary mission reached Baḥrayn, while a second achieved the straits of Hormuz. Arrian suggests that a complete circumnavigation of the peninsula was apparently the goal, terminating at the Egyptian port of Heroopolis (Heroöpolis), but Hieron of Soloi, to whom the mission had been entrusted, did not advance much beyond Rās Musandam and into the Arabian Sea.¹⁸⁷ At about the same time, another expedition, led by Anaxicrates, made an

¹⁸⁰ Donner 1986. ¹⁸¹ Retsö 1990; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 15.

¹⁸² Retsö 2003: 252. ¹⁸³ Xen. An. 7.8, 25–6.

¹⁸⁴ Retsö 2003: 256–7; see too Klein 2013: 601–2.

¹⁸⁵ Arrian, Anab. 7.20.1–8; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 22.

¹⁸⁶ Retsö 2003: 268–9, and more generally on Alexander 263–81.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Arrian, Ind. 43, noting that Alexander's admiral Nearchus had noted a large cape or promontory—probably (according to Retsö 2003: 267) Rās Musandam. Arrian further says in

attempt from Egypt that reached the coasts of South Arabia. Theophrastus of Eresus (d. 287 BC) says that members of the crew, who had landed to secure supplies of fresh water, discovered incense and myrrh; this suggests that they had reached the coast of Ḥaḍramawt, perhaps landing at Qanī'.¹⁸⁸ It does not seem as if Anaxicrates went any further, leaving Alexander without a complete circumnavigation of the Peninsula, and with more than 1000 km of coast between Qanī' and Rās Musandam unexplored. Nonetheless, the expeditions produced important results, since, previously, the Greeks had imagined an unbroken coastline between western India and the Red Sea. Alexander's expeditions gathered valuable information on the topography and populations of both sides of the Red Sea, as well as determining the production centres of myrrh and incense.¹⁸⁹

After Alexander's death in 323, his generals fought for control of his vast empire, further altering the geopolitical map of the Near East as a generation of bloody conflict produced the Hellenistic kingdoms: the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Antigonids in Macedonia, the Seleucids throughout much of Syria, Iraq, and Iran, as well as a range of other polities.¹⁹⁰ Early rivalries in the immediate aftermath of Alexander's death set Seleucus and Ptolemy against Antigonus the One-Eyed, who, after losing ground to Seleucus in 312, campaigned in Syria in preparation for a renewed war with Ptolemy. Much of this effort was recorded by Diodorus Siculus, a native of Agrigum in Sicily, and the author of an ambitious universal history down to 60 BC.¹⁹¹ In book 19, Diodorus recorded the campaigns of Antigonus in the 'land of the Arabs who are called Nabataeans'. A number of ancient authors, including Diodorus, labelled the Nabataeans as Arabs, and this identification has helped to stimulate a lively modern debate on whether or not the Nabataeans possessed an 'Arab identity', represented (for example) in their customs, language, and habits.¹⁹²

Diodorus noted that the Nabataeans took part in the trade of spices from Arabia Eudaimōn (Felix), and possessed a technical proficiency with the capture and storage of water.¹⁹³ His remarks suggest that he considered the Nabataeans to be a nomadic people, saying that they were unfamiliar with growing crops, wine-making, house-building, and other 'settled' pursuits.¹⁹⁴

the same section of the *Indica* that nobody had managed to round this cape, and only Alexander could have done so (by virtue of his drive and will).

¹⁸⁸ Theophr. Hist. Pl. 9.4.4.

¹⁸⁹ See Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 11–14; Salles 1988.

¹⁹⁰ See Green 1990; Shipley 1990.

¹⁹¹ On Diodorus see Ambaglio et al. 2008; Canfora 1990; Hau et al. forthcoming; Rubincam 1987; Sacks 1990; Sacks 1994.

¹⁹² E.g. Joseph. AJ 13.1.2; Strabo 16.4.18. For the modern debate, see e.g. Healey 1989; Shahid 1984a: 9; for a sober assessment, Macdonald 1999; see too Fisher 2011a, ch. 4.

¹⁹³ Diod. Sic. 19.94.5, 8.

¹⁹⁴ Diod. Sic. 19.94.2–10; Hoyland 2001: 70–1; Macdonald 1991 discusses the arguments for the 'nomadism' of the Nabataeans.

From the perspective of some Graeco-Roman authors, the 'nomadic life' was a useful literary contrast with ideas about civilization, which, focused around raising crops, living in houses, adherence to laws, 'correct' living and marital arrangements, and so on, might be didactically opposed to the 'nomadic life'.¹⁹⁵ In this particular case, and the parts which follow it, Diodorus' lengthy account is unusually balanced, acknowledging a diversity of Arabs—'some of whom even till the soil'—and lacks the asperity occasionally found elsewhere.¹⁹⁶ In some ways, it trends towards a stereotype of the 'noble savage'.¹⁹⁷ The degrees of truth, falsehood, and exaggeration in ancient stereotypes of nomads have been exhaustively studied, and it will suffice to say here that the statements of ancient authors on the lifestyle and customs of Arabs need not always be taken at face value.¹⁹⁸

The target of the military campaign recorded by Diodorus was a 'rock', a strong refuge where the Nabataeans left their possessions, and some of their people, during a festival. Antigonos entrusted his friend, Athenaeus, with the ultimately unsuccessful mission.¹⁹⁹ The 'rock' mentioned in Diodorus' report is sometimes identified with Petra, although Retsö, in his lengthy commentary on this passage, is sceptical.²⁰⁰ A later assault under Demetrius 'The Besieger', the son of Antigonos, was bought off. In Diodorus' text, Demetrius is swayed by an impassioned speech in which the Nabataeans offer a carefully crafted, romanticized image, for Graeco-Roman consumption, of a proud and free people, who convince Demetrius of the futility of his mission.²⁰¹

While Diodorus thought of the Nabataeans as 'Arabs', others throughout the Hellenistic world could also be described in similar terms: for example, *araps* (Arabs) appear in sources from Ptolemaic (and later, Roman) Egypt, where the label possesses a range of meanings that defy simple categorization.²⁰² *Araboi* appear with others, such as Parthians, under Seleucid influence.²⁰³ The Arabian Peninsula also played a role in the affairs of the Hellenistic kings: the Seleucids, for example, maintained relations with an important Arabian emporium, Gerrha, which functioned as a purveyor of luxury goods, and, according to Polybius, the Seleucid king Antiochus III ('the Great'; 222–187 BC) was honoured by the

¹⁹⁵ See Macdonald 2009b: 3. ¹⁹⁶ Diod. Sic. 19.94.9.

¹⁹⁷ Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 23.

¹⁹⁸ See Scharrer 2004, Briant 1982, and Shaw 1982; also Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 23–5, and Macdonald 2009b: 18–20, and *passim*, for the fallacy of equating 'Arab' with 'nomad'. Many of the attributes given to 'Arabs as nomads' by Classical writers later became favourite topoi of Christian writers (cf. Ch. 6), where they represent indications of barbarity which might be 'corrected' by conversion.

¹⁹⁹ Diod. Sic. 19.94.1, 95.1, 96.1.

²⁰⁰ Retsö 2003: 285–9; see Hoyland 2001: 70–1; Bowersock 1983: 12–18.

²⁰¹ Diod. Sic. 19.97–8; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 30.

²⁰² Macdonald 2009b: 14–16, responding to Honigman 2002.

²⁰³ Retsö 2003: 300–7.

people of Gerrha after he guaranteed their 'freedom', presumably in exchange for a cut of the profits.²⁰⁴

Throughout the second and first centuries BC, the Hellenistic kingdoms disintegrated under pressure from the Roman Republic and other regional powers. The Seleucids, in particular, were weakened by the emergence of the Parthian state, as well as the ambitions of both Tigranes the Great of Armenia (94–63 BC) and Mithridates VI of Pontus (121–63 BC). These geopolitical shifts were ultimately to Rome's advantage, and much of the Near East was 'acquired' for the Republic by Pompey in 63 BC.²⁰⁵ Arabs appear in the narratives of this turbulent period; the biographer Plutarch, for example, records that the Roman general Lucullus encountered Arabs during his conflict with Tigranes in 69,²⁰⁶ and Plutarch also mentions an Arab leader who offered poor intelligence to Crassus in his fateful Parthian campaign of 55—'treacherously' setting him on a course which would lead to his death.²⁰⁷

Augustus, Strabo, and Arabia

Following the victory of Julius Caesar's adopted son Octavian over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BC, the new leader of the Roman state, who took the name Augustus in 27 BC, ordered an expedition to the Arabian Peninsula under the command of the prefect of Egypt, Aelius Gallus. Several sources, including Augustus himself, record this ambitious venture.²⁰⁸ Augustus grandly claimed that the expedition reached Mariba (Maryab, or Marib), the capital of Saba' (see Ch. 2).²⁰⁹ Strabo's version, written under the patronage of Gallus, is one of the earliest detailed Roman sources on the Arabian Peninsula and is candid about the drawbacks faced by the expedition. The account is found in the *Geography*, a work that reflects the important link between the acquisition of geographical knowledge and the exercise of imperial power.²¹⁰

Gallus transported the Roman expeditionary force by ship to the port of Leuke Kome, on the Arabian side of the Red Sea. Its destination was *Arabia Eudaimōn* (*Felix*), a term used in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods to describe certain parts of the Arabian Peninsula, including its southern portion from where some of the more attractive luxury goods originated (see Fig. 1.1).

