ARABS, ARABIAS, AND ARABIC BEFORE LATE ANTIQUITY

I. Arabs in Antiquity

The need for imprecision

Human beings usually feel part of a number of overlapping communities, and other people classify them by their membership of these, and possibly other groups. Membership of such communities is identified by criteria which are usually of different types and different degrees of precision. Even today, it is extremely difficult to answer precisely the questions « on what basis does someone identify him/herself as "an Arab" ? » or « what do we mean when we call someone "an Arab" ? » It is, perhaps, better to accept that, like all such labels, this one *needs* to be ill-defined in order to serve the purposes for which it is used. When clear-cut definitions are required – as for instance in the establishment of legal nationality – precise and restrictive criteria are adopted. But we are all aware of the problems this can cause in individual cases, since human beings seldom fit comfortably into the tight legalistic categories by which bureaucracies would like to define them. For general purposes, most of us use expressions such as « the Arab World », « Arab », « the Arabs », « Arab culture », etc, in both speech and writing with an imprecision which is necessary if we are ever to get past the stage of defining our terms.

Imprecision in thinking and in use of language are characteristic of the way such labels are used at all periods, and I would suggest that we should not necessarily expect to find an obvious, or identifiable, characteristic linking *all* those people and peoples who were called « Arab » in antiquity, any more than we can identify such a characteristic in the way the term is used today. It is also probable, that, at different times and in different places, people may have used the term « Arab » of *different* groups based on different criteria. In most cases, we have no way of knowing what these criteria were, since, before the sixth century AD, few first-hand records have survived from the peoples so described, and the references by others often lack detail.

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Moreover, in some of our sources the term may be used as a metaphor, or a *topos*, and such usages may often have been independent of the author's personal knowledge and/or experience of people called « Arabs ». One can see a parallel case in the references to, and « descriptions » of, Jews in English literature between the fourteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, when there were no Jews in England [1].

On the other hand, an author may use the term « Arab » of only one of a variety of groups or types of people to which he knows the term could apply. Indeed, the author may not know, or not care, that by using it of one among many, varied, groups called « Arabs », he is implying a reference to them all. It is therefore important to recognise that such usages reflect only the extent of the author's knowledge, ignorance, or intention – or are relevant only to the point he was making. Very often, they tell us more about the author and *his* culture than about his knowledge of the people he labels « Arabs », let alone about the « Arabs » themselves. For example, in nineteenth century Britain, the terms « City Arab » and « Street Arab » were applied to homeless British children living on the streets of British cities, because they were seen to be wanderers of no fixed abode who were given to stealing – as the urban British assumed the Bedouin to be [2]. Such a metaphor tells us something about early nineteenth century British perceptions, but very little about the nature, way-of-life, and self-perception of nineteenth century Bedouin, let alone urban « city » Arabs, at the very moment of

1. Edward I expelled the Jews from England and Wales in 1290 and there were no Jewish communities in these countries until the mid-seventeenth century when a number of Marano families settled secretly in London. Following a proposal from leaders of the Sephardic community in the Low Countries, and a heated pamphleteering debate, Oliver Cromwell made it clear in December 1655 that the ban on Jews settling in England and Wales would no longer be enforced, and that those who settled in these countries would be allowed to practice their religion openly, if discreetly. There were apparently no Jewish communities in Ireland before the seventeenth century, or in Scotland before the eighteenth.

2. The first written occurrence of the term « City Arab » is from 1848. The term began as « The Arab of the City », almost immediately became « City Arab », and later changed to « Street Arab » (*Oxford English Dictionary s.v.* Arab.3). On 9th June 1848, Lord Shaftesbury (in the second recorded usage of the term) said in Parliament that « City Arabs ... are like tribes of lawless freebooters, bound by no obligations, and utterly ignorant or utterly regardless of social duties ». This metaphorical use of the phrase « City Arab » was accepted despite the fact that, by this period, educated Britons had long known of the civilized life of the inhabitants of Arab cities through travel writers, Orientalist painters, and the *Arabian Nights*, the last of which had been a staple of children's reading since the early eighteenth century (Irwin 1995, p. 19-20).

the « Arab Awakening » [3]. There are surely parallels here with Cicero's use of the word *Arabarches* as a disparaging reference to Pompey, in a letter to Atticus [4].

I would suggest that this is how we should regard much of the « ethnographic » description of « the Arabs » in the Assyrian Annals [5] or Classical writers like Diodorus and Strabo [6], or references to « Arabs » by the Hebrew prophets [7]. They tell us something about the self-perceptions of their authors and their societies – expressed by contrast with the « other » : sedentary *vs*. nomad, civilization *vs*. barbarism, the rule of law *vs*. lawlessness, etc., in positive [8] as well as negative terms – but they cannot be taken as representing the totality of their authors'

3. This is the title of the famous book by George Antonius (1938) charting the rise of the Arab national movement. It begins with the sentence, « The story of the Arab national movement opens in Syria in 1847, with the foundation in Bairut of a modest literary society under American patronage ». Coincidentally, this was a year before the first written occurrence in English of the term « The Arab of the City », which no doubt would have had very different connotations for those who founded the literary society in Beirut.

4. *Ad Atticum* II. 17. 3 (written shortly after 36 BC). In the same letter, Cicero had already twice referred to Pompey as *Sampsiceramus*, the name of the leader of the *Emesenoi* and ruler of the town of Arethusa (modern Restan) at the time of Pompey's conquest of Syria in 64/63 BC. This tribe appears to have been nomadic in central Syria at the beginning of the first century BC and parts of it may still have been so at the time of Cicero, or it may have recently founded, or settled in, the town of Emesa (modern Ḥimṣ), to which it seems to have given its name (see the very useful discussion in Sartre 2001, p. 382-383, and references there). The use of the name *Sampsiceramus* and the title *Arabarches* as coded references to Pompey, can only refer to his conquest of Syria in 64/63 BC, and it is interesting to note that for Cicero and Atticus the most characteristic feature of Syria at the time was the (presumably extensive) presence of Arabs. They are, of course, displaying the arrogant disdain of the elite metropolitan for the provincial, and possibly the age-old contempt of the city-dweller for the nomad, and of the imperial power for the 'native', whether inside or outside the empire. It is in this that the nineteenth-century British use of the term « Arab » is similar to Cicero's.

5. See, for instance, Zaccagnini 1982, especially p. 410-411, and Malbran-Labat 1980. Note also her quotation from Pierre Briant on ancient Greek attitudes to nomads « le qualificatif "désert", chez les Anciens, ne peut donc être compris dans un sens géographique strict ; il est déjà chargé d'une valeur interprétative ... qui, elle-même, n'est pas neutre » (quoted in Malbran-Labat 1980, p. 12, n. 2).

6. See Macdonald 2009, V, p. 21-30 [= 2001, p. 255-266].

7. For instance, Isaiah's « Never again will the Arab pitch his tent there » (13:20), or Jeremiah's « You waited by the roadside for them like an Arab in the desert » (3:2).

8. For instance, in Diodorus' descriptions of the Nabataean Arabs' love of liberty (XIX. 94. 2-4 ; 96. 3-5), on which see Macdonald 2009, V, p. 30 [= 2001, p. 266].

knowledge or experience of Arabs, let alone as an objective description of *all* Arabs at the time [9].

Today, we employ varying degrees of precision in the labels we use to refer to peoples ; and there is no reason to suspect that ancient writers were any different in this respect. If we look at the way Palestinians are referred to in Israel and the West, we surely have an interesting comparison with the way Josephus and other Classical writers referred to the Nabataeans. The Palestinians consider themselves to be Arabs and are so regarded by non-Palestinians. They are often referred to more or less indiscriminately in Israeli and western writings as « Palestinians » or « Arabs », the former being used either to distinguish them from other groups called Arabs, or simply as a matter of choice on the part of a speaker or writer. Similarly, Josephus sometimes refers to the Nabataeans by their specific political name and sometimes by the generic « Arabs »/« Arabians », usually without making any clear distinction between the two [10]. However, as with the Palestinians, the distinction must surely have been between, on the one hand, a political entity (the kingdom of *Nbṭw* with its subjects, the Nabataeans), and on the other, an ethnic group (Arabs), however defined, to which the king and the majority of his subjects belonged.

Who were called Arabs in Antiquity?

In the ancient sources which have come down to us, the term « Arab » was applied to a large number of different individuals and peoples with a wide range of ways-of-life [11]. At various times before the second century AD, Arabs are found in :

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9. Compare Tidrick's excellent account of the growth of European knowledge of the Arabs, and the diverse uses to which the concept of the « Arab » was put, in seventeenth- to early twentieth-century Europe (1981, p. 5-53). To take just one example, Laurent d'Arvieux (1635-1702), who spoke fluent Arabic and was the first European traveller to live with the Bedouin, gave a very rosy picture of Bedouin life in his *Voyage en Palestine*, and « could not resist comparing the manly Arabs of Mount Carmel with the mincing fops of Paris : he was probably the first European traveller to perceive the Bedouin as offering an instructive contrast to the artificialities of civilized life » (Tidrick 1981, p. 9-10).

10. Jan Retsö's attempt to find a meaningful distinction, rests on his belief that the « Arabs » and the « Nabataeans » represented two « *ordines* or estates » within the Nabataean kingdom (1999, p. 118) and that « "Arabs" was the designation of the army » (2003, p. 378). Though he argues the case for this ingenious solution with his usual enormous scholarship, I have to admit that I remain unconvinced.

11. It will be clear that the references in the notes which follow are not intended to be exhaustive. Each occurrence could be discussed in detail, as most of them have been in Retsö 2003 (though, I do not agree with his conclusions in some cases, nor with his general thesis). My purpose here is simply to give an idea of the many different areas which Arabs were said to inhabit in antiquity, and the range of different ways-of-life and professions they followed.

– eastern Egypt, the Fayoum and the Delta [12], Sinai [13],
– southern Palestine [14], Samaria [15],
– northern Transjordan [16], southern Transjordan [17],
– the southern parts of the Lebanon, the Beqaʿ Valley and the Anti-Lebanon [18],
– Mount Hermon [19],

12. Herodotus II. 8, 19 ; Pliny *NH* VI. xxxiv. 177 ; Untersteiner, Calderini & Accordi 1964, p. 386-391 ; Boswinkel 1983 ; Abd-El-Ghany 1989 ; Honigman 2002, p. 56ff. It is interesting that, at least in the Julio-Claudian period, the *Arabes* in Egypt « paid the capitation tax at the highest level and they were registered for tax purposes together with the other peasants of Philadephia, for the village was their *idia* [‘place of origin’, MCAM] » (Hanson 1992, p. 137). It would appear that these « Arabs » were certainly peasants and were considered by the Ptolemaic and Roman authorities to be part of the native population, though they were still distinguished from their Egyptian neighbours by the label *Arabes*. The fact that *Arabes* (like *Ioudaioi*) are still distinguished, and distinguish themselves, in the Roman period suggests that (as with the Jews), both the state and the *Arabes* themselves were aware that they formed a distinctive community within whatever section of the Egyptian population they were living. Hanson’s arguments (following Schwarz) for anti-Semitism (directed at both Jews and Arabs) in Roman Egypt (1992, p. 138-140) do not, surely, explain the instances of self-identifications as Ἄραψ, see below.

13. See the discussion in Eph‘al 1982, p. 107-108, 206-210 ; Plutarch *Mark Antony* §69.4 ([Nabataean] Arabs burn Cleopatra’s ships on the Suez isthmus) ; Briant 1996, p. 236-237 ; and Macdonald 2009, V, p. 8 [= 2001, p. 239-240].

14. See for instance the discussion in Eph‘al 1982, p. 206-210 ; and Macdonald 2009, V, p. 8-10 [= 2001, p. 239-241].

15. See Eph‘al 1982, p. 105-108.

16. Polybius *Histories* V. 71. 1-4 ; Macdonald 2003a, p. 314.

17. See for instance Briant 1996, p. 237-238, and references there ; Macdonald 2003a, p. 316-317.

18. For the Anti-Lebanon and the Beqaʿ, see letters from some of Sargon II’s officials (Parpola 1987, nos 173, 175, 177-179), and discussion in Eph‘al 1982, p. 94-100 ; Fales 1989, p. 124-126. For the Lebanon, the Beqaʿ Valley and the Anti-Lebanon see Quintus Curtius Rufus IV. 3. 1 ; Strabo XVI. 2. 18 (based on Eratosthenes) ; and discussion in Macdonald 2003a, p. 313-314 ; 2009, V, p. 10-11 [= 2001, p. 242-243].

19. See for instance Macdonald 2003a, p. 313.

– northern [20], central [21] and southern Syria [22],
– the Jezīrah [23],
– northern [24], central [25], southern [26] Mesopotamia,
– western Iran [27]

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20. See, for instance, Dio Cassius 68. 21. 1 referring to Mannus, ruler of the part of Arabia neighbouring Edessa**.** Pliny VI. xxxii. 142 places the north-western corner of « Arabia » on the slope down from Mount Amanus [in the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean] in the direction of Cilicia and Commagene. See also Macdonald 2003a, p. 315-316.

21. See for instance Macdonald 2003a, p. 314-315.

22. See for instance Macdonald 2009, V, p. 18 [= 2001, p. 251].

23. For instance, letters from some of Sargon II's officials (Parpola 1987, nos 82, 84), see the discussion in Fales 1989, p. 123-124, 126. See also Pliny (*NH* VI. xx. 85 « From this point [where the Euphrates emerges from the Taurus] it [the Euphrates] forms the frontier between, on the left, the district of Arabia called the country of the Orroei, and on the right, Commagene ...». Thus in the north of the Jezīra around Edessa (Latin *Orr(o)ei*). « Right » and « left » refer to a map with south at the top, as was common in antiquity until Ptolemy stated that the north should be at the top (II.1.4).

24. See for instance, Dio Cassius 75. 31. 1. « next he came to Arabia and began operations against the people of Hatra ». See also Macdonald 2003a, p. 315-316 ; 2009, V, p. 14-15 [= 2001, p. 246-248].

25. See for instance Macdonald 2003a, p. 316 ; 2009, V, p. 15 [= 2001, p. 248].

26. See for instance Macdonald 2009, V, p. 15 [= 2001, p. 248].

27. In the description of Sargon II's campaign against the Medes in his ninth year, Uiadaue, Bustis, Agazi, Ambanda and Dananu are said to be « far-off territories on the confines of the land of the Arabs, where the sun is rising » (Lie 1929, p. 30-31 §187-188). This has generally been explained as referring to nomads in general, rather than Arabs in particular (see Streck 1900, p. 353-354, who also discusses other theories, followed by Eph'al 1982, p. 7-8 who calls them « nomads in Media who had no ethnic connection with the nomads of the Syrian desert and were probably not even Semites »). Fuchs has traced the progress of this campaign and locates the places mentioned as being south-east of Ḫarḫar and east of Ellipi (1994, p. 445, §5), that is in the region of Luristan in the angle of the Karkheh and Dez rivers. If the places named in the Annals are in Luristan, the land of the Arabs would have been on its western edge and thus in the area roughly between modern Baghdad and the Kabīr Kūh mountains west of the Karkheh. It is worth noting that, in his description of Alexander the Great's march south through Mesopotamia, Quintus Curtius Rufus says that Alexander passed Arabia on his left, which would place it east of the Tigris (*History of Alexander the Great* V. 1. 11). « Left » in this passage has generally been interpreted as an error for « right » (i.e. between the Tigris and Euphrates), but, if correct, « left » would place this Arabia in Adiabene, between the Greater and the Lesser Zab rivers, north of the area in which I have suggested

– and central Iran [28],

– northern Arabia [29] and the eastern [30] and western [31] coasts of the Peninsula, including the Kamaran islands off the west coast of Yemen [32].

