INSIDE AND OUT

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

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THE PEOPLES BEYOND THE ARABIAN FRONTIER IN LATE ANTIQUITY: RECENT EPIGRAPHIC DISCOVERIES AND LATEST ADVANCES*

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Abstract

For a century, the research on the interactions between the Roman empire and its neighbours on the Arabian frontier was based on texts transmitted by Muslim scholars. The gradual opening up of the vast Arabian Peninsula to archaeological research from the 1950s onwards has now resulted in major advances and radical revisions of previous views. In this paper, we shall provide an overview of these new developments in the field, among which the multiplication of precise chronological and geographical data can be mentioned, owing to the discovery of numerous dated inscriptions that have been found *in situ*. As far as revisions are concerned, we can mention the evidence for the domination of the kingdom of Ḥimyar over Arabia from around 350 to 560 and the challenge to the ideas of the 'migrations' of tribes and 'domination' of nomads. We can add the new perspective on the official religion of Ḥimyar, which—as now seems clear—consisted in a kind of monotheism inspired by Judaism, followed, from around 500 onwards, by Christianity. Concerning the role of Rome in the affairs of Arabia, it will be argued that the existence of a real frontier in the sixth century can now be considered as doubtful.

Introduction

Arabia has been a constant source of fascination. The ancients thought that, beyond the desert, fabulous treasures were hidden by the Arab caravaneers in a more or less mythical country called 'Arabia Felix'. In the Muslim empire, the lexicographers and grammarians of the ʿAbbāsid period looked at the nomadic people of Arabia Deserta as models of pure language. And closer to our time, the myth has been upheld by the tales of scholars, travellers, and adventurers who were bold enough to confront the obstacles erected by nature and man.

However, despite this fascination, the historical evidence transmitted by the manuscript tradition is scarce. The Arabic historiographical literature, although abundant and valuable for understanding the world-view of the time or to see the diversity of peoples and modes of livelihood, disappoints when it comes to ascertaining facts and dates. The knowledge of the Arab historians, heirs of a scholarly tradition which began with the first companions of Muḥammad, son of ʿAbd Allāh, the Prophet of Islam, did not reach far back in time, hardly more than three or four generations, and this is only when informants have survived. With some exceptions, this knowledge did not come from archives, but from stories recounted by participants and witnesses—or their descendants—after which they were transmitted from teacher to student. These accounts are generally no more than short anecdotes, often illustrated by poetic quotations. To date events and persons, one had to look at the genealogy that might provide some synchronistic elements, and a relative chronology.

With such writings, which preserved a multitude of small facts but at the same time revealed nothing of the general context, the Arab historians were unable to compile a continuous, chronological history. Such a goal was made even more unattainable because the accounts included numerous contradictions and improbabilities. As a result, the historians merely enumerated the various versions, occasionally establishing a hierarchy based on the assumed value given to the chains of witnesses. In one case, however, written records seemed to have been available, those of the city and monasteries of al-Ḥīra in the lower valley of the Euphrates. These documents concerned Arabia to a certain degree since on several occasions the kings of al-Ḥīra played an important role there, either for themselves or on behalf of their lords, the Sasanian Persian kings.

In addition to the Arabic historiographical literature, the manuscript tradition also includes some external sources, which all derive from the Romans, given that nothing remains from the scientific works of the Sasanian Persians except for some borrowings preserved in Islamic writers such as Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Ṭabarī. In general, these external sources do not reveal much; Arabia was not of primary concern to its neighbours. Two brief periods, however, form an exception.

The interest of the Romans in the Red Sea area, which had declined in the late second century, was rekindled at the time of Constantius II (337–61), despite the war and tense relations with Persia. The main event of this revival of interest was an embassy loaded with sumptuous gifts that the emperor sent to the (unnamed) sovereign of the Homerites (that is, Ḥimyarites) in the 340s. The aim was to convert this prince to the Christian faith and to bring him into the fold of the Roman empire, like the

Aksumite kings of Ethiopia. Another memorable initiative was the letter written by the emperor to the two sovereigns of Aksum asking them to seize Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, who had been deposed from his see, and whose whereabouts were unknown. Curiously, none of these events has retained the attention of the ancient chroniclers; they are known to us only through ecclesiastical writers—an Arian *History of the Church* and a self-justificatory account by Athanasius himself.[1] A legal text indirectly confirms that the lands of the Red Sea were then the focus of particular attention, as it defines the conditions for the reception of the embassies departing for Ḥimyar and Aksum.[2]

We have to wait for another 150 years after the reign of Constantius II for Arabia to return to the forefront again. Several devastating raids launched by the Arabs of the desert struck all the provinces in the diocese of the East during the last years of the fifth century. Immediately afterwards, the Persian war was reopened, pushing the Roman emperor to recruit Arab auxiliaries as a counterpoint to those of the Persians whose effectiveness was formidable.[3] South of the Red Sea, the Christian king of Aksum, with whom relations had weakened, once again became an attractive ally. He had subjected the kingdom of Ḥimyar in the early years of the sixth century, and after a bloody rebellion, had reduced it to a mere dependency. Justinian (527–65) therefore decided to mobilize Aksum and Ḥimyar to divert the trade with India which enriched Persia through the Red Sea and to launch ground operations against Mesopotamia through Arabia. In the 530s, he sent two embassies to Aksum and Ḥimyar to this effect of which we have brief accounts.[4]

The ecclesiastical authors were particularly interested in one episode of these events, the massacre of many Christians, chiefly in the oasis of Nagrān (now Najrān), by the Jewish king of Ḥimyar Yūsuf Asʾar, who

1. Philostorgius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.4 (*GCS* 55, pp. 32–34); Athanasius, *Apology to Constantius* 31 (*SChrét.* 56bis, pp. 160–63), on which see also the paper of Piovanelli, this volume, p. 335, with n. 11. For further discussion, see below pp. 43–44. Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.45–47, who mentions Ḥimyar in his geopolitical description of the East.

2. For the law of Constantius II, dated 15 January 356 or 357, see *C.Th.* 12.12.2.

3. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, pp. 141, 144 De Boor; Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* 57 (*CSCO* 91, p. 283). These passages are further discussed below, p. 63. For an up-to-date survey of the role of the Arabs between the two empires, see G. Fisher, *Between Empires. Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford, 2011).

4. On these events and embassies, see Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.19–20; Nonnosus, in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 3; Malalas, *Chonographia* 18.15, 56, pp. 362–63, 384–85 Thurn. These passages are discussed in the papers of Elton and Greatrex, this volume, pp. 245, 250, and 255.

had revolted against the Aksumites in 522, and the elimination of that king by the Aksumites. The anti-Chalcedonians of Antioch and northern Syria, who entertained close relations with Ḥimyar, were the first to seize on the victims of the massacre and worship them as martyrs. The Chalcedonians soon followed. Because both faiths tried to outdo one another, we have several accounts of these tragic events.[5]

Ever since the Renaissance, European scholars have questioned the credibility of these accounts and the degree to which Christianity had penetrated Arabia. The recent opening up of the Arabian Peninsula to archaeological research has allowed scholars to make significant progress on several key points: the political situation in Arabia, the scale and nature of Judaism and Christianity which rooted in the west and east, respectively, and, finally, the extent of Abraha's power in the middle of the sixth century. In what follows, I shall address these topics in chronological order.

The Ḥimyarite Conquest and Annexation of Arabia Deserta (c. 350–450)

Although the Arabic tradition presents pre-Islamic Arabia as a land without government or laws, where no political or religious authority (except perhaps for the Temple of Mecca) has the ability to impose any rule, Ḥimyarite inscriptions offer quite a different picture: one in which the kingdom of Ḥimyar, whose sovereign was not powerless, continuously dominated most of Arabia Deserta for nearly two centuries. In fact, in religious matters, the decisions of the Ḥimyarite king applied directly and immediately to the entire kingdom. Proof of the Ḥimyarite domination of Arabia Deserta is furnished by a total of eight inscriptions: two were discovered in the Yemen, three in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula, specifically at Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, 200 km west of modern al-Riyāḍ, and three in the south-west of Saudi Arabia, some 200–30 km north of Najrān. Of these eight inscriptions, three were discovered in the early 1950s by the Philby–Ryckmans–Lippens expedition and published shortly thereafter, two were found in the 1960s and 1970s, and the last three only recently. I shall limit myself here to the domination of Arabia Deserta at the time when the Ḥimyarite kings founded a new religion inspired by Judaism. There are four inscriptions that shed light on this period.

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5. Symeon of Beth Arsham, *Letter* 1 Guidi, and *Letter* 2 Shahîd; *Book of the Ḥimyarites* 9–26 Moberg; *Martyrdom of St Arethas* 3–24 Detoraki. See now J. Beaucamp, F. Briquel-Chatonnet, and C.J. Robin (eds), *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux vᵉ et vɪᵉ siècles. Regards croisés sur les sources* (Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance Monographies 32; Paris, 2010).

ʿAbadān 1 (June 360)

The oldest inscription preserving the memory of Ḥimyarite military activities in the centre of Arabia Deserta is dated to June 360.[6] The king of Ḥimyar, then Thaʾrān Yuhanʿim (before 324–*c*. 380) is mentioned twice in the text. This is the longest inscription known from southern Arabia. Discovered in the 1970s by J. Pirenne on a large rock in wādī ʿAbadān, south of Niṣāb, in Yemen (Fig. 1), it was published in 1996. It commemorates the military deeds and great works of a princely family of Ḥaḍramawt for three generations. The first part, which deals with war exploits, is certainly the most surprising.

The inscription recounts twelve military campaigns which the dhu-Yazʾan either directed or participated in. They are the ancestors of the famous Sayf ibn dhī Yazʾan of the sixth century who appealed to the Sasanian Persians to drive the Aksumites out of Yemen. Many of these campaigns do not go beyond the periphery of Yemen. The farthest ones reach eastern, central, and western Arabia, namely the Yabrīn oasis (Fig. 5; eastern Arabia, 250 km south-west of the current Qaṭar, campaign number four); perhaps the territory of the Iyādh[um] tribe (in Arabic Iyād), in northeast Arabia (campaign number six); and central and western Arabia (campaigns numbers eight and twelve). The fourth, sixth, eighth, and twelfth campaigns which reach various parts of Arabia Deserta can be dated respectively to *c*. 340, *c*. 345, *c*. 350, and to the years before 360.

The most noteworthy point in the sixth campaign is the capture, during a confrontation in an unknown location, of a tribal chief from Lower ʿIrāq.[7] The list of looting is incomplete, and ends with 2500 camels and nine horses (captured or killed). During the eighth campaign which mobilizes 300 riders, the Ḥimyarites reach Gawwān (Arabic al-Jaww) and Khargān (Arabic al-Kharj) in central Arabia. The identification of

6. ʿAbadān 1. See on this inscription, most recently, M. Zwettler, 'Maʿadd in Late-Ancient Arabian Epigraphy and Other Pre-Islamic Sources', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 90 (2000), pp. 223–307 at 230–38 and W.W. Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften nach Ären datiert. Bibliographie, Texte und Glossar* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz. Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 53; Wiesbaden, 2010), pp. 50–54. The date is dhu-madhraʾān (*ḏ-mḏrʾⁿ*) 470 of the Ḥimyarite era (which begins in 110 BCE, with a margin of error not exceeding a few months).

7. ʿAbadān 1, line 14: *w-(ʾ)s³r Ḫwlyᵐ Ṯʿlbt bn S³llᵐ s¹yd ʾydᵐ* 'And Khawliyy[um] captured Thaʿlabat, son of Śalūl[um], *sayyid* of Iyādh[um]'. Iyādh[um] is the Sabaic transcription of the Arabic Iyād. It is worth noting that we find, in the genealogy of Iyād transmitted by Ibn al-Kalbī, one Thaʿlaba ibn Salūl. See W. Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab. Das genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* 1 (Leiden, 1966), Table 174.

'Abadān (*'bd*ⁿ) [Niṣāb]
'Alab^um (*'lb*ⁿ) [al-'Ādiyya]
'Amurān (*'mr*ⁿ) [Ḥamrā' 'Alab]
[Aṭṭān]
[al-Baydā']
Baynūn (*Bynn*) [Baynūn]
Bayt Naʿāma
Dhamār (*Ḏmr*) [Dhamār]
dhu-'Adan^um [ʿAdan]
(*ḏ-ʿdn*ⁿ)
Ḍāfū (*Ḏfw*) [Ḍāf]
[Ghaymān]
Ḥakir^um (*Ḥkr*ⁿ) [Ḥakir]
Ḥidū (*Ḥdw*) [Ḥadīm]
Ḥaṣī (*Ḥ(ṣ)ȳ*) [Ḥaṣī]
Ḥāziy^um (*Ḥzy*ⁿ) [Ḥāz]
[Jabal al-'Awd]
Jabal Tur'at [Riyām]
(*Tr'*)
Khamir (*Ḥmr*) [Khamir]
[Laḥj]
Maryab/Marib [Maʾrib]
(*Mryb/Mrb*)
Naʿḍ (*Nʿḍ*) [Naʿḍ]
Nāʿiṭ^um (*Nʿṭ*ⁿ) [Nāʿiṭ]
Najrān (*Ngr*ⁿ) [Najrān]
Nashq^um (*Nsʰqʰ*ⁿ) [al-Baydāʾ]
Nashshān (*Nsʰⁿ*) [al-Sawdāʾ]
Qanīʾ (*Qnʾ*) [Bīʾr ʿAlī]
Qarnā (*Qrnw*) [Maʿīn]
Radāʿ (*Rdʿ*) [Radāʿ]
Raydat (*Rydt*) [Rayda]
Samīʿān (*Sʰmʿ*ⁿ) [Maṣnaʿat Māriya]
Shabwat (*Sʰbwt*) [Shabwa]
Shibām^um (*Sʰbm*ⁿ) [Shibām al-Ghirās]
Shibām^um (*Sʰbm*ⁿ) [Shibām-Kawkabān]
Saʿdat^um (*Sʿdm*ⁿ) [Saʿda]
Ṣanʿāʾ (*Ṣnʿw*) [Ṣanʿāʾ]
Sirwāḥ (*Srwḥ*) [Sirwāḥ]
Sawāʿ^um (*Sʰwʿ*ⁿ) [al-Sawāʿ]
[Taʿizz]
[Tanʿim]
Thāt (*Tt*) [Thāt]
Waʿlān (*Wʿlⁿ*) [al-Miʿsāl]
[Wādiʿ]
Yaklaʾ (*Ykl*ʾ) [al-Nakhla al-Ḥamrāʾ]
[Yarīm]
Yaslaḥ Pass (*Ys·lʰ*)
Ẓafār (*Ẓfr*) [Ẓafār]

[LOWLANDS] Modern territory
Nagrān Ancient place name
(*Ngr*ⁿ) Transcription of the ancient place name
[Najrān] Modern place name

Red Sea

Gulf of Aden
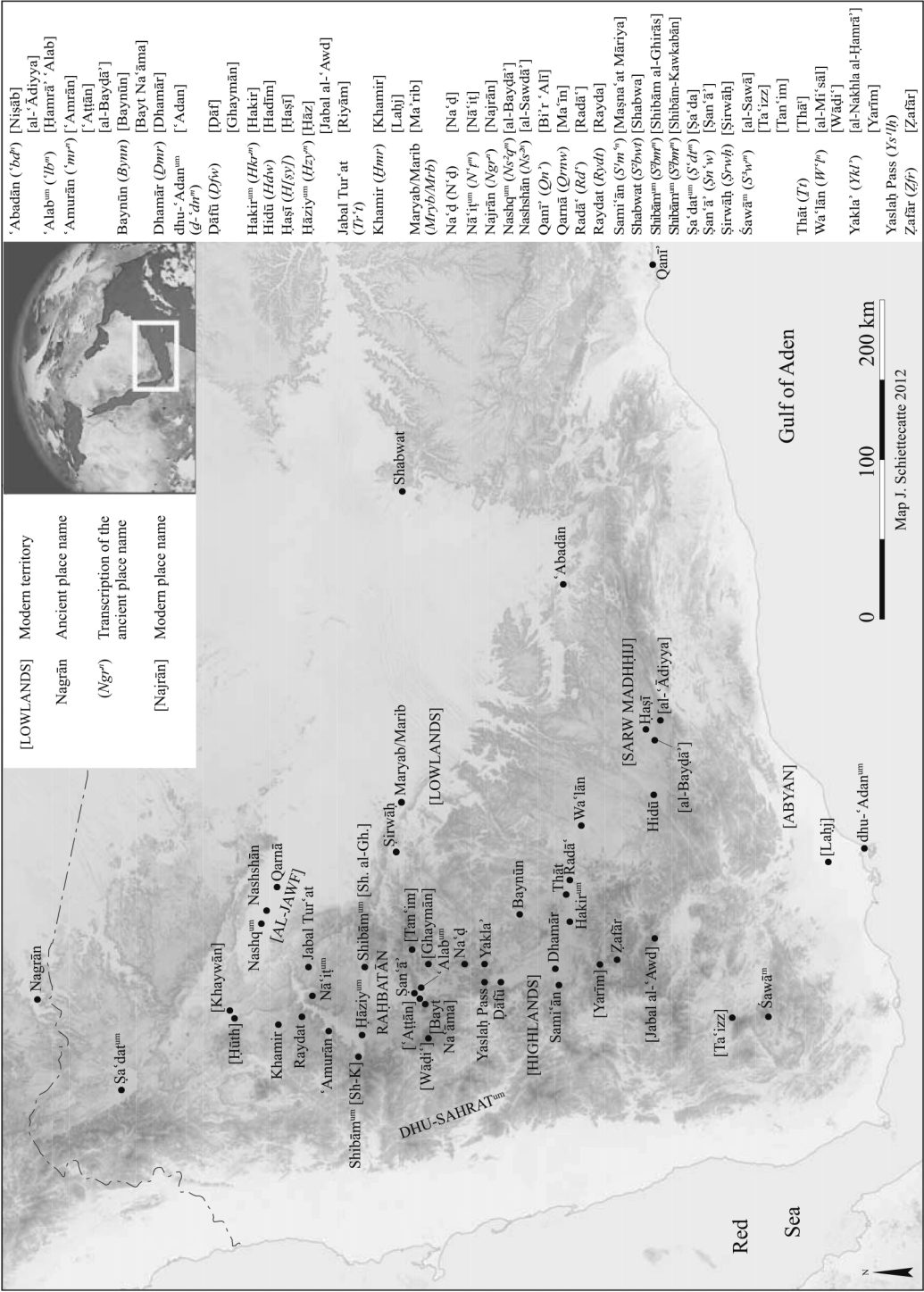
0   100   200 km
Map J. Schiettecatte 2012

Fig. 1. Ancient Yemen (map J. Schiettecatte).