²⁰⁴ Polyb. 13.9.4–5; Hoyland 2001: 25. On Gerrha, see Robin and Prioletta 2013.

²⁰⁵ Sartre 2005: 1–87; Butcher 2003: 19–78; Millar 1993a: 27–42.

²⁰⁶ Plut. *Luc.* 25.5–6, 26.4; Schmitt 2005: 273.

²⁰⁷ Plut. *Crass.* 21.1; see Retsö 2003: 394; Segal 1984: 95.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Pliny, *HN* 6.32.160–2; Cass. Dio 53.29.3–8; Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26.5; Strab. *Geog.* 16.4.22–4.

²⁰⁹ Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26.5.

²¹⁰ Strab. 16.4; see Retsö 2003: 263–328; Dueck et al. 2005; Dueck 2000. Hornblower and Spawforth 1998: 266–7; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 11, 18–19.

Ancient writers also knew an *Arabia Deserta*, the barren region stretching from the Syrian desert down the spine of the Peninsula, through the Nāfūd desert, and into the Empty Quarter.²¹¹ It was into the edges of this desert area that sometime later, in 25 bc, the army set off. It seems that individual settlements were easily taken, but progress was hampered by a progressively serious lack of water that ultimately caused the army to withdraw. In addition to water shortages, Strabo states that the success of the enterprise was hindered by other factors: navigation was hampered by tides and waters full of submerged rocks; diseases afflicted the army; the land route selected for the expedition was too long. Strabo's unflattering description of the proficiency of the people of Arabia as soldiers reflects ethnographic attitudes towards 'barbarians', deeply embedded in classical literature since the time of Herodotus. Later, Strabo digresses on the bizarre sexual habits of the inhabitants of Arabia *Eudaimōn*, furthering the Graeco-Roman fascination with the 'exoticism' of the area.²¹²

The blame for the outcome of the mission is cast squarely on the Nabataean official, Syllaeus, who had been chosen by Gallus as the expedition guide. Strabo says that Syllaeus was beheaded as a result, but it seems that this is untrue and that the Nabataean continued to be highly influential in the kingdom for some time, until, caught up in the power struggle around the succession of the Nabataean king Obodas III, he was finally put to death by Augustus in 9 bc.²¹³ Strabo may thus have been denouncing Syllaeus to find a suitable scapegoat for what was perceived, at the time, as a failure: the Romans did not annex any new territory, nor did they acquire new allies as a result of Gallus' labours. On the other hand, the expedition did advertise Roman power in the region, and sometime later, the Sabaeans—one of the targets of the original mission—sent ambassadors to Augustus. This development lends some credence to the otherwise rather optimistic view provided in the emperor's own *Res Gestae*.

The mission itself was likely motivated by the prospect for economic gain, as Strabo suggests. However, competition with the Parthians might also have played a role, for if Roman influence could be spread into the Arabian Peninsula, Parthia's flank, and its own influence in the region, might be threatened.²¹⁴ Indeed, Strabo is clear about the strategic importance played by Arabs living along the edges of the Fertile Crescent and *Arabia Deserta*, suggesting that Gallus' expedition may have been planned with broader goals in mind. Earlier in his narrative, Strabo talks of Arabian 'chieftains', some influenced by the Parthians, others by the Romans, anticipating the greatly elevated role to be played by Arab leaders in the competition between Rome

and the successors to the Parthians, the Sasanians, in late antiquity.²¹⁵ The Greek term used to describe the 'chieftains' is *phylarchoi* (sing. *phylarchos*), or 'phylarch'—literally, 'tribal leader'. Later on, this term would develop new layers of meaning, but in the early imperial period, it could be used to refer quite literally to 'leaders of tribes' without a clear affiliation to one state or another. A certain Mannus, for example, would negotiate with Trajan during his campaigns in the east (AD 113–17), wavering between Rome and Parthia as he judged the likely outcome of the struggle, but it is clear that Mannus was completely subordinate to neither empire.²¹⁶ The ambiguity of Mannus' position suggests, on the one hand, the changing reality for peoples caught up in the struggle between Rome and Parthia; but on the other, Mannus' ability to dither over which side to back reflected the broader range of choices represented, for now, in the existence of a plethora of semi-independent petty kingdoms and city states between Rome and Parthia.²¹⁷ After the campaigns of Severus, and those of Aurelian and Diocletian (see section 'The fourth and fifth centuries: allies and enemies'), the political choices for those caught up in the borderlands between Rome and Persia were less forgiving. By the time of the Jafnid dynasty (c. AD 529–82; see Chs 5 and 6), 'phylarch' thus acquired a more precise function, describing tribal chiefs woven into the local Roman military hierarchy, usually at the provincial level, whose duties focused on military and policing activities. In the late empire, phylarchs and their militia guarded frontiers, quashed revolts, and campaigned against Persia with the Roman army (e.g. 5.16, 5.31).²¹⁸

At numerous points in the *Geography*, Strabo refers to 'Scenitae', a broad term denoting 'tent-dwellers', or Arabs of the desert. This label was sometimes used by Graeco-Roman authors until its replacement by 'Saracen', and in Syriac, 'Ṭayyāyē', to refer to Arabs of the desert (see section 'Ammianus and the Saracens'). Strabo's characterization of the 'Scenitae' as people permanently on the move, interested only in pasture and booty, offers observations of 'the nomad' similar to those of Diodorus and, later, Ammianus (1.25).²¹⁹

At one point Strabo calls the Scenitae 'brigands'. While unflattering, this label reflects one of the realities of the relationship between the different populations of the Near East, and particularly between the Arabs of the desert and the residents of the villages and towns of the frontier areas. Numerous sources discussed throughout this volume (e.g. 5.1, 5.7, 6.3) illustrate the importance for Arabs of raiding as a source of income, along with the opportunity that

²¹¹ See Hoyland 2001: 2–5, 64.

²¹² Strabo 16.4.25; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 22–3.

²¹³ Strabo 16.4.24; Joseph. *AJ* 16.351–3.

²¹⁴ Sidebotham 1986: 120–30; Hoyland 2001: 45; Marek 1993.

²¹⁵ Strabo 16.1.28.

²¹⁶ Cass. Dio 68.21.1ff.; see Isaac 2000: 238.

²¹⁷ Cass. Dio 68.22.2.

²¹⁸ The classic study of phylarchs remains Grouschevoy 1995. See also Fisher 2011a; Liebeschuetz 2007; Isaac 2000; Shahid 1989b and 1984b; Mayerson 1991; Sartre 1993 and 1982; Paret 1958.

²¹⁹ E.g. Strabo 16.126–7; see also Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 19–21.

brigandage provided to exert political leverage against the powerful states and kingdoms with whom they interacted.

The Trade in Luxury Goods

For hundreds of years the populations of Arabia used to transport incense and myrrh through a network of caravan routes (see Fig. 1.2). This network crossed the Peninsula from the places of production in the Ḥaḍramawt, to Petra and the Mediterranean coast.²²⁰ Many of the spices and aromatics involved in this trade originated in *Arabia Felix*, which, together with *Arabia Deserta*, formed the two most significant geographical divisions of the Peninsula and the region around it, in the view of Graeco-Roman observers. (To these, Claudius Ptolemy, whose *Geography* was completed in c. AD 150, added *Arabia Petraea*—‘rocky’ Arabia—broadly reflecting the territorial reach of the Nabataean kingdom.)²²¹

Goods were increasingly transported by sea, but the overland routes remained important. Strabo noted that in his day the greater part of the goods that had previously been transhipped through the port of Leuke Kome, on the Arab coast, were now redirected to Myos Hormos in Egypt.²²² From there they reached Coptos and the Nile, and finally Alexandria. This does not mean that the overland route was abandoned, nor that the privileged economic position of Petra was seriously affected by the increased use of shipping. Rather, Strabo intended to stress the greatly increased development of commerce through Egypt; nowhere does he say that the overland route was abandoned. Another source, the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, written around AD 50, also attests to the vitality of the port of Leuke Kome, where Nabataean officials taxed goods arriving from South Arabia.²²³

Another perspective is provided by Pliny the Elder, whose *Natural History*, dedicated to the Emperor Titus, examined an enormous diversity of material connected to the natural world. Pliny, like Strabo, was also interested in Arabia’s production of exotic goods, aromatics, and spices.²²⁴ For his part, Pliny claimed the continued existence of an overland route, specifying that frankincense was conveyed to Sabota in the Ḥaḍramawt, and from there to Thomna (Tamna), capital of the Gabbanitae—that is, the kingdom of Qatabān, in South Arabia.²²⁵ Through a route divided into 65 stages, the caravans ultimately reached the Mediterranean city of Gaza. Pliny’s account appears to reflect a functioning system roughly contemporary to his own time. He specifies that Gaza is located on the Roman coast, and that Roman customs

²²⁰ De Maigret 1997; Macdonald 1997. ²²¹ Hoyland 2001: 64; MacAdam 1989.