The term is applied to :

– prosperous merchants [33],

Sargon's Arabs would have lived, and in a region which was known to contain Arabs in later periods (see RETSÖ 2003, p. 266, 413-414).

28. According to Quintus Curtius Rufus, Alexander the Great sent Polydamas from his camp in Drangiana, on the northern edge of Seistan (on the borders of modern Iran and Afghanistan), across the Great Salt Desert to Ecbatana in Media bearing orders to kill Parmenion (*History of Alexander the Great* VI. vi. 36-VI. vii. 1). Polydamas was ordered to travel as swiftly as possible in order to reach Media before the news that the plot to assassinate Alexander had been foiled (*ibid*. VII. ii. 16). Before leaving, Polydamas « put off the dress he was wearing and put on an Arab costume [*deposita veste habebat Arabica induitur*]. Two Arabs, whose wives and children were meanwhile as a pledge of loyalty held as hostages with the king, were given him as companions. They arrived at the designated place on the eleventh day, traversing on camels places which were made desert by dryness. And before his arrival could be reported, Polydamas again assumed Macedonian dress… » (*ibid*. VII. ii. 17-19, Loeb translation). No explanation is given as to why this disguise was necessary, or as to why Arab dress was an appropriate concealment in the Great Salt Desert of Iran. Nor is it explained how Alexander came to have two Arab families to hand, nor why Arabs should be suitable companions (and, one assumes, guides) in the Iranian desert. The simplest explanation would surely be that people identified as « Arabs » inhabited this desert and the area near Alexander's camp, and that Polydamas donned Arab dress so that news of his journey would not reach Parmenion before him. If this is the case, then there were people identified as « Arabs » (at least by Curtius, or his source) in this part of Iran in the fourth century BC. What, alas, we cannot know is what Curtius (or his source) meant by « Arab » in this context : he may have used it simply as a picturesque synonym for « nomad » (as suggested by, for instance, BRIANT 1996, p. 373), or he may have been confused by reports of a river « Arabis » in Drangiana (see Ptolemy VI. 19. 2, if this is the correct reading and interpretation, see ZIEGLER 1998, p. 228, 6. 19. 2, n. 1), or he may have meant it as a genuine ethnicon.

29. See for instance EPH'AL 1982 *passim* ; MACDONALD 2009, V, p. 18-19 [= 2001, p. 251-252], etc.

30. See for instance MACDONALD 2009, V, p. 11-13, [= 2001, p. 244-246].

31. See for instance MACDONALD 2009, V, p. 4, 13-14, 17-18 [= 2001, p. 236, 246, 249-252].

32. Hecataeus of Miletus (late sixth/early fifth century BC) in JACOBY 1923, p. 36, Fragment 271.

33. See for instance MACDONALD 2009, V, p. 3, 8, 23 [= 2001, p. 235, 239-240, 257].

– tax-collectors [34],
– a barber [35],
– a bird-augurer [36],
– peasant farmers and small landowners [37],
– market gardeners [38],
– a seller of baskets [39],
– brigands [40],
– a gymnasiarch [41],
– founders or restorers of towns and cities [42],
– city-dwellers [43] and rulers of cities [44],
– kings with large numbers of chariots [45],

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34. See Lesquier 1917, especially p. 100-102 ; but also Abd-El-Ghany 1989, p. 236-239 ; and Hanson 1992, p. 138, n. 25.

35. See no. **(10)** in the list of those who identified themselves as « Arabs », below.

36. See no. **(15)** below.

37. See, for instance, the γεωργός (no. (5) of the list of self-identifications below), and *P.Grenf*. I 33. *recto* lines 6-29, 30-32, or *P.Tebt*. III.2. 848 fr. 4 col. ix lines 111, 113, 121 and the introduction on p. 44. For « Arab » farmers outside Egypt see Macdonald 2003a, p. 314 ; 2009, V, p. 10-11 [= 2001, p. 242-244].

38. See nos **(11)** and **(12)** below.

39. *P.L.Bat*. XX. 54/3-4 (see Pestman 1980, p. 203-204) : the writer has been reimbursed for what he had paid to Φυήρει τῶι Ἄραβι for an unspecified number of καρτάλλους (baskets with pointed bases). For the reading of the name, see Pestman 1980, p. 204, n. 2. Naturally, Phuēris's activities need not have been confined to selling baskets, but this is the only one of them for which a record survives.

40. See, for instance, Strabo XVI.1.26 ; XVI.2.18 ; Macdonald 2003a, p. 314.

41. No (1) in the list of self-identifications below.

42. See, for instance, « Spaosines son of Sagdodonacus, king of the neighbouring Arabs », who restored the city of Charax, at the head of the Persian Gulf, and renamed it after himself, and « constructed embankments for the protection of the town, and raised the level of the adjacent ground over a space of six miles in length and a little less in breadth » (Pliny *NH* VI. xxxi. 139). Pliny also says that Heliopolis « not far from Memphis, had Arab founders » (*NH* VI. xxxiv. 177).

43. See, for instance, Macdonald 2009, V 11 and n. 63, 20 [= 2001, p. 243 and n. 63, 254].

44. See, for instance, Strabo XVI. 2. 11.

45. See, for instance, Macdonald 2003a, p. 315-316 ; 2009, V, p. 4-15 [= 2001, p. 246-248].

– guards, policemen, soldiers and paramilitaries [46],
– breeders of sheep and owners of flocks of sheep and herds of goats [47],
– and camel-breeding nomads [48].

Who called themselves Arabs in Antiquity ?

From the ninth century BC, when we first find the term [49], up to, and including, the pre-Islamic poetry and prose of the sixth-seventh centuries AD [50], instances of individuals identifying *themselves* as « Arabs » are relatively infrequent, and in none of these is it clear what this label meant to the person concerned. I have so far found some sixteen instances in which it would seem safe to take it as a *self*-identification, with an almost equal number about which there are uncertainties ; and there are no doubt others which I have missed. All but three of these are from Egypt [51]. At this point, I am not concerned with what exactly was meant by the

46. Abd-El-Ghany 1989, p. 239 ; Honigman 2002, p. 61-67.

47. Honigman 2002, p. 58, 61. Hanson notes that « Some of the *Arabes* mentioned in the Zenon archive performed guard duties ... The *Arabes* associated with Philadelphia [at the north-east corner of the Fayum] in the days of Zenon, however, were more often concerned with flocks of sheep and goats ... and the same business interests may have occupied the Julio-Claudian *Arabes* of Philadelphia » (1992, p. 137-138). Some of these were shepherds (e.g. [Ἀπολ]λώνιος Δημητρίου Ἄραψ ποιμὴν in *SB* III. 6759/17, of 247/246 BC ; and perhaps *P.Mic*h. I. 67/17-19, of *c*. 242 BC), others seem to have been the owners of flocks since their names appear in the tax records, as does that of a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος) named Ἰσάκ. He « trafficked in sheep and goats, their hides, and their fleece, and he may have been the owner of the flocks ; he was not a shepherd.... » (Hanson 1992, p. 138).

48. See, for instance, Macdonald 2003a, p. 315-318 ; 2009, V, p. 17-19 and n. 110 [= 2001, p. 249-253 and n. 108].

49. The earliest reference is in the Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser III from Kurkh, which mentions that Gindibu the Arab (^{m}*gi-in-di-bu-*' ^{kur}*ar-ba-a-a*) brought 1000 camels to the battle of Qarqar in northern Syria, in 853 BC. For a discussion and references see Eph'al 1982, p. 75-77.

50. There are only rare occasions in the poetry when *'arab* (and its derivatives) seems to have an ethnic sense, see for instance Zwettler 1978, p. 162-163. But it is found much more frequently in pre-Islamic prose, and particularly in the *Ayyām al-'arab*, see the list in von Grunebaum 1963, p. 21-22. However, see Retsö 2003, p. 102, n. 34, on this point. In these pre-Islamic works, the term does not seem to be used specifically as an individual self-identification, but rather as the name of the group to which, by implication, the « speaker » belongs.

51. On one level, this is the result of the ready availability of papyrus in Egypt in antiquity and a widespread bureaucracy and legal system in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, combined with the extraordinary preservation of perishable materials there, a combination of conditions which are not found in the Near East.

term but merely with the fact of self-identification as « Arabs ». I list the instances I have been able to find, as far as possible in chronological order.

(1) Ἀνουβίων, a gymnasiarch, who appears to identify himself as Ἄραψ in the inscription on the wooden label attached to the mummy of his wife, Θαῆσις. It is undated, but is thought to be from the Ptolemaic period [52].

(2) Ὀλύμπιχος Ἄραψ, a graffito on a wall in the tombs of the Pharaohs at Thebes, thought to be from the Ptolemaic period [53].

(3) Δημήτριος and **(4)** Πετεχῶν, dekatarchs of the Arabs in Philadelpheia (in the Arsinoïte *nome*, in the north-east of the Fayoum), in a letter to Ἀπολλώνιος, the διοικητής asking for permission for the Arabs to have a chief (ἐπιστάτης) of their own. It is undated, but is thought to be from the mid-third century BC [54].

(5) Πετεμοῦς son of Ἀρμιύσις, who is described as Ἄραψ and γεωργός « a farmer, husbandman » in an abstract of contracts (εἰρόμενον) [55] dated 223/222 BC [56]. Since the abstract is of a contract in which Πετεμοῦς is one of the principals, it seems reasonable to assume that Ἄραψ here is a self-description [57].

On the other hand, this discrepancy distorts the historical record to such an extent that it is impossible to decide whether there is in fact any historical significance in this apparent imbalance.

52. *SB* I 3460 (= Breccia 1911, p. 229 and Pl. LVIII, no. 512) : (1) Θαῆσις γυνή (2) Ἀνουβίωνος (3) γυμνασιάρχου (4) Ἀράβου. However, note that Liesker & Tromp suggest that Ἀράβου here might be a patronym (1986, p. 89, n. 1), as it must be, for instance, in P.Tebt. III.2 1009/2.

53. Baillet 1926, p. 108, no. 486. Note that no. 487 is by someone who also gives only his name and his « ethnicon », Γλαυκίας Θρᾷξ. On the use of Θρᾷξ as a « real » (as opposed to a « pseudo- » or « fictitious ») ethnicon, see Goudriaan 1992, p. 77-79.

54. *PSI*. V. 538: (1) ... Δημήτριος καὶ Πετεχῶν δεκαδάρχαι τῶν (2) ἐμ Φιλαδελφείαι Ἀράβων. Δεόμ(εθ)ά σου ἐπιστάτην ἡμῖν δοῦναι· οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν· (3) ἢ Σώστρατον ἢ Μάρωνα. εἰσὶν δέ τινες ἐν τοῖς παρ' ἡμῖν Ἄραψιν πρεσ- (4) βύτεροι, οἳ δύνανται τὰς χρείας ἡμῖν παρέχεσθαι. Interestingly, the men they ask for as their ἐπιστάτης are not Arabs but are Sostratos, the brother of the nomarch, and Maron, the sub-manager of estate on which Zenon was employed. See Rostovtzeff 1922, p. 114.

55. *P.Tebt*. III.1. 815, fragment 2, *recto,* coll ii : (1) ἐμίσθωσεν Ἀριστίων Κυρηναῖος δεκανικὸς τῶν Μ̣ε̣ ..... (2) Πετεμούτι Ἁρμιύσιος Ἄραβι γεωργῶι καὶ Ταύρωι (3) Πτολεμαίου Θρ<α>ικὶ τῆς ἐπιγονῆς .... See Hunt & Smyly 1933, p. 277-280 on the nature of this document, and page 283 on fragment 2.

56. So Liesker & Tromp 1086, p. 87 and 88. However, Hunt & Smyly (1933, p. 277) date it to 228-221 BC.

57. The other person mentioned with Πετεμοῦς is described as Θρᾷξ τῆς ἐπιγονῆς (on this expression, see the next note).

(6) Πόρτεις son of Πετενῦρις, Ἄραψ τῆς ἐπιγο[νῆς] [58] ; **(7)** Ταπιῶμις, Ἀράβισσα, daughter of Πόρτεις [59] ; **(8)** Θάσεις [60] [Ἀράβ]ισσα ; **(9)** Πτολεμαῖος [Ἄρα]ψ τῆς ἐπιγονῆς guardian (κυρίος) of Θάσεις ; all in a contract for the repayment of a loan, dated to 222 BC [61]. Again, since this is a contract in which Πόρτεις, with Θάσεις and Ταπιῶμις through their guardians, are principals, it seems reasonable to interpret the terms Ἄραψ τῆς ἐπιγονῆς and Ἀράβισσα here as self-descriptions.

(10) Παράτης, a barber (κουρεύς) in Ptolemaic Egypt, who describes himself as Ἄραψ in a claim for fees dated to 221 BC. Since the claim is framed in the first person singular, it would seem that this is a self-designation [62].

(11) Ασωπεύς son of Ὧρος and **(12)** Στοτοήτις son of Πεχ[ο]ῦς both « Arabs » [63], who were among three tenants leasing a plot of horticultural land, in a contract from the southern Fayoum, dated to 154 BC [64]. Since they are among the contracting parties, it seems safe to assume that Ἄραψ is a self-designation.

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58. For a recent contribution to the long-standing debate on the significance of the description « ethnic designation + τῆς ἐπιγονῆς » (Arab, Macedonian, Thracian, etc. « of the offspring/descent ») see Láda 1997.

59. Note that the description « ethnic designation + τῆς ἐπιγονῆς » seems never to be applied to women (see Láda 1997, p. 566).

60. The name is lost in line 11 but is restored on the basis of its occurrence in line 19. La'da excludes this example from his count of women bearing the ethnicon Arabissa because « a number of other known ethnic designations, e.g. Θράισσα and Πτολεμάισσα, also fit the surviving dative ending. Secondly, the ethnic designation of the κύριος of the individual designated as [Ἀραβ]ίσσα is also uncertain ([...]ς τῆς ἐπιγονῆς), which makes this supplement even less likely » (2002a, p. 186, though note that Θάσεις is included in La'da 2002b, p. 24, no. E193, albeit with a question mark). On the other hand, it may be noted that all the other people involved in this transaction are described either as Ἄραψ τῆς ἐπιγονῆς or Ἀραβίσσα.