Khargān with the oasis of al-Kharj 80 km southeast of modern al-Riyāḍ in Najd is confirmed by the mention of Maʿaddᵘᵐ, the vast tribal confederation of central Arabia. As for Gawwān, it is the main city of the oasis of al-Kharj. In the enumeration of booty, mention is made of 'a hundred captives, 3200 camels, and twenty-five horses captured or killed'. Finally, the 2000 men and 160 riders from the twelfth campaign won a victory to the north-east of Mecca, where they 'faced the ʿAbdqaysān tribe (Arabic ʿAbd al-Qays) at Siyyān (Arabic al-Siyy) at the waters of the well Sigah (Arabic Sijā) between the country of Nizārᵘᵐ and the country of Ghassān and fought against the Shannᵘᵐ tribe and the banū Nukrat and the banū Ṣabirat'.[8] These ethnonyms and toponyms all refer to western (Nizār, Ghassān, al-Siyy),[9] central (Sijā),[10] and eastern Arabia (ʿAbd al-Qays, its Shann faction, as well as the banū Nukrat and banū Ṣabirat who are probably ruling lineages).[11] The results are significant. The princes, officers, and men kill or take as prisoners 150 combatants, kill or capture eighteen horses, and seize 400 captives, 4000 camels, and 12,000 sheep.

The purpose of these repeated military expeditions in various parts of Arabia Deserta is not clearly indicated. The text does not explicitly state that they are undertaken by order of the king, nor does it mention the submission of tribes or the installation of garrisons. It is difficult to believe that the Yazʾanids would engage in risky expeditions far from home without the consent of the king of Ḥimyar. In my opinion, he was the one who took the initiative for these expeditions. The unification of southern Arabia at the end of the third century significantly strengthened his power base. Moreover, the crisis that 'paganism' faced at the time probably allowed him to confiscate the treasures of the great shrines and in this way to provide the necessary resources for the campaigns.

The Yazʾanid campaigns were primarily raids of intimidation and retaliation in response to the threat that the kings of al-Ḥīra, vassals of the Sasanians, represented. The epitaph of Imruʾ al-Qays son of ʿAmr (died 328) from Namāra indeed reports that this king of al-Ḥīra had launched a raid against the Ḥimyarite city of Nagrān on the outposts

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8. ʿAbadān 1, lines 29–30: w-hwkbw ʾs²rtⁿ ʾbdqysˡⁿ b-Sˡyⁿ ʾly mw bʾrⁿ Sˡgh bynn ʾrḍ Nzrᵐ w-ʾrḍ Ḡsˡⁿ w-ḥrbw ʾs²rtⁿ S²nᵐ w-bny Nkrt w-bny (Ṣb)rt.

9. According to al-Bakrī, Muʾjam, p. 1370 al-Saqqā al-Siyy is three stages from Mecca, between dhāt ʿIrq and Marrān, so at about 100 to 220 km to the east-north-east of Mecca.

10. The wells of Sijā / Sajā are situated 380 km to the north-east of Mecca.

11. ʿAbd al-Qays is a great tribe of Rabīʿa. See Caskel, Ǧamharat an-nasab 1, Tables 141 and 168; Shann is one of its main factions. The banū Ṣabirat can be linked to Ṣabira ibn al-Dīl ibn Shann ibn Afṣà ibn ʿAbd al-Qays or to Ṣabira ibn Nukra ibn Lukayz ibn Afṣà ibn ʿAbd al-Qays; concerning the banū Nukrat, they are found in the genealogy of Ibn al-Kalbī as Nukra ibn Lukayz ibn Afṣà ibn ʿAbd al-Qays.

of southern Arabia, and became king of Nizārū and Maʿaddū, that is, of west and central Arabia.[12] These campaigns were thus meant to detach the tribes of Arabia Deserta from al-Ḥīra's tutelage and, no doubt, to impose the payment of taxes. Nonetheless, it is not unlikely that, already at this time, the kings of Ḥimyar envisioned a systematic conquest. They had just annexed the kingdom of Sabaʾ, whose rulers had been involved in Arabia Deserta as early as the 220s through exerting influence over the kings of Kinda and establishing diplomatic contacts with several tribes, and the kings of Ḥimyar continued their policy.[13] One might object that neither the inscription of ʿAbadān nor any other text mentions operations of the royal army. But this is not a decisive objection. Often only the leaders of auxiliary troops engrave inscriptions to publicize their exploits, while the king and his generals do not find it worthwhile to do so. The composition of the troops commanded by the Yazʾanids is also interesting to note; they incorporated the 'communes'[14] over which they held sway in the west and in the south of Ḥaḍramawt, along with troops from

12. Y. Calvet and C.J. Robin, *Arabie heureuse, Arabie déserte. Les antiquités arabiques du Musée du Louvre* (Notes et documents des Musées de France 31; Paris, 1997), pp. 265–69 (no. 205, lines 2–3): ... *w-mlk ʾl-ʾšryn w-Nzrw w-mlwk-hm w-ḥrb M(ḏ)hgw ʿkdy wgʾ b-zg-h fy rtg Ngrn mdynt Šmr w-mlk Mʿdw* '[Imruʾ al-Qays] became the king of the Asūrites [the inhabitants of Sasanian Āsūrestān, *TAVO* B VI 3] and of Nizārū and of their/his kings, he waged war against Madhḥigū until he knocked on the doors of Nagrān, the town of Shammar, with his spear, and then he became king of Maʿaddū ...'.

13. The diplomatic missions of which we know that they were sent to the kings of al-Asd/al-Azd, Ghassān, Kinda-and-Madhḥij, Madhḥij, Nizār, and Tanūkh are: 1) the Sabaean embassy sent by Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub and Yaʾzil Bayān, kings of Sabaʾ and of dhu-Raydān (c. 235–55) *b-ʿbr ʾmlk s²mt ʾl-Ḥrt bn Kʿbm mlk-ʾs¹d w-Mlkm bn Bd mlk Kdt w-Mḏḥgm w-ḏ-bn ʾʿrbn ...* 'to the northern kings, al-Ḥārith ibn Kaʿbum king of Asd and Mālikum son of Baddāʾ king of Kiddat, of Madhḥigum and of various Arabian people …' (Ja 2110, lines 7–10 = AM 848; for this inscription, see D.B. Doe and A. Jamme, 'New Sabaean Inscriptions from South Arabia', *JRAS* 100 [1968], pp. 1–28 at 5, 15–16); 2) the Sabaean embassy sent by Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub king of Sabaʾ and of dhu-Raydān when he reigned alone (c. 255–60) *b-ʿbr ʾmlk ʾs²bn Ǧsʾn w-l-ʾs¹d w-Nzrm w-Mḏḥgm* 'to the kings of the communes of Ghassān, al-Asd, Nizārum, and Madhḥigum ...' (ʿĪnān 75); and 3) the Ḥimyarite embassy sent by Shammar Yuharʿish king of Sabaʾ, dhu-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat (c. 287–c. 311; with this title, c. 296–c. 311) *b-kn blt-hw mrʾ-[h]w S²mr Yhrʿs² b-ʿbr Mlkm bn K[ʿb]m mlk-l-ʾs¹d w-s¹bʾ tty s¹bʾty[n]w-wz mẓʾ ʾdy Qṭwṣf w-Kwk mmlkty Frs¹ w-ʾrḍ Tnḫ* '... when his lord Shammar Yuharʿish sent him to Mālikum ibn Ka[ʿb]um king of al-Asd and when he had done two missions until he arrived in Ctesiphon and Seleucia, the two royal cities of Persia, and in the country of Tanūkh' (Sharaf 31, lines 8–12). 'The country of Tanūkh' is probably the ancient name of the sixth-century 'kingdom of al-Ḥīra', C.J. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar, des "Romains" et des Perses (IIIᵉ–VIᵉ siècles de l'ère chrétienne)', *Semitica et Classica* 1 (2008), pp. 167–202 at 189–91.

14. Throughout this paper, I take the term 'commune', as proposed by A.F.L. Beeston, *Warfare in Ancient South Arabia (2nd. – 3rd. Centuries A.D.)* (Qahtan, Studies in Old South Arabian Epigraphy 3; London, 1976), pp. 2–3, to refer to the sedentary tribes of south Arabia.

the Arab kingdom of Kinda (which includes Madhḥij and Murād; Fig. 5).[15]

These Ḥimyarite campaigns in Arabia Deserta changed the balance sheet in the Peninsula and undoubtedly had an impact on the relations of Ḥimyar with the Sasanian and Roman empires. Already at the beginning of the fourth century, immediately after the annexation of the kingdom of Sabaʾ (c. 275) and the conquest of Ḥaḍramawt (c. 296), the Ḥimyarite King Shammar Yuharʿish (c. 275–311) sent ambassadors to the Sasanian and Roman rulers, probably in order to inform and reassure them. The ambassador sent to the Sasanian capital manifestly failed in his mission, however. He was a Sabaean, from one of the noblest families, called Raymān dhu-Ḥazfar[um], and mentions his journey in a text commemorating an offering made in the Great Temple of Maʾrib:

> In gratitude because he is back safe and sound after his Lord Shammar Yuharʿish sent him to Mālik[um] son of Kaʿb[um] king of al-Asd—he went there twice and continued until reaching Ctesiphon and Seleucia, the two royal cities of Persia, and (also) the country of Tanūkh, and Almaqah granted him to come back safe and sound and to have cause for satisfaction wherever his master had sent him ....[16]

The wording is somewhat crooked; Raymān goes to the capital of the Sasanian empire and the country of Tanūkh, without saying explicitly that he had an official mission and without mentioning their sovereign; this journey is an embassy to the king of al-Asd, whose capital is in the present ʿAsīr, in Saudi Arabia, near Yemen, but 1700 km from the Sasanian capital. There is obviously no direct link between these two missions.

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15. We can say, on the basis of two distinct arguments, that Madhḥij was dependent on Kinda beginning with the reign of Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub (c. 235–c. 260). The first argument is that, in the second half of the third century, the titles of the kings of Kinda include Madhḥij. Secondly, thereafter, Madhḥij (or a group from its midst) is never mentioned without Kinda in first place, which became a kingdom integrated into the Ḥimyarite kingdom. Note, however, that Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub still sent an ambassador to the king of Madhḥij towards the end of his reign (as the author of ʿInān 75 invokes this king without his brother). Therefore the tribe would have initially kept some autonomy. The case of Murād is somewhat less clear. The Arab genealogists tell us that, at the dawn of Islam, Murād is a 'son' of Madhḥij. He was thus one of his fractions, together with Jald, ʿAns, and Saʿd al-ʿAshīra. If we go back in time, all the references to Murād in Ḥimyarite inscriptions mention the supply of auxiliary troops. However, these aids are always mentioned after those of Kinda and Madhḥij. So we can conclude that Murād was already closely associated with Madhḥij.

16. Sharaf 31, lines 7–14: ... w-ḥmd[m] b-[ḏt]ʾtw b-wfy[m] b-kn blt-hw mrʾ-[h]w S²mr Yhrʿs² b-ʿbr Mlk[m] bn K[ʿb][m] mlk-l-ʾs¹d w-s¹bʾ ṯty s¹bʾty[n]w-wzʾ mẓʾ ʾdy Qṭwṣf w-Kwk mmlkty Frs¹ w-ʾrḍ Tnḫ w-ḥmr-hw ʿlmqh ʾtw b-wfy[m] w-hfs²ḥn b-[n]kl ḏ-blt-hw mrʾ-hw .... For the location of Ctesiphon and Seleucia, see TAVO B VI 3, Nebenkarte 1 ('Tisifōn' and 'Kōkē/Maḥōzā') and Fig. 5.

If they are mentioned together, it is probably to hide the failure of the second: it seems likely that the Sasanian king refused to receive Raymān.

The date of the inscription can be established with some degree of precision, as it appears to have been written around 310. A first indication is provided by the 'long' title of Shammar Yuharʿish, 'king of Sabaʾ, dhu-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat'. This title implies a date between *c*. 296 and *c*. 312. The chronology of Shammar's reign is well-known. He co-reigned with his father at a date prior to 275 and succeeded him shortly after 286, conquered Ḥaḍramawt in *c*. 296, and then subsequently modified his existing title 'king of Sabaʾ and dhu-Raydān' by adding 'and of Ḥaḍramawt and Yamnat'.[17] Shammar disappears from the record shortly after 310. The date of *c*. 310 is deduced from what Raymān says about his career. He makes an offering to the god Almaqah because he has three reasons to be grateful: he has returned safely and loaded with booty from the military expeditions conducted in the name of King Shammar on the periphery of Yemen, in the mountains bordering the Red Sea (a region called dhu-Sahrat^{um}); he has returned safely and is satisfied by the embassy that Shammar has entrusted him to conduct before the king of al-Asad and by the journey to the royal Persian cities of Ctesiphon and Seleucia and to the country of Tanūkh; and, finally, he has successfully served the same King Shammar for forty years as governor of the city Ṣaʿdat^{um} in the north of Yemen. The number forty is probably approximate, but it implies that Raymān made his offering at the very end of the reign of Shammar Yuharʿish, so around 310.

As regards the date of the two diplomatic missions, the only certainty is that they occurred in the sole reign of Shammar Yuharʿish and at some point before the dedication of the offering, in other words between *c*. 286 and *c*. 310. However, sending an embassy, or rather an exploratory mission to the Sasanian ruler, seems to fit better after the conquest of Ḥaḍramawt than before. I would, therefore, prefer to situate the mission between 296 and 310, though this is not a decisive argument, since we do not know all the diplomatic activities of Ḥimyar. B. Overlaet has recently suggested that the Arab embassy received by the Sasanian King Bahram II (276–93), which is represented on the rock relief number 4 at Bishapur,

17. Interpreting the addition of 'Ḥaḍramawt' to the Ḥimyarite royal title does not present any problems, as it is known that King Shammar Yuharʿish conquered Shabwat, the capital of Ḥaḍramawt, and probably annexed the kingdom as a whole or in part in *c*. 296. However, the meaning of 'Yamnat' is still debated; it could be the official name of the territories of Kinda given that their annexation occurred shortly before. See C.J. Robin, 'Les rois de Kinda', in A. al-Helabi *et al.* (eds), *Arabia, Greece and Byzantium. Cultural Contacts in Ancient and Medieval Times* (Riyadh, 2012), pp. 59–129 at 65.

was that of Raymān.[18] Such an identification is not ruled out by the time-line, but seems unlikely; if Raymān had effectively been received by the Sasanian king, he would have mentioned this success in the story of his embassy.