²²² Strabo 16.2.4. ²²³ Young 2001: 95–6, 99–100.

²²⁴ On Pliny see Healy 1999; Isager 1991; Hornblower and Spawforth 1998: 545–6.

²²⁵ Pliny, *HN* 12.32; Hoyland 2001: 41–2.

officers taxed the goods there; Gaza was incorporated into the Roman provincial system only in 4 BC, after the death of Herod.²²⁶ Pliny also notes that in his time, or just before, a second harvesting of incense had been introduced, presumably to meet growing demand. The second harvest was gathered in the spring, but until the autumn unfavourable winds made maritime traffic in the Red Sea dangerous. The land route thus remained part of this vibrant commerce activity for at least all the first century AD, a date consistent with the last-known text from the Arabian Peninsula mentioning a caravan (2.25).²²⁷

Pliny, Strabo, Diodorus, and the others discussed here illustrate the different views of Arabs: romanticized nomads, tent-dwellers, traders, potential allies, and sometime enemies, spread over a vast region of the Near East. Between the fifth century BC and the early Roman imperial period, the pool of Graeco-Roman knowledge about Arabia had increased significantly through exploration and the growing dominance of Roman power. Still, though, there were many Arabias, and many populations could be called Arabs. The growth in knowledge was not always accompanied by greater precision in labelling, categorization, or understanding.

Greg Fisher and Ariel Lewin

The New Testament

This multiplicity of opinions on Arabia, and Arabs, is further reflected in the New Testament:

Arabia and the Arabs in the New Testament

[1.23] Acts 2.8–11 (NIV).

Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Lybia near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.

Here ‘Arabs’ are listed as one of the many peoples who received the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost in Jerusalem. The passage is more of a theological construction than a remembered historical event; its purpose is to stress the widespread participation of a diversity of populations. The list of peoples is divided into groups, with the Arabs mentioned in the same group as Judaeans, proselytes, and Cretans. A clue to the literary function of the Arabs here is suggested by the *Story of Ahiqar*, the sayings of an Assyrian wise man from approximately five centuries before *Acts*. In the *Story of Ahiqar*, the Arabs appear as the opposite of the Sidonians: Arabs designate the land-dwellers, while the

²²⁶ Joseph. *BJ* 2.97; *AJ* 17.320.

²²⁷ Lewin 1994: 112–13; Fiema 2003a: 38–43; Robin 2001a; see Hoyland 2001: 41.

Sidonians symbolize the maritime people. In the passage here we find a similar situation, where the Cretans take the role assumed by the Sidonians in the *Story of Ahiqar*, and so it seems that the term 'Arabs' is being used here to refer to people living around Judaea.²²⁸

[1.24] Galatians 1.15–17 (NIV)

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

In this passage Paul narrates his journey to Arabia from Damascus. 'Arabia' is probably not a reference to Nabataea, as, in 2 Cor. 11.32, Paul says that his flight from Damascus was due to the animosity of a Nabataean official towards him. Instead, it has been argued that 'Arabia' should be understood in the context of Paul's adherence to the Law, which evoked the memory of Elijah.²²⁹ Paul was thus perhaps travelling to the same region of the Sinai visited by Elijah, after his killing of the prophets of Baal, in order to gain an understanding of his mission.²³⁰ This identification is strengthened by the prophetic lexicon detectable in Gal. 1.15, and by the fact that in Gal. 4.25, Mount Sinai is described as a mountain 'in Arabia'.²³¹ The parallel with Elijah is, however, by no means conclusive. In Acts 9.19–20, Paul informed people in Damascus about his intentions for missionary work, and so we might instead deduce that Paul travelled, probably as a missionary, to Trachonitis, a region close to Damascus, whose population is described as 'Arabs' by both Ptolemy and Strabo.

Donata Violante

Trajan and Septimius Severus

Trajan (AD 98–117) expanded Rome's reach into Dacia, annexed the Nabataean kingdom as *Provincia Arabia*, and campaigned against the Parthians. Between 113 and 117 Trajan led an ambitious and successful expedition which briefly extended Roman rule to the Tigris river. In 115 Trajan attempted to reduce both Nisibis and Edessa, and found himself negotiating with Arab phylarchs—the Mannus mentioned above, as well as another, Sporaces. Both receive only a passing mention in the surviving parts of Cassius Dio's Greek eighty-book *Roman History*, and it is clear that they did not play a major role in the campaign.²³² In 117 Trajan attempted an assault on Ḥaṭrā; like that of

²²⁸ Retsö 2003: 416–18.

²²⁹ See Gal. 1.13–4.

²³⁰ 1 Kings 19.8.

²³¹ Wright 1996.

²³² Cass. Dio 68.22. On Dio see Millar 1964; Andersen and Hohl 1975.

Severus later on, Trajan's army could not operate effectively in the terrible heat, and was plagued by swarms of insects.²³³

Trajan's victories in the East brought a new dimension to the conflict between Rome and Parthia. The subsequent success of Avidius Cassius and Lucius Verus (AD 161–6) against the Parthians raised the stakes for those, like Arab phylarchs, city states, and small kingdoms, who lived in the borderlands between the two great powers.²³⁴ Further conflict between Rome and Parthia resulted from the civil war at the end of the second century, triggered in part by the assassination of Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius. The victor of this brutal conflict was Septimius Severus, who, after defeating his rivals, initiated another Roman campaign in the East during which he achieved impressive success over the Parthians, and punished those who had supported one of his rivals, Pescennius Niger. Severus targeted the city of Edessa and the region of Adiabene in 195, and after this campaign Severus was honoured in his titulature with the names of *Arabicus* and *Adiabenicus*.²³⁵ Following this campaign Severus invaded the Parthian empire in 197, capturing its capital, Ctesiphon. On his return from this venture, Severus invested the city of Ḥaṭrā.

Severus' rationale for the Hatran campaign, which is also reported in the *Historia Augusta*, was that Barsemius, the king of Ḥaṭrā, had given aid to Pescennius Niger; this was his punishment.²³⁶ This *casus belli* is also reported by Herodian, in his Greek history of the period between AD 180 and 238.²³⁷ Herodian describes just one siege by Severus, but Cassius Dio states that the emperor tried to capture it twice. The first attempt can be dated to the spring of the year 198, while the second was conducted some months later, probably during the autumn.²³⁸ Ḥaṭrā was not, it seems, either large or rich, but it possessed formidable defences and its desert location presented logistical challenges for the army of Severus, as it had also done for that of Trajan. The ingenuity of the Hatrans was reported by Herodian, who said that they 'made clay containers filled with little flying insects that had poisonous stings, which were then fired off. When these missiles fell on to Severus' army, the insects crawled into the eyes and exposed parts of the skin of the soldiers without being noticed and stung them, causing severe injuries.'²³⁹ Cassius Dio is explicit about the threat posed by the Arabian cavalry, reflecting the

²³³ Cass. Dio 68.31.

²³⁴ Sartre 2005: 132–50; Millar 1993a: 90–140.

²³⁵ Cass. Dio 75.1–3; Kennedy 1987; Ross 2001: 46–56; Millar 1993a; see too Bowersock 1983: 110–22; Sartre 2005: 344–5; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 28–9.

²³⁶ Cass. Dio 76.10–13; *SHA* Sev. 9.10–11, 18.1.

²³⁷ Hdn 3.1.3. See the introduction by Whittaker to the Loeb translation, and Andersen and Hohl 1975.

²³⁸ Birley 1998: 130–1; see Sartre 2005: 345–8.