61. *SB* XVIII 14013 and Liesker & Tromp 1986, p. 82-85 : (8) [Ὁμολογοῦσιν Πόρτε]ις Πετενύριος Ἄραψ τῆς ἐπιγο (9) [νῆς καὶ Ταπιῶμις] Πόρτειτος Ἀράβισσα μετὰ κυρίο᾽υ΄(10) [..... τοῦ Πετεν]ῦριος Ἄραβος τῆς ἐπιγονῆς (11) [Θασεῖτι .... Ἀραβ]ίσσηι μετὰ κυρίου Πτολεμαίο᾽υ΄ (12) [τοῦ ..... Ἄραβο]ς τῆς ἐπιγονῆς ἀποδώσ̣ε̣ι̣[ν].... Note that the name and half the patronym of the κυρίος of Tapiômis are lost (line 10), but that the description Ἄραψ τῆς ἐπιγονῆς is intact. The patronym has been restored as [Πετέν]ῦριος in both *SB* XVIII 14013 and Liesker & Tromp 1986, p. 83, 84, and, if this is correct, the κυρίος would be either an uncle of Tapiômis (as suggested by Liesker & Tromp 1986, p. 84) or her father. Given the latter possibility, I have not included this κυρίος in the list, to avoid the risk of double counting.

62. *P.Enteux* 47, *verso* : (2) Παράτης Ἄραψ κουρεύς, (3) πρ(ὸς) Μάλιχον περὶ μισθοῦ.

63. τοῖς δυσὶν Ἄρα[ψιν].

64. *SB* III 7188/5 : [....]αλωνιος Πέρσηι τῆς ἐπιγονῆς καὶ Ἀσωπεῖ Ὄρου καὶ Στοτοήτει Πεχ[ο]ῦτος τοῖς δυσὶν Ἄρα[ψιν περὶ τὴν κώμην ----]. On the date see Rémondon 1953, p. 124, n. 1. On the provenance see Bonneau 1993, p. 42, n. 335.

(13) Μυρουλλᾶς and **(14)** Χαλβας, Ἄραβας (*scil*. Ἄραβες), in a letter to a certain Δακούτης, dated 152 BC [65].

(15) An epitaph in Greek, from the third century AD, on the Greek island of Thasos, which was set up for his son by a certain Ῥουφε[ῖ]νος, who describes himself as Ἄραψ πόλεως Σεπτιμίας Κάνωθα, on which see below [66].

(16) A graffito in the Ḥaḍramī script at al ʿUqlah in Ḥaḍramawt (Ja 950) by (1) *ʿtybt* / *bn* / ʿ (2) *mr*^{m} / *ʿrbyn* (3) *mqtwyn*, « ʿtybt son of ʿmr^{m}, the Arab, the *mqtwy* (a lieutenant of the king in military affairs) » [67]. The text is undated but is just below the inscription of the king of Ḥaḍramawt Yd''l Byn who is dated in the 240s AD [68].

To these might be added another thirteen cases where there is, however, an element of doubt.

(17) Δράκων and **(18)** Νεχθε[μῖνις] or Νεχθε[μβῆς], [Ἄρα]βες, authors of a fragmentary letter in the Zenon archive (and thus early-mid third century BC) claiming pay (ὀψώνιον). [69] It is not certain whether these two should be included since the first half of the word Ἄραβες is restored.

(19-24) The children of a certain Ψεμμίνις [70] : **(19)** Παχνο(ῦβις ?), Ἄρ(αψ) ; **(20)** Π[άσπ]ης, Ἄρ(αψ) ; **(21)** Ψενχο(ῦβις / μῖνις), also called Ὀβράπις, Ἄρ(αψ) [71] ; **(22)**

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65. UPZ I. 72 (*P.Paris* 48) : (1) Μυρουλλᾶς καὶ Χαλβᾶς (2) Ἄραβας Δακούτει (3) τῷ ἀδελφῶι χαίρειν.... They address Dakoutis as « brother », but, as Witkowski (1911, p. 91, n. 8) points out (followed by Wilcken 1927, p. 341, commentary on line 3), if Dakoutis were really their brother it would be unnecessary for Muroullas and Chalbas to specify that they were Arabs. This point is ignored by Liesker & Tromp 1986, p. 87 (nos 7 and 13), and 88 (no. 38), who describe all three men as « brothers ». Wilcken (1927, p. 341-342) has identified the name of their town, Ποῖις / Ποΐς, with Πῶΐς τῆς αὐτῆς Ἀραβίας in the Thebaid, mentioned in a papyrus dated to AD 127/128, and so suggests that they may have come from the Ἀραβία τοῦ Μεμφίτου in eastern Egypt.

66. *IG* XII 8, 528, on which see Robert 1946. See p. 302–303 below

67. For this interpretation of this term see Robin 2006, p. 49, and 50 n. 10.

68. See Robin 1981, p. 320-321. Jamme (1963a, p. 50) mentions that *ʿrbn* – which he interprets as « the Arab » (1963b, p. 56) – occurs in a text in northern Wādī Ḥaḍramawt, but unfortunately he does not quote the inscription or even the context.

69. *PCZ* III 59425 : (1) [Ζήνωνι χαί]ρειν Δράκων καὶ Νεχθε[μβῆς / μῖνις, Ἄρα]βες. ἀξιοῦμέν σε (2) [----ἐ]πειδὴ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπεχόγ[των Ἀρά]βων τὸ ὀψώνιον.... Edgar restored the second name as Νεχθε[μβῆς], but Pestman 1981, p. 111, 372 restores Νεχθε[μῖνις] on the basis of *PCZ* IV 59744/14 and 59787/26. Liesker & Tromp (1986, p. 87, 89, n. 10) describe Νεχθε[μβῆς] / Νεχθε[μῖνις] as a « Hirt » on the basis of identifying this Δράκων and Νεχθε[μβῆς / μῖνις] with a Δράκων and Νεχθεμῖνις in *PCZ* IV 59744, though the latter are not described as « Arabs » and no other connection is apparent.

70. *P.Grenf*. I. 33/6-29.

71. Grenfell read ἧς καὶ in the *editio princeps* (1896, p. 63, line 10), but BL.I. p. 181 re-read it as ὅς καί (« also called »).

Σενχνο(ῦβις) the elder, Ἀρ(άβισσα) [72] ; **(23)** Σενχνο(ῦβις) the younger, Ἀρ(άβισσα) ; and **(24)** Ταψαΐς, Ἀρ(άβισσα). These three brothers and three sisters are mentioned in a memorandum of a contract, dated *c*. 103/102 BC, in which they agree to sell 1.25 *arourae* of corn-growing land in the lower (i.e. northern) toparchy of the Latopolite *nome* in the Thebaid, to a certain Παῆσις son of Πετεύρις, who is given no « ethnicon ». The name of each of the sellers is followed by the abbreviation αρ which has been taken to stand for Ἄρ(αψ) and Ἀρ(άβισσα) [73].

(25)-(26) Another contract in the same papyrus [74] is between Παῆσις son of Πετεύρις, who is given no 'ethnicon', and **(25)** Τάμνου[βι]ς [75] daughter of Φιλίππος, Ἀρ(άβισσα), whose guardian (κυρίος) is **(26)** Ἀρσιήσις son of Πα[τ]ώτης, Ἄρ(αψ).
Since the parties mentioned in this memorandum — i.e. nos (**19**) to (**26**) — are the principals in the contracts, one might expect that this was a self-identification. On the other hand, since their identification as « Arabs » rests on an expansion of an abbreviation which is, at present, unique to this papyrus, [76] an element of doubt must remain.

(27) Ἀπολλοφάνης Ἄραψ in a dedicatory inscription dated 79/78 BC [77]. Technically, Ἀπολλοφάνης is one of the dedicators of the inscription, however since over 250 dedicators are named, it is open to doubt whether the drafter of the text asked each one for his self-description.

(28) Κλαυδ(ίου) Ἀνικήτου Ἀραβ( ) carved on a plaster stopper for a vase, which is very roughly dated to the first century AD [78]. The problem here is that there is no way of knowing whether the abbreviation should be expanded simply to an ethnicon, Ἀράβου, or to an occupational term such as Ἀραβάρχης which probably does not carry ethnic implications.

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72. The patronym for all three women is given in line 15, and Παχνο(ῦβις?) is named as their guardian (κυρίος) in lines 15-17.

73. See Naber 1906, p. 11, WB. III p. 269, and Liesker & Tromp 1986, p. 84.

74. *P.Grenf*. I. 33 (lines 30-32) : (30) Μεχεὶρ ιβ ἀπέδοτο Τά[μνουβι]ς Φιλίππου, αρ ὡς L κ (31) μέση μελ στρογγυλοπρ εὐθ[υ]ρ΄, μετὰ κυρίου τοῦ ἑαυτῆς (32) οἰκήου Ἀρσιήσιος τοῦ Πα[τ]ώτου αρ ὡς L με εὐμεγέθης.

75. Τά[μνουβι]ς in line 30 is restored on the basis of Τάμνου[βι]ς in line 49.

76. The expansion by Boswinkel (1983, p. 28, followed by Liesker & Tromp 1986, p. 87), of the letter ᾳ to Ἄ(ραβος ?) at the end of line 2 in *PCZ* III 59394 is both highly speculative and inherently unlikely. Apollonios the author of the letter was well-known to Zenon the recipient and would hardly have needed to specify his ethnic identity to him.

77. *SB* I 4206, col. ii. line 148. For the date see Zucker 1956, p. 228**.** It is interesting that of more than 250 dedicators, Ἀπολλοφάνης and two others are the only ones who are not given a patronym. One of the others may also be distinguished simply by an 'ethnicon', if this is the correct interpretation of the bizarre Ἀπ<π>ολλόνιος Κύπρι<ο>ς (no. 225) ; the second are the anonymous Ἐγλελοχισμένοι μαχαιροφό(οι) βα(σιλικοί) (no. 239, on which see Zucker 1938, p. 32-33).

78. Milne 1905, p. 130, no. 33014.

(29) In the Namārah epitaph of AD 328, which is written in Old Arabic using the Nabataean script [79], the dead man is described as *mlk' l-'rb kl-h* which is conventionally taken to mean « king of all the Arabs ». Strictly speaking, this is not a self-description and does not describe the king himself as an « Arab ». For a convincing alternative explanation of the phrase *mlk' l-'rb kl-h*, which takes it as referring to a geographical area rather than an ethnic group, see Zwettler 1993.

What did the term « Arab » imply in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt ?

As noted above, all but nos **(15)**, **(16)** and **(29)** come from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and there has long been a debate as to what exactly the term Ἄραψ meant in Egypt at this period [80]. In an interesting recent article, Sylvie Honigman has taken as her « hypothèse de travail » the idea that prior to Alexander's conquest of Egypt, there was a tendency among both the Greeks and the Egyptians – and indeed in the ancient Near East in general – to label as « Arabs » any persons or groups exhibiting nomadic characteristics [81], that is a form of synecdoche, i.e. calling all nomads by the name of one particular nomadic group [82]. She suggests that, as a result of this, Egyptian scribes of the Hellenistic and Roman periods reversed the synecdoche [83] and saw all Arabs as « Bedouin » originating from the desert, even when they were actually settled in the Nile Valley or the Fayoum [84]. She notes that some of those called Arabs are herdsmen or guards and she suggests that, based on this, « il semble y avoir clairement superposition, dans l'esprit des auteurs des documents, entre le sens ethnique [d'Ἄραψ] et le sens

79. See most recently Bordreuil *et al*. 1997.

80. See, for instance, in the last twenty years, Boswinkel 1983, Liesker & Tromp 1986, Abd-El-Ghani 1989 and Honigman 2002, and the references there.

81. Honigman 2002, p. 56.

82. Honigman does not call it synecdoche, though that is what she appears to be suggesting.

83. Once again, Honigman does not call it synecdoche, and indeed does not seem to notice the reversal in attitude required by what she presents as a smooth transition.

84. Honigman 2002, p. 60. For instance, « en dernier ressort, ces 'Arabes' de la vallée du Nil sont perçus comme venant du désert, au moins par les scribes égyptiens » (2002, p. 60). She even seems to espouse this view herself when she writes of the family mentioned in *P.Grenf*. I. 33/6-29 (nos 18-24 above), « cette famille de Bédouins s'est sédentarisée dans la vallée du Nil » (2002, p. 60, n. 68), even though there is nothing in the papyrus to suggest that this family had ever been « Bedouins », and, on the same page, she writes that Arabs in the Fayoum could have come from upstream in the Nile valley, rather than from the desert.

professionnel » [85]. This profession she thinks was that of policemen, soldiers and guards, with special expertise in the desert [86].

While Honigman is clearly far better qualified than I to deal with the material from Egypt, and her well-documented theory is advanced with admirable caution, I have to admit that I remain to be convinced. Firstly, as I hope to have shown elsewhere [87], the ancient Near Eastern and Classical sources outside Egypt, do *not* present a uniform identification of Arabs with « warlike nomadic pastoralists ». Nor, in Egyptian documents of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods is the term applied by any means exclusively to guards, policemen or military personnel with desert expertise – the profession to which Honigman tentatively suggests the term Ἄραψ became attached from at least the third century BC [88]. We are told the occupations of several of those who describe themselves as Arabs in the papyri (or are so described by others), and we find a gymnasiarch, a barber, a herdsman (ποιμήν), a tenant farmer, market gardener, seller of baskets, etc. (see above) [89].

I would therefore suggest that the use of the term « Arab » in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt may have been as imprecise and multi-layered as I have proposed it was in the Near East. On some occasions, it may have meant a person from ἡ Ἀραβία east of the Nile, or one the « Arabian » districts [90] ; on others, an occupation [91] such as a pastoralist or a guard, and on yet others someone with a

85. Honigman 2002, p. 61.

86. « Les *Arabes* des documents d'époque romaine, et déjà d'époque lagide, sont un corps militaire opérant avant tout dans le désert » (Honigman 2002, p. 67).

87. Macdonald 2003a ; 2009, V [= 2001] ; and see above.

88. Honigman 2002, p. 70.

89. The fact that some *women* refer to themselves, or are referred to, as Ἀράβισσα is not in itself an argument against Honigman's thesis, at least if she is arguing that « Arab » became a « fictitious ethnic designation » like Ἕλλην / *wynn* and Πέρσης/ *mdy*, since, as La'da argues, the female equivalents of these « are likely to have functioned not as real ethnic designations but as familial-status terms ... i.e. they denoted the wives, daughters and possibly other female family members of men who bore the fictitious ethnic designation....» (La'da 2002a, p. 171 and n. 8).

90. See Abd-El-Ghany 1989, p. 235-236. It has even been suggested that in the early fourth century AD there was a short-lived Egyptian province named Νέα Ἀραβία (Barnes 1982, p. 151, 204-205, 211-214). However, see Rea 1983, p. 47-49, for a full discussion and possible alternatives.