The embassy to the Roman emperor, who is curiously called 'Caesar, king of the north' (Qys^1r^m mlk $S^2{}^\jmath mt$),[19] is mentioned in an unpublished Ḥimyarite inscription.[20] The two ambassadors, men of obscure descent, make an offering in the Great Temple of Maʾrib in order to thank the god who has brought them back safe, but without further explanation. This dedication should be dated to after the conquest of Ḥaḍramawt on the basis of the title that the two royal ambassadors give to King Shammar. Nothing in the text suggests that the dedication is to be dated long after the return of the embassy, which can thus be dated to not long after 296.

The assumption that the Sasanian authorities worried about the conquest policy of Ḥimyar fits well with the mentioned raid that Imruʾ al-Qays son of ʿAmr, 'king of all Arabs', launched in southern Arabia at a date which was surely much earlier than his death in 328. Imruʾ al-Qays, who may well be the king of the land of Tanūkh visited by the Ḥimyarite ambassador Raymān, was a vassal of the Sasanian ruler. The raid, which was aimed at Madḥḥij, an Arab tribe under Ḥimyarite authority, reached the city of Nagrān, the great oasis which is now in Saudi Arabia, on the border with Yemen.[21]

The embassy sent by Constantius II to the king of Ḥimyar of around 340, mentioned at the start of this paper, can be seen in the same context of tension between Ḥimyar and the Sasanians.[22] According to the *Church History* of Philostorgius, Constantius put much effort into seducing the

18. B. Overlaet, 'A Himyarite Diplomatic Mission to the Sasanian Court of Bahram II Depicted at Bishapur', *Arabian Epigraphy and Archaeology* 20 (2009), pp. 218–21.

19. 'North' may perhaps mean Syria here (*al-Shām* in Arabic).

20. The inscription (MB 2004 I-123) was discovered by the American mission on the pavement of the peristyle of the Great Temple of Maʾrib. I am grateful to Mohammed Maraqten for having brought this important document to my attention.

21. See above, n. 12.

22. See above, n. 1. On this embassy and one of its leaders, Theophilus the Indian, see M. Rodinson, 'La conversion de l'Éthiopie', *Raydān* 7 (2001), pp. 225–62 at 228–36. The mission is dated '*c.* 340' by J. Desanges, *Recherches sur l'activité des Méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique, VIe siècle avant J.-C. – IVe siècle après J.-C.* (Collection de l'École française de Rome 38; Rome, 1978), p. 356, and between 339 and 344 by M. Rodinson, 'Conversion de l'Éthiopie', p. 235. Indeed, Theophilus returned to Antioch shortly after 344, J. Desanges, 'Une mention altérée d'Axoum dans l'*Expositio totius mundi et gentium*', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 7 (1967), pp. 141–55 at 151, with n. 1. W. Ensslin, 'Theophilos 25', in *RE* 2nd Series 5.2 (1934), cols 2167–68 at 2167, proposes another date, *c.* 356, between two periods of disgrace and exile of Theophilus, a date which continues to be repeated despite the good arguments that were put forward against it. For these, see Desanges, 'Mention altérée d'Axoum' and Rodinson, 'Conversion de l'Éthiopie'.

Ḥimyarite king: one of the leaders of the embassy, Theophilus the Indian, came from an island close to Ḥimyar and the embassy presented the king with lavish gifts, including 200 horses.[23] Philostorgius does not mention the Ḥimyarite king's name, but the date of the embassy implies that it is Thaʾrān Yuhanʿim, who was already king in 324 and disappears from view in *c.* 380. Clearly, the embassy was intended to convert the king of Ḥimyar to Christianity and therefore to bring him into an alliance with Rome. However, it turned out to be a failure. The king was certainly friendly, offering to construct three churches for Christians travelling to his kingdom at his own expense,[24] but because of the pressure of the Jews around him, he refused to convert.

The embassy of Constantius II, dating to around 340, is roughly contemporary with the first Ḥimyarite expeditions to the heartlands of Arabia Deserta. Such expeditions, however, which targeted areas close to the Persian Gulf, could hardly have been organized and renewed without the assent of the Sasanians. All this took place during the long reign of Shāpūr II (309–79), the ruler to whom are assigned the long walls and ditch (*Khandaq Sāpūr*) that protected the border edge of the desert in south-western Mesopotamia, as well as military operations in al-Baḥrayn (the Arabic name for the Arabian Gulf shore). Presumably, during the four or five decades between the conquest of Ḥaḍramawt and the early expeditions to central Arabia, Ḥimyar developed links with the Sasanians and perhaps even became their official allies. The embassy of Constantius II would then have arrived too late.

Even if we do not have any concrete evidence proving an alliance between Ḥimyar and Persia, we nevertheless have a reference to a commitment of Ghassān, an Arab tribe from western Arabia whose main centre was apparently at Yathrib (modern al-Madīna),[25] with the Sasanian Persians at the time of the expedition of the Emperor Julian against Persia in 363. According to Ammianus, the phylarch of the 'Assanites'— the Aramaic pronunciation of Ghassān—laid an ambush in the valley of

23. Philostorgius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.4 (*GCS* 55, p. 34); trans. P.R. Amidon, *Philostorgius. Church History* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 23; Atlanta, 2007), pp. 40–41: 'Now Constantius fitted out the embassy magnificently and with the utmost splendor, sending with it all of two hundred of the finest breed of horses from Cappadocia conveyed on ships designed as cavalry transports, as well as many other gifts calculated to strike wonder at their sumptuousness and to enchant the beholder'.
24. One church was built in the capital and the two others in ports.
25. C.J. Robin, 'Ghassān en Arabie', in D. Genequand and C.J. Robin (eds), *Les Jafnides. Rois arabes au service de Byzance (VIe siècle de l'ère chrétienne)* (Paris, in press).

the Euphrates, near Ozogardana, not far from modern Hit, which failed.[26]
The religious policy of Ḥimyar (to which I shall return in the next section) supports the hypothesis of a formal or implicit alliance with Sasanian Persia. Polytheism, abandoned by the elites in the course of the fourth century, was rejected and officially replaced by a new religion of Jewish inspiration around 380. Such a choice assured the Sasanians that Ḥimyar had distanced itself from Rome.

Maʾsal 1 = Ry 509 (c. 440 ?)

Some eighty years after the inscription of ʿAbadān was written, central Arabia became a Ḥimyarite possession, as is proclaimed by an inscription engraved in the rock surface of an arid valley in Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, 200 km west of modern al-Riyāḍ, in the heart of Saudi Arabia. The place is completely deserted; no traces of human presence have been found here, apart from a few tombs hewn out of the escarpments and some rock graffiti. In the inscription, the Ḥimyarite Kings Abīkarib Asʿad and his son Ḥaśśān Yuhaʾmin commemorate the annexation of the tribal confederation Maʿadd[um]:

> (The kings) engraved this inscription in the wādī Maʾsal Gumḥān when they came and took possession of the land of Maʿadd[um] while they installed garrisons provided by some of their communes, with their communes Ḥaḍramawt and Sabaʾ—the sons of Marib—, the cadets of their princes, the youngest of their officers, their agents, their hunters and their troops, as well as with their Arabs Kiddat, Saʿd, ʿUlah, and H ...[27]

This document does not commemorate a victory, since it does not mention any military operation, but rather records a political reorganization of the kingdom of Ḥimyar, resulting from a change in the legal status of Maʿadd[um]. This reorganization logically resulted in the adoption of a new titulature for the rulers of Ḥimyar, which for the first time explicitly mention the Arabs.

26. Ammianus Marcellinus 24.2.4; trans. J.C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus* 2 (Loeb Classical Library 315; Cambridge, MA, 1940), p. 411: *... Surena ... and Malechus Podosacis nomine, phylarchus Saracenorum Assanitarum, famosi nominis latro, omni saevitia per nostros limites grassatus diu, structis Ormizdae insidiis ...* '... the Surena ..., and the Malechus, Podosaces by name, phylarch of the Assanitic Saracens, a notorious brigand, who with every kind of cruelty had long raided our territories, laid an ambuscade for Ormizda ...'. The itinerary of Julian is illustrated in the map *TAVO* B VI 4, Nebenkarte: Der Feldzug Iulians gegen die Sāsāniden (363).
27. Maʾsal 1 = Ry 509, lines 4–10: *... rqdw ḏn mrqdⁿ b-wdyⁿ Mʾs¹l Gmḥⁿ k-s¹bʾw w-ḥllw ʾrḍ Mʿdᵐ (b-)mw nzlᵐ bn ʾs²ʿb-hmw w-b-s²ʿb-hmw Ḥḍrmwt w-S¹bʾ [w-]bny Mrb w-ʾṣ(ğ)rt ʾqwl-hmw w-(ʾğ)lm [kl] mqtwt-hmw w-ʾtly-hmw w-ṣyd-hmw w-qbḍ-hmw w-b-ʿʾrb-hmw Kdt w-S¹(ʿ)d w-(ʿ)lh w-H.[?].*

From the time of the annexation of Ḥaḍramawt by Shammar, the Ḥimyarite royal title was 'king of Sabaʾ, dhu-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat'. At Maʾsal, the kings added for the first time 'and the Arabs of Ṭawd and Tihāmat'.[28] The meaning of this new titulature is not entirely certain. It is clear that Tihāmat means the coastal regions of western Arabia between Mecca and Yathrib. The term Ṭawd, which means 'mountain', refers to the Ḥimyarite name for Najd. The most conclusive argument for this identification is the location of the inscription from Maʾsal and the various evidence for the Ḥimyarite occupation of central Arabia. Ṭawd and Tihāmat would then seem to be the Ḥimyarite names for central and western Arabia. The new titulature, which consists of five entities of equal value (Sabaʾ, Ḥimyar, Ḥaḍramawt, Yamnat, and the Arabs), grouped under the aegis of the kings of Ḥimyar, was soon revised, however, as the phrase 'and the Arabs of Ṭawd and Tihāmat' was replaced by 'and their Arabs in Ṭawd and Tihāmat'.[29] In the second version, 'their Arabs' probably means 'the Arabs of Sabaʾ, Ḥimyar, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat'. The position of the Arabs therefore declined from a strict equality with the old south Arabian nobility to a form of subordination.

The new status of Maʿaddᵘᵐ is alluded to by two terms whose broad sense is clear, but whose precise meaning is not: ḫll, which means 'to stop, to halt', hence probably 'to take possession, to annex', and nzl 'to halt, to be stationed, to establish themselves'. The two forces on which the sovereigns relied are mentioned: on the one hand their communes and, on the other, three Arab tribes. It is noteworthy that Ḥaḍramawt and Kinda are mentioned first in these two enumerations, which fits perfectly with the evidence of the inscription from ʿAbadān discussed above. The conquest of central Arabia was achieved by the Yazʾanid princes of Ḥaḍramawt and the Arabs of Kinda.

The date of the inscription is certainly between 400 and 450, but probably more towards the end of this range. Abīkarib ruled for a long time, since he already sat on the throne with his father in January 384, and was still king in August 433, fifty years later. The earliest date known for his successor, his son Shuriḥbiʾīl Yaʿfur, is January 456. In 433, the support of King Abīkarib is invoked by princes of the Ṣanʿāʾ area who also mention that Abīkarib co-reigned with four of his sons.[30] In this text, Abīkarib still bears the title consisting of four components, without the Arabs.

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28. *w-ʾʿrb Ṭwd w-Thmt.*
29. *w-ʾʿrb-hmw Ṭwdᵐ w-Thmt.*
30. Ry 534 + MAFY-Rayda 1. See C.J. Robin, 'Le royaume Ḥujride, dit "royaume de Kinda", entre Ḥimyar et Byzance', *CRAI* (1996), pp. 665–714 at 703–706; Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, p. 62; C.J. Robin, 'Quel judaïsme en Arabie?', in C.J. Robin (ed.), *Le*

It is therefore likely, though not entirely certain, that the inscription of Maʾsal is later than 433. Hypothetically, then, I date the annexation of central Arabia to around 440.

al-ʿIrāfa 1 (c. 440?)

The Ḥimyarite domination of central Arabia is confirmed by a fragmentary, undated inscription from Ẓafār, the capital of Ḥimyar, which I. Gajda discovered and published in 2004.[31] This text contains the earliest mention of Muḍar, the vast tribal confederation of western Arabia, in line 4, '... Nuʿmānān and Muḍar at Maʾsal^{um}, Maʾsal Gumḥ^{um}'.

According to the Arabic-Muslim tradition, Muḍar in western Arabia balanced the power of Maʿadd^{um} in central and eastern Arabia. The anthroponym before Muḍar is undoubtedly the name of its chief or king. This text therefore tells us that the chief of the western Arabian tribes went to Maʾsal, in central Arabia, presumably to meet the king of Ḥimyar and to pledge his allegiance. So we have here an allusion to a probable subjugation of western Arabia, as is suggested by the royal titulature mentioned above.

The inscription from Ẓafār also mentions a confrontation with Tanūkh (the political entity that the sources of the sixth century call the kingdom of al-Ḥīra)[32] and lists a variety of areas that Ḥimyar seems to have captured in central and eastern Arabia, including a dozen topographical landmarks, notably Yamāmatān and Hagar^{um} (Arabic al-Yamāma and Hajar [modern al-Hufūf]). It is likely that this text is roughly contemporary with the previous one, so it too dates tentatively to around 440.

Maʾsal 3 (474–75)

The site of Maʾsal, which apparently had a great symbolic significance—it is even mentioned in some pre-Islamic poetry[33]—welcomed a third Ḥimyarite ruler during the fifth century. An unpublished

judaïsme de l'Arabie antique, forthcoming. The four co-rulers with Abīkarib were Ḥaśś[ān Yu]haʾmin, Maʿdīkarib Yuhanʿim, Marthadʾīlān Yazʾan, and Shuriḥbiʾīl Yaʿfur.

31. I. Gajda, 'Ḥimyar en Arabie centrale—un nouveau document', *Arabia* 2 (2004), pp. 87–98, with—in the latest instance—Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar', pp. 200–201.

32. Cf. already the inscription of the ambassador Raymān (Sharaf 31), above. For the identification of Tanūkh with al-Ḥīra, see Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar', p. 190.

33. U. Thilo, *Die Ortsnamen in der altarabischen Poesie* (Schriften der Max Freiherr von Oppenheim-Stiftung 3; Wiesbaden, 1958), pp. 68–69.

inscription, unfortunately largely illegible, commemorates the visit of King Shuriḥbiʾīl Yakkuf in 474–75, and again mentions Tanūkh.[34]

As we can see from these inscriptions, the Ḥimyarites dominated Arabia Deserta on a long-term basis. The Arabic-Muslim tradition does not dispute this fact, but places the focus on the Arab princes, calling them 'kings', to whom the Ḥimyarites delegated power.[35] It is difficult to trace with precision the borders of the territories that Ḥimyar controlled. Yet there is little doubt that it encompassed almost all of Arabia Deserta, as far as the vicinity of Lower ʿIrāq and perhaps Palestine. The inscriptions report:

– in central Arabia, the tribal confederation of Maʿadd[um]; the toponyms Maʾsal Gumḥān (Arabic Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, 200 km to the west of al-Riyāḍ), Ḥalibān (90 km west-southwest of Maʾsal and 300 km southwest of al-Riyāḍ), Khargān (Arabic al-Kharj, 280 km east of Maʾsal and 80 km southeast of al-Riyāḍ), Yamāmatān (Arabic al-Yamāma, the area of the oasis of al-Kharj), and a dozen sites in the same region;[36]

– in eastern and north-eastern Arabia, the tribes of ʿAbdqaysān (Arabic ʿAbd al-Qays), Iyādh[um] (Arabic Iyād), and Tanūkh; the toponym Hagar[um] (Arabic Hajar);

– in western Arabia, the tribal confederation of Muḍar; the tribes of Nizār[um] and Ghassān, the toponyms Sigāh (Arabic Sijā) and Siyyān (Arabic al-Siyy, 100–200 km east-northeast of Mecca).

In sum, these inscriptions clearly indicate that the Ḥimyarites were involved in all areas of Arabia Deserta, except perhaps for the great oases of the northern Ḥijāz.