²³⁹ Hdn 3.9.1–8 (trans. Whittaker).

commonly held association between Arabs and their skill at horse-borne warfare.²⁴⁰

Greg Fisher and Ariel Lewin

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES: ALLIES AND ENEMIES

The assassination of Severus Alexander in AD 235 accelerated a deteriorating security situation in the Roman empire. In the east, the emergence of the Sasanian dynasty a decade earlier, in 224, had heralded a new phase in Rome's wars against Persia. The economic, military, spiritual, and political challenges of the third century, and especially between 235 and 284, witnessed some of the most stunning setbacks for Roman power in the region, including the defeat and capture of Valerian near Edessa in 259/60, and the revolt of Palmyra. Towards the end of this turbulent period, tentative control was re-established by Aurelian (r. 270–5) and then, more firmly, by Diocletian (r. AD 284–305) and the Tetrarchy which he established.²⁴¹ Diocletian initiated a significant upgrade of Roman defences with the creation of the so-called *strata Diocletiana*, a fortified zone which stretched through much of the Syrian frontier.²⁴² While the Romans conducted campaigns against Arabs towards the end of the third century,²⁴³ the main threat continued to come from the Persians, and in this contest the Romans regained some of the pride lost at Edessa. The Peace of Nisibis (AD 298), an extremely favourable settlement won on the back of the victorious campaigns of Diocletian's imperial colleague, Galerius, brought an equilibrium of sorts on the eastern frontier, lasting until Julian's disastrous Persian campaign in 363.²⁴⁴

The loss of Palmyra's independence removed one of the last client-state buffers between Rome and Persia. While Palmyra may not have been as vital a 'mediator between the Roman and the Bedouin world' that some have suggested, its loss served to make Rome and Persia the only viable regional options for this role.²⁴⁵ The increased competition for influence by both would make political neutrality nearly impossible for the peoples who lived

²⁴⁰ Cass. Dio 68.31 (Trajan); Gawlikowski 1994. See too Millar 1993a: 494–5 and see now Driven 2013.

²⁴¹ For useful overviews, Potter 2004: 215–99; Southern 2001: 64–182.

²⁴² Mal. Chron. 12.17–22/pp. 307–8; Amm. Marc. 23.5.2; Blockley 1992: 5–7; Potter 2004: 280–98; Dodgeon and Lieu 1991: 122–3, 136–8; Lewin 2002.

²⁴³ Pan. Lat. 3/2, 5.4–5.

²⁴⁴ Dodgeon and Lieu 1991: 124–31; Blockley 1992: 5–30; Potter 2004: 294–9; Southern 2001: 134–68.

²⁴⁵ Schmitt 2005: 277; Edwell 2008.

around the edges of the Roman and Persian states;²⁴⁶ and by the fourth century religious neutrality, too, would also become increasingly difficult. During the reign of Constantine the Great (AD 306–37), state-sponsored persecution against Christians ended, and the Roman empire adopted Christianity as its official religion. This shift in policy had momentous implications well beyond the scope of this discussion; but for the frontier peoples who found themselves between Rome and Persia, including (but by no means limited to) Arabs, the emergence of a Christian empire with universal aspirations entangled questions of political allegiance with those of religious choice. The complex relationship between Arabs and Christianity in both Rome and Persia, including the political consequences of adopting or avoiding Christianity, are examined in detail in Ch. 6, but some of the major issues are anticipated, and reflected, in the otherwise rather political episodes involving Mavia and Amorkesos (see sections 'Queen Mavia' and 'The Fifth Century: Theodosius, Bahram V, and Leo').

The Fourth Century: From Constantine to Valens

An early indication of the growing importance of Arabs for both Rome and Persia is the famous funerary inscription of Imru' al-Qays (Mara' al-Qays) from al-Namāra, in Syria, usually dated to AD 328. This inscription, discovered in 1901 by René Dussaud and Frédéric Macler, is one of the earliest texts in the Arabic language, and is translated and examined in detail in Ch. 7 (7.3). We may note here several points of historical interest pertinent to this discussion.

The location of the find makes it probable that Imru' al-Qays was a Roman ally—but only, perhaps, at the end of his life, for the inscription celebrates the power of the king within the framework of both Roman and Persian power, describing a series of campaigns throughout Arabia which appear to have been carried out with the consent of, or as a vassal (?) of either (or both) states.²⁴⁷ Unfortunately, little can be said with confidence about the historical content of the inscription, including over whom, or what, the king may have ruled, and even the identity of Imru' al-Qays himself is also open to debate. Some see the king as the second of the Lakhmid (Naṣrid) kings of al-Ḥīra, the son of the 'Amr(u) from the Paikuli inscription.²⁴⁸ No contemporary source supports such an identification, however, and the king remains something of a

²⁴⁶ For discussion of these developments as they pertain to the position of the Arabs: Sartre 1982: 132–40; Bowersock 1983: 123–47; Shahid 1984b: 32–73; Millar 1993a: 174–89; Isaac 2000; Parker 1986; Lewin 2007.

²⁴⁷ Isaac 2000: 240.

²⁴⁸ Based on an identification with the Imru' al-Qays in al-Ṭabari, 1.834.

historical enigma. It does seem clear that the degree of confidence (even boastfulness) in the text would not have been possible in the second or third centuries, when Arabs, and other peripheral peoples, were less important to the concerns of the Romans and the Persians.²⁴⁹

Ammianus and the Saracens

Not long after the Namāra inscription was erected, Constantine's son, Constantius II (r. 337–61), and his successor, Julian (r. 361–3), used Arab militia in their wars against Persia. Our main source for much of this period is Ammianus Marcellinus, one of the best known of the Roman historians. Born in the early 330s into a military family, Ammianus served as a staff officer to the *magister equitum* in the East, Ursicinus, and so Ammianus (like Procopius later as the secretary to Belisarius; see Ch. 5) was in a position to provide first-hand testimony of some of the most prominent events of the time, including the successful Persian siege of Amida (359), from which Ammianus barely escaped.²⁵⁰ Ammianus' Latin *History*, steeped in Latin historiography and Greek culture, is a crucial witness to a key part of the fourth century.²⁵¹

In book 22, embedded in a discussion of the geography of Egypt, Ammianus informs the reader that the 'Scenitic Arabs'—the 'Scenitae'—are now called 'Saracens'.²⁵² *Sarakenoi*, and a district known as *Sarakēnē*, were known to Ptolemy in his *Geography*, but without any indication that the term was being used to describe nomadic Arabs.²⁵³ Exactly how and why the two became equated, and Saracen became shorthand for 'tent-dweller', is not at all well understood. Attempts to explain this development have highlighted, for example, the biblical association between Arabs and Ishmael,²⁵⁴ which included Sara (whence, Saracen); the Arabic term for east (*sharq*), thief (*sāriq*), or an Aramaic word, *s'rāq*, meaning 'empty', evoking the desert, have also been advanced as possibilities.²⁵⁵ Similar attempts have been made to explain why Syriac texts paralleled this change, adopting the term 'Ṭayyāyē' as a shorthand for the 'tent-dwelling' Arabs, connecting it with a specific tribe (Ṭayyi'), and even the idea of 'error' (*ṭo' yay*).²⁵⁶

²⁴⁹ Fisher 2011a: 138–44; see too Zwettler 1993; Shahid 1984b: 55–6, n. 23; Bowersock 1983: 138–47; Sartre 1982: 136–9; Isaac 2000: 239–40; Shahid 2000.

²⁵⁰ For biography see Matthews 1989: 71–80; Kelly 2008; Rohrbacher 2002: 14–25.

²⁵¹ The work originally encompassed the period between the accession of Nerva (96) down to Ammianus' own time, but has not survived complete; only books 14 to 31 are extant, covering events between 353 and 378.

²⁵² Amm. Marc. 22.15.1. ²⁵³ Ptol. *Geog.* 5.17.21; see Macdonald 2009c: 1.

²⁵⁴ On this link, see Ch. 6.

²⁵⁵ Graf 1978: 14–15 offers a useful summary; Graf and O'Connor 1977; Fisher 2011a: 76. Macdonald 2009c: 2.

²⁵⁶ Segal 1984: 103; see also Millar 2005: 301–4. See also Millar 2013c: 138–9.

One answer lies in the problems posed by the multiplicity of ways in which the word 'Arab' could be understood. In particular, it has been suggested that the creation of *Provincia Arabia* in 106 offered yet another layer of meaning to the label 'Arabia', and consequently another layer, too, to what the term 'Arab' might represent. Macdonald has suggested that it thus became desirable to make the distinction between inhabitants of the province, who could be called Arabs, and the 'tent-dwelling' Arabs of the desert, and that a word based on the North Arabian root *s²-r-q*, which could mean 'to migrate to the inner desert', might have given rise to the use of 'Saracen' as a generic label for nomads.²⁵⁷ Hoyland has further argued that the increased visibility to the Romans of Arabs who lived in the desert, a result of the dismantling of client states, the establishment of direct administration over the eastern provinces, combined with the greater role of Arabs as militia, might also have contributed to a desire to differentiate between different 'types' of Arabs.²⁵⁸ These two explanations constitute the most plausible of the many available, but it is not known exactly why ancient authors started to call 'tent-dwellers' Saracens and Ṭayyāyē.