91. What, at first sight, appears to be evidence that the term Ἄραψ could be used of an occupation comes from fragments 4+5 recto, col. ii, lines 207-215 of *P.Count* 49 (= *P.Sorb*. inv 557) in Clarysse & Thompson, i, 2006, p. 502. I am most grateful to Dr Dorothy Thompson for sending me a pdf of their edition of this papyrus, in advance of its publication. Most of *P.Count* 49 consists of the names of men and women listed under their occupations : carpenters, potters, porridge-sellers, perfume-sellers,

particular linguistic and/or cultural background [92]. At one period or another, it may even have come to indicate a particular tax-status, as Ἕλλην / *wynn* and Πέρσης / *mdy* did [93], though as yet we have no evidence for this.

Excursus. **Names and religion as ethnic indicators**

As is well-known, the majority of those described as Arabs in the papyri bear Egyptian or Greek names [94]. Indeed without the addition of the term « Arab », they would

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goatherds, garlic-sellers, etc. Lines 207-215 contain the names of seven men listed under the heading Ἀράβων (for the use of genitive, see Clarysse & Thompson, i, 2006, p. 493). This is followed by a list under a badly damaged heading which the editors tentatively read as [Β]αλᾳνείῳν « bathhouse managers », followed by a final list under the heading ἐπιγόνων. However, as the editors point out, the reading [Β]αλᾳνείῳν « bathhouse managers » at the head of the list between the Arabs and the *epigones* is « just possible » and « poses a problem » (2006, i, p. 508, note to line 216). If the word read as [Β]αλᾳνείῳν was instead an « ethnicon » (as with Ἀράβων), or quasi-ethnic description like ἐπιγόνων, then the « subsections » on fragments 4+5, which come at what is clearly the end of the entire list (2006, i, p. 493), might not be ordered according to occupation, as in the rest of the document, but by (quasi-) ethnic groups. It is interesting to compare this with *CPR*.XIII. 11, which is a list of the population of Ἀθηνᾶς Κώμη giving the numbers of those liable to the salt tax. The list begins with two « ethnic » groups, Greeks (a « fictitious ethnicon » [?] on which see La'da 1994, p. 186-189) and Arabs (fragment ii, lines 13 and 14 respectively), while the rest of the inhabitants are listed according to their professions (farmers, camel-drivers, oil manufacturers, etc.). If the editor's reading and expansion of the abbreviations φυ(λακίται) and θη(σαυροφύλακες) are correct, it is interesting — in view of Honigman's thesis — that policemen and guards seem to be listed separately from the Arabs. As Clarysse & Thompson show, « Arab » was, among other things, a favoured tax category in Ptolemaic Egypt, like « Hellenes » and « Persians » (2006, ii, p. 159) but this does not prevent it also being an ethnic, rather than an occupational, designation. They conclude, « since, however, as with 'Hellene', a further occupation might be added to the designation, it seems that 'Arab' remained a primarly ethnic or status, not an occupational, term. That those termed Arabs in our lists were in some sense ethnic Arabs is likely » (2006, i, p. 160).

92. As a parallel, see Goudriaan's conclusion that in Ptolemaic Egypt the only criterion by which a person was labelled Greek was « the use of the Greek language » (1988, p. 92) ; « ... language was a convenient symbol for the roles people played and the networks they moved in and language was in the Egyptian *chôra* decisive for ethnicity. To switch over from Greek to Egyptian or vice versa as one's language of preference was essentially only one symptom of a change in habits, in the social functions performed and the groupings one preferred to join ; but precisely as a symbol of this change, the adoption of another language could be interpreted by one's fellows as a change of ethnic identity » (*ibid* 93).

93. See La'da 1994, p. 188-189.

94. Boswinkel suggests that in at least some of these cases : « Es könnte denkbar sein, daß diejenigen, die ofter mit Arabern verkehrten, mit der Aussprache und erst recht mit der annähernd korrekten Schreibung der arabischen Namen große Schwierigkeiten

have been indistinguishable from other members of Egyptian society, and this is a point worth exploring.

A large proportion of names in the ancient Near East and in the societies whose religious traditions are drawn from it, have religious overtones. Modern Western views of the implications of names have been moulded by the monotheistic background of our largely secular societies. In monotheistic communities, people tend to give their children names associated with their religion, as an (often unconscious) sign of adherence to that faith [95]. This is why, of all the names used in the ancient Near East before Late Antiquity, « Jewish » names are the only ones which, in general, give a clear indication of the ethnicity of the bearer [96].

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hatten. Diese Schwierigkeiten hat man vielleicht dadurch vermieden, daß man den Arabern irgendeinen gängigen griechischen oder ägyptischen Namen gab. Ähnliche Praktiken kommen auch heute vor, wenn man mit Gastarbeitern Umgang zu pflegen hat » (1983, p. 35). While it is perhaps conceivable that Zenon or another employer might have called one of his employees by a name he found more convenient than the man's own, this hardly explains those cases where Ἄραψ / Ἀράβισσα is a self-designation. Moreover, surely the idea of a 'correct spelling' of foreign names is anachronistic. Anyway, the huge number of Greek transliterations of Semitic names throughout the Hellenistic and Roman Near East strongly suggests that Greek-speakers and writers had little difficulty in adapting Semitic names to Greek orthography.

95. Such names with religious overtones are not only theophoric compounds referring to the « One True God » or his attributes, but the names of patriarchs, prophets, saints, etc., some of whom may have borne pagan names which have become « exorcised » by their connection with the saint, etc. These are then drawn into the stock of names by which adherents of the particular monotheistic religion are recognized, e.g. Dionysus (> Denis/Dennis) in the Christian tradition, and possibly Esther (< *Ištar*?) in the Jewish.

96. I would agree with Michael Sommer when he states that in choosing a name for a child « it is ... the environment that counts ». « [I]n an environment made by various distinct and rivalling [*sic*] traditions, the different onomastic options for parents had a strong significance that went far beyond the esthetical » (2004, p. 168-169). However, he seems to have misunderstood the profoundly important difference between monotheist and polytheist (or secular) societies when he writes « Calling a child Michael, in a Western society usually does not imply any religious or cultural belonging. Calling a child Mohammed in the same milieu, however, does » (2004, p. 169). In monotheist communities which are, by their very nature exclusive and intolerant – « our God is the only God, anyone who does not believe in Him, or who believes there is another god, is damned » – naming is a way of expressing membership of the community of the « righteous » or the « saved ». Thus, Sommer is contrasting Western secular society (in which the Judaeo-Christian significance of the name « Michael » is no longer immediately apparent) with the monotheist Muslim community in which naming is treated as a visible sign of membership. This works both ways. Few outside the Muslim community would call their child « Mohammed », because the name so strongly implies a Muslim identity. However, some ex-Muslim agnostics in Western societies might well use it for particular non-religious reasons (for instance, it might have family connections as the name of the child's grandfather or paternal uncle), or they might choose other, less immediately

However, in polytheist – as in modern predominantly secular – communities there was no religious impetus to maintain exclusivity, and one obvious mark of integration into a host society was the adoption of names used in it [97]. Polytheists would not have faced the religious problems encountered by monotheists in living in a « foreign » community, since there was no reason to reject its divinities and, indeed, it was common practice to identify one's own deities loosely with those of other societies. On the other hand, naming practices can be affected by political as well as religious circumstances. A conquering community is more likely to retain the names it has brought with it (as did the Normans in England, or the Macedonians in Egypt and the Near East, though see below), whereas those non-conquering, immigrant communities which wish to assimilate may more readily adopt names common among their hosts. There are numerous variations on these patterns according to circumstances (of which in antiquity we are largely ignorant) and there are no hard and fast rules. As always, the naming of a child is an intensely personal act by individual parents and it is usually impossible for outsiders to guess at the motives for the choices they make.

Since, in the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs entered Egypt as immigrants rather than conquerors, their adoption of Egyptian or Greek (mostly theophoric) names is neither particularly surprising nor particularly significant, and unfortunately does not give us much information, one way or the other, about whether they retained their language and other aspects of the culture they, or their ancestors, had brought with them.

« Arabs » = nomadic pastoralists?

In a paper published in 1995, Michel Gawlikowski stated his belief that « le terme d'arabe, à commencer par l'assyrien *aribi* jusqu'au *ʿarab* moderne, décrit en premier lieu un mode de vie, et non l'origine ethnique ». « Il est inconcevable ... que le terme puisse se référer à un groupe défini par le critère linguistique ....» [98]. This view appears to be based on a fundamental misconception. The Arabic term *ʿarab* is indeed used as a self-description by the Bedouin, and is used of them by others, but it describes a great deal more than a way-of-life, as indeed does the

identifiable, « Muslim names » or hypocoristica of them (e.g. Aziz, Hasan, Latif, etc.). Alternatively, they might use names from the « host community » which are « cognates » or homophones of names from their inherited culture, such Josef, Sammy, etc. or Fred (*Farīd*), Camille (*Kāmil, Kamāl*), etc. This is similar to the practice assumed to be behind the use of Greek theophoric names by polytheists in the Near East and Egypt, i.e. the « translation » of names such as *Wahb-lāt* to Ἀθηνόδωρος, etc. (see for instance Sartre 1985, p. 150). Finally, they may go the whole way and adopt names which are wholly typical of the host society, such as Charlie, Harry, etc.

97. An interesting example of the contrast between monotheist and polytheist societies in antiquity comes from Ḥimyar in South Arabia. Christian Robin has pointed out that « dans un premier temps, du Ier s. av. è. chr. au IVe ap., il n'impose pas ses dieux aux peuples conquis. C'est seulement après l'adoption du monothéisme au début des années 380 que Ḥimyar renoue avec une politique religieuse dirigiste. Dès lors, le polythéisme est interdit dans l'ensemble du royaume, comme le prouve la disparition totale des inscriptions païennes » (Robin 2006, p. 48).

98. Gawlikowski 1995, p. 87 ; a view repeated in Gawlikowski 2006.

term *badw* [99]. However, from at least the Islamic conquests, when our records begin to be plentiful, to the present day, the term *ʿarab* has also been the *ethnicon* — based theoretically on genealogy, but, in day-to-day practice, recognizable by language and culture — of hundreds of millions of people who are not themselves, and whose families have never been, nomadic pastoralists. The *Jazīrat al-ʿarab* is not the « Peninsula of the nomads » but that of the Arabs, just as *lisān al-ʿarab* is the language of the Arabs — as an ethnic entity — not just that of Middle Eastern nomadic pastoralists. In antiquity, we have a very clear example in the contract (dated AD 267) for the sale of a female slave γένι Ἀράβισσαν « of Arab race » (*P.Oxy*.XLI 2951/23), in an expression which cannot possibly refer to her way-of-life.

Gawlikowski also claims that « c'est bien le mode de vie et l'organisation sociale des nomades qui les distinguaient du paysan ou citadin, quelle que soit la langue des uns et des autres » [100]. But this is another misconception. The tribal form of social organization was, and is, widespread throughout the Middle East both among nomads and among the sedentaries [101]. Indeed, many tribes have both nomadic and settled sections. The tribe as a form of social organization is not, and was not, exclusive to the nomads. Naturally, it has many and varied forms : thus, for instance, it can be based purely on (generative) genealogy [102] as with the Bedouin, or on genealogy combined with « belonging » to a particular place. In the Greek inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Syria, we find the self-identification « A son of B of the village X, of the tribe Y » [103], a marriage of tribe and geographical location which – superficially at least – is similar to that in Yemen today [104]. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the simplistic equations

« Tribe » automatically = « Nomad »,

« Arab » automatically = « Nomad », or indeed

« Nomad » automatically = « Arab »,

obscure rather than clarify our fragmentary picture of the ancient Near East [105].

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99. See, for instance, Lancaster & Lancaster 1988, particularly 54 ; and the interesting discussion in Retsö 2003, p. 1-7.

100. Gawlikowski 1995, p. 87.

101. See Lancaster & Lancaster forthcoming.

102. See Lancaster 1981, p. 24-42.

103. For instance, Wadd 2265, 2393, 2396a and b, 2431.

104. See for instance Dresch 1989, p. 276-291.

105. Macdonald 2003a, p. 308-309.

Gawlikowski's statement that « il est très peu probable que les Assyriens se souciaient de savoir quelle était la langue de cet adversaire insaisissable » [106] reveals a misunderstanding of the argument that such ethnicity was based on a complex of linguistic and cultural factors. If the Assyrians regarded Gindibu and his successors *simply* as nomads, why did they not describe them as such, using Assyrian terminology, e.g. *a-ši-bu-ut kuš-ta-ri* « tent-dwellers » or *a-ši-bu-ut mad-ba-ri* « desert-dwellers » ? In fact, of course, they did describe *some* of the Arabs, as well as other groups, in these terms [107], but it is important to note that these descriptive phrases are attached to the names of peoples, e.g. Aramaeans, Sutians and Arabs. The fact that the name « Arab » is found as a loan-word in East Semitic, West Semitic, Central Semitic and South Semitic, as well as Greek and other languages, surely means that it can only have been a *self*-description by the people to whom it is applied ? If it had simply been « la désignation du nomade dans la bouche du sédentaire » [108], then each group of sedentaries would have used a term of its own.

If, then, the term *ʿarab* can only have originated as a self-designation, what was it which linked all those who called themselves, and were called, « Arabs » throughout the Middle East and in Egypt ? I hope to have shown that it is unlikely to have originated as a description of a way-of-life, profession, or geographical location. One of the most common bases for identifying ethnicity in oneself and in others is a loose, relatively ill-defined, complex of language and culture, and it would seem to me that this is likely to have been the (irritatingly imprecise) criterion by which Arabs identified themselves and were recognized by others in antiquity, as it is today. This is not to suggest that the ethnicon « Arab » was derived from the name of the language. Almost certainly it was the other way round. But, I would argue, that it was the common language (whatever it was

106. Gawlikowski 1995, p. 88 ; 2006, p. 42.

107. See the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary s.v. kuš-ta-ru(m)* and *mad-ba-ru(m)*. It is curious that Ephʿal (1982, p. 7-11) who cites a number of examples where these expressions are applied to Arabs and other peoples (e.g. Sutians and Aramaeans) and notes that « the term "tent-dwellers" is not exclusive » to the Arabs (1982, p. 11), yet comes to the conclusion that « the term "Arab" designates a desert dweller, a Bedouin » (1982, p. 7). His argument is confused by his peculiar application of the term « nomads » « to oasis dwellers as well » (1982, p. 5). He claims that this conflation is present in the Biblical and cuneiform sources « which do not enable us to distinguish between the sedentary population and the other desert dwellers » (1982, p. 6), but this is only because he assumes that the term « Arab » means « nomad ». Yet, later in the book he refers to Arabs living in walled towns in Babylonia (1982, p. 115). As I have asked in a previous paper, « if "Arab" = "nomad", does one cease to be an "Arab" when one becomes a sedentary or moves from the desert to the sown ? » (2003a, p. 309).

108. Gawlikowski 1995, p. 87 ; see also 2006, p. 42.

called) and elements of the culture which went with it, that defined « Arabs », for themselves and for others, in antiquity, as today [109].