Ḥimyar's Adoption of an Official Religion Inspired by Judaism (c. 380)

I have already mentioned that the Ḥimyarite king established a new official religion inspired by Judaism around 380. This was the result of a long evolution. In southern Arabia, religious cults and practices changed significantly from the beginning of the Christian era, with a sharp

34. Maʾsal 3 was discovered by the French-Saudi mission at Najrān in 2008.

35. Robin, 'Rois de Kinda'.

36. These are Gawwān (Arabic al-Jaww), Birk[um] (Arabic Birk), Sharafān (Arabic al-Sharaf), Nīrān (Arabic al-Nīr), ʿAramat[um] (Arabic al-ʿArama), Abān[um] (Arabic Abān), Rumatān (Arabic al-Ruma; for their location, see Robin, 'Arabes de Ḥimyar'), Turabān (Arabic Turabān), and dhu-Murākh (for their location, see C.J. Robin, 'Abraha et la reconquête de l'Arabie déserte: un réexamen de l'inscription Ryckmans 506 = Murayghān 1', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 [2012], pp. 1–93 at 27–30).

acceleration in the course of the third and fourth centuries. In the past, each political entity had its own gods and religious traditions, and some of these deities were only found in a single polity (Fig. 2). This type of organization can be defined by saying that the political and religious spheres overlapped. The Ḥimyarite kingdom, formed in the course of the first century BCE, is the first political entity in south Arabia which does not have its own pantheon and a federal temple; the cohesion in the kingdom was now based on allegiance to the prince.

The Ḥimyarite territorial expansion, through the annexation of Sabaʾ and the conquest of Ḥaḍramawt, increased the rift between religion and politics. Most of the temples no longer received the rich offerings and long texts of thanksgiving that were offered in the past. The cult of the great god of Sabaʾ, which previously associated other deities into the Sabaean pantheon, developed into a kind of henotheism. Building inscriptions refer less frequently to the gods and supernatural powers. Apparently, the religious question was one on which there was no longer a clear consensus.

The First Public Demonstration of Adherence to Monotheism

The most significant change is the appearance of 'monotheistic' inscriptions. These texts break radically with earlier religious practices. They cite a single deity called 'lord of Heaven' or 'God lord of Heaven' and no longer a series of deities and supernatural powers. They use a different phraseology which is characterized by linguistic borrowings from Aramaic. The oldest monotheistic text is dated to about 330 and four more are known from between 330 and 380, the approximate date of the official adoption of Jewish monotheism. I shall now briefly review these inscriptions.

The oldest monotheistic inscription was written by a certain Abīyadaʿ, a nobleman of the commune of Maḍḥā^{m} (in the region of al-Bayḍāʾ, 200 km southeast of Ṣanʿāʾ; see Fig. 2), who held the office of 'governor of Datīnat' (ʿqb Dtnt).[37] It commemorates the opening of a quarry on behalf of some princes of Maḍḥā^{m} who are documented in 310 ± 10 and 330 ± 10 CE.[38] Abīyadaʿ concludes his text with the invocation, '... and may God, the lord of Heaven ($ʾl^n$ $bʾl$ S^1my^n) help them'. The second inscription, found in the same location as the previous one, was written

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37. Upper Buraʿ (Buraʿ al-Aʿlà) 2. See F. al-Aghbarī, 'Nuqūsh sabaʾiyya jadīda taḥtawī ʿalà aqdam naqsh tawḥīdī muʾarrakh', *Raydān* 8 (2013), pp. 167–83 at 174–76.
38. 345 and [36]5 of the Nabaṭ^{um} era.

Fig. 2. Map of tribes in the Yemen in the first–fourth centuries (map J. Schiettecatte).

by a son of Abīyadaʿ.[39] It commemorates the extraction of alabaster for a royal palace in 355 ± 10 CE[40] 'with the help of God lord of Heaven' (*b-rdʾ ʾlⁿ bʾl S¹myⁿ*).

The third inscription, of unknown provenance, commemorates the construction of a *gyrt*, a term of which the meaning is not certain.[41] It could be a facility to produce lime (*gyr*, Arabic *jīr*). The authors do not belong to the nobility, but are 'officers of the king' (*mqtwt mlkⁿ*). They conclude their inscription with an invocation to '[God] who is in Heaven' and 'their lord Dharaʾʾamar Ayman' without a title. It is likely that Dharaʾʾamar Ayman is the 'king' referred to in the phrase 'the king's officers'. The inscription is dated to August 354.[42] Although the inscription is not from the capital, it is plausible that the authors lived there.

The fourth monotheistic inscription is from Ḥumlān, a commune whose territory extended to the north-west of Ṣanʿāʾ (Fig. 2).[43] Its authors are the princes of the commune, that is, members of the Ḥimyarite aristocracy, here of Sabaean origin. On two occasions, they beg 'the Lord of Heaven' (*Bʾl-S¹myⁿ*) to fulfil their request. The date, unfortunately mutilated, may be 353–54, 363–64 or 373–74.[44] It is likely that a fifth monotheistic inscription,[45] undated, can be situated in the period ranging from 330 to 380: this is the only one that combines 'pagan' and monotheistic phraseology. It was written by the princes of the commune of dhu-ʿAmurān (Fig. 2) in commemoration of the construction of a *mikrāb*, the new place of worship.

These five 'monotheistic' inscriptions were written by influential persons, either people close to the king, or from the provincial aristocracy (from the area of Ṣanʿāʾ in the north and al-Bayḍā in the south), as are most of the monumental inscriptions. They use a radically different phraseology from that of contemporary polytheistic inscriptions.

39. Upper Buraʿ (Buraʿ al-Aʿlà) 1. See al-Aghbarī, 'Nuqūsh', pp. 168–73.

40. 388 of the Nabaṭᵘᵐ era.

41. B 8457. See A. Prioletta, 'A New Monotheistic Inscription from the Military Museum of Ṣanʿāʾ', in A. Sedov (ed.), *New Research in Archaeology and Epigraphy of South Arabia and Its Neighbors. Proceedings of the 'Rencontres sabéennes 15' Held in Moscow, May 25th–27th, 2011* (Moscow, 2012), pp. 315–32.

42. *d̲-ḥrfⁿ* 464 of the Ḥimyarite era.

43. YM 1950, on which see I. Gajda, 'The Earliest Monotheistic South Arabian Inscription', *Archäologische Berichte aus dem Yemen* 10 (2005), pp. 21–29; Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, p. 57.

44. [46]3, [47]3, or [48]3 of the Ḥimyarite era.

45. *CIS* IV 151 + 152, on which see C.J. Robin, *Les Hautes-Terres du Nord-Yémen avant l'islam* 2 (Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul 50; Istanbul, 1982), pp. 87–89.

Monotheism is not a form of polytheism, but a new religion that breaks with the past.

The New Religion: Jewish Monotheism

When Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin (son of Thaʾrān Yuhanʿim), who reigned between about 380 and 400, came to the throne—or shortly after his accession—monotheism became the official religion of the Ḥimyarite kingdom. This religious reform can be inferred from the changes that we observe in the epigraphic corpus.

– Monotheism in royal inscriptions

From *c.* 380 onwards, all royal inscriptions are monotheistic. The oldest one may be placed around 380,[46] on the basis of the fact that the king has only one co-regent, whereas he has two in 384,[47] but such an argument, it is true, is not always decisive. The oldest monotheistic royal inscription which includes a date goes back to January 384.[48] None of the monotheistic royal inscriptions prior to the Aksumite conquest of the 520s contains any reference to a specific religious orientation, whether Judaism, Christianity, or any other variant of monotheism (including 'pagan' monotheism).

– The disappearance of polytheistic inscriptions

From the time when kings proclaim their adherence to monotheism, it takes twenty years for the polytheistic inscriptions to disappear completely.[49] Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the only two polytheistic inscriptions belonging to this transition period come from the countryside.[50] In the Great Sabaean temple of Marib, where excavators

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46. Ja 856 = Fa 60. See A. Jamme, 'The Late Sabaean Inscription Ja 856', *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 7 (1960), pp. 3–5; Robin, 'Quel judaïsme en Arabie?', forthcoming.

47. *RES* 3383 and Garb-Bayt al-Ashwal 2. For these inscriptions, see G. Garbini, 'Una bilingue sabeo-ebraica da Ẓafar', *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 30 (1970), pp. 153–65 at 160–63 (no. 2), and Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, pp. 58–59.

48. ḏ-dʾwⁿ 493 of the Ḥimyarite era, in *RES* 3383 and Garb-Bayt al-Ashwal 2.

49. This observation takes into account only the inscriptions with a date or with evidence allowing a relatively precise dating.

50. MAFY Banū-Zubayr 2 dated to 402–403 (512 of the Ḥimyarite era) and Khaldūn-ʿIlbij 1. For the first inscription, see Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, p. 60, for the second one K. Nuʿmān, *A Study of South Arabian Inscriptions from the Region of Dhamār (Yemen)* (PhD-thesis University of Pisa, 2012), pp. 172–73. The village Banū Zubayr is 40 km northwest of Ṣanʿāʾ and ʿIlbij 80 km to the south. The date of Khaldūn-ʿIlbij 1 is based on the mention of King Dharaʾʾamar Ayman I; it is not impossible that he has received or took the royal title before the religious reform. Note that, even if this text

have identified nearly 800 inscriptions for the period between the first and fourth centuries, no text is known from the reign of Malkīkarib, while three date to the time when he was a co-regent with his father Thaʾrān: hence it is plausible that the temple of Marib was closed when Malkīkarib became sole ruler. In other polytheistic temples, no inscriptions of this late date have been found. The evidence thus suggests that temples were abandoned during the course of the fourth century, and permanently closed around 380.

– Two types of monotheistic inscriptions

Monotheistic inscriptions can be classified into two categories. The ones that are called 'minimalist' contain no term or symbol that may betray a preference for a religious orientation that we are able to identify. The others are more or less explicitly Jewish or Jewish-sympathizing. Among the minimalist inscriptions we find all royal inscriptions, as I mentioned above, and a bit less than half of the inscriptions that have been inscribed by individuals. In contrast, the majority of the inscriptions written by individuals are Jewish or Jewish-sympathizing. Before 530, none of the inscriptions shows a leaning towards Christianity.

– A new term to designate the places of worship: *mikrāb*

None of the terms previously used to denote places of worship (mainly *bayt* and *maḥram*) is attested anymore. They are replaced by the term *mikrāb*. This noun disappears again with the collapse of political Judaism in *c.* 500 and is then replaced by 'church' (*qalīs* and *bīʿat*).

– The emergence of a relatively large number of new terms, borrowed primarily from Judaeo-Aramaic

Many loanwords from Judaeo-Aramaic appear in the monotheistic inscriptions, while there are none in the polytheistic inscriptions. The most revealing of them concern the notions of 'prayer' (*ṣlt*) and 'favour, (divine) grace' (*zkt*). These two terms will be found, 200 years later, with the meaning of 'prayer' and 'legal alms' in Islam, where they were to form two of its five 'pillars'. Also several *mikrāb* are called *Barīk*, which means 'Blessed' in Aramaic.

Thus King Malkīkarib established a new official religion which alone could play a part in public life. The place of worship of the new religion

is from a rural area, its authors are aristocrats and princes of the local commune, Muhaʾnif[um] (Fig. 2).

was called *mikrāb*, which means 'place of blessing', following a specific Yemenite lexical pattern. We now have a dozen references to *mikrāb*, mainly built by kings and princes, the princes of the communes.

The believers seem to fall into two categories: those who rejected polytheism and celebrated one God, and those who more or less explicitly adhered to Judaism. The *mikrāb* is clearly frequented by both. Several inscriptions commemorating the construction of a *mikrāb* were written by the high Yemenite society who present themselves as monotheist, although they did not, from what we can see, convert to Judaism. However, the *mikrāb* is also a Jewish sanctuary. In the cemetery of Ḥaṣī reserved for the Jews (*ʾyhd*), we find a *mikrāb* called Ṣūrīʾīl, a name derived from a Hebrew anthroponym. Furthermore, this *mikrāb* is entrusted to a *ḥazzān*, a term borrowed from Judaeo-Aramaic. Finally, we know of a *mikrāb* that included a *kneset*, the Judaeo-Aramaic noun, which seems to designate the prayer hall.

My hypothesis is that the new official religion was a monotheism based on Judaism. It is likely that the followers of this new religion subscribed to the 'natural' morality of the Noahide laws and adopted Jewish rules of life that did not contradict the traditional ways of living. Presumably they were also instilled with stories and legends from the Bible that were later echoed in the Qurʾān. No doubt, this new religion was friendly to the Jews, who were probably viewed as masters of the faith because of their access to sacred texts, and the models and source of blessing their religion provided. Just as in the Roman world, there would have been two degrees of obedience to Judaism: firstly, a full adherence involving a strict compliance to the Law and a life in separation and, secondly, a minimalist Judaism of the kind we see in the Roman world with the so-called 'God-fearers' (*metuentes*, σεβόμενοι τὸν Θεόν,[51] or θεοσεβεῖς),[52] for whom 'fearing God' meant rejecting polytheism. The difference is, however, that in the kingdom of Ḥimyar, minimalist Judaism was the official and dominant religion, while strict Judaism was an ideal reserved for the few.

The existence of these two degrees may explain how Judaism, with its many prohibitions, could become the dominant religion in a society organized in traditional tribal structures, in which the ways of life and the rules of solidarity had their own logic regardless of religious affiliation. The existence of these two degrees would also explain why the royal

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51. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.72; Acts of the Apostles 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7.

52. M. Hadas-Lebel, *Rome, la Judée et les Juifs* (Antiquité/Synthèses 12; Paris, 2009), pp. 139–43, 215–16.

inscriptions always display monotheism in neutral terms. In his public appearance, the king, even if he himself was a Jew, appeared as a follower of the official religion. It can be noted here that, according to Islamic tradition, Yemen was converted to Judaism through two Jewish doctors of Yathrib who were brought to Yemen by King Abīkarib, the son of Malkīkarib.

To sum up, I propose that King Malkīkarib created a new religion, which would have been a 'minimalist' form of Judaism. A.F.L. Beeston, taking up a suggestion by D.S. Margoliouth, proposed calling this religion 'Raḥmānism', after the most common name given to God.[53] But this designation is ambiguous because 'Raḥmānān' (Arabic al-Raḥmān) is also the name of God for the Christians, not to mention the followers of Musaylima. I would rather speak of a 'Jewish-sympathizing monotheism' or a 'Jewish monotheism'. It is not easy to define the type of Judaism that was adopted in the Ḥimyarite kingdom because the inscriptions do not provide us with much information. Neither Rabbinic Judaism nor Judaeo-Christianity can be identified in them. A few indicators recall Hellenistic Judaism, while others point to a Judaism that maintains a commitment to the Temple and its priests. Among the Jews of the Ḥijāz, about whom we have precise information only for the time of Muḥammad, the influence of the rabbis seems to be decisive. It is reasonable to suppose that these communities, who no longer had the Ḥimyarite kingdom as a model, as it was forcibly conquered and Christianized by Aksum in the late 520s, would instead turn to Syria and Palestine.

Mapping Jewish Monotheism

We can map the major lineages that supported the Jewish or Jewish-sympathizing kings between 380 and the establishment of Aksumite control (c. 500). When King Malkīkarib, son of Thaʾrān, decided to convert to 'monotheism' and defined it as the official religion of the kingdom (probably around 380, certainly before January 384, as we have seen above), the centre of the new faith was unquestionably the capital, Ẓafār. However, the historic capital, Marib, seems to have retained some of its former glory, as this was where King Malkīkarib built the first known *mikrāb*.

53. D.S. Margoliouth, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites Prior to the Rise of Islam* (Schweich Lectures, 1921; Oxford, 1924), p. 71; A.F.L. Beeston, 'Himyarite Monotheism', in A. Abdalla, S. al-Sakkar, and R. Mortel (eds), *Studies in the History of Arabia*, 2. *Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Riyadh, 1984), pp. 149–54.

The leading families who gave their support were the banū Hamdān and Suʾrān (communes of Ḥāshid^um and Bakīl^um), the banū Murāthid^um (commune of dhu-ʿAmurān), the banū Kibsiy^um (commune of Tanʿim^um), the banu Haṣbāḥ (commune of Maḍḥā^m), and the banū Yazʾan (commune of Ḍayfatān). To these, we may have to add the banū Gurat (commune of Samhar^um), the banū Bataʿ (commune of Ḥumlān), and some clients of the banū Ruʿayn, which are documented in incomplete texts.[54] It is therefore indeed 'the entire Yemen'—or at least all the aristocracy in the kingdom—that converted to the new religion, as the Arab Muslim historian al-Yaʿqūbī (died 897) reports.[55] No other religious orientation (mainly Christianity and 'paganism') is mentioned in any inscription, that is, a text written on a durable medium usually intended to be exposed. It is likely that the authorities did not approve.