Under Constantius II and Julian, the Roman empire refined its use of Arabs, or Saracens, as military allies. It appears that, following a pattern used in the west, Constantius established certain Arab tribes as *foederati* (Gr. *hypospondoi*), politically subordinate allies who rendered military service in return for an *annona*, subsidies in cash or in kind.²⁵⁹ Ammianus suggests that the arrangement was already mature by the reign of Julian, who welcomed Arabs for their skill in guerrilla warfare.²⁶⁰ Ammianus also noted, later, that Julian withdrew financial and in-kind payments, apparently alluding to an established system of paying the *annona*.²⁶¹ The payment of subsidies constituted an important aspect of Roman policy towards both allies and enemies, and withholding expected payments could be dangerous.²⁶² Their retraction during Julian's campaign created numerous difficulties; it was even alleged (by Libanius) that the spear which delivered the mortal wound to Julian's liver was thrown by a disgruntled Saracen.²⁶³ Later, a row over imperial gold payments for the Jafnid leader al-Mundhir would contribute to a dangerous falling-out with the Roman emperor Justin II (see 5.29).

In Ammianus' text, a certain 'Malechus', named 'Podosaces', and a 'phylarch of the Assanitic Saracens', is of some interest.²⁶⁴ 'Malechus' appears to be a Latinization of the Arabic *malik*, king, known as the title of other Arab leaders in late antiquity, including Imru' al-Qays at Namāra (7.3) and the

²⁵⁷ Macdonald 2009c: 3–5.

²⁵⁸ Hoyland 2001: 235.

²⁵⁹ Schmitt 2005: 278, discussing Julian, *Or.* 1.15; on *foederati* see Heather 2001; Heather 1997.

²⁶⁰ Amm. Marc. 23.3.8.

²⁶¹ Amm. Marc. 25.6.9–10.

²⁶² On subsidies, see e.g. Blockley 1985; Isaac 2000: 231, 245, 248, 260.

²⁶³ *Lib. Or.* 24.6; Schmitt 2005: 278.

²⁶⁴ Amm. Marc. 24.2.4.

Jafnid al-Hārith (7.6). The term is best understood as a reflection of élite status, rather than a credible claim to royal rule over a kingdom. The label 'Assanitic' suggests Ghassān, a tribe usually connected to the Roman empire via the Jafnid dynasty (here, Podosaces appears as a Persian, not a Roman ally, although in the shifting world of frontier alliances, this hardly disqualifies any 'Ghassānid connection'). This (or any) tribal link cannot, however, be proven on the basis of Ammianus' bald testimony.

Ammianus describes Podosaces as a 'notorious robber' and a dangerous raider, engaged in preparing an ambush for one of the Roman officers attached to Julian's army.²⁶⁵ The idea of the dangerous, perfidious Saracen is one of the main themes in Ammianus' highly scathing view on the utility of Arabs as allies, which is worth quoting here in full.

The manners and customs of the Saracens

[1.25] Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 14.4.1–7 (trans. Rolfe, vol. 1, pp. 27–9). The Saracens, however, whom we never found desirable either as friends or as enemies, ranging up and down the country, in a brief space of time laid waste whatever they could find, like rapacious kites which, whenever they have caught sight of any prey from on high, seize it with swift swoop, and directly they have seized it make off. Although I recall having told of their customs in my history of the emperor Marcus, and several times after that, yet I will now briefly relate a few more particulars about them. Among those tribes whose original abode extends from the Assyrians to the cataracts of the Nile and the frontiers of the Blemmyae all alike are warriors of equal rank, half-nude, clad in dyed cloaks as far as the loins, ranging widely with the help of swift horses and slender camels in times of peace or of disorder. No man ever grasps a plough handle or cultivates a tree, none seeks a living by tilling the soil, but they rove continually over wide and extensive tracts without a home, without fixed abodes or laws; they cannot long endure the same sky, nor does the sun of a single district ever content them. Their life is always on the move, and they have mercenary wives, hired under a temporary contract. But in order that there may be some semblance of matrimony, the future wife, by way of dower, offers her husband a spear and a tent, with the right to leave him after a stipulated time, if she so elect: and it is unbelievable with what ardour both sexes give themselves up to passion. Moreover, they wander so widely as long as they live, that a woman marries in one place, gives birth in another, and rears her children far away, without being allowed any opportunity for rest. They all feed upon game and an abundance of milk, which is their main sustenance, on a variety of plants, as well as on such birds as they are able to take by fowling; and I have seen many of them who were wholly unacquainted with grain and wine. So much for this dangerous tribe.

Ammianus' rhetorical discussion mirrors the types of ethnographic digressions found in numerous Graeco-Roman authors, and historians in particular.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Amm. Marc. 24.2.4 (trans. Rolfe).

²⁶⁶ Isaac 2011; Matthews 1989: 352–3.

Elsewhere in his narrative Ammianus also made a famous digression on the Huns, focusing on similar ideas: the Huns, he stated, eat raw meat and wild plants; they wear pointed hats and rarely change their clothes; and their children know nothing of their origins because they are constantly on the move.²⁶⁷ Here Ammianus' description of Arab customs falls back on a range of familiar attributes applied to both 'barbarians' and 'nomads': brigandage and banditry, perfidy, lack of familiarity with the basics of civilization such as housing, farming, wine, and decorum in personal relationships.²⁶⁸ From this perspective, Ammianus' views recall those of Diodorus and Strabo discussed earlier in this chapter.

Queen Mavia

The Persian expedition of Julian ended in disaster.²⁶⁹ After Julian's death, the hurried settlement between the Persians and the new emperor, Jovian, cost the Romans most of the benefits won from the Peace of Nisibis.²⁷⁰ Not long afterwards, fresh crises faced Valens (r. 364–78), the brother of Valentinian (r. 364–75), who succeeded Jovian in 364. One emergency, the revolt of an Arab queen, Mavia, ran concurrently with the growth in tensions between Romans and the Goths, which would lead to Valens' death at Adrianople in 378.

Numerous accounts of Mavia's rebellion appear in the work of ecclesiastical historians—Sozomen, Socrates Scholasticus, Theodoret, and Rufinus. These writers naturally took considerable interest in the religious dimensions of the story, and perhaps exaggerated what seems to have been largely a political matter. Nevertheless, their testimonies reflect the growing importance of religious confession in cementing agreements between the Roman empire and its Arab allies. Presented here is the most detailed account, from Sozomen.

The revolt of Queen Mavia

[1.26] Sozomen, *HE* 6.38 (trans. Hartranft, pp. 374–5).

About this period the king of the Saracens died, and the peace which had previously existed between that nation and the Romans was dissolved. Mania [Mavia], the widow of the late monarch, after attaining to the government of her race, led her troops into Phoenicia and Palestine, as far as the regions of Egypt lying to the left of those who sail towards the source of the Nile, and which are generally denominated Arabia. This war was by no means a contemptible one, although conducted by a woman. The Romans, it is said, considered it so arduous and so perilous, that the general of the Phoenician troops applied for assistance to the general of the entire cavalry and infantry of the East. This latter ridiculed the summons, and undertook to give battle alone. He accordingly attacked Mania,

²⁶⁷ Amm. Marc. 31.2.3–10.

²⁶⁸ Matthews 1989: 353 and Shaw 1982.

²⁶⁹ Amm. Marc. 25.3.6.

²⁷⁰ Amm. Marc. 25.7.9; Matthews 1989: 185–7; Potter 2004: 519.

who commanded her own troops in person; and he was rescued with difficulty by the general of the troops of Palestine and Phoenicia. Perceiving the extremity of the danger, this general deemed it unnecessary to obey the orders he had received to keep aloof from the combat; he therefore rushed upon the barbarians, and furnished his superior an opportunity for safe retreat, while he himself yielded ground and shot at those who fled, and beat off with his arrows the enemies who were pressing upon him. This occurrence is still held in remembrance among the people of the country, and is celebrated in songs by the Saracens. As the war was still pursued with vigor, the Romans found it necessary to send an embassy to Mania to solicit peace. It is said that she refused to comply with the request of the embassy, unless consent were given for the ordination of a certain man named Moses, who practiced philosophy in a neighboring desert, as bishop over her subjects. This Moses was a man of virtuous life, and noted for performing the divine and miraculous signs. On these conditions being announced to the emperor, the chiefs of the army were commanded to seize Moses, and conduct him to Lucius. The monk exclaimed, in the presence of the rulers and the assembled people, 'I am not worthy of the honor of bearing the name and dignity of chief priest; but if, notwithstanding my unworthiness God destines me to this office, I take Him to witness who created the heavens and the earth, that I will not be ordained by the imposition of the hands of Lucius, which are defiled with the blood of holy men.' Lucius immediately rejoined, 'If you are unacquainted with the nature of my creed, you do wrong in judging me before you are in possession of all the circumstances of the case. If you have been prejudiced by the calumnies that have been circulated against me, at least allow me to declare to you what are my sentiments; and do you be the judge of them.' 'Your creed is already well known to me,' replied Moses; 'and its nature is testified by bishops, presbyters, and deacons, who are suffering grievously in exile, and the mines. It is clear that your sentiments are opposed to the faith of Christ, and to all orthodox doctrines concerning the Godhead.' Having again protested, upon oath, that he would not receive ordination from them, he went to the Saracens. He reconciled them to the Romans, and converted many to Christianity, and passed his life among them as a priest, although he found few who shared in his belief.