II. From « land of the Arabs » to « people of Arabia »

The creation of *Provincia Arabia*, in AD 106, marked a change in the use of the terms « Arab » and « Arabia », which, though no-doubt gradual, was profound and has stayed with us to the present day. Whereas, before this, *māt aribi* / *Ἀραβία* / *Arabia*. etc. was anywhere inhabited by people who (for whatever reason) were called « Arabs » ; from now on, an « Arab » was defined as an inhabitant of the administrative area known as « (Provincia) Arabia » [110]. Once this new usage became established, a new term had to be found for people who would previously have been called « Arabs », but who were not inhabitants of *Provincia Arabia*. Gradually, writers in Greek and Latin came to employ the term « Saracen » for such people, at first for nomadic Arabs [111], as opposed to the mainly settled « Arabs » of the Province, then for all those who would have been called « Arabs » before AD 106.

Why Provincia Arabia *?*

The exact processes by which the kingdom of *Nbṭw* was annexed by Rome and became *Provincia Arabia* remain mysterious and have long been debated. But one aspect is seldom discussed : why was the new province called *Arabia*, and what did the Roman administration understand by the term, and wish to imply by it ? The political unit it was replacing was the kingdom of *Nbṭw*, though Classical writers seem united in designating its population as « Arabs » ; and looking south from the capital, Bosra, the rich agricultural region in the north of the Nabataean kingdom, *Galaaditis*, was an area which had been called « Arabia » as early as the

109. *Contra* Gawlikowski 2006, who, however is, of course, perfectly correct when he states « on ignore en fait quelle langue ou langues ils parlaient » (2006, p. 42). I am not implying that all those who were called « Arabs » in antiquity necessarily spoke mutually comprehensible dialects, any more than Arabs do today, simply that they called themselves « Arabs » and recognized in each other common cultural and linguistic traits, as Arabs from, say, the Maghreb and the Levant do today.

110. As a corollary of this, whereas before AD 106 there had been many « Arabias » scattered throughout the Middle East, « Arabia » (outside Egypt) now became a specific geographical area, albeit one whose borders were periodically shifted. On the shifting borders of the Province see now Sipilä 2007.

111. See the discussion in Macdonald 2009, VIII, p. 3-5 [= 1995, p. 95-96].

third century BC [112]. It is, of course, understandable that Rome would not wish to perpetuate the political name of the kingdom whose territory it was taking over, and the names of its provinces usually reflected the « ethnicity » of the inhabitants or geographical areas, rather than earlier political entities.

However, in this case, the Nabataean kingdom was only one of a number of areas to which the name *Arabia* was applied [113]. According to Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy, much of the Province of Syria was populated by Arabs and was therefore sprinkled with numerous « Arabias » already (nominally) under Roman rule. However, by AD 106, there was one area which had come to be considered *Arabia* par excellence, and that was the Arabian Peninsula, the northern borders of which have always been geographically indefinable. Pliny makes a distinction between « Arabia » as a term for each of the numerous communities of Arabs, from Mount Amanus, at the northern end of the Syrian coast, to the Egyptian coast (*Arabia, gentium nulli postferenda amplitudine* VI.142), and *ipsa vero paeninsula Arabia* (VI.143) [114].

In his very interesting discussion of Ptolemy's « Three Arabias », Bowersock begins by reviewing « the treatment of Arabia in the century or so preceding Ptolemy in order to establish the tradition that both he and Marinus inherited » [115]. Naturally, in the context of his discussion, he assesses these earlier treatments of Arabia from the point-of-view of Ptolemy's tripartite division – *Petraea, Deserta* and *Felix*, and shows that Ptolemy's *Arabia Petraea* has no precedent in the surviving works of earlier writers. Instead, in Classical writers of the first century AD, *geographical* Arabia refers to the area which Ptolemy calls ἔρημος (*Arabia Deserta*) in the north of the Peninsula, and εὐδαίμων (*Arabia Felix*) the frankincense-producing area, in the south [116].

Whittaker makes a very convincing case for supposing that the Romans, at least under the Principate, did not think in terms of a defined, or definable, edge

112. In the anonymous source used by Polybius *Histories* V. 71. 1-4. See MACDONALD 2003a, p. 314.

113. See section I, above.

114. If Bowersock's analysis of Gaius Caesar's *expeditio Arabica* in 1 BC is correct (1971, p. 227), Pliny knew that Gaius had fought in the Nabataean kingdom, but specifies that he only had a glimpse of Arabia (*prospexit tantum Arabiam* VI/160), by which presumably he means the Peninsula (VI.160).

115. BOWERSOCK 1988, p. 48.

116. BOWERSOCK 1988, p. 48-49.

to the empire [117]. The Ocean in all directions was the only theoretical limit [118], and in practical terms Roman authority simply extended as far into barbarian lands as it could be enforced.

> [T]he unknown regions between the known center and the ideological periphery of Oceanus were perceived in terms not of territory but of power. The clearest illustration of this comes from the works ... which it is generally agreed derive from the cartographic and chorographic initiatives of Julius Caesar but above all of Augustus .... In the lists of *provinciae* contained in those works are many that were never Roman 'provinces' at all but were regions that extended to the four quarters of the ocean. ... These pseudoprovinces corresponded to areas that the Romans *claimed to control but not to organize*. In each quarter of the world we also have recorded the *gentes* [119], the barbarian periphery that ringed the *oikoumene* and "went on as far as Oceanus" – *pergentes usque ad oceanum*. But they lay *within*, not outside, the *provinciae* [120].

Obstructions with gates, like Hadrian's Wall and the *fossatum Africae*, were intended to control movements of peoples, and were not boundary markers [121], As Whittaker points out

> ... arbitrary, artificial lines had little to do with reality, let alone imperial military strategy. As long as an imperial state has neighbors, the neighbors are necessarily inferior and the state has no frontiers in our sense (1994, p. 66).

As for Arabia, he states that

> the Arabian frontier [in the east] was a true *limes*, a road for movement and not a blocking, defensive system. ... [W]e do not find in this sector anything that could be called a frontier 'system.' Here particularly we have confirmation that the eastern frontier, as it is traditionally described, from the Pontic shore to the Red Sea was in essence a line of communication and supply, *the base from which the Romans extended their control without any sense of boundaries* [122].

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117. Whittaker 1994. See particularly his chapters two and three and his detailed arguments against Luttwak's thesis in the latter.

118. Tacitus famously described the Roman empire as « hedged about by the sea of Oceanus and remote rivers » (*Annales* 1.9), see also Whittaker 1994, p. 35. Josephus, in a speech he puts into the mouth of Agrippa, gives the « whole known world » as the extent of the Roman empire, with its boundaries « on the east the Euphrates, on the north the Ister, on the south explored Libya as far as the uninhabited regions, on the west Gades » ; and not content with this, he says, « they have sought a new world beyond Ocean and carried their arms as far as the Britons, previously unknown to history » (*BJ* II. 363 [xvi. 4]).

119. On Strabo's views of the *externae gentes* see Whittaker 1994, p. 16-17.

120. Whittaker 1994, p. 14-15 (the emphases are mine).

121. See Whittaker 1994, p. 82-83, on Hadrian's Wall, and 47-49, 91-92 on Hadrian's Wall and the African *limes*.

122. Whittaker 1994, p. 59, my italics.

I would suggest that this was also true in the south of the new province. In the deserts of the Peninsula any boundary line would have been arbitrary and unenforceable before the days of aerial surveillance. Moreover, it seems clear that such an idea was foreign to Roman imperial thinking. In desert areas, it did not really matter whether the inhabitants accepted, or even knew, that Rome regarded them as her subjects [123]. If they posed no threat it was simpler and cheaper for the empire to leave them be. If they caused trouble, then a punitive raid could be mounted [124]. There had, of course, to be control of, and protection for, economically and militarily strategic points, as well as for the more easily controllable and taxable, sedentary regions such as oases, and agricultural and urban areas, which were vulnerable to « hit and run » raids. But, as Isaac has shown, such security measures were also taken *within* those provinces, such as Judaea, which were not on the edges of the empire, and I would suggest that similar measures in provinces such as Syria and Arabia were also considered as « internal » [125].

The common assumption that there was a definite southern frontier or border to *Provincia Arabia*, somewhere just south of modern Madā'in Ṣāliḥ or al-ʿUlā, is based on the *argumentum e silentio* that signs of Roman occupation have not been found in the largely unexplored areas further south and south-east. More fundamentally, however, it begs the question « what would it have been a border *with* ? » [126]. Today, when the whole world has been parcelled up into the territories of various states, it is easy to forget that this was not the case in antiquity. There would have been no point in Rome (or indeed the kingdom of *Nbṭw* before it) drawing a line in the sand somewhere south of al-ʿUlā and declaring this the

123. Whittaker gives examples of tribes in other parts of the empire which were treated as part of the empire although their lands had never been annexed (1994, p. 95-96). See also his remarks on the Roman « occupation without annexation » (Dillemann 1962, p. 197) of Mesopotamia long before it became a province under Septimius Severus : « [i]t is a good example of how indeterminate the frontier remained. and how little the Romans felt constrained by the differences between directly administered provinces and indirectly controlled territory beyond » (1994, p. 57).

124. There is a distinction between the nature of the threat posed by the nomadic pastoralists of Arabia, and those of the Germanic tribes on the eastern frontier of the European provinces. In the period of the Principate at least, the former would have attacked in search of booty, only to withdraw again. Many of the latter, by contrast, were interested in invasion and settlement.

125. See also Whittaker 1994, p. 79-81 on the *clausurae* walls in North Africa, where he states that « they were never military barriers that divided the desert from the sown but were *internal controls* on shepherds and herdsmen who traditionally traversed them » [my emphases].

126. Whittaker 1994, p. 61 quotes Lucien Febvre's statement that « mountains, rivers, and deserts, far from being barriers, "are promoted to the dignity of being a natural frontier" by victorious nations in the process of expansion and in the desire to define space ».

frontier of its territory,[127] when there was (from the Roman point-of-view) nothing — *i.e.* no recognizable state — on the other side[128]. It takes two to make a frontier. I would therefore suggest that, when Trajan claimed *Arabia adquisita* on his coins, he was referring not just to the former Nabataean kingdom but to the whole Peninsula as well. The Romans did not need close administrative control over the whole of this vast, rather vaguely perceived, and largely unexplored area. It was only necessary to protect and police access to the centres of population[129].

« Arab » as an administrative identity

The use of the term « Arab » for an inhabitant of the Province is the only one which can be defined with some precision, and it needs to be separated from earlier and later usages of the term[130]. Once the Province had been called

127. Graf has argued strongly that the southern border of *Provincia Arabia* did not lie in the Hejaz. Instead, despite a lack of any contemporary evidence, he feels that a line similar to the present Jordan-Saudi border south of Aqaba « seems a reasonably relative [*sic*] administrative border for the Roman province as well » (1990, p. 180). However, Graf does not appear to have realized that his arguments support the case not for a southern frontier in a different place, but for a lack of any real southern frontier at all. As he himself comments « it is obvious that Roman perception of the imperial borders did not necessarily coincide with the deployment of military troops on the frontier » (1990, p. 178).

128. Clearly, with a rival power such as Parthia, the *de facto* « frontier » was at some periods the « armistice line », and at others as much of the other's territory as one could claim without provoking resistance. Whittaker quotes Isaac's verdict on the eastern « frontier » that « "it simply did not matter much to the Romans where the boundary ran", since they did not see borders in terms of military defense » (Whittaker 1994, p. 66). As Whittaker points out later on, Strabo's description of the inhabitants along both sides of the Euphrates makes it clear that « the riverbanks were held by culturally identical Arab tribes, who were used by Romans and Parthians alike. The river was primarily a line of communication between north and south, not a cultural divide » (1994, p. 78).

129. As Bowersock rightly remarks « where the province [of Arabia] abutted on the desert, there is no clear line of demarcation, nor should anyone expect to find one there. In the Sinai, in the Ḥejāz, and in the great Syrian desert to the east, we can only distinguish the areas that fell within the responsibility of the governor of Arabia. It is impossible to say at just what point those responsibilities evaporated. On the other hand, this kind of imprecision in desert terrain should not be interpreted to mean that such outlying parts were not considered within the province of Arabia. The frontier at these points was an open one ....» (1983, p. 103). See also, more recently, Sipilä 2007, p. 201.

130. As discussed above, it is possible that in some cases the term « Arab » was used in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt simply to designate someone originating in the area east of the Nile known as *Arabia*, and on no other grounds, but I have not been able to find a single unequivocal instance of this.

Arabia, its inhabitants, whatever their origins and however they perceived their own identities, would have been described, and would have described themselves, in political-administrative terms as « Arabs ». Similarly, from 1901 onwards, a subject of the kingdom of Benin in West Africa would have become, in politico-administrative terms, a « Nigerian », i.e. a subject of Nigeria, which like *Provincia Arabia* was a political and administrative entity defined and named by an external imperial power [131].

An interesting contrast is supplied by the man who commissioned a Palmyrene inscription in AD 132, in which he described himself as *nbṭy'* « a Nabataean » [132]. Here, he first gives his political identity (« the Nabataean »), then his social identity (« the Rwḥite », i.e. of the tribe of Rwḥ), followed by his military identity (« who is a cavalry-man in Ḥirtā and in the camp of ʿĀnā »). The fact that this man calls himself « the Nabataean », rather than « the Arab », twenty-seven years after the kingdom of *nbṭw* was replaced as a political entity by *Provincia Arabia*, suggests that he was making a political statement about his independence from Roman rule, in a city which was itself independent of Rome. He acknowledges his Palmyrene patron (*gyr*) but states his own and his family's origins.

I would suggest that this may help explain the use of the term Ἄραψ in a third-century AD Greek inscription from the island of Thasos [133]. The author, Rufinus son of Germanus, describes himself as Ἄραψ πόλεως Σεπτιμίας Κάνωθα. While Kanōtha (Qanawat) seems to have been removed from the Province of Syria and included in the Province of Arabia some time in the Severan period, the exact date is uncertain [134]. If this change had already been made by the time the inscription was carved, the term Ἄραψ would simply indicate that Rufinus was a native of the Province of Arabia (and hence « an Arab »). It would be sensible to specify this on a far-away island where the name of his city would not be widely known. In this way, the words Ἄραψ πόλεως Σεπτιμίας Κάνωθα, would parallel those of

131. The kingdom of Benin was destroyed by a British « punitive expedition » in 1897. In 1901 its population would have become subjects of the British Protectorate of Nigeria, in 1914 of the British Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, in 1960 subjects of the Federation of Nigeria (under the British monarch), and from 1963 citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The name, of course, was not only imposed from outside but, unlike *Arabia*, was created from a language, Latin, which was entirely foreign to the inhabitants of Nigeria.