The Origins of Arabian Judaism

Accurate data on the way in which Judaism was introduced into Yemen is hard to come by. From the beginning of the Hellenistic period, the trade of perfumes in southern Arabia had ceased to be the monopoly of the Minaean and Amīrite caravaneers of southern Arabia.[56] The merchants of Gerrha (eastern Arabia), and then those of Petra (southern Syria), along with the Liḥyānites of Dedān, then also became major players in trans-Arabian trade. It is possible that Judaeans were associated with these entrepreneurs, as some inscriptions in Dedānite writing include anthroponyms that could be of Judaean origin.

'Judaean', which is a geographical term and means 'from Judaea', is a better term to use here than 'Jew' which designates the 'followers of the beliefs and lifestyle called Ἰουδαισμός'.[57] The first irrefutable evidence for the circulation of Judaeans in Arabia dates back to 25–24 BCE, when Herod sent 500 men chosen from among his bodyguards to support the

54. For the localization of these communes, see Figs 2 and 3. See also C.J. Robin and U. Brunner, *Map of Ancient Yemen—Carte du Yémen antique, 1 : 1 000 000* (Munich, 1997), C.J. Robin, 'Matériaux pour une prosopographie de l'Arabie antique: les noblesses sabéenne et ḥimyarite avant et après l'Islam', in C.J. Robin and J. Schiettecatte (eds), *Les préludes de l'Islam. Ruptures et continuités des civilisations du Proche-Orient, de l'Afrique orientale, de l'Arabie et de l'Inde à la veille de l'Islam* (Collection Orient et Méditerranée 11; Paris, 2013), pp. 129–271.

55. *al-Yaman bi-asri-hā* (al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 1, p. 219 al-Manṣūr).

56. The centres of the communes of Maʿīn^um and Amīr^um were the town of Qarnā in the Jawf of Yemen, and the oasis of Nagrān (see Fig. 1).

57. The term Ἰουδαισμός, in opposition to Ἑλληνισμός, appears at the time of the Maccabees. It is attested for the first time in the second book of Maccabees 2:21. The sources, which use *yhwdy* in Aramaic, make no difference between 'Judaean' and 'Jew'.
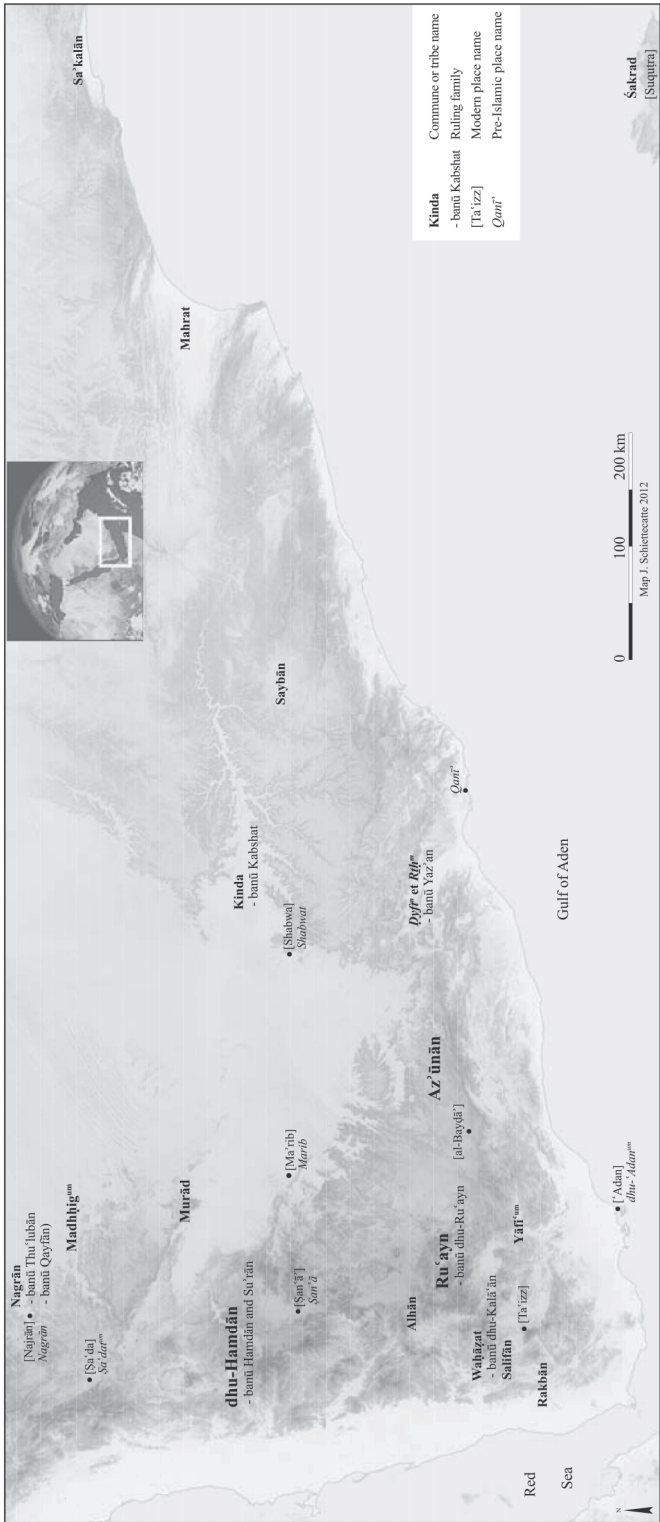
Fig. 3. Map of tribes in the Yemen in the fifth–sixth centuries (map J. Schiettecatte)

army with which the prefect of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, aimed to conquer southern Arabia.[58] In addition, there is the tomb of a Judaean (*yhwdy*) at Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ (formerly al-Ḥijr, Ḥigrâ in Aramaic) dated to the third year of King Mālikū of Nabaṭū (42–43 CE).[59] Nevertheless, the part played by Judaeans in trans-Arabian traffic must have been modest. The spread of Judaism was rather a result of the arrival and installation of Judaeans or Jews of the Mediterranean diaspora, who had fled the hostile powers in Judaea (after 70) or Alexandria (after 115–17).

In the Ḥijāz, three of the 'chief citizens' (*ryš*) of the Taymāʾ and Ḥigrâ oases, who are attested in two epitaphs written in post-classical Nabataean dating to 203 and 356, have biblical names. The one from Taymāʾ, which was recently discovered, mentions 'Isaiah *Nblṭ*', son of Joseph, chief citizen of Taymāʾ'.[60] The name and patronymic of this man and the name of one of his brothers suggest that he was Jewish. In the second one from Ḥigrâ, dated to 356, we encounter a woman called Māwiyah, who had as father ''Amrū son of *ʾdywn* son of Samuel, chief citizen of Taymāʾ' and as husband ''*dywn* son of *Ḥny* son of Samuel, chief citizen of Ḥigrâ'.[61] Samuel, the name of the two grandfathers, is certainly Jewish. Still at Ḥigrâ, the inscription dated to 267, incised in the tomb of Raqāsh, daughter of ʿAbdmanawāt, is known principally for its language, old Arabic written in the Nabataean script.[62] However, it also sheds an interesting light on religion. The author, Kaʿb son of Ḥārithat, places the tomb of his mother under the protection of the 'master of the world' (*mry ʾlmw*), a god who does not appear in the Nabataean pantheon. It is not impossible that this name refers to the one God of the Jews. True, Raqāsh's mother bears a 'pagan' name, but that does not prove much, not even that Raqāsh was born in a 'pagan' family. In favour of this monotheistic hypothesis, I point out that less than a century later, Ḥigrâ had its 'chief citizen' with a biblical name.

In Yemen, the oldest inscription bearing the hallmark of Judaism goes back to the first or second century according to its script. It was

58. Strabo 16.4.23 (Ἰουδαῖοι); Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.9.3.
59. *CIS* II 219.
60. M. al-Najem and M.C.A. Macdonald, 'A New Nabataean Inscription from Taymāʾ', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 20 (2009), pp. 208–17.
61. See the revised reading of this text in Al-Najem and Macdonald, 'New Nabataean Inscription', pp. 213–14. Three of these names are also found in those of al-Samawʾal ibn Ḥannā ibn ʿĀdiyā, a Jewish prince and famous poet from Taymāʾ, who lived around the middle of the sixth century.
62. JS Nab. 17, on which see J.F. Healey and G.R. Smith, 'Jaussen-Savignac 17: The Earliest Dated Arabic Document (A.D. 267)', *Atlal* 12 (1989), pp. 77–84.

discovered in Tanʿim, some 25 km east of Ṣanʿāʾ (Fig. 2).[63] The assump-tion that it comes from a Jewish-oriented *milieu* is based on the vocabu-lary. We find the noun *masgid*, which is borrowed from Aramaic, and the exclamation *amen* (repeated twice), which comes from Hebrew and is attested in Arabia, up to *c*. 500, only in Jewish inscriptions. This text would prove that a Jewish community was established in Tanʿim in the first or second century. Tanʿim remained one of the major centres of Judaism until the twentieth century. In the nearby village of Bayt Ḥāḍir a list was found (written in Hebrew) of *mishmarot* or 'watchmen', listing priestly families in charge of the perpetual sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem.[64] Another ancient text commemorates the construction of a *mikrāb* by the princes of the region.[65] In the years 1868–75, it was precisely in Tanʿim that the Jewish 'messiah' Shukr Kuhayl II chose to settle.[66]

Recently, there has been a sharp increase in finds attesting to the pro-gress of monotheistic ideas and the popularity of biblical names during the first centuries CE. These finds confirm the old hypothesis that many Jews fled to Arabia at the end of the first and the early second century, where they settled in the oases of northern Arabia and probably also in Yemen. From the fourth century onwards, several large aristocratic Ḥimyarite families rejected polytheism and became Jewish or Jewish-sympathizing. A massive movement of conversions made Yemen a coun-try where Judaism was dominant for nearly 150 years.

A Military Campaign of Ḥimyar
Probably Coordinated with Rome (521)

A South Arabian inscription, also reproduced at Maʾsal, commemo-rates a military campaign of the Ḥimyarite King Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur beyond the Euphrates, as far as Kūthā ('*rq Kt*'; see Figs 4–5), in the begin-ning of the year 521. On his way back, the king came through Maʾsal in June, and then through Ḥamḍa, 200 km north of Najrān, in August of the same year.[67] The Syriac accounts of the Christian massacre of Nagrān

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63. G.W. Nebe, 'Eine spätsabäisch-jüdische Inschrift mit satzeinleitendem doppelten Amen aus dem 4./6. Jahrhundert nach Chr.?', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22 (1991), pp. 235–53. For the date, see A. Prioletta, 'La colonne de Tanʿim, la plus ancienne inscrip-tion juive du Yémen?', in Robin, *Judaïsme de l'Arabie antique*, forthcoming.

64. M. Gorea, 'Les classes sacerdotales (*mishmarôt*) de l'inscription juive de Bayt Ḥāḍir (Yémen)', in Robin, *Judaïsme de l'Arabie antique*, forthcoming.

65. Ry 520. See now Robin, 'Quel judaïsme en Arabie?', forthcoming.

66. B.-Z. Eraqi Klorman, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century* (Brill Series in Jewish Studies 6; Leiden, 1993), pp. 118, 119 (n. 39), etc.

67. Ḥamḍa 1 = Ja 2484 (= Mandaville 59). See Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, p. 97.

Fig. 4. Arabia at the time of Abraha (map J. Schiettecatte).

• Ephesus

BYZANTIUM

CAPPADOCIA

• Halicarnassus

Sarūg •
Qenneshrē •
Mabbūg • Urhay /
[Manbij] Edessa •
OSRHOENE

ISAURIA CILICIA Gabbūlā
[al-Jabbūl] Tella (Constantina) •

Antioch • Qenneshrē EUPHRATESIA [DIYĀR BAKR]
SYRIA I [Greek Chalcis] Callinicum
[al-Raqqa]
[DIYĀR RABĪʿA]

SYRIA II [DIYĀR MUDAR]

PHOENICIA
PHOENICIA Euphrates Tigris
LIBANENSIS
[al-SHĀM] TANŪKH Ctesiphon-Seleucia
PALESTINE II [Tisifōn-Kōkē / Maḥōzā]
• Tiberias Kutha •
PALESTINE I JUDAEA ʿARABIA • (al-Namāra) Ḥīrtā dō-Nuʿmān [al-ʿIRĀQ]
• Jerusalem [al-Ḥīra]
AUGUSTAMNICA I IYĀDH[um] [IYĀD]
[LAKHM]
AUGUSTAMNICA II

PERSIA

PALESTINE III • Petra
ARCADIA [Ayla] • Dūmat (Dūmat al-Jandal)

JŪZĀM
[JUDHĀM] [Tabuk] • Taymāʾ TAYY[um] [TAYYIʾ] [RABĪʿA]
• (Ḥāʾil)
Ḥigrā [al-Ḥijr] MUDAR [al-Qaṭīf] •
(Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) ṬAWD[um] [NAJD] Hagar[um] • Khaṭṭ (al-ʿUqayr)
Dedān • WĀDĪ ʾL-QURĀ [al-BAḤRAYN]
[Baṭn ʿAqil] [Hajar, greek Gerrha] [QATAR]
• Khaybar [shiʿb Jabala]
(al-Riyāḍ) ʿABDQAYSĀN
Yathrib Khargān [ʿABD al-QAYS]
[al-Madīna] • GHASSĀN Maʿsal Gumḥān [al-Kharj] Gawwān [al-Jaww] •
[Maʿsal al-Jumḥ] • Yabrīn •
[AL-NAḌIR] SIYYĀN [AL-SIYY] • Sigah Ḥalibān • MAʿADD[um]
[QAYNUQĀʾ] • [Sijā]
[QURAYẒA] [AL-ḤIJĀZ] NIZĀR[um] YAMĀMATĀN
[AL-AWS] [NIZĀR] [AL-YAMĀMA]
[AL-KHAZRAJ]

'Kingdom' of Kinda:

◩ KIDDAT
◩ MADHḤIG[um]
◩ MURĀD[um]

Ghamr dhī Kinda •
[Mecca] •
[KINĀNA]
ASDĀN / AL-ASD
[AL-AZD] Qaryat [Qaryat al-Faʾw] •
MADHḤIG[um] MADHḤIG KIDDAT [KINDA]
Murayghān •
(...) Modern Arabic name • Ḥamḍa
[...] Ancient Arabic name (Khamīs-Mushayṭ) • [Jurash]
• ʿAbhā ʾ AMĪR[um]
For Arabia and Syria, the names are ʿULAH • Nagrān [Najrān] MURĀD[um]
mostly given with their Sabaic or [MURĀD]
Aramaic orthography Ṣaʿdat[um] [Ṣaʿda] •
dhu-SAHRAT[um]
MAʿADD[um] Kingdom, commune SAʾD[um] RAḤBATĀN Marib KIDDAT
or tribe [SAʾD al-ʿASHĪRA] SABAʾ [Maʾrib] [KINDA]
Ẓafār Town Ṣanʿāʾ • ḤIMYAR[um] ḤAḌRAMAWT
ṬAWD[um] Country Ẓafār • ʿAbdān • (Niṣāb)
al-Namara Place name (montain, AKSŪM • [al-Bayḍāʾ]
river, well)

TIHĀMAT

Carte : Astrid Emery

0 500 km

3000 m
2000 m
1000 m
500 m
200 m
0 m

N

Fig. 5. The ancient Near East and Arabia (map A. Emery).

report that this king, put on the throne of Ḥimyar by the Aksūmites, was a Christian. During his visit to Maʾsal, dated to June 521, Maʿdīkarib

> ... established and published this text at Maʾsalᵘᵐ Gumḥān (*sic*) on his return from an expedition in the ʿIrāq of Kūtaʾ because the Arabs in revolt had called him when Mudhdhirᵘᵐ waged war against them; he campaigned with his communes Sabaʾ, Ḥimyarᵘᵐ, Raḥbatān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamna, with his Arabs Kiddat and Madh|ḥi[g]ᵘᵐ and with the banū Thaʿlabat and Mu(ḍa)r. He campaigned [in the mon]th of dhu-qay[ẓā]n 631.[68]

During this expedition, Maʿdīkarib would have rescued Arabs who had revolted against al-Mundhir. But he does not mention the capture of prisoners or booty, nor does he claim to have successfully defeated al-Mundhir. It is clear that the expedition had no significant results.