Sozomen was born in Bethelia, near Gaza in Palestine, and died c.AD 448/9. His *Ecclesiastical History*, written in Constantinople and dedicated to the emperor Theodosius II (r. 408–50), shows a deep interest in the activities of monks, and ranged well beyond the concerns of the Roman church to include Christianity in Persia and amongst 'barbarians', including the Arabs. He was also interested in the Jews, and in his musings he presents an important reflection on the connections between Judaism and the habits of the Arabs (see 6.52).²⁷¹ Notably, Sozomen relied heavily on the work of his near-contemporary Socrates Scholasticus, born in Constantinople in 380. Socrates, possibly a lawyer ('Scholasticus') in professional life, wrote an 'unpretentious,

²⁷¹ See also Millar 2005: 309–12.

engaging, and balanced' work, designed to continue that of Eusebius of Caesarea; it covered a period between 306 and 439. Sozomen's history is regarded as the more sophisticated of the two.²⁷²

Mavia's uprising began in the spring of 377 and probably lasted until the beginning of 378.²⁷³ According to Sozomen, the senior officer present, the *magister militum per Orientem*, was taken off-guard by the ferocity and skill of his enemy—who came close to defeating the Romans in a pitched battle—and needed to be rescued by his subordinates. The Arabs continued to plunder many of the eastern provinces, and consequently the Roman authorities were forced to ask for peace. After the war Mavia's daughter was given as wife to the *magister militum praesentalis*, Victor, then an old man, and probably very close to Valens, underscoring the importance that the emperor attached to ending the rebellion.²⁷⁴ The word used by Sozomen (as well as Socrates) to describe the position of Mavia is *hypospondos* (pl. *hypospondoi*). The appearance of this technical term appears to confirm that the 'system' set in train by Constantius II for handling the empire's Arab allies was being continued.²⁷⁵

The location of the revolt is not clear. According to Theodoret, Moses lived an ascetic life on the borders between Palestine and Egypt.²⁷⁶ Rufinus suggests that Moses was alone in the desert, close to where Mavia once lived, and this has led to the assumption that Mavia and her people lived in the Sinai; Shahîd has instead suggested that Mavia ruled over a tribe which was encamped in the steppe between Palmyra and Tabūk.²⁷⁷

In addition to recounting the military nature of the revolt, different versions of the story bear witness to the growing importance of Christianity in determining relations between the empire and its allies. Complications over the ordination of Moses as a bishop for Mavia and her people are cited as a difficult obstacle to ending the rebellion, for while Valens assented to the request, it was Lucius, the Arian patriarch of Alexandria, who was given the task of consecrating Moses. Arianism, condemned at Nicaea (AD 325) but favoured by Valens, was apparently unacceptable to Mavia, and it took extraordinary lengths for the matter to be settled. Even if the tensions between orthodoxy and heresy have been exaggerated, particularly by Rufinus,²⁷⁸ it is clear that shared religious links were becoming increasingly important for

²⁷² See Rohrbacher 2002: 117–25. Urbainczyk 1997 offers an examination of the relationship between the works of Socrates and Sozomen. See Rohrbacher 2002: 108–16 and Treadgold 2010: 134–45 on Socrates (quote from p. 138).

²⁷³ See Lenski 2002: 208–9; Roberto 2003: 77–81, for discussion on the date.

²⁷⁴ Lewin 2007; Lenski 2007: 121–2; Schmitt 2003. Victor's career is examined in Roberto 2003.

²⁷⁵ Soc. Schol. *HE* 4.36; Soz. *HE* 6.38, 7.1.

²⁷⁶ Theod. *HE* 4.23.

²⁷⁷ Ruf. *HE* 11.6. See further Sartre 1982: 141–2; Rubin 1990; Shahîd 1984b: 140–1, 196–7; Lewin 2007: 249; Gnoli 2005: 527–8.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Ruf. *HE* 11.6; Mayerson 1980a: 131.

creating ties of trust and obligation. For Mavia, however, trust could only be established if the emperor provided the 'right sort' of bishop.²⁷⁹

The successful conclusion of the revolt provided a boost for the Romans when, as part of the crisis which saw the death of Valens and the defeat of the Roman army at Adrianople (AD 378), Constantinople itself came under threat, but was defended in part by a contingent of Arabs (although only Socrates is specific about their origin, referring to 'a few Saracen allies that had been dispatched by the queen Mavia').²⁸⁰ From Zosimus and Socrates we might deduce that the Arabs defended the capital in two different circumstances, the first one before the battle of Adrianople, the second one some weeks after it.²⁸¹ The defence of the capital is also reported by Ammianus, whose account is intriguing. He states that one Arab, 'a man with long hair and naked except for a loin-cloth, uttering hoarse and dismal cries, with drawn dagger rushed into the thick of the Gothic army, and after killing a man applied his lips to his throat and sucked the blood that poured out'.²⁸² This puzzling and surprising act has been described as a 'horror story', and linked with cannibalism.²⁸³ The drinking of blood itself is unusual in classical literature, but cannibalism does appear in the works of some Graeco-Roman authors, usually associated with 'barbarians'.²⁸⁴ Ammianus offers no hint, however, that the Arab soldier ate the flesh of his victim.

Arab Allies, Arab Enemies

A number of the sources discussed here underscore the growing use of Arabs as auxiliaries in the service of the state. A further perspective on the recruitment of Arabs is confirmed by the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a bureaucratic list of ranks and offices created in the 420s that includes valuable information on the disposition of Roman military units. The aim of the document seems to have been to present a full list of offices for a unified empire, but the eastern and western portions are dated differently, and the document as a whole is uneven and incomplete. The western section dates to the 420s, though inconsistencies in the material mean that it cannot be fixed to one date in time; on the other hand, the eastern section offers a more coherent whole, and probably dates to around 395.²⁸⁵ The *Notitia* lists a number of units which appear to have been

recruited from Arabs: the *equites Saraceni indigenae*, the *equites Saraceni Thamudeni*, and the *equites Thamudeni Illyriciani*.²⁸⁶ The first leaves little doubt as to its origins, while in the last two we can recognize Thamud (see section 'The Ruwāfa Inscriptions').

By the fourth and fifth centuries, cavalry forces, *equites*, were in demand as the empire increasingly focused on the mobility of its armed forces. Unlike the *foederati* referred to in the Theodosian Code (see section 'The Fifth Century: Theodosius, Bahram V, and Leo'), Roman commanders would have been in charge of these Arab *equites*. We do not know when these *Notitia* units were raised, though they were in their respective regions by 395: the *equites Saraceni indigenae* under the *dux Foenicis* in Phoenicia, the *equites Saraceni Thamudeni* under the *comites limitis Aegypti* in Egypt, and the *equites Thamudeni Illyriciani*²⁸⁷ under the *dux Palaestinae* in Palestine. The Romans often preferred to base their non-Roman troops some distance from their homes, but this does not seem to have been the case with these Arab units. Although the nomenclature indicates that it might be reasonable to expect that Arabs would have comprised a significant portion of these units' soldiers, we cannot say if this was always the case. Along the same lines, although these are the only units that provide clear evidence of Arab recruitment into the Roman army in late antiquity (as opposed to recruitment as *foederati*), there are many other units listed in the *Notitia* that could have been manned, at least in part, by Arab soldiers, given that Arabs had been fighting for Rome for some time by the end of the fourth century.²⁸⁸

This evidence, together with the actions of Mavia's troops at Constantinople, reflect the military utility of Arabs who, like many other non-Roman peoples, might fight for the Roman state. Yet the story of Mavia also highlights the threat which the tribe might occasionally pose to the state. Indeed, a number of the authors discussed in this chapter comment on the warlike nature of the Arabs, their talent for guerrilla warfare, and their skill as brigands. While such characterizations included a certain amount of ethnographic stereotyping, it is clear that from time to time Arab raids did threaten the security of both Rome and Persia. Details of Arab raids in the Persian empire are scarce, a reflection, perhaps, of the nature of the sources, but there are several clues: as noted above, the *Astronomical Diaries* record incursions in the first century BC, some of them fairly serious. The campaigns of Shapur II against Arab tribes were apparently a response, in part, to raids, and it is noteworthy that the martyr legend of Mar Qardagh, probably composed during the seventh century, but set during the period of persecutions under Shapur II, records how bands of Romans and Arabs conducted vigorous raids

²⁷⁹ Fisher forthcoming; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 14–15.