132. *CIS* II. 3973 : *'bydw br 'nmw [br] š'dlt nbṭy['] rwḥy' dy hw' prš [b]ḥyrt' wbmšryt' dy 'n' …*

133. No. **(15)** above = *IG* XII 8, 528 : Ῥουφε[ῖ]νος Γερμανοῦ οἰωνοσκόπος Ἄραψ πόλεως Σεπτιμίας Κάνωθα Γερμανῷ τῷ ὑῷ ζήσαντι ἔτη κβ΄ μνήμης χάριν. See Robert 1946.

134. See Kettenhoffen 1981, p. 69 and Sartre 1982, p. 62-64. I am most grateful to Pierre-Louis Gatier and Maurice Sartre for discussing the implications of this inscription with me. They are not, of course, responsible for (and may well not agree with) the use I have made of their help.

the author of *CIS* II 3973, discussed above, who was also far from home, and who gave his political identity followed by his tribe (*nbṭy' rwḥy'*), perhaps because the latter would not necessarily have been widely known in Palmyra. On the other hand, if Kanōtha was still in the Province of Syria when the Thasos inscription was carved, the use of the term Ἄραψ could indicate that Rufinus was a native of the neighbouring Province of Arabia, but had made his home in Kanōtha. This appears to me to be a simpler explanation than L. Robert's ingenious proposal that, since Rufinus was a bird-augurer (οἰωνοσκόπος), a profession for which Arabs were well-known, his use of the term Ἄραψ « constituait pour lui une réclame ... qui assurait à Rufinus l'empressement déférent de ces clients » [135]. I am not convinced that the tombstone of his son would have been an appropriate or effective place for advertising of this sort, whereas a reference to ancestral origins on a grave-marker in a foreign land, would seem entirely natural.

III. A complex of language and culture ?

It will be clear from the range of peoples who were called « Arabs » in antiquity and from the number of widely-separated places in which they were located, that to most ancient writers the term did not simply mean a nomadic pastoralist [136] nor, until AD 106 [137], someone from a particular geographical area [138].

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135. Robert 1946, p. 48. Robert assumes that Rufinus originated in « la population arabe de Kanôtha, et tenant de son milieu national [*sic*] et familial la connaissance de son art augural, notait fièrement sa nationalité [*sic*] : Arabe » (*ibid*.). It seems to me that part of the problem here is the anachronistic attribution of « nationality » to ancient peoples. Robert accepts Dussaud's view that « la région du Hauran, dont fait partie Kanotha, a reçu, dès une époque ancienne, un afflux constant de population arabe, en sorte que les habitants en étaient partie Araméens, partie Arabes » (*ibid.,* p. 44). On this assumed « afflux constant » see Macdonald 2003a, p. 311-312. There may well have been people in the ancient Ḥawrān who were considered (and/or thought of themselves) as « Arabs » in a non-political sense, but we know nothing about them, nor do we know whether they were recent immigrants or had been there since time immemorial. Crucially, we are entirely ignorant of how they perceived their identity. For a rather different case in which people from neighbouring provinces are said to come from « Arabia », see Hoyland forthcoming (the section entitled « The location of the monasteries of Arabia »).

136. As explained above, some writers may have used the term as a synonym for « nomad » or « guard », but this does not fit all, or even the majority, of the peoples to which it is applied.

137. The date of the creation of the Roman *Provincia Arabia*, see above. Needless to say, I am not suggesting a universal change in usage as soon as the Province came into being.

138. It is perfectly possible that once the Arabian Peninsula was defined as such, some writers may have expected all those who inhabited it to be « Arabians ». Thus, the

Thus, what was it which identified an individual or a group as 'Arab' and linked them to others who called themselves, or were referred to, by the same term ?

I would suggest that only a complex of language and culture [139] could have formed a common identification for such diverse groups of people. In the days before nation states, this must surely have been the commonest means by which members of non-tribal cultures [140], identified members of other societies. Indeed, for many people today, it is still a complex of language and culture which identifies their own « ethnicity » and that of others – albeit in a rather vague way and with inevitable exceptions [141].

A parallel from mediaeval European history may help to illustrate what I mean. At the time of the Norman invasion of England in 1066, Normandy was « French in its speech, in its culture, and in its political ideas » [142]. However, its ruling family and a significant part of its population were of relatively recent Scandinavian origin, and it was an independent duchy whose vassalage to the kings of France, though « always claimed » by the French crown, was only « sometimes recognized » by the Dukes of Normandy [143]. As Webber puts it, « they were Scandinavian enough to be separate but Frankish enough not to offend

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distinction between the non-Arab South Arabian producers of frankincense and the Arab middlemen, was blurred, and all tended to be called « Arabs » by peoples at the northern end of the trade route. It is surely for this reason that lands which produced the frankincense were called *Arabia* Felix. It is also possible that in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt the term may sometimes refer to an origin in the eastern part of the country which was called ἡ Ἀραβία.

139. I leave this term undefined on purpose. Today, « Arab culture » (like any other) is fundamentally indefinable in any strict sense which does not produce a host of exceptions. I suspect that this may well have been so in antiquity, but whether or not I am correct in this, we have virtually no clue as to what it was like because we have so little evidence from the Arabs themselves, before the pre-Islamic poetry.

140. The ancient references to « Arabs » are found in the writings of members of non-tribal societies such as Assyria, Greece, and Rome.

141. It is surely because ethnicity is so often based on language and culture that the labels such as Aryan, Semitic, etc. which properly belong to 'families' of languages, are all too often transferred to supposed genetic inheritances.

142. Douglas 1964, p. 30. The Normans consciously regarded themselves as a new *gens* formed from different ethnic and cultural groups. See the passage in *Inventio et miracula Sancti Vulfranni* which states that Rollo (the first Norman ruler of the area around Rouen) « won over people of all origins and different skills, and so made one people from various gentes » (quoted in Webber 2005, p. 25-26).

143. Douglas 1964, p. 28.

[the Franks] » [144]. It was in no way a part of the French realm [145] ; and, in claiming the English crown and invading England, Duke William was acting on his own account, not on behalf of his nominal overlord, the king of France. The English who tried to repulse him were well aware of this, and yet they commonly referred to the invaders, not by their geo-political and ethnic origins (i.e. « Normans »), but by their language and culture (i.e. « French ») [146].

Thus, I would propose that it was by a particular complex of language and culture that certain people or peoples first identified themselves as « Arabs », or were so identified by others. Further, I would suggest that this continued, and continues, to lie at the basis of the self-definition. As we have seen, many ancient writers, at least until the second century AD, recorded the presence of Arabs, pursuing a wide range of ways-of-life, in many parts of the Middle East. At the same time, however, for some writers, and perhaps some societies, the term came to be associated with the most obvious characteristics of those Arabs they first encountered : merchants with an air of exotic luxury, or nomadic pastoralists, etc. In the minds of some non-Arabs, such associations may well have come to supersede the original basis for identifying people as « Arabs » by a process which may be made clear by a modern example.

In the late 1940s and the 1950s, it was common for Breton farmers to travel to England and ride around English cities on bicycles, wearing berets, and carrying strings of onions which they sold door-to-door. As a child, I was told that these men were French, a description roughly based on their language and culture. However, to many children – and probably some untravelled adults in the days before television was widespread – for whom these were the only Frenchmen they had encountered, it was easy to assume that *all* Frenchmen wore berets and rode bicycles with onions hanging from the handlebars, and equally easy to conclude

144. Webber 2005, p. 26.

145. By the time of the Norman conquest of England, the Franks regarded the Normans as being of pure Scandinavian descent and emphasized that they were not Franks (Webber 2005, p. 44-45). « The Normans were, by this point, considered a separate people who were united by bonds of commonality, which the Franks had come to recognise .... » (*ibid*., p. 50).

146. To take an instance at random, the description of the battle of Hastings in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* : « William came from Normandy ... and the French had possession of the place of slaughter » (Swanton 1996, p. 199). Similarly, in the Bayeux tapestry, the captions never refer to « the Normans » but to « the French », e.g. *HIC CECIDERUNT SIMUL ANGLI ET FRANCI IN PRELIO* or *HIC FRANCI PUGNANT ET CECIDERUNT QUI ERANT CUM HAROLDO*. The suggestion that, by using the word *franci*, the designer of the tapestry was subtly downplaying William's role in favour of Count Eustace II of Boulogne (Bridgeford 2004, p. 141-145), though ingenious seems rather forced, and does not take away from my point, since the subterfuge would only succeed if the word *franci* were normally applied to the Normans as well as to the French.

that anyone displaying these characteristics must be « a Frenchman ». I would suggest that by a similar process of false logic some ancient writers developed images of the Arabs which gradually grew into a rich mixture alluded to and developed by many different authors [147].

Before Late Antiquity we have almost no clue as to what part « Arabs » themselves played in the development of these images. Nor is there much information as to the criteria by which one Arab would recognize another from a different context. I have suggested that it was a complex of language and culture, but of course, this can be no more than an hypothesis.

When, in Late Antiquity, we have the earliest surviving literature by Arabs – albeit recorded, and probably edited, in the Islamic period – we find identity expressed in terms of an individual's tribe, as opposed to other tribes or non-tribal individuals or groups, rather than as a supra-tribal « Arab » ethnicity. Yet, underlying this, is a recognition of a distinction between those who, though not members of your tribe, are still *ʿarab* like you, and others who are not. The criteria on which this recognition is based are unspoken because they were obvious at the time. But here, as in earlier periods, it seems to me that the most likely criterion would be an ill-defined mixture of linguistic and cultural traits.

I would suggest that it was only after the early Islamic conquests and the establishment of an empire in which Arabs were the *élite* that the need to create a more clearly defined « Arab » ethnic identity arose. In such situations, the rulers usually wish to distinguish themselves from the ruled in order to maintain their privileges [148], something which became increasingly urgent as many of the subjects of the new Arabo-Islamic empire learnt the language of their conquerors and adopted their religion, thus becoming their « brothers » in Islam. In order to establish this ethnic class distinction – it was not a caste, for it was occasionally permeable – genealogy, on which tribal identity was based, was extended to encompass all those recognized as Arabs (presumably, on the previous criteria). This was done by assuming that « the Arabs » formed one huge « tribe » with numerous subdivisions, to one of which each Arab should be able to trace his lineage. Representatives of those settled (non-Arab) tribes of ancient South Arabia, who had taken part in the conquests and had powerful positions in the Umayyad state, also succeeded in having their lineages incorporated into this system. For,

147. It is this process of false logic which Sylvie Honigman suggests lies at the basis of Near Eastern and Hellenistic Egyptian identifications of « Arabs » as nomads and nomads as « Arabs » (2002, p. 44ff.).

148. In the sixteenth- to twentieth-century European empires in Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas, this was easily recognizable by skin colour, one reason why British colonialism, at least, was suspicious of those with mixed parentage. In situations where such blatant criteria were not available, such as the Norman conquest of England, lineage was used, in cases of doubt, to distinguish members of the ruling *élite* from the ruled.

tribal genealogy is, after all, not a record of historical fact, but a way of expressing and explaining current political and social relationships [149].

IV. What did the ancient Arabs speak ?

There is an easy assumption that all those called « Arabs » in the pre-Islamic period were in some sense the cultural – if not the genetic – ancestors of those known as Arabs at, and after, the Rise of Islam. While for Late Antiquity there is enough evidence to indicate that this view is probably more or less correct, for earlier periods it is much more difficult to prove, mainly because we know so little about these peoples. Thus, one may ask : « what is there to link the Arabs in eastern Egypt described by Herodotus in the fifth century BC, with those of the Islamic conquests ? » Or « what connects the Arabs of the Assyrian to the Roman periods in north and central Mesopotamia and Syria, southern Lebanon, northern Jordan, southern Palestine and Sinai, etc., with those who swept into these regions in the seventh century AD ? ». In terms of firm evidence, there is very little to connect them beyond the name.

From this first assumption stems a second : namely, that since the common language of the Arabs from the pre-Islamic poetry onwards was Arabic, the Arabs of earlier periods must have spoken a language which was in some respects « ancestral » to this. Although, at first sight, these positions may appear self-evident, it is worth emphasizing that we have only two words [150] which might link some of those whom the Assyrians called *aribi* (etc.) with « une langue de type arabe » [151], and pitifully few traces of the language(s) spoken by those whom the Greek and Roman writers called « Arabs » [152]. In central Arabia we

149. See, for instance, Lancaster 1981, p. 28-29, 35, 151-154.

150. These and a possible example of the definite article were identified by Livingstone (1997) in the Annals of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BC) in descriptions of his wars against Samsi, queen of the Arabs.

151. A useful, and calculatedly imprecise, expression suggested by Felice Israel (2006, p. 20).

152. Traditionally, the names of the two deities whom Herodotus tells us were worshipped by the Arabs in eastern Egypt (Ἀλιλάτ and Ὀροτάλ(τ), I.131 ; III.8), are cited. However, doubt has recently been cast on the authenticity of the forms of these names as they have come down to us (Hämeen-Anttila & Rollinger 2002). There is also the Old Arabic epitaph of the *mlk 'l-'rb kl-h* at al-Namārah (see above). Apart from these, the association of Old Arabic with peoples specifically called « Arabs » is limited to the Nabataeans. There is a certain number of loan-words from « une langue de type arabe » (see the previous note) in the Aramaic dialect used by the Nabataeans as a written language. In the inscriptions, the great majority of these loans are found in north-west Arabia, but a number have now been found in the legal

are somewhat better off, since in general we are dealing with later periods, and the tribes (Qaḥṭān, Kinda, Maḏḥiǧ) who made Qaryat al-Fāw [153] their capital are described as « Arabs » in South Arabian inscriptions [154], and occur in the Arab tribal genealogies of the Islamic period. But even so, the amount of epigraphic linguistic material available from these tribes is extraordinarily small.

There are, of course, occasional references to an « Arabic language », though as far as I know these come from writers in Late Antiquity. Thus Epiphanius (AD 315-403) famously reports that the population of Petra and Elusa « praise the Virgin with hymns in the Arabian language [Ἀραβικῇ διαλέκτῳ] and call her Χααμοῦ in Arabic [Ἀραβιστί]...» [155]. Jerome (AD 347-420) writes in the Prologue to his commentary on the Book of Job that his translation will « echo the Hebrew and Arabic, and occasionally the Aramaic, language » [156]. Fergus Millar, in a very perceptive article, questions what Jerome meant by *arabicus sermo* here and, elsewhere, by *arabica lingua* [157]. He dismisses any idea that Jerome would have « encountered any written text in Arabic (or would have been able to read it if he had) » [158]. Millar is surely correct in this [159], and the large number of different

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papyri in Nabataean Aramaic from the Dead Sea area. The status of these words needs further investigation, as does their use in a legal context. See Levine 2000, and Yadin *et al*. 2002. There are also two lines of Old Arabic written in the Nabataean script embedded in a Nabataean inscription at ʿĒn ʿAvdat (first published in Negev, Naveh & Shaked 1986, and see Lacerenza 2000 for the extensive subsequent bibliography on this text).

153. This is where an inscription in Old Arabic written in the South Arabian script was found, see note 164 below.

154. See Robin 1991, p. 71-82 for an extremely helpful exposition in which he notes that the distinction between the words *ʿrb* and *ʾʿrb* in Sabaic is still not clear in all contexts.