In fact, the major cause for Maʿdīkarib's pride was to have reached as far as the region called *ʿrq Ktʾ*. This is a toponym that must be located beyond Maʾsal, when coming from the direction of Yemen. It is even quite likely that it lies beyond the Euphrates if we identify *Ktʾ* with the village called Kûthâ in Aramaic and Kūthā in Arabic, situated between the Euphrates and the Tigris.[69] The *ʿrq Ktʾ* would then be the region of the ʿIrāq of which Kūthā is the centre. If this interpretation is correct, the king would have crossed the Euphrates. This is not implausible. According to the Arabic-Muslim tradition, one of the vassals of Ḥimyar was the Kindite prince al-Ḥārith, son of ʿAmr. Al-Ḥārith, however, was, for a short time, on the throne of al-Ḥīra. His grandson, the famous pre-Islamic poet Imruʾ al-Qays, recalls this when he claims that King al-Ḥārith ruled ʿIrāq,

> Will after King al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr
> who ruled over al-ʿIrāq as far as ʿUmān ….[70]

The list of the troops involved in the expedition of Maʿdīkarib is particularly revealing. It consists in the first place of the south Arabian communes in order of protocol: Sabaʾ, Ḥimyarᵘᵐ, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamna(t), with the addition of Raḥbatān (the Sabaean Highlands with Ṣanʿāʾ as centre) between Ḥimyar and Ḥaḍramawt. Note that in this text,

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68. Maʾsal 2 = Ry 510, lines 3–9: ... (ḥ)wrw w-wtf ḏn ms¹ndⁿ b-Mʾs¹lᵐ Gmḥⁿ ʿly mhn-s¹bʿtᵐ b-ʿrq Ktʾ l-hm ḏ-ndyn-hmw ʿrbⁿ qs¹dᵐ w-ḥrb-hmw Mḏrᵐ w-s¹bʾw b-s²ʾb-hmw S¹bʾ w-Ḥmyrᵐ w-Rḥbtⁿ w-Ḥ(ḍ)rmt w-Y(m)n w-b-ʿm ʾ̈rb-hmw Kdt w-Mḏḥ[g]ᵐ w-b-ʿm bny Ṯʿlbt w-Mḍr-w-s¹bʾw b-wrḫⁿ ḏ-qy[z]ⁿ ḏ-l-ʾhd-w-tlty-w-s¹t mʾtᵐ. See on this inscription Robin, 'Royaume Ḥujride' and Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, pp. 95–96.

69. See the map *TAVO* B VI 3, Nebenkarte II ('Kuta/Kūtā').

70. *Abʿada ʾl-Ḥārithi ʾl-maliki bni ʿAmrⁱⁿ la-hu mulku ʾl-ʿIrāqi ilà ʿUmāni.* Quoted by G. Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda of the Family of Ākil al-murār* (Lunds Universitets Årsskrift N.F., Avd 1, 23.6; Leipzig, 1927), p. 66.

Ḥaḍramawt no longer comes first. Next come the Arab auxiliaries under suzerainty of Ḥimyar, 'his Arabs Kiddat and Madh|ḥi[g]ᵘᵐ'. Finally, the king added 'the banū Thaʿlabat and Mu(ḍa)r'. So we find here the large tribal confederation of western Arabia which pledged allegiance to Ḥimyar around the mid-fifth century, with a further clarification: their leaders come from the lineage called 'banū Thaʿlabat'. The mere mention of these leaders implies that Muḍar was not a simple tributary of Ḥimyar, but an ally.

Muḍar also had connections with Rome, as can be inferred from the fact that its chiefs, the banū Thaʿlabat, fought alongside the Romans during the campaign of 502 in Upper Mesopotamia. According to the Syriac chronicle ascribed to Joshua the Stylite:

> The Persian Ṭayəyê[71] advanced to the (river) Khabur, but Timostratus, the *dux* of Callinicum, went out against them [and defeated them]. The Roman Ṭayəyê, who are called Thaʿlabites,[72] went towards Ḥîrtâ, (the residence) of Nuʿmān, ... but they did not attack Ḥîrtâ itself, because (its population) had gone into the inner desert.[73]

The Byzantine chronicler Theophanes also knows the name Thaʿlaba but he mentions it in an enigmatic expression, 'the son of Thalabane'. He identifies Arethas with whom the Emperor Anastasius concluded a treaty in 502, as follows:

> In this year Anastasios made a treaty with Arethas (known as the son of Thalabane), the father of Badicharimos and Ogaros after which all Palestine, Arabia, and Phoenice enjoyed much peace and calm.[74]

The Arabic-Muslim tradition also mentions a Thaʿlaba, allied to Rome and with authority over the tribes of Muḍar, who reigned between the Salīḥids and the Jafnids, thus locating him in the late fifth or early sixth century:

> The reason for which Ghassān received the dignity of king from the Romans was that the Ḍajāʿim, that is, the banū Ḍujʿum ibn Ḥamāṭa ibn Saʿd ibn Salīḥ ibn ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥāf ibn Quḍāʿa, were kings in Syria before the arrival of Ghassān. The Salīḥ collected taxes on whoever settled in their land

71. *Ṭyy' d-Pwrsy'*. The Syriac name 'Ṭayəyê', which designates the Arabs of the desert, is derived from Ṭayyiʾ, an important Arab tribe of central Arabia (see Figs 4–5).

72. *Ṭyy' d-byt Rhwmy' d-mtqryn d-byt Tʿlb'*.

73. Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* 57 (*CSCO* 91, p. 283); trans. F.R. Trombley and J.W. Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Translated Texts for Historians 32; Liverpool, 2000), pp. 68–69 (slightly adapted). See on this passage also the paper of Whately, this volume, p. 226 and the paper of Elton, this volume, p. 243.

74. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 144 De Boor; trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), p. 223; cf. p. 141 De Boor. See on this passage also the paper of Elton, this volume, p. 243.

coming from Muḍar and on any other tribe, on behalf of the Byzantines. The Ghassān arrived with a great army, heading for Syria, so as to settle in their territory. The Salīḥ told them: 'accept (to pay) tribute, if not we shall fight you'. They refused. The Salīḥ fought and defeated the Ghassān. Ghassān's war leader, in those days, was Thaʿlaba ibn ʿAmr ibn al-Mujālid ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAdī ibn ʿAmr ibn Māzin ibn al-Azd. The Ghassān accepted to pay tribute to the Salīḥ who were drawing from them, for every individual, one dīnār, one dīnār and a half or two dīnārs each year, according to their possibilities. The Salīḥ continued to deduct taxes from them as long as God willed, until Jidhʿ ibn ʿAmr the Ghassānid[75] killed the Salīḥ tax collector, who was Sabīṭ ibn al-Mundhir ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf ibn Ḍujʿum ibn Ḥamāṭa. The Salīḥ mobilized around their war cry, just like the Ghassān. They met in a place called al-*Mḫjj*, where Ghassān annihilated them. The king of the Romans feared that the Ghassān would ally with Persia against him. He sent a messenger who said to Thaʿlaba: 'You are a people distinguished by your power and by your number. You have massacred this tribe despite the fact that it was the strongest and the most numerous of the Arabs. As for me, I settle you in their place and conclude between me and you a pact: if an army constituted of Arabs attacks you, I will support you with forty thousand already equipped Roman warriors. If an army made up of Arabs attacks us, you will have to provide twenty thousand warriors. The condition is that you do not enter in a war between us and Persia'. Thaʿlaba accepted this. (The emperor) wrote the treaty between them, made Thaʿlaba king and crowned him. The Roman emperor was called Decius.[76]

The last text in our dossier of the name Thaʿlaba is an undated graffito discovered by U. Avner in the region of Eilat in Israel in 1979, but which has only recently been deciphered by L. Nehmé. It mentions an Arab king named Thaʿlaba, 'I am ʿAdīyū, son of Thaʿlabah, the king (*Tʿlbh ʾl-mlk*)'.[77]

The campaign of Maʿdīkarib in Lower ʿIrāq, conducted with the help of Roman auxiliaries, was probably an operation at the request of Rome. It is possible that it was the Roman response to a serious incident of that period; the capture by al-Mundhir, the king of al-Ḥīra, of two Roman generals, John and Timostrates, with their soldiers, who had imprudently pursued al-Mundhir at an unknown place and date. We only know that

75. According to Ibn al-Kalbī, Jidhʿ ibn ʿAmr is Thaʿlaba's 'brother'. See Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab* 1, Table 208.

76. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, pp. 370–72 Lichtenstadter; trans. by the author. See on this text A.-L. de Prémare, '"Il voulut détruire le Temple". L'attaque de la Kaʿba par les rois yéménites avant l'islam. *Aḫbār* et Histoire', *Journal Asiatique* 288 (2000), pp. 261–367 at 395–96. In Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab* 1, Tables 279 and 326, the genealogy of Ḍujʿum is Ḥamāṭa (*Ḍujʿum*) ibn Saʿd ibn ʿAmr (*Salīḥ*) ibn Ḥulwān ibn ʿImrān ibn al-Ḥāfī ibn Quḍāʿa. That of Thaʿlaba (Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab* 1, Table 208) is Thaʿlaba ibn ʿAmr ibn al-Mujālid ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAdī ibn ʿAmr ibn Māzin ibn al-Azd. Jidhʿ ibn ʿAmr is the 'brother' of Thaʿlaba.

77. U. Avner, L. Nehmé, and C.J. Robin, 'A Rock Inscription Mentioning Thaʿlaba, the Saracen of the Romans', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 24 (2013), pp. 237–56.

the release of these two generals was obtained by a diplomatic conference held in the region of al-Ḥīra in early 524.[78]

Abraha, Christian King of All Arabia (552)

The last major development in scholarship to which I would like to draw attention concerns the political and religious situation in Arabia in the mid-sixth century. A recently discovered inscription states that a Christian king, Abraha, dominated (or at least claimed to dominate) the entire Arabia Deserta in the 550s. It is now possible to discuss in more detail his religious orientation.

Abraha's Reign: The Current State of Research

To have a better understanding of the implications of these new data, it is necessary to go back in time a bit. The kingdom of Ḥimyar became a tributary of the Christian kingdom of Aksum in the early sixth century, in circumstances which remain unclear. The Jewish-sympathizing kings were thus followed by rulers chosen by the Aksumite *negus*. It is certain that the second of these rulers, Maʿdīkarib, who probably reigned from 519 to June 522, and whose expedition to Kūtaʾ in ʿIrāq was discussed above, was a Christian. The third one, Joseph, a Jew, revolted against the *negus* two or three months after he became king (which can be dated to June 522). After slaughtering the small garrison that the *Negus* Kālēb had placed in the capital, he attacked the pro-Aksumite population. The massacre of Christian notables associated with Rome in the oasis of Nagrān caused an outbreak of indignation that allowed the *negus* to launch an expedition of conquest. The success was complete. The rebel king was killed during the invasion of the Aksumite troops in Arabia, which occurred between 525 and 530. Subsequently, the Aksumites seized the entire Ḥimyarite territory. Before returning to his country, the *Negus* Kālēb put on the throne a Ḥimyarite Christian whose obedience was ensured by an Aksumite army garrisoned in Arabia.

This Ḥimyarite Christian king stayed on the throne for only a short time—a few years at most. He was soon overthrown by Abraha, one of

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78. I. Shahîd, 'Byzantino-Arabica: the Conference of Ramla, A.D. 524', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 23 (1964), pp. 115–31 (repr. in idem, *Byzantium and the Semitic Orient before the Rise of Islam* [Variorum Collected Studies 270; London, 1988], Ch. VI); M. Detoraki and J. Beaucamp, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons (BHG 166)* (Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance Monographies 27; Paris, 2007), pp. 14–15 (n. 13).

the leaders of the Aksumite army left behind by the *negus*. The information that we have on Abraha comes from various sources. In his *Persian Wars*, Procopius, a contemporary of the events, paints a highly negative picture of Abraha: 'Later on Abramus too, when at length he had established his power most securely, promised the Emperor Justinian many times to invade the land of Persia, but only once began the journey and then straightway turned back'.[79] It is clear that, for Procopius, Abraha, who had been a slave, is an adventurer who cannot be trusted.[80] The Arabic-Muslim tradition presents a different picture, with many details giving to Abraha the standing of a great Arabian king, while others turn him into a presumptuous and sacrilegious king, punished by God for having attacked the Temple of Mecca. The positive elements are obviously of south Arabian origin; in Yemen, Abraha, whose name was included in the genealogies, was considered a legitimate king. The perversion of Abraha's image probably has its basis in the tradition of Mecca, transmitted by the theologians of Islam.

Two episodes from the life of Abraha have received particular attention: his rise to power and, above all, his expedition against the Temple of Mecca. In the latter case, Abraha wanted to avenge an insult or, according to another version, was concerned by the Arabs going on pilgrimage to the Temple of Mecca, the famous Kaʿba. Consequently, he decided to destroy this temple. The army he set up and at the head of which he placed an elephant reached the outskirts of Mecca, but was unexpectedly pushed back. For the Meccans, there was no doubt that the Temple was saved by divine intervention, as is evoked in *sura* 105 (*al-Fīl* 'The Elephant') of the Qurʾān:

> Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the men with the elephants?
> Did He not cause their mischiefs to go astray?
> He sent on them birds in swarms,
> Which pelted them with stones of baked clay,
> And made them like devoured ears of corn.[81]

Following this victory, most of the peoples of Arabia recognized the sanctity of Mecca's Temple, and the tribe of Mecca received the nickname 'God's people'. The pilgrimage, which appealed to an increasing number of worshippers, was coupled with major fairs. Soon, in the late sixth and

79. Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.20.13; trans. H.B. Dewing, *Procopius 1. History of the Wars, Books I–II* (Loeb Classical Library 48; Cambridge, MA, 1914), p. 195.
80. Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.20.4; trans. Dewing, *Procopius*, p. 191: 'Now this Abramus was a Christian, but a slave of a Roman citizen who was engaged in the business of shipping in the city of Adulis in Ethiopia'.
81. Qurʾān, *sura* 105; trans. A. Jones, *The Qurʾān* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 589.

early seventh century, Mecca reached an unexpected zenith that was not wholly in proportion to its people or natural resources. Of course, the question of the historic nature of the Expedition of the Elephant has been raised and much of the evidence from the tradition is clearly apologetic in character.[82] However, there are other elements in the story which could well be authentic, for example, some accounts ascribe the defeat of Abraha to an epidemic, and in these same accounts and other ones, Muḥammad's grandfather plays an ambiguous role. An additional argument for supporting the historicity of the Expedition of the Elephant is that pre-Islamic poetry recounts the event with a different vocabulary and style than that of the Qurʾān.

Finally, the reign of Abraha is known from five Ḥimyarite inscriptions, four of which were recorded by the king. They shed light on the decade between 547 and 558. The most important of these inscriptions was found at Maʾrib by the Austrian explorer E. Glaser at the end of the nineteenth century. Published in 1897, it commemorates the consolidation of Abraha's power and the dam's repair in 547–48.[83] We owe to the expedition of Philby–Ryckmans–Lippens (1951–52) the discovery of the second inscription, which records the success of a 'fourth expedition' in central Arabia in 552. This famous inscription, discovered on 7 December 1951, is engraved on a rock overlooking the wells of Murayghān, 230 km north of Najrān.[84] And we have a third inscription written by the leader of a tribal group participating in repair work of the Maʾrib Dam in 558.[85] The recent discovery of two inscriptions, on top of the three others already known, provides some new information. The first, dated to February 548, was found during the excavations by the German mission near the Maʾrib Dam and published by N. Nebes in 2004.[86] Following this discovery,

82. E.g. De Prémare, '"Il voulut détruire le Temple"', who argues that *sura* 105 echoes a legendary event in the history of the Ptolemies, inspired by the third book of Maccabees.
83. Sadd Maʾrib 5 = *CIS* IV 541. See, recently, Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, pp. 110–17; C. Darles, C.J. Robin, and J. Schiettecatte, with a contribution by G. el Masri, 'Contribution à une meilleure compréhension de l'histoire de la Digue de Maʾrib au Yémen', in F. Baratte, C.J. Robin, and E. Rocca (eds), *Regards croisés d'Orient et d'Occident. Les barrages dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Orient et Méditerranée 14; Paris, 2013), pp. 9–70.
84. Murayghān 1 = Ry 506. See Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, pp. 118–19; Robin, 'Abraha'.
85. Sadd Maʾrib 6 = Ja 547 + 546 + 544 + 545. See Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, pp. 120–21; Darles, Robin, and Schiettecatte, 'Contribution', pp. 30–39.
86. Sadd Maʾrib 4 = DAI GDN 2002/20. See N. Nebes, 'A New ʾAbraha Inscription from the Great Dam of Mārib', *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 34 (2004), pp. 221–30; Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, pp. 107–109; C.J. Robin, 'Nouvelles observations sur le calendrier de Ḥimyar', *Rassegna di studi etiopici* NS 4 (2012), pp. 119–51 at 139–43; Darles, Robin, and Schiettecatte, 'Contribution', pp. 16–17.