²⁸⁰ Soc. Schol. HE 5.1 (trans. Zenos); see too *Nd. Or.* 28.17, 32.27–8, describing Arab units which might be connected with the events here.

²⁸¹ Zos. HE 4.22.1–3. See Lenski 2002: 35, n. 94; Lewin forthcoming; Woods 2002.

²⁸² Amm. Marc. 31.16.5–6 (trans. Rolfe).

²⁸³ Shahid 1984b: 257; Woods 2002; Lenski 2002: 200–10.

²⁸⁴ Isaac 2006: 207–11; Whately 2014: 222; cf. Hdt. 1.216, Diod. Sic. 32.3.

²⁸⁵ See Whately 2013: 114–18, for overview and bibliography on the *Notitia*. For the date of the eastern section, see Zuckerman 1998.

²⁸⁶ *Nd. Or.* 32.27–8, 28.17, and 34.22. See Shahid 1984a: 57–63.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Fisher 2011a: 76 on the possible origins of this unit.

²⁸⁸ E.g. AE 1976: 495; AE 1959: 188; see Spaul 1994: 176–8.

into Persia, and took captives near Nisibis.²⁸⁹ As the texts discussed in Chs 5 and 6 indicate, Arab marauding could take place with or without imperial participation (or even approval), and was an effective way to destabilize and terrorize the frontier regions of both empires, as well as win loot and plunder for the antagonists.

In the Roman empire, the Graeco-Roman literary sources, and the impressive archaeological remains of fortresses, roads, reservoirs, and watchtowers throughout modern Syria and Jordan bear vivid testimony to the vigour with which the Romans defended the Near Eastern provinces.²⁹⁰ The archaeological record, in particular, has asked questions of the nature of the security threat posed by Arabs in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Was the so-called *limes Arabicus*, the fortified zone running from Aila ('Aqaba) to Boṣrā (Bostra), designed to control Arabs? A long debate on this topic has suggested that concerns over internal security, and the threat posed by the Persians, exercised the most significant influence over the way that the defences of the region developed. In contrast, the idea of the 'nomadic menace' has been softened by research focusing on the complex relationship between the peoples of the desert and those of the villages and the towns of the frontier areas.²⁹¹ Despite the lower profile accorded to the threat posed by Arabs, their raids did on occasion cause considerable damage through the destruction of property and the taking of captives,²⁹² as well as the killing of Roman soldiers in their daily duties.²⁹³

The Fifth Century: Theodosius, Bahram V, and Leo

Fifth-century Latin, Greek, and Syriac sources confirm the further evolution of the trends discernible in the fourth-century sources discussed above: an increased use of Arabs for military purposes, the greater formalization of treaties or agreements, and the increasing importance of religious ties in cementing agreements. From being 'good neither as friends nor enemies', as Ammianus noted, Arabs would win the ear of the emperor in Constantinople.

The Theodosian Code, a vast legal project compiled by order of the Emperor Theodosius II (r. AD 408–50), provides a snapshot of how the management of Arab allies was being written into the laws of the state. A *novella* from

²⁸⁹ Walker 2006: 48–9.

²⁹⁰ For Persia's frontier defences, see most recently Sauer et al. 2013.

²⁹¹ The literature on this topic is vast. See Parker 1987; Parker 1986; Isaac 2000; Fisher 2004; Kennedy 2004; Lewin 2007; Lewin 2015; Mayerson 1989; Mayerson 1986; Macdonald 2009e; Banning 1987; Banning 1986; Graf 1978; Luttwak 2009; Luttwak 1976.

²⁹² See Lenski 2011 and Chs 5 and 6.

²⁹³ E.g. AE 1948 (AD 334); Iliffe 1942; Isaac 2000: 175–6; Zuckerman 1994; Parker and Betlyon 2006: 559.

September 443 specifies that while part of the *annona* given to the *limitanei*, the troops who garrisoned the frontiers of the empire, might be removed, the Saracen *foederati* were explicitly protected from losing any part of this subsidy. This stipulation suggests, perhaps, that Arab allies occupied a certain importance in military affairs and that steps needed to be taken to ensure their cooperation and goodwill.²⁹⁴

While the Romans were developing a legal and practical framework for administering Arab military alliances, the Persians, too, were making growing use of Arabs as soldiers. In 420 Rome and Persia went to war over a number of issues, including the treatment of Christians in the Persian empire towards the end of the reign of the Persian king Yazdegerd I (r. AD 399–420). Yazdegerd was succeeded by Bahram V, who took a harsh line with Christians, and, eventually, religious tensions, the flow of refugees fleeing Persian persecution, and the Persian treatment of Roman merchants triggered a Roman invasion into Armenia and Mesopotamia. The advantage oscillated between Rome and Persia until a peace was agreed in 422; one of the stipulations of the treaty was that neither empire would take in the allies of the other.²⁹⁵ Socrates Scholasticus, who describes the course of the war, details the exploit of a 'certain warlike chief named Alamundarus' in Persian service, who promised Bahram that he could capture Antioch. The mission was a failure, however, and the Saracen force, imagining that they were trapped by the Roman army, 'precipitated themselves, armed as they were, into the river Euphrates, wherein nearly one hundred thousand of them were drowned'.²⁹⁶ The dramatic demise of the Saracen force seems a little contrived, but represents suitable divine vengeance narrated by a Christian author, in the context of contemporary events. The Alamundarus who appears in Socrates' text may be the same as the one who, in later tradition, had raised Bahram at al-Hira (see 8.22, 8.46) and emerged as one of his key supporters.²⁹⁷

In 473 a priest arrived in Constantinople with a request to see the Emperor Leo, who was in the final year of his reign. The events which subsequently occurred illustrated once again the important role played by a shared Christian faith in cementing agreements.

Amorkesos and Leo

[1.27] Malchus, fragment 1 (trans. Blockley, pp. 405–7).

In the seventeenth year of the reign of Leo the Butcher, when everything everywhere seemed to be in confusion, a priest of the Christians amongst the Tent Arabs, whom they call Saracens, arrived for the following reason. When in the time of Theodosius the greatest war had broken out against the Persians, they

²⁹⁴ *Nov. Theod.* 24.2 (September 443); see Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 45; for a detailed study of the Theodosian Code, see Matthews 2000.

²⁹⁵ Blockley 1992: 56–7; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 36–44; Greatrex 1993; Holum 1977, for the religious context of the war.

²⁹⁶ Soc. Schol. HE 7.18 (trans. Zenos).

²⁹⁷ Millar 2005: 301–2.

and the Romans made a treaty to the effect that neither side would accept the Saracen allies of the other if any of them attempted to revolt. Amongst the Persians was a certain Amorkesos of the tribe of Nomalius, who, whether because he did not receive honour in the land of Persia or because for some other reason he thought the Roman empire better, left Persia and travelled to that part of Arabia adjacent to Persia. Setting out from here he made forays and attacks not upon any Romans, but upon the Saracens whom he encountered. Building up his forces from these, he gradually advanced. He seized one of the islands belonging to the Romans, which was named Iotaba [Iotabe], and, ejecting the Roman tax collectors, held the island himself and amassed considerable wealth through collecting taxes. When he had seized other villages nearby, Amorkesos wished to become an ally of the Romans and phylarch of the Saracens under Roman rule on the borders of Arabia Petraea. He, therefore, sent Peter, the bishop of his tribe, to Leo, the Roman Emperor, to see if he could persuade Leo and arrange these things. When Peter arrived and spoke to the Emperor, Leo accepted his proposals and immediately sent for Amorkesos to come to him.

This intention of Leo, which he carried out, was very unwise. If he wished to appoint Amorkesos phylarch, he ought to have made this appointment while keeping him at a distance and while Amorkesos held Roman power in awe, so that he would always come submissively before the Roman officials whom he encountered and give heed to the Emperor's communications. For in this case he would have thought the Emperor to be much greater than the rest of mankind. But as it was he first led him through cities which he would observe to be full of luxury and unready for war. Then, when he came to Byzantium, the Emperor readily received him in person, invited him to dine at his table and, when the senate was meeting, had him attend that assembly. The worst insult of all to the Romans was that the Emperor, pretending that Amorkesos had been persuaded to become a Christian, ordered that he be granted a chair amongst the highest-ranking patricians. Finally, Leo dismissed him, having received from him as a personal gift a very valuable ikon of gold set with precious stones, while giving him in return money from the public treasury and ordering all the senators to give him gifts. The Emperor not only left him in firm control of the island which I mentioned earlier, but added to it a large number of other villages. By granting Amorkesos these things and by making him phylarch, as he desired, Leo sent away a proud man who would not work for the advantage of those who had received him.