155. *Panarion* 51. 22. 11.

156. *Haec autem translatio nullum de veteribus sequitur interpretem ; sed ex ipso Hebraico, Arabicoque sermone, et interdum Syro, nunc verba, nunc sensus, nunc simul utrumque resonabit* (Jerome/Migne 1846, cols 1080-1081.

157. In the preface to his translation of the Book of Daniel where Jerome states *Job quoque cum Arabica lingua habere plurimam societatem* (Jerome/Migne 1846, col. 1291).

158. Millar 2005, p. 304.

159. While I remain convinced (see Macdonald 2000, p. 57-60 ; 2005, p. 98-103) that, before the fifth or sixth centuries AD, Old Arabic was, to all intents and purposes, a purely spoken language, rather than an habitually written one, it is as well to recognize that, necessarily, this is largely an *argumentum e silentio* and so can only be an hypothesis.

translations of the two lines of Arabic in the Nabataean alphabet embedded in the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription, shows how very difficult it would have been to read Arabic in the scripts available in Palestine and Roman Arabia at the time. On the other hand, I cannot follow Millar in dismissing the possibility that the terms *arabicus sermo* and *arabica lingua* refer to a spoken language.

The spoken language remains a possibility – but to Jerome the nomads that he encountered either in the Syrian desert or not far from Bethlehem were « Saraceni ». So is it possible that he was actually referring to whatever Semitic dialect was current in the province of Arabia, and not to « Arabic » (in our sense) at all ? This explanation, however, will hardly apply to Jerome's claim that the book of Job showed a close relationship with the « Arabica lingua » [160].

If, in the period up to AD 106, the term « Arab » referred, as I have suggested, to people who shared a common language and culture (however vaguely defined), it is surely likely that this language was known as « Arabic ». As the recognizably common language of all the different groups throughout the Middle East who had been called « Arabs », it would not have been confined to nomadic *Saraceni* but would have been used by those settled groups who were also called « Arabs » – i.e., in Jerome's sphere, primarily the population of the *Provincia Arabia*. Though we still cannot prove it, we now have much more evidence to suggest that the « Arabic » language played a major cultural role in Nabataean society, than we did when I wrote that « the case for spoken Arabic [in Nabataean society]... seems to me unproven » [161]. The consistent use of Arabic words to parallel Aramaic legal technical terms in the Naḥal Ḥever papyri, taken together with the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription [162], has put the debate on the possible use of Arabic by the Nabataeans in Transjordan, on a completely new, and much more secure, footing. It therefore seems to me very likely that the nomadic *Saraceni* whom Jerome encountered, together with much of the settled population of the Province of Arabia, may have spoken what was recognizably the same language, and that this was known as « Arabic ». The recognition by Jerome, or his sources, that these dialects were related to the language which coloured the Hebrew of the Book of Job showed considerable linguistic perspicuity. The linguistic influence of what *we* know as « Arabic » on the language of Job, is generally recognized today, and so suggests that the dialects heard by Jerome (and/or his sources) were indeed Old Arabic.

Thus, I would suggest that, from the small amounts of evidence for the association of the vestiges of Old Arabic with peoples called « Arabs », it is reasonable to infer that Old Arabic was the common language in the complex of linguistic and cultural factors which I think made up the Arab ethnic identity.

160. Millar 2005, p. 304-305.

161. Macdonald 2000, p. 47.

162. See most recently Macdonald 2005, p. 98-99.

However, in the numerous cases where we have no direct evidence, it is worth remembering that this is an inference not a fact.

On the problems of identifying and analysing fragments of ancient languages in Arabia

It may be useful to examine some of the problems involved in trying to salvage the fragmentary remains of a dead language, or the prehistoric stage [163] of a living language. It seems appropriate in this context that I should use Old Arabic as an example, but I am doing so without prejudice to the caveats in the previous paragraphs.

I have suggested defining Old Arabic as Arabic from the pre-Islamic period representing some of the ancestors of some of the forms of Arabic known from the seventh century AD onwards. I have divided the evidence available into, (1) « literary » (that is the Qur'ān, the pre-Islamic poetry, the *Ayyām al-ʿarab*, and other pre-Islamic material recorded, and in some cases possibly standardized, in the early Islamic period) and (2) « epigraphic » (material, mostly epigraphic, which has survived from the pre-Islamic period independently of the early Arab grammarians and lexicographers) [164]. It is the problems concerned with identifying and analysing 'epigraphic Old Arabic', that I shall be discussing here, and, in doing so, I shall concentrate on the nature of the data available to us and the tools we use to analyse it.

In the *Jāhiliyyah*, the ancestors of the forms of the Arabic language known from the Islamic era, *seem* to have been written only very rarely – or at least this is the impression given by the sparse and fragmentary evidence available to us, though we have no way of knowing, how much this is the product of accidents of survival and discovery. Thus, for instance, we cannot tell whether Arabic was habitually written in the Sabaic script on perishable materials at Qaryat al-Fāw and thus whether the 'Igl bin Haf'am inscription [165] is the tip of an iceberg of Arabic expressed in the Sabaic script, or whether it is as rare as it seems at present. A similar point can be made with regard to the examples of Arabic expressed in the Nabataean script. The fact that this script continued to develop both in Syria and in northern Arabia towards what we think of as the « Arabic script », shows that it must have continued to be used to write in ink, even though we only have occasional snapshots of this development in the monumental inscriptions

163. I mean by this the stage before it became habitually written.

164. See Macdonald 2008a.

165. An inscription in the Old Arabic language written in the Sabaic script found at Qaryat al-Fāw, see Ansary 1977 ; and the photograph on Ansary 1982, p. 146 ; Beeston 1979, p. 1-2 ; Robin 2001, p. 548-549 ; Macdonald 2008 a, p. 467, and photograph on 475.

and graffiti [166]. The last monumental inscription in the Nabataean script (and in the Aramaic language) is dated 356 AD [167], but recently (unpublished) graffiti, some apparently dated to the fifth century AD [168], have been found in north-west Arabia, in a form of the script which is transitional between what we think of as the Nabataean script and what we think of as the Arabic script [169].

A purely spoken language becomes a written one when the society, or societies, which use it become literate in the language they *speak,* i.e. when reading and writing in that language become necessary for the functioning of key aspects of the society, e.g. the administration, the economy, religion, etc. [170]. If a society has been literate in a language different from the one most of its members habitually speak – as, for instance, in Latin in early mediaeval Western Europe, or in Church Slavonic in much of mediaeval Eastern Europe – it will tend to use the script of the old *written* language to express the spoken language, once writing in the vernacular becomes conceivable, and then acceptable. Thus, the very fact that the Nabataean alphabet became, before the rise of Islam, the habitual vehicle for writing Arabic, suggests that this development took place in an area where Nabataean Aramaic had long remained the normal written language. Even more importantly, it suggests that this change occurred because more and more members of this society felt a strong need to write the language they spoke. The form of the transitional script in the graffiti from north-west Arabia, mentioned above, implies that the Nabataean alphabet must have continued to be fairly widely used for writing in ink in that area in order for the script to have developed to such an extent [171].

In dealing with the fragmentary evidence for Old Arabic, we need to be aware of the limitations of the material available to us. Obviously, different types of data need to be treated in different ways and cannot be expected to yield information of identical, or comparable, quantity, quality, or date. Documentary texts generally provide linguistic information which is contemporary with the writer, and together with literary texts, provide the greatest amount of linguistic

166. See Macdonald 2003b, p. 51-56. It may also have been used to write Arabic in southern Iraq, but as yet we have no examples.

167. Stiehl 1970.

168. This assumes that in this case, and in that of the monumental inscription (Stiehl 1970), that the era used is that of *Provincia Arabia*.

169. These inscriptions, from what has been called the *Darb al-Bakrah*, are being prepared for publication by Dr ʿAlī al-Ghabbān and Dr Laïla Nehmé. One has already been published in al-Ḏīyayb 2002, no. 132+133. See the extremely important discussion and illustrations in Nehmé 2010.

170. See Macdonald 2005, p. 49-50.

171. See Macdonald 2003b, p. 51-56 ; 2010.

material. Unfortunately, however, no documentary texts in Old Arabic have so far been discovered, and we need to bear in mind that the one pre-Islamic « literary text » in epigraphic Old Arabic (lines 4 and 5 of the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription) [172] could have been composed by the author of the inscription, but could equally well be a quotation, and so might represent linguistic information that is more ancient than the man who wrote it down – as, for instance, quotations or expressions taken from the seventeenth-century Authorised Version of the Bible suffuse English writing of later periods. Monumental inscriptions usually provide us with a relatively limited range of vocabulary and syntactic structures – though we are very fortunate that the Namārah epitaph is something of an exception in this respect – and graffiti, when they consist of more than names, yield an even narrower range of grammatical information and vocabulary. Names, of course, can usually only provide linguistic data that are archaic and are irrelevant to the language of the texts in which they are embedded [173]. The result of all this is that we have only a fragmentary and heterogeneous collection of data scattered over a wide geographical area, from which it is impossible to *reconstruct* a language either in synchronic or diachronic terms, but which *may* help to identify its closest linguistic « relative(s) ».

On what basis, then, do we decide that an expression or a text may be in « Old Arabic » ? Christian Robin has suggested the presence of the definite article *ʾl-*, and the *ʾfʿl* causative verbal form, as criteria [174]. But as I have pointed out elsewhere [175] the second is found in all Ancient North Arabian dialects, as well as in Nabataean and several other dialects of Aramaic, most notably Syriac [176]. I have suggested that at present the following indicators can be identified : the use of the article *ʾl-*, the use of a feminine singular relative pronoun *ʾlt* (cf. Classical Arabic *ʾallatī*), and the realization of medial or final /w/ or /y/ + short vowel into a long vowel which appears as /a:/ in Classical Arabic (as opposed to the retention of /w/ or /y/ in most Ancient North Arabian dialects and in Ancient South Arabian) [177],

172. See Macdonald 2005, p. 98-99.

173. Macdonald 1998, p. 187-189 ; 2009, III, p. 38 [= 2000, p. 38].

174. Most recently in Robin 2001, p. 545.

175. MacDonald 2000, p. 49.

176. Naturally, in a continuous text (such as the Namārah inscription or Stiehl 1970) the difference between Old Arabic and Aramaic is clear, but in graffiti, where there is usually only a handful of words (some, or all, of which may have been used as « ideograms », see Macdonald 2000, p. 73, n. 137), in a defective script (see below), it can often be difficult to identify the language with any certainty.

177. It should be noted that Christian Robin explains this feature by the assumption that *w* and *y* were used as *matres lectionis* for /a:/ in the Ancient South Arabian and Ancient North Arabian scripts (Robin 2001, p. 552-556, 570-577). I would suggest

when taken together with other features which would not be incompatible with the language being Arabic [178]. Clearly, this is not a solid basis on which to identify a language, but at present it is all we have.

The problems of identification are increased by the scripts in which the fragments of Old Arabic are expressed, since they are all defective in one or more ways. Linguistic data which could be considered to be Old Arabic have been identified in the following scripts : Nabataean, Safaitic, Hismaic, Dadanitic, and Sabaic. Each of these had its own orthographic conventions, which in each case limit, often seriously, our identification, let alone our reconstruction, of the linguistic data written in them. The Nabataean script does not express short vowels or medial /a:/ and lacked letters to express seven of Arabic's twenty-eight consonants [179], and while, in its early forms, *d* and *r* are indistinguishable, in its cursive form (in the papyri) and its later manifestations on stone, a growing number of letters come resemble to others [180]. In the Ancient South Arabian and all but one of the Ancient North Arabian orthographies – with a few exceptions – no vowels of any sort, and no diphthongs, are shown [181]. Add to this, that Ancient North Arabian graffiti and the Nabataean papyri employ *scriptio continua* and it

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that this is to look at these ancient languages through the lens of Classical Arabic and to try to make them conform to it. In order to do this, he has to assume that medial and final /a:/ was represented in these scripts more or less indiscriminately by *w*, *y* (sometimes ') and often no *mater lectionis*. There are many problems with this theory and I discuss it in detail in MACDONALD, in preparation.

178. For instance, *'f' l*-causatives as opposed to those in *h*- or *s¹*-.

179. That is /ḏ/ /ṣ/ /ġ/ /ḫ/ /ś/ /ṯ/ /ẓ/. Of these, the phoneme represented by the letter *sīn* in the Arabic script, and *s¹* in Ancient North Arabian and Ancient South Arabian, was not realised as [s] in Arabic until the mid ninth century AD, or later. The phonemes (/š/ and /ś/) later represented in the Arabic script by *sīn* and *šīn* respectively were both represented in the Nabataean script by *š*, and since the Aramaic letter *semkath* represented the sound [s], which did not exist in Arabic at the time, it gradually fell out of use as the Nabataean Aramaic script came increasingly to be used to write Arabic. It is for this reason that it has no « descendant » in the Arabic script, and that the « descendant » of Aramaic *š* is used in the Arabic script for both *sīn* and *šīn*, which therefore have to be distinguished by diacritical dots (see MACDONALD 2008b, and in preparation).

180. For example, *g* and *ḥ*, often *z* and *r*, *l* and *n* ; in some positions *y* and *t*, and in some texts even *d* and *k*, see MACDONALD 2008b. By the latest period there were only sixteen distinctive letter forms in the Nabataean alphabet to express the twenty-eight consonants of Arabic. Ironically, *d* and *r* develop distinct shapes during this process, which is why they are distinct even in the earliest examples of the Arabic alphabet, which is simply a very late form of the Nabataean script.

181. The exception is Dadanitic in which final /a:/ is shown by *h*, final /u:/ by *w*, and sometimes final /i:/ by *y*, see MACDONALD 2004, p. 495.

will be clear that it can be very difficult to identify – let alone analyse – examples of Old Arabic in the texts in which they are likely to occur.

It is for these reasons that I have categorized the dialects of ANA texts by the *scripts* in which they are written (Taymanitic, Dadanitic, Safaitic, etc.), unless there is clear evidence – e.g. the use of the definite article *'l-* rather than *h-* – that the language is different from that habitually expressed by the script [182]. Note that the handful of texts in the Dadanitic and Safaitic scripts which use the definite article *'l-* – and which one is therefore inclined to classify as Old Arabic – are often otherwise indistinguishable in their formulae from texts in the same scripts which use the ANA article *h-/hn-*. It is only by careful attention to orthographic conventions that one can distinguish some elements.

Thus, on the one side of the comparison, we have fragmentary and ambiguous attestations of what are probably a number of different pre-Islamic Arabic dialects, expressed in various imperfect scripts with different orthographic conventions.