I embarked on a project, in collaboration with the architect C. Darles and the archaeologist J. Schiettecatte, to reinterpret the long inscriptions commemorating the repairs to the Maʾrib Dam. We were able to demonstrate that the intervention of Abraha at the site was relatively limited, its main achievement being the construction of a high tower which flanks the southern lock.[87] But it is especially on the last inscription, discovered in 2009, that I would like to concentrate now.[88]

The Submission of Northern Arabia to Abraha (c. 552)

The text in question is a rock inscription that has been labelled Murayghān 3. It is carved in large characters on a rock clearly visible at the entrance of the ravine where the wells of Murayghān and the inscription discovered in 1951–52 (Murayghān 1) are located. The new inscription has quite distinctive features compared with the older one.[89] Murayghān 3 is short, neatly incised, easy to see at the entrance of the site, without any religious formula (though with a cross), and undated. Murayghān 1, in contrast, is carved on a rock high up and out of reach; the text, in relatively small characters, is presented in such a way that its reading is difficult; and it contains a religious formula and a date. So we have here on the one hand some kind of solemn proclamation and on the other a fragment of a chronicle narrating the success of a military campaign.

The date of Murayghān 3 can be approximately fixed, as the style suggests that the inscription was written after Murayghān 1 (September 552) and the contents imply a date before June 554, the date of accession to the throne of the prince ʿAmr b. al-Mundhir mentioned in the text.[90] Two significant facts are stated in this new text. The first is the explicit indication that the kings of Ḥimyar had lost control of the great tribal confederation of Maʿadd[um] in central Arabia to the kings of al-Ḥīra, probably around the beginning of the 530s. Indeed, Abraha congratulates himself for having re-conquered Maʿadd[um] and having expelled from it ʿAmr, the son of the king of al-Ḥīra, who was its governor (ḫlft).[91] The

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87. Darles, Robin, and Schiettecatte, 'Contribution'.

88. C.J. Robin and S. Ṭayrān, 'Soixante-dix ans avant l'Islam: l'Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien', *CRAI* (2012), pp. 525–53.

89. The name Murayghān 2 was given to a small graffito incised to the right of Murayghān 1. See Müller, *Sabäische Inschriften*, p. 119.

90. T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Leiden, 1879), p. 170 (n. 1).

91. For this term, see *CIS* IV 541, lines 11 and 13. The inscription Murayghān 1, line 8 indicates that the king of al-Ḥīra 'had made him (ʿAmr[um]) the governor of Maʿadd[um]' (s¹ṯlf-hw ʿly Mʿd[m]).

Arabic-Muslim tradition has preserved the memory of the government of this prince in Arabia, as it states that he presided over a peace treaty between two tribes in the vicinity of ʿIrāq, at the dhū ʾl-Majāz market, 35 km east of Mecca.[92]

The second significant information is the list of the territories which submitted to Abraha, '… (the king) took hold of all the Arabs of Maʿadd^um[, of Ha]gar^um, of Khaṭṭ, of Ṭayy^um, of Yathrib, and of Guzā(m)'. The domination of Ḥimyar over Maʿadd^um dated back for nearly 200 years. It is the other territories which present the greatest interest. The first two are Hagar^um and Khaṭṭ. Hagar^um, Arabic Hajar, is the ancient name of the great al-Hufūf oasis of eastern Arabia, in the interior some 70 km from the shore of the Persian Gulf. It is also the name of the province of which this oasis was the centre. The name 'Hagar' is known in Greek as 'Gerrha'.[93] In the Arabic-Muslim sources, this province is also called al-Baḥrayn. Khaṭṭ, in Arabic al-Khatt, is the name of a small coastal town on the Persian Gulf, of which the Persian name is Pît-Ardashîr (*Pyṭ-ʾrdšr*). It is now called al-ʿUqayr.[94] In the Arabic-Muslim authors the name 'al-Khaṭṭ' is given to a village, but also to a region, whose limits could considerably vary and stretch as far as the coastal area between ʿIrāq and Yemen.

The association of Hagar^um with Khaṭṭ is not new, as it was already attested in the name of a Nestorian bishopric of about the same time. In a synod of the bishops from the Arabian coast of the Gulf in 576, we find among the signatories of the decrees Isaac of Hagar and Pīṭ Ardashīr, in which it should be recalled that Pīṭ Ardashīr is the Persian name of Khaṭṭ.[95] From this information it can be seen that Abraha adopted the same geographical divisions as the Nestorian Church, and, probably, as the Sasanian state. It is also noticeable that, in eastern Arabia, Abraha did not obtain allegiance from all the regions where Christianity was deeply rooted: only those on the mainland were won over.[96] The islands are not

92. M. Lecker, 'Tribes in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia', in idem *People, Tribes and Society in Arabia around the Time of Muḥammad* (Variorum Collected Studies 812; Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2005), Ch. XI at p. 39.

93. C.J. Robin and A. Prioletta, 'Nouveaux arguments en faveur d'une identification de la cité de Gerrha avec le royaume de Hagar (Arabie orientale)', *Semitica et Classica* 6 (2013), pp. 131–85.

94. Previously Khaṭṭ had been identified with al-Qaṭīf (*Synodicon orientale*, p. 672 Chabot [index]). But a text of al-Balādhūrī (*Futūḥ*, p. 81 Riḍwān) proves that these are two separate locations. The identification with al-ʿUqayr is now the most plausible hypothesis (Robin and Prioletta, 'Nouveaux arguments', pp. 139–41).

95. *Synodicon orientale*, p. 387 Chabot.

96. See Fig. 4: bishoprics are marked by a cross; (remains of) churches by the image of a building.

mentioned and likely remained under the authority of the Sasanian empire. We do not know if the presence of Christians in the Gulf region facilitated Abraha's conquests, but it is not likely, as the official Christianity of Ḥimyar was not Nestorian, as was the case in the Gulf. We can add that in 676, that is, about 40 years after the Muslim conquest, Hagar[um] and Khaṭṭ are still mentioned in the episcopal lists, but each now has its own bishop: Pusai at Hagar and Shāhīn at Ḥaṭṭa.[97]

The text of Abraha mentions next the submission of Ṭayy[um] (*Ṭy[m]*), in Arabic Ṭayy or Ṭayyiʾ,[98] an important tribe, whose territory was in the area of the modern Ḥāʾil, 600 km to the north-west of al-Riyāḍ.[99] Before Islam, it played a significant role, since its name in Syriac is used to designate the Arabs as a whole.[100] The following name is Yathrib, the name of a great oasis in Ḥijāz, 350 km north of Mecca. We already have two attestations of this name in southern Arabia, which might date from the Persian era or from the beginning of the Hellenistic era. Yathrib is also named among the oases that Nabonidus, king of Babylon, conquered around 552 BCE.[101] But Yathrib is better known under the name Medina. When Muḥammad founded his theocratic society there in 622, he indeed renamed the oasis as al-Madīna *al-munawwara*, that is, the 'the Enlightened City'. At the time of Muḥammad the population of Medina was extremely diverse: there were among others, three Jewish and two polytheistic tribes. Since these polytheists are said to have originated from Yemen, one might wonder if they were the descendants of the tribal groups that the Ḥimyarite kings put in charge of controlling the oasis.

The last name, Guzām, is the only one whose identification is uncertain. I propose that we are dealing here with the tribe of Judhām,[102] supposing that Arabic *dhāl* was rendered by a *zayn* in Sabaic. The tribe of Judhām, established on the marches of Palestine between Ayla et Tabūk,[103] had indeed close links with Yathrib which is mentioned just before in the inscription; al-Yaʿqūbī for instance, echoes traditions which connect it with two of the Jewish tribes from Yathrib.

97. *Synodicon orientale*, p. 482 Chabot.

98. I. Shahîd, 'Ṭayyiʾ ou Ṭayy', in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam* 10 (2nd ed.; Leiden, 2002), p. 431.

99. *TAVO* B VII 1; Shahîd, 'Ṭayyiʾ ou Ṭayy'.

100. See e.g. the text already quoted above (n. 73) of Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* 57 (*CSCO* 91, p. 283); *Synodicon orientale*, pp. 285, 532–33, etc. Chabot.

101. Robin and Ṭayrān, 'Soixante-dix ans avant l'Islam', p. 546.

102. C.E. Bosworth, 'Djudhām', in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam* 2 (2nd ed.; Leiden, 1965), p. 588; I. Hasson, 'Judhām entre la *Jāhiliyya* et l'Islam', *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995), pp. 5–42.

103. *TAVO* B VII 1.

It can be concluded that Abraha obtained the submission of vast territories forming an arc in northern Arabia, between the Persian Gulf and Syria.

Abraha's Christianity

That Abraha made Christianity the official religion is proven by three of his inscriptions, which begin with an invocation of the Trinity or God and his Messiah. They are as follows:

– 'With the power, assistance, and mercy of Raḥmānān, his Messiah and the Spirit of Holiness';[104]
– 'With the power, support, and assistance of Raḥmānān, lord of Heaven, and his Messiah';[105]
– 'With the power of Raḥmanān and his Messiah'.[106]

Only one of Abraha's inscriptions does not include a religious invocation, the one just discovered at Murayghān. But it should be noted that this inscription stands out by its content, which looks more like a triumphal account than a commemoration. However, it is introduced by a cross.

The epigraphic material is terse, and thus provides little information on the dogmatic character of the king's religion. But it is clear that the religious formulations found in the inscriptions have been carefully chosen. We are dealing here with public monuments, which served as models of reference. Despite the conciseness of the inscriptions, I believe it is possible to discern two successive dogmatic stages in the Christianity of Ḥimyar, on the basis of the manner in which the second person of the Trinity is named. For the Ḥimyarite king enthroned by the *Negus* Kālēb around 530, of whom we have one inscription, the religious invocations at the beginning and the end of the text are:

> [In the na]me and with the protect[ion of Raḥmanān, his son Christ Victor, and the Ho]ly Spirit,
> ...] in the name of Raḥmanān, of his son Christ Victor. [....[107]

104. *CIS* IV 541, lines 1–3 : *b-ḥyl w-[r]dʾ w-rḥmt Rḥmn^n w-Ms^{1}ḥ-hw w-Rḥ [q]ds^1*.
105. DAI GDN 2002/20, lines 1–4: *b-ḥyl w-n(ṣr) w-rdʾ Rḥmn^n mrʾ S^{1}my^n w-Ms^1 ḥ-h(w)*.
106. Murayghān 1 = Ry 506, line 1: *b-ḥyl Rḥmn^n w-Ms^{1}ḥ-hw*.
107. Ist. 7608bis (= *RES* 3904) + Wellcome A103664, which is introduced by the invocation *[b-s^1]m w-s^{2}r[ḥ Rḥmn^n w-bn-hw Krs^{3}ts Ḡlb^n w-mn]fs^1 qds^1*, and ends with *...]b-s^{1}m Rḥmn^n w-bn-hw Krs^{3}ts^3 Ḡlb^n .[...*. On this text see the recent discussion by C.J. Robin, 'Joseph, dernier roi de Ḥimyar (de 522 à 525, ou une des années suivantes)', *Jerusalem Studies on Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), pp. 1–124 at 96–100.

At this time, the official doctrine of Ḥimyar is clearly the one of the Aksumite Church. It is unlikely that the king, a recent convert and just baptized, would have expressed a strong opinion on matters of Christian doctrine.[108] Moreover, the whole ecclesiastical structure of Ḥimyar was in the hands of the Aksumites:

> But after [the king and the army] that was with him had stayed in the land of the Ḥimyarites about seven months, and after he had performed there all that he would, and built many churches in that land, and appointed in them priests from those who were with him, and appointed also a king, and made the land pay tribute, and left notables of the Abyssinians to guard the king against enemies, and also the churches that he had built, he brought with him many captives from the erring Ḥimyarites and fifty princes of the royal family.[109]

The terminology used in the inscription emphasizes this dependency on Aksum. The name 'Christ' (Krīśtōś, *Krs³ts³*) is the transcription of Geʿez *Krīstōs* (in turn derived from Greek Χριστός). The Holy Spirit is named *[Mn]fs¹ Qds¹*, which is a transcription of Geʿez *Manfas Qəddūs*.[110] As regards the adjective 'Victor', which is not evangelical, it is expressly attested at Aksum in an inscription of Kālēb, 'By the power of God and by the grace of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Victor, in whom I believe'.[111] Moreover, in the inscription Christ is also explicitly qualified as 'Son' (of God).

The inscriptions of Abraha, dating from about twenty years later, show notably different features. Abraha systematically names the second person of the Trinity 'his Messiah', that is the Messiah of Raḥmānān. This second person is no longer called 'Son' or 'Krīśtōś Victor'. More generally, the inscriptions of Abraha replace the Aksumite loanwords by others taken from the Syriac: the terms Messiah (*ms¹ḥ, mshîḥô*), church (*bʾt, bîʿotô*), and priest (*qs¹s¹, qashîshô*). These changes probably indicate a new Christology and a change in ecclesiastical organization. At the time of Kālēb, the Ḥimyarite Church was closely controlled by the Church of Aksum. But after Abraha's rebellion, the relations between the two

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108. *Book of the Ḥimyarites* 47 Moberg; trans. Moberg, p. cxl: 'Account that tells how this believing Kālēb, King of Abyssinia, by his authority appointed a king in the land of the Ḥimyarites. And this Christ-loving King Kālēb took a [man], one of the notables of the Ḥimyarites, who was also of the royal family there, whose name was ʾ..[wr]. And because he had seen in him good-will towards faith and that he had greatly desired for a long time to be baptized and to be a Christian, he commanded the [priests who were with him] and they baptized him, and he acted as sponsor at his baptism and made him his spiritual son and appointed him as king over all the land of the Ḥimyarites'.
109. *Book of the Ḥimyarites* 48 Moberg; trans. Moberg, p. cxlii.
110. Ist. 7608bis, line 1.
111. *RIÉ* 191.2–3: *b-ḥyl ʾgzʾbḥr w-b-mwgs ʾyss Kr(s)³ts wld ʾg<z>ʾ bḥr mwʾ z-ʾmnk bt ….*

Churches had certainly been severed. Procopius reports that the *Negus* Kālēb sent two, failed, expeditions to take back control of Arabia and that until his death (at a date before 547, probably around 540) there was no reconciliation.[112] The Arabic-Muslim tradition also testifies to this quarrel.[113]

It is therefore likely that under Abraha the Church of Ḥimyar separated itself from the Church of Aksum, which answered to the see of Alexandria. The Church of Ḥimyar may have turned towards Antioch and Syria. Before the massacre of 523, the Christians of Nagrān already had close relations with the ecclesiastical authorities of northern Syria, which were generally hostile to the Council of Chalcedon and had Severus of Antioch as their emblematical figure.[114] It is also in the same region

112. Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.20.5–7.

113. R. Daghfous, *Le Yaman islāmique des origines jusqu'à l'avènement des dynasties autonomes (Ier–IIIème s./VIIème–IXème s.)* 1 (Publications de la Faculté des sciences humaines et sociales de Tunis, série 4. Histoire 25; Tunis, 1995), pp. 115–22.