Malchus was born in Philadelphia (Amman) c.430 and wrote a classicizing history, which was probably published sometime during the reign of Anastasius (491–518). Its precise length is disputed, and both the beginning and the end of his work are no longer extant. Excerpts survive in the *Bibliotheca* of the ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, whose compilation, put together in about 845, discussed the works which the scholarly Photius had read.²⁹⁸ Fragments of Malchus' text are also found in the tenth-century encyclopaedia,

²⁹⁸ Treadgold 2010: 79–80, on Photius.

the *Suda*, as well as the *Excerpta*, a compilation of documents organized at the direction of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (r. 913–59), preserving immense amounts of work from older writers. One section of the *Excerpta*, the *De Legationibus*, 'On Embassies', preserves this part of Malchus, and also fragments of Nonnosus (see 5.18) and Menander the Guardsman (see 5.24–6).²⁹⁹

Malchus is intensely hostile to the Emperor Leo (457–74) who, along with Zeno (474–91), figures prominently in his work. Blockley notes that the criticism of Leo levelled here is reasonable, as the emperor had imprudently diminished the aura of imperial power by admitting Amorkesos to his own circle in Constantinople.³⁰⁰ While later emperors, most notably Justinian, would cultivate personal relationships with individual Arab phylarchs and permit them access to the court, Leo's actions constitute a rare event for the fifth century. Leo was clearly swayed by Peter, who successfully established the *bona fides* of Amorkesos, who was, after all, a Persian defector. The acceptance of Amorkesos underscores how deeply entrenched Christianity had become as a marker of political trust, and indeed it is difficult to imagine that Amorkesos would have been successful without the 'pretence' (an open secret, Malchus suggests) of a shared Christian bond. It also probably helped to smooth over the potential problems which could arise from the fragrant violation by both Leo and Amorkesos of the treaty between Rome and Persia from 422, which prohibited the reception of wayward allies.³⁰¹ The employment of a Christian holy man as an intermediary between an Arab leader and the Roman state reflects an important development of the fourth and fifth centuries, further examples of which are addressed in Ch. 6.

Amorkesos' control of Iotabe probably diverted considerable revenue away from the imperial treasury. This raises questions over what other pressures perhaps faced Leo and influenced his decision. The empire had very recently lost a fleet and the good part of an army in a doomed campaign against the Vandals, in 468; some of those forces may have been drawn from the fortifications of the province of Arabia, leaving Leo powerless to take any hostile action against the newcomer, and indeed only a generation afterwards would the Romans launch a campaign to recover Iotabe (see 5.2).³⁰² The Arab-Islamic tradition (see 8.29), stating that the tribe of Salih were the main Arab allies of the Romans in the fifth century, might also offer clues, for it has been suggested that Salih were either occupied elsewhere (the failed campaign against the Vandals?) or were weakened in some other way, and unable to respond to the arrival of Amorkesos.³⁰³ With no contemporary

²⁹⁹ Treadgold 2010: 80–1, for the *Excerpta*; see Treadgold 2010: 103–7 for a biographical sketch; a more detailed discussion is offered by Blockley in the translation (1981, vol. 1: 71–86 and 124–30).

³⁰⁰ Noted by Blockley in the translation (1981, vol. 1: 79).

³⁰¹ Blockley 1992: 78.

³⁰² See Fisher 2004.

³⁰³ Fisher 2004; Sartre 1982: 155; Blockley 1992: 78.

mention of Salih by Graeco-Roman authors, unless one accepts the (doubtful) association of the fifth-century convert Zokomos with this tribe (see 6.2), this must remain a hypothesis.³⁰⁴ Further compounding attempts at identifying the groups of people behind the series of events reported by Malchus, the tribe 'Nomalius' is not well known, and the name as it appears here has been emended from 'Nokalius', found in the first printed version of Malchus' work, from 1603.³⁰⁵

Arab raiding continued throughout the Near East in the fifth century. Priscus, the late fifth-century Roman historian, encountered a Roman general settling a conflict with Saracen ambassadors near Damascus, following an incursion into Roman territory.³⁰⁶ During the same period, Arab raids prompted a dramatic literary outpouring in Syriac by the poet Isaac of Antioch, who lamented that 'the son of Hagar, like a famished wolf, raids in our neighbourhood'.³⁰⁷ It seems that drought and famine, together with the opportunity provided by tensions between Rome and Persia, combined to unleash Arab raiders, whom Isaac characterized as vague and nebulous agents of destruction.³⁰⁸ At another point, the poet is more blatant about the savagery of the Arabs, 'children of Hagar, those furious wild asses', in the well-known account of the sack of Beth Ħur, near Nisibis, c.474.³⁰⁹ Isaac claims that the Arabs sacrificed to 'Uzzai (Venus/Aphrodite; see Ch. 6).³¹⁰ Notably, Evagrius, possibly discussing the same event, and using similar generic language, noted an assault carried out by 'barbarian Scenitae, laying waste everything'.³¹¹

Greg Fisher, Ariel Lewin, and Conor Whately

CONCLUSION

It will be clear from the sources discussed in this chapter that a considerable range of meanings could be understood by the Persian kings, Greek and Roman historians, explorers, lawmakers, and Roman officers who documented, categorized, and wrote about the interactions between the states and empires of antiquity and the Arabs who might be enemies, allies, objects of derision or who, like Arabia, might be confined to the ancient cabinet of curiosity. Arabia itself attracted the attention of ambitious monarchs,

³⁰⁴ See for discussion Elton 2014: 235.

³⁰⁵ Elton 2014: 243. See too on Amorkesos Isaac 2000: 247; Mayerson 1992; Fisher 2011a: 40; Fisher forthcoming; Shahid 1989b: 61, who connects Amorkesos with Ghassān.

³⁰⁶ Priscus, fr. 26; see Elton 2014: 237.

³⁰⁷ Isaac of Antioch, 14.105/p.250 (trans. after Bickell).

³⁰⁸ Segal 1984: 106–7.

³⁰⁹ Isaac of Antioch, 11.37–95/pp. 208–10, excerpts (trans. after Bickell).

³¹⁰ See Segal 1984: 105–6; Greatrex 1998a; Klugkist 1987; Shahid 1989b: 38–9.

³¹¹ Evag. *HE* 3.2 (trans. Whitby); see too Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5996/p. 120.

including Nabonidus, Alexander the Great, Antiochus III, Augustus, and Ardashir, who occasionally sought to profit from its wealth, or enforce their authority over it. Yet even the term 'Arabia' possessed multiple definitions: a Mesopotamian Arabia for Xenophon, a tripartite Arabia of *Felix, Petraea*, and *Deserta* for Ptolemy, and the *Provincia Arabia* after AD 106. The establishment of the province, and emergence of the terms Saracen and Ṭayyāyē, to describe a certain 'sort' of Arab, added further layers of meaning to words which already defied a simple definition.

It will also be clear that while there were peoples called 'Arabs' and places called 'rb or 'Arabia' in the Fertile Crescent in the periods covered in this chapter, there is a considerable bias in the origin of our sources, and we know relatively little about 'Arabs' from their own records. This is because, with the notable exception of Syriac, no literature has survived from these societies, and we are dependent on the inscriptions and graffiti they have left us and a handful of documents which have been found.³¹² Yet even these relatively meagre records show that these peoples lived in a number of different types of society, and led a range of different ways of life. This fact offers, from a different angle, another perspective on the multiplicity of meanings for 'Arab' and 'Arabia', and also demonstrates that the common assumption that the term 'Arab' in our ancient sources automatically means 'nomad' is as much of a fallacy in regard to antiquity as it would be today.

Finally, a theme of fundamental importance, traced throughout the latter half of this chapter, should be noted. With the successful displacement of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty by the Sasanians, the progressive demise of Rome's Near Eastern clients, and the endorsement of Christianity by Constantine, Arabs began to play a higher-profile role as one of the many frontier peoples whose political and religious neutrality was increasingly compromised by the escalating tensions between Rome and Persia. The role of Arabs in the sixth-century conflict between the two late antique superpowers, and the increasingly vital role played by Christianity, are the subjects of Chapters 5 and 6.

Greg Fisher and Michael C. A. Macdonald

³¹² For the latter see the Nabataean papyri in Yadin et al. 2002: 169–276, and the Syriac parchments in Healey 2009: 252–75, nos 62–3.

Arabs and Empires before Islam

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