On the other side, we are comparing this with the massive body of material constituted by « Arabic », which, as we know it, is a phenomenon of the Islamic period [183]. There is a common view that one can find anything in the Arabic dictionaries. Certainly, they are so rich that it might appear so. Yet the more one compares their contents with, say, the vocabulary of the Ancient North Arabian texts [184] the more one is struck by the interesting things which appear to be missing from the Arabic lexica. Michel Gawlikowski considers that the Safaitic words *nḫl* « valley » and *mdbr* « inner desert » suggest a relationship between Safaitic and Hebrew, on the basis that forms of these words (*nḫl*/*naḥal* and *mdbr*/*midbār*) occur with the same or similar meanings in both languages, but not in Classical Arabic [185]. However, it seems unlikely that words so basic to the way-of-life of most of those who wrote the Safaitic inscriptions would have been borrowed

182. We do not know *how* different the dialects were, of course.

183. Even those works reputed to date from the *Jāhiliyyah* – the pre-Islamic poetry, the *Ayyām al-ʿarab*, etc. – were only recorded (and probably edited) in the early Islamic period.

184. That is the « umbrella term » for Dadanitic, Dumaitic, Hasaitic (?), Hismaic, Safaitic, Taymanitic, Thamudic B, C, D, and Southern Thamudic inscriptions. See Macdonald 2000, p. 29 ; and 2004, p. 488-494.

185. Gawlikowski 2006, p. 45 : « il y a aussi des convergences lexicales entre l'hébreu biblique d'une part et d'autre part les inscriptions safaïtiques.... Il n'est pas téméraire d'admettre une parenté avec la langue des sédentaires de Palestine et Phénicie ». There is, of course, a « relationship » between all Semitic languages, but Ancient North Arabian and Biblical Hebrew belong to different subgroups of Semitic and do not have the sort of closeness suggested by Gawlikowski. It would, anyway, probably be more appropriate to compare the cognates of these words in Aramaic (*naḥal* and *madbərā'*), which, in the case of the latter may be the origin of Hebrew *midbār*.

from the language of a geographically and culturally distant, settled people [186]. In fact, there are numerous other words in Ancient North Arabian which do not seem to have cognates in the Classical Arabic lexica. One of the commonest terms in the Safaitic texts, *wgm* « to grieve », is not found in Classical Arabic with a meaning suitable to the Safaitic contexts. Another word, common in curses, *nq't*, has no satisfactory explanation in any form of Arabic known to me. On the other hand, one can sometimes find in the modern Bedouin colloquials a word which is similar in form to a Safaitic word, or from the same root, and has a meaning not found in Classical Arabic which appears to fit the context. Thus, *'s²rq*, which has traditionally been translated « he went east » on the basis of Classical Arabic [187], is more probably to be interpreted as « he migrated to the inner desert [regardless of direction] » on the basis of the verb *šerriq* in the colloquials of the Syrian and North Arabian Bedouin [188]. Just as Littmann suggested that many of the personal names found in the Safaitic inscriptions could still be found among the Ahl al-Jabal tribes which inhabit the same geographical area, although such names are unknown elsewhere [189], so it seems possible that vocabulary, and particularly terms to do with the way-of-life, *may* have survived in some Bedouin vernaculars [190].

However, naturally, no automatic equation between the language of an ancient text and a modern Bedouin dialect can be assumed. Extensive tribal movements over the fourteen centuries since the Revelation of Islam mean that it is usually difficult to identify which particular modern Bedouin dialect *might* be descended from the pre-Islamic dialect used in the area from which a particular text comes – even if one assumes that whoever composed the ancient text was a native of that area and not a visitor [191]. Moreover, the use in a Safaitic inscription – in a totally

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186. Moreover, of course, if Hebrew or Aramaic *naḥal* had been borrowed into Safaitic, one would expect it to appear as **nḥl* in Safaitic. The fact that the Safaitic word is *nḫl* strongly suggests that it is a North Arabian word, cognate with, but not borrowed from Hebrew or Aramaic. I have defined « North Arabian » as a dialect bundle consisting of Ancient North Arabian and Arabic, see Macdonald 2000, p. 29-30.

187. See Littmann 1901, followed by *CIS* V 95 etc., and all subsequent editors.

188. Musil 1927, p. 237 ; 1928, p. 45, 90, etc. See Macdonald 1992, p. 4-6 ; 2009, VIII, p. 3-5. It is curious that although Littmann noted this usage in the commentary to LP 180, he continued to translate *'s²rq* as « go eastward » (LP 180, 602, and p. 346).

189. Littmann 1943, p. xxvii-xxviii. It should be noted, however, that since the Safaitic script shows no vowels at all, this cannot be entirely certain.

190. Examples of this will be found in the contributions made by Clive Holes to Macdonald 2004, and cf. the remarkable examples of Akkadian words and a phrase for « sunset » which have survived in some of the Arabic dialects of the Arabian coast of the Gulf, discussed in Holes 2001, p. xxix-xxx.

191. On possible « visitors », see for instance, Safaitic inscriptions by people who claim to be Nabataeans (Macdonald, Al Mu'azzin & Nehmé 1996, p. 444-449, and further

nomadic context – of the spelling *ʾyḍ* for the verb normally spelt *qyẓ* (« to spend the dry season ») [192] – a linguistic feature (/q/ > /ʾ/ and /ẓ/ > /ḍ/) nowadays typical of *urban* dialects in the Levant and unknown in Bedouin speech – should make us very cautious about applying to ancient texts, distinctions on urban *vs* Bedouin dialects from modern dialectology.

We need to look carefully at the grammar and lexicon of Classical Arabic within its own context. If we accept – as is now fairly generally agreed – that it is the result of a harmonization and formalization of the language of the pre-Islamic poetry and that of the Qur'ān, with a strong input from the dialects of the Bedouin available to the grammarians of Kufah and Basrah, then it actually represents a rather restricted range of pre-Islamic dialects. We should not, therefore, expect that it will be a safe, let alone a complete, guide to the interpretation or even recognition of linguistic material from earlier centuries and from other parts of the Peninsula. Moreover, if Retsö and others are correct in regarding the *ʿarabiyyah* of the pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'ān as an archaic language artificially maintained for specific religious and artistic purposes, the relationship of the *fuṣḥā* to any surviving pre-Islamic documentary material is likely to be even more remote [193].

The Arabic lexica contain vocabulary ranging in date from the pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'ān up to writings of the lexicographer's own day. However, little indication is given of the chronological development of the forms and meanings of the words they contain – apart from the isnads attached to some meanings, or the name of a poet attached to a quotation – and it is left to the reader to try to work out what is likely to be the « primary » meaning of a root and what are « secondary » developments [194].

An interesting example is provided by the words *ṭibb* and *ṭabīb*, which *Lisān* glosses as *ʿilāǧ al-ǧism wa-ʾl-nafs* and *ʿālim al-ṭibb* respectively (vol. I : 553a) and for which Lane gives as the first meanings « medical ... treatment » and « a physician » respectively (p. 1820c and 1821a). A colleague once sent Professor A.F.L. Beeston a translation of a Dadanitic inscription in which he had read a

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discussion in Macdonald 1998, p. 186), or by an author who gives his *nibah* as *hn-ḥwly* (LP 87, re-read in Macdonald 1993, p. 308).

192. The context is the statement *w ḥll h-dr dṯ' f 'yḍ f s²ty* « and he camped here spending the season of later rains (*dṯ'*), then the dry season (*'yḍ = qyẓ*), and then the winter (*s²ty*) », so the interpretation is certain (see Macdonald 2004, p. 498 ; 2005, p. 88-89). For the translations of the names of the seasons and the verbs for spending them in a certain place, see Macdonald 1992.

193. See for instance, Zwettler 1978, p. 110, 160-161 ; Retsö 2002, p. 145 ; 2003, p. 594-595.

194. On the problems of interpreting newly discovered words in « dead languages » and the nature of the material collected in the Arabic lexica, see Beeston 2005.

word in Dadanitic as *ṭb* and translated it as « medical treatment ». In his comments Beeston explained:

> « The rendering of *ṭb* as « medical treatment » [in this inscription] is impossible. Mediaeval and modern Arabic *ṭibb* « the art of medicine » and *ṭabīb* « medical practitioner » are an Abbasid innovation ; in earlier Arabic up to the first century AH *ṭibb* meant only « knowledge, learning », with no specific association with medical knowledge » [195].

This neatly demonstrates how easily even the great Arabic-Arabic lexica and Lane can mislead the unwary. Lane's dictionary (1863-1893) was based directly, but critically, on the best of the great Arabic-Arabic lexica and was created with constant reference to experts on the language, in Cairo. It cites a context for a great many of the meanings it provides, as well as examples of usage. However, like the Arabic-Arabic lexica on which it is based, it is not 'a dictionary on historical principles' like the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and does not put the meanings of words in chronological order [196], or give dates for the first known occurrence of each. Much more hazardous to use for this purpose – though obviously they are useful in other circumstances – are dictionaries like those of Biberstein Kazimirski (1860) which are simply compendia of other European Arabic dictionaries. These rarely give contexts and never sources, but simply list meanings, with no indication of whether or not a particular sense is the primary meaning, a development of this, a metaphorical usage, or is restricted to a specific expression.

A rather different set of problems beset comparison between pre-Islamic texts and Aramaic. By far the best documented of the Aramaic dialects is Syriac, an eastern Aramaic dialect which became standardized as a literary language in the early centuries AD. Thus, with Syriac, we are making comparisons with an eastern Aramaic dialect used for over 1300 years, and itself influenced by Arabic in the Islamic period, to try to elucidate texts from periods and places which are often very remote in space and time from the milieux in which Syriac vocabulary developed. However, with Syriac, we have the *Thesaurus Syriacus* of R. Payne Smith (1879-1901) and Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum* (1928) both of which cite references for the use of the different meanings of the words they list and so give some indication of the earliest attestations of particular senses. On the other hand, J. Payne Smith's *Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (1903), though it gives copious examples of expressions in which a word is used, can be a trap for the unwary since it rarely gives references for these, and so, again, makes it impossible to trace their chronological development.

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195. Copy of an undated letter (probably late 1970s/early 1980s) in the Beeston papers, now housed in the Bodleian Library.

196 The only Arabic dictionary to attempt this is the *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache* (Ullmann 1970-), which alas has so far dealt with only two letters.

The next largest collections of Aramaic vocabulary are the Jewish Aramaic dialects used in the Targumim, Midrash and Talmudim [197]. Much of this vocabulary is rather specialized and, is often remote in time and place from the subject-matter of the pre-Islamic texts it might be used to help elucidate. But these, and more remote parallels with, for instance, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew, South Arabian and Gəʿəz, are all we have. My point is not that comparisons with these sources should not be used in trying to interpret the languages of pre-Islamic Arabia, but that they need to be approached with considerable care and a constant awareness both of their limitations and the many ways in which they can be misleading.

The most intractable problem in the identification of pre-Islamic Arabic, is that of distinguishing between Old Arabic and Ancient North Arabian. The distinction between *'l-* and *h-* dialects is a convenient modern one developed by linguists to provide some clarity in ordering the fragmentary and heterogeneous data available to us. However, it is not a distinction which would have had much linguistic significance for communication in antiquity [198]. The reason I have argued strongly for retaining the distinction is that if Ancient North Arabian texts are interpreted as if they are more or less Classical Arabic (as for instance Caskel did with Dadanitic) [199], this leads to distortions of the evidence and the obscuring of important distinctions.

The misconception that Ancient North Arabian is simply Classical Arabic in a different script, is unfortunately all too widespread in practice, though it is seldom acknowledged. It has led not only to some bizarre translations of texts, but to a failure to appreciate the differences between Ancient North Arabian and Old Arabic, and to anachronistic claims that pre-Islamic documents are written « in Classical Arabic » ! If one starts with that assumption it is not difficult to make a text written in *scriptio continua* in a purely consonantal alphabet, appear so.

But the one thing of which we can be certain is that these pre-Islamic texts were *not* written in Classical Arabic and it is, of course, an anachronism to assume that they were. Alas, far too many would-be epigraphists isolate a word in an Ancient North Arabian text and then « look it up » in a dictionary of Classical Arabic, as if the latter represented a vocabulary of Ancient North Arabian, or the text were in Classical Arabic using a different script. As any epigraphist and philologist knows, this is an abuse both of the text and the dictionary. The Classical Arabic lexica – like the Aramaic, Gəʿəz, and other dictionaries one may consult – can provide *clues* to the meaning of the Ancient North Arabian word, in the form

197. Collected, for instance, in Jastrow 1903 and now in Sokoloff 1990 and 2003.

198. It is quite clear that the dialects which used *'l-* and those which used *h(n)-* were not in any sense « deux langues différentes » as suggested by Gawlikowski (2006, p. 45).

199. See for instance, Caskel 1954, p. 77.

of possible cognates or by indicating the approximate semantic field(s) of the root. But that is all. A linguistic argument then needs to be constructed from these clues and the particular context, to propose a meaning for the Ancient North Arabian word one is seeking to interpret.

It is necessary to look at ancient texts as far as possible in their own terms rather than through the prism of the later material which, perforce, has to be used to help interpret them. For this reason, it is extremely important to understand the uses of the scripts in which these texts were written and, in particular their orthographic conventions *and the limitations of these*. It is as important to work out what a text *cannot* tell us, as to know what information it can give.

V. Conclusion

Thus, to sum up, I would suggest that (a) the term « Arab » was in origin a self-designation based on a recognition of an ill-defined complex of linguistic and cultural characteristics ; (b) that in many ancient sources, particularly in documentary texts, it was used in this sense [200] ; and (c) that, at the same time, *images* of what « Arabs » were – based on reports of encounters with particular groups of Arabs, often in the distant past – developed, became *topoi*, and were used to flesh out « ethnographies » or to fill gaps in the information available to non-Arab writers.

As I have described elsewhere, the most common and most powerful of these images were fabulous wealth, the nomadic lifestyle, and unconquerable independence [201]. These *topoi* drawn from encounters with many different groups of Arabs over a long period of time, became mixed, misunderstood, and fossilized. At different periods, one or another aspect would be emphasized, or the kaleidoscope would be shaken and new patterns arise. Yet, at the same time as these images were appearing in scholarly and literary texts, I would suggest that the Arabs of the *Jāhiliyya* probably continued to identify themselves and each other – and be identified by non-Arabs – on the basis of the complex of linguistic and cultural characteristics. This, no doubt, continued even after the Roman empire imposed its own, administrative, definition of the term « Arab », based on very different, and much narrower, criteria than the older *ethnicon*. It was only when the Arabs themselves became the ruling élite of an immense, multi-ethnic empire that they felt the need of a more specific definition of the *ethnicon*, and devised one based on tribal genealogy. Naturally, like any theory where there is

200. It is sometimes also used in this way in literary texts (e.g. histories, geographies, etc) in cases where individuals or peoples are simply termed « Arabs », with no « ethnographic » descriptions.

201. For a description and discussion of these images see Macdonald 2009, VIII, p. 21-30 [= 2001, p. 255-266].

so little available evidence, this reconstruction of the meaning and history of the term « Arab » is incapable of proof. However, it seems to me that it makes a useful working hypothesis.

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Lane	LANE 1863-1893.
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III	= BILABEL 1926.
XVIII	= RUPPRECHT 1993.
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