114. These relations appear from a significant body of small facts: 1) Philoxenus, bishop of Mabbûg (modern Manbij) in 485–519, consecrated the first two bishops of Nagrān at the beginning of the sixth century. See Symeon of Beth Arsham, *Letter* 2, pp. VI–VII Shahîd; trans. Shahîd, p. 46: 'And they gathered together all the bones of the martyrs and those of Mâr Paul (*Pwlws*), the bishop, who had been consecrated the first bishop of Nagrān by the holy Mâr Aksenâyâ (*ʾksnyʾ*), who (is called) Philoxenos (*Fyllwk-snws*), the bishop of Mabbûg (*Mbwg*); for this [Mâr] Paul had won the crown of martyrdom by stoning—as had Stephen the first martyr—at the hands of Jews from Tiberias (*Ṭbʾryʾ*), in the city of [Ẓafār], the Royal City [of the Ḥimyarites]. But now they burnt also his bones with fire together with [the holy Mâr] Paul, (the other) bishop, who was consecrated the second (bishop) of the city of Nagrān by the very same Mâr Aksenâyâ, the bishop of Mabbûg'. For a biography of Philoxenus, see E. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au vi^e siècle* (CSCO 127; Leuven, 1951), pp. 66–68. 2) Jacob of Sarûg, bishop of Baṭnān də-Sarûg (a bishopric near Mabbûg, in the province of Osrhoene, which borders the province of Euphratesia to the north-east) in 519–21, addressed a letter of consolation to the Ḥimyarite Christians, following a persecution antedating the one of 523 (because he died on 19 November 521). See Jacob of Sarûg, *Letter* 18 (*CSCO* 110, pp. 87–102). For a biography of Jacob of Sarûg, see Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés*, pp. 52–53. 3) Among the victims of the repression by King Joseph in Ḥaḍramawt, in 522–23, *Letter* 2 attributed to Symeon of Beth Arsham mentions a priest named Elias, trained in the monastic life at Ṭellā and ordained priest by John of Ṭellā (bishop in 519–21). Ṭellā is a bishopric dependent on Edessa, situated to the east of this metropolitan see, on the upper course of the al-Khābūr river. The same letter also mentions a priest named Thomas, trained in a monastery at Edessa. See Symeon of Beth Arsham, *Letter* 2, pp. IV–V Shahîd; trans. Shahîd, p. 45: 'And first was killed in Ḥaḍramawt the holy Mâr Elias (*ʾlyʾ*) the presbyter, who had become a monk at the convent of Bêth-Mâr Abraham of Ṭella (*Ṭllʾ* = Constantina), which is situated near the city of Callinicum (*Qlnyqws*), (and who) had been ordained presbyter by Mâr John (*Ywḥnn*), the bishop of the city of Ṭella. And with him were crowned his mother and her brother, and also Mâr Thomas (*Tʾwmʾ*) the presbyter, whose left hand had been formerly cut off for confessing Christ (and who) had become a monk at the monastery of Bêth-Mâr Antiochînâ (*ʾnṭywkynʾ*) in the city of Edessa (*ʾwrhy*, Ûrhay)'. About Ṭellā and the career of John of Ṭellā, see Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés*, pp. 51–52 and Map 1. 4) *Letter* 1 of

that the first Arabian martyrs began to be venerated. John Psaltes, abbot of the monastery of Bēth Aphthoniā at Qenneshrê on the Euphrates (in Euphratesia),[115] composed a hymn in honour of the martyrs of Nagrān in the 530s, which implies that a cult was already dedicated to them in this monastery.[116] At the time of Abraha, the anti-Chalcedonians of Syria were divided into two opposing camps, the first claiming its inspiration from Julian of Halicarnassus,[117] and the second from Severus of Antioch.[118] The controversy centred on the question of whether the body of Christ had been touched by corruption after his death.[119] The 'incorruptibility' thesis, maintained by Julian, was quickly assimilated to the doctrine of Eutyches, which taught that the human and divine nature had fused in Christ, and to the old docetic theory which gave to Christ only the appearance of a body, and won many followers in the empire. Among them we find Jacob of Sarûg, who addressed a letter of

Symeon of Beth Arsham, which denounces the Nagrān persecution, is addressed to the superior of a monastery of Gabbûla in Syria Prima. See Symeon of Beth Arsham, *Letter* 1, pp. 501–15 Guidi. For the location of Gabbûla (modern al-Jabbūl), about forty kilometres to the south-east of Aleppo, see Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés*, Map 1, at the end of the volume.

115. A monastery not to be confused with Qinnesrîn/Chalcis: see Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés*, pp. 178 and 191.

116. R. Schröter, 'Trostschreiben Jacob's von Sarug', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 31 (1877), pp. 361–405 at 400–405; E.W. Brooks, *The Hymns of Severus and Others in the Syriac Version of Paul of Edessa as Revised by James of Edessa* (PO 7; Paris, 1911), pp. 613–14 (no. 154, i, VII: 'On the holy Homerite Martyrs').

117. About this famous character, see R. Draguet, 'Julien d'Halicarnasse', in A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, and E. Amann (eds), *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 8.2 (Paris, 1925), cols 1931–40, and Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés*, pp. 125–31. His detractors nicknamed him the 'phantasiast'.

118. About Severus of Antioch, see Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés*, pp. 19–25. Severus and Julian, who were both resolute opponents of the Council of Chalcedon, argued and quarrelled during their exile in Egypt in the 520s.

119. More precisely the debate focused on the question if the Word made flesh had suffered and died voluntarily or independent of his will, and if the body of Christ had been 'incorruptible' (ἄφθαρτον) before and after the Resurrection or only after. The followers of Julian's doctrine, who opted for the first option, are for this reason called 'aphthartodocetics'. The followers of Severus were in turn derided under the name 'phthartolaters' ('worshippers of corruption'). The origin of the controversy lay in two different conceptions of human nature. For Julian, it was a perfect creation of God, 'which, wholly present in Adam, remains present at each moment of time in all men who at the same time participate in it and constitute it'. But this human nature, because of the sin of Adam, has been corrupted and altered; it is this corrupted form which is transmitted to the descendants of Adam, who suffer and die independent of their will. On the contrary, Christ preserves the unadulterated human nature of the origin. Severus disagreed with Julian because he opposed the idea that sin and guilt could pre-exist the first act of will.

consolation to the Ḥimyarite Christians before 521,[120] a bishop of Alexandria, and even the emperor Justinian himself towards the end of his life.

Arabia, or more precisely Nagrān, was one of the target areas for the Julianists. Michael the Syrian is the most explicit source:

> The poor Eutropius [who succeeded Procopius, the Julianist bishop of Ephesus], useless vessel, added to his malignity and ordained ten bishops, whom he sent in every direction to be the advocates of the Phantasiasts' heresy. One of them went down to Ḥîrtâ of Bêt Nuʿmān (Arabic al-Ḥīra) and the country of the Ḥimyarites. His name was Sergius. He had been an ascetic and had received the tonsure: he became a useless vessel; he led into error and perverted those lands. He ordained priests, and, after having spent three years in the country of the Ḥimyarites, he established in his place, as bishop, a certain man named Moses; he himself died in the country of the Ḥimyarites.[121]

These Julianists were expelled from Najrān in 640 by the Caliph ʿUmar, after which they established themselves near al-Ḥīra in Lower ʿIrāq, at a place they also called Najrān.[122] Some 150 years later (in 791–92, so it seems), the Nestorian *catholicos* Timothy I congratulated himself that the 'Julianists' of Nagrān of al-Ḥīra (or a part thereof) were won over to 'Nestorianism':

> … Jesus … took in this time even the city of Najrān, situated near al-Ḥīra, which was until now subjected to the impiety of Julian of Halicarnassus. Twenty-five men, clerics, priests and deacons, came to find us, with a great crowd of people, and they asked that we consecrated a bishop for them. If it pleases God, we will do it on Palm Sunday.

> At Nagrān too, a famous city, dominated until now by the heresy of Julian, thirteen churches joined us last year, which constitutes a community of more than two thousand souls.[123]

120. Mentioned above, n. 114.

121. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, p. 320 Chabot; trans. based on the one in French by Chabot, vol. 2, p. 264.

122. The two Najrāns can be distinguished by calling the second one Najrān of al-Ḥīra, Najrān of al-Kūfa or Najrāniyya.

123. *Letters* 27 and 41 quoted by J.-M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne* 3. *Bét Garmaï, Bét Aramāyé et Maišān nestoriens* (Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth 42; Beirut, 1968), p. 228; see already I. Guidi, 'La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bêth-Aršâm sopra i martiri omeriti', *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, serie terza. Memorie della Classe di Scienze morale, storiche e filologiche* 7 (1881), pp. 471–515 at 482–83 (n. 3) (repr. in idem, *Raccolta di scritti* 1. *Oriente cristiano* [Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto per l'Oriente; Rome, 1945], pp. 1–60).

The author of the *Chronicle of Seert*, who seems to ignore that there are two Najrāns, sums up the events in a particularly confusing way:

> Some of them (the miaphysites who had taken refuge to al-Ḥīra in the time of Justin I) withdrew to Najrān where they established themselves and sowed the doctrine of Julian (*Yūliyānā*), master of Severus, who pretends that the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ came down from Heaven. This doctrine spread all over the land of Payram.[124] They (the heretics) deceived by their spell some people of al-Ṣaʿīd (*qawmʰⁿ min al-Ṣaʿīd*)[125] who, in order to flee the emperors of Persia,[126] had taken refuge in this region. They were afterwards converted by saint Mar ʿAbda, son of Ḥanīf.[127]

For the time of Abraha, the only bishops of Ḥimyar whose names have come down to us are Julianists.[128] We can therefore assume that the Ḥimyarite Church conformed to the anti-Chalcedonian line with Julianist tendencies. In the Christian Ḥimyarite inscriptions, the replacement of the expression 'His Son Krīśtōś Victor' by 'Messiah (of Rahmānān)' would reflect that transition from a relation of dependency of the Aksumite Church to an adhesion to Julianist doctrine.

Many scholars of Islam—A. Nallino, M. Guidi, and more recently, J. Henninger[129]—have defended the thesis that the doctrine of Julian of Halicarnassus, or rather the caricatured formulations that we find in the writings of his adversaries and that some of his followers no doubt took over in their own name, was used as a model for the representation of Jesus in the Qurʾān.[130] Another hypothesis, however, corresponds better

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124. The first station in Babylonia for the traveller arriving from Syria (Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne* 3, p. 221, with n. 5).

125. It is unlikely that *al-Ṣaʿīd* refers here to Upper Egypt, as the editor supposes.

126. *mulūk al-Fars*. Because of his interpretation of *al-Ṣaʿīd* as 'Upper Egypt', the editor here corrects 'of Persia' to 'Roman'.

127. *Chronicle of Seert* 22 (*PO* 7, p. 144); trans. based on the French one by A. Scher (with corrections as noted in the previous two footnotes).

128. I dismiss here Bishop Gregentios, a person whose life is of a 'highly legendary character', see A. Berger, *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios, Archbishop of Taphar* (Millenium Studien 7; Berlin, 2006), p. 6.

129. J. Henninger, 'L'influence du christianisme oriental sur l'Islam naissant', in *Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema: L'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà, Roma 31 marzo – 3 aprile 1963/Firenze 4 aprile 1963* (Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura, Quaderno 62; Rome 1964), pp. 379–411 at 391–95.

130. For Muḥammad, Jesus did not die on the cross:

155a/156 [We cursed them] because they disbelieved and uttered a great calumny against Mary,

157 And because they said, 'We killed *al-Masīḥ*,

Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of God

157a – They did not kill him nor crucify him,

But it was made to seem so to them (*wa-lākin shubbiha la-hum*) …

158 No. God raised him to Himself.

to the doctrinal and terminological change visible in Abraha's inscriptions. The Christology of Abraha presents many remarkable traits: Jesus is called 'Messiah'; he is no longer described as the 'Son' (of God); nonetheless he is quite an exceptional being since he is invoked among the divine powers. This Christology corresponds to the one encountered in some trends of Judaeo-Christianity which believe in the messianic mission of Jesus but consider him a mere mortal, even if his birth may have had some kind of supernatural character.[131] It is close to the one found in the Qur'ān which calls Jesus *al-Masīḥ* and denies his divine filiation, but implicitly acknowledges his miraculous birth by calling him 'Jesus son of Mary' (and not 'Jesus son of Joseph'). All these details which seem devoid of meaning when considered separately together constitute a rather coherent picture. The Christological doctrine which can be discerned in Abraha's inscriptions, whose domination extended over the whole of Arabia, is in agreement with the one of the Qur'ān. In other words, the teachings of Muḥammad have their roots in the debates that were waging amongst the Christians of Arabia and that opposed them to mainstream Christianity.

Conclusion

The recently discovered inscriptions discussed in this paper shed new light on the chronology, political organization, and religious map of Late Antique Arabia. Of course these inscriptions offer only snapshots and only concern the governing classes. Moreover, the royal inscriptions are certainly propaganda tools, which served to embellish actual events. Finally, it is difficult to evaluate the real significance of some events, such

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(Qur'an, *sura* 4, 'The Women [*al-Nisā*']'; for the first verse, the numbering refers to Flügel's 1870 edition and the second to the Cairo edition of 1923; trans. Jones, *Qur'ān*, pp. 106–107). The meaning of *shubbiha la-hum* has been the subject of a great many hypotheses, which depend on what one takes as the subject of the verb *shubbiha*. Literally the expression means '(the thing) was made uncertain for them', that is, 'they were the subject of an illusion' (Henninger, 'Influence du christianisme oriental', p. 395). Just like Abraha, Muḥammad calls Jesus 'Messiah', but never 'Son', also contesting that he was the 'Son of God' and that he could have been born of God and a woman.

131. S. Pines, '"Israel, My Firstborn" and the Sonship of Jesus: A Theme of Moslem Anti-Christian Polemics', in idem, *Studies in the History of Religion* [Collected Works of Shlomo Pines 4; Jerusalem 1996], pp. 116–29, and 'Studies on Jewish Christianity', in the same volume, pp. 209–486 at 248, and *passim*. About the beliefs of the Judaeo-Christians, see S.C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Essais historiques* (Patrimoine; Paris, 1998), esp. p. 88. On other relations between Judaeo-Christianity and Islam, see F. de Blois, '*Naṣrānī* (*Nazôraios*) and *ḥanīf* (*ethnikos*): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam', *BSOAS* 65 (2002), pp. 1–30.

as the subjection of Yathrib to the power of Abraha.[132] The progress made in the knowledge and understanding of the events in this time period is, nevertheless, significant. We now possess independent sources which confirm anecdotes, whose truth used to seem doubtful. I will quote only one example. The Arab-Muslim historian Ibn Qutayba reports that the ancestors of the Prophet of Islam took Mecca 'with the help of Caesar', that is, with the help of Rome.[133] This conquest would have taken place six generations before Muḥammad, that is, around 500. The inscriptions confirm that Arabia, previously under Persian influence, now passed into the Roman sphere of influence, where it remained for at least sixty years.

Concerning the Qur'ānic text and its sources, scholars have come up against two difficulties. They wondered how the supposedly polytheistic audience of Muḥammad could understand the revelation while the exemplary tales drawn from the Bible were mentioned only quite allusively, and the lexicon was full of terms borrowed from foreign languages. Moreover, how did Muḥammad acquire his wide religious culture and knowledge about the controversies dividing the Jews and the Christians? We can now affirm that the religious culture of Muḥammad and his audience was not the product of a spiritual thirst peculiar to his generation, but that it was rooted in the well-established presence of numerous Jewish and Christian communities. The study of the themes and prescriptions shared by the Qur'ān with Judaism and Christianity thus gains a whole new perspective.

As a result, a radically new picture of Arabia during Late Antiquity takes shape, and it is with this picture in mind that I shall return to the themes of this volume. The first theme is the relationship between leadership on the frontiers and the great power of Rome (and Persia). We can observe a significant change around the fourth century. The kinglets who previously had a title indicating the tribe over which they held authority, such as al-Azd, Kinda, Ghassān, or Nizār, now became 'kings': we hear of al-Ḥārith the king, ʿAmr the king, or Thaʿlaba the king, without any mention of a tribe. They no longer derive their power from their subjects but from an emperor, and have become agents on behalf of the Roman

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132. We will leave the question of how Abraha exercised his authority there (through the payment of taxes, the nomination of a governor, the stationing of troops, etc.) and for how long out of consideration here.

133. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, pp. 640–41 ʿUkāsha: *wa-aʿāna-hu Qayṣar ʿalya-hā*. See M.J. Kister, 'Mecca and the Tribes of Arabia: Some Notes on Their Relations', in M. Sharon (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of David Ayalon* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 33–57 at 50, with n. 95.

and Persian empires. It should be added, however, that the Roman and Persian emperors are not the only source of power, wealth, and honours. The kings of Ḥimyar and Aksum behaved like emperors, because they probably took their inspiration from them. No doubt, both are more or less in the orbit of Persia and Rome. But in their power games with chiefdoms, they appear as autonomous actors.

The second issue before us is the comparison between Arabia and Africa. It is striking that, in both cases, a distant kingdom is supported by an empire whose aim was to have a better control of the in-between spaces where chiefdoms dominate. It does not seem that this parallelism is the result of a concerted policy;[134] the influence of the empires on Ḥimyar and Aksum was never strong. The similarity would rather be explained by a similar geography and natural conditions. Here are some avenues that I have sketched out, but will be discussed more deeply in the rest of the volume.

134. As is also argued in the paper of Greatrex, this volume, who focuses especially on the reign of Justinian.