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Greg Fisher and Philip Wood

Writing the History of the "Persian Arabs": The Pre-Islamic Perspective on the "Naṣrids" of al-Ḥīrah

Modern scholarship on Arabs in the pre-Islamic period has focused on Rome's Arab allies —the so-called "Jafnids" or "Ghassānids," with much less attention paid to Persia's Arab allies, the so-called "Naṣrid" or "Lakhmid" dynasty of Arab leaders at al-Ḥīrah in Iraq. This article examines select pre-Islamic sources for the Persian Arabs, showing that even with the meager evidence available to us, and the lack of archaeological material, it is possible to draw a relatively complex portrait of the Persian Arabs. This article situates the Persian Arabs as important figures in some key themes and phenomena of late antiquity, such as the growth of Christian communities, the conflict between Rome and Persia, and the struggle for influence in the Arabian peninsula.

Keywords: Arabs; Christianity; Islam; Persia; Sasanians; Roman-Persian War; Arabian peninsula

Introduction

Roughly between the end of the third century and the beginning of the seventh, the Sasanian Persian Empire supported a group of Arab allies, usually called the "Lakhmids" or the "Naṣrids," and assumed to have been based at al-Ḥīrah in Iraq. The sources for their history and activities are unevenly balanced between the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods: a very small corpus of information from writers within the Roman Empire and inscriptions from Arabia is overshadowed by a much more extensive corpus of post-Roman material, provided, for example, by Muslim writers such as al-Ṭabarī, whose *Tārīkh* preserved the work of Hishām ibn al-Kalbī, or al-Balādhurī, whose *Futūḥ al-Buldān* discusses al-Ḥīrah. Gustav Rothstein relied on this latter substantial collection of sources to write the first modern history of the "Lakhmids" in 1899, mirroring the work produced by Theodor Nöldeke for the Arabs allied with the Roman Empire. The Muslim material has provided a rich portrait: genealogies of the Lakhmid kings, discussions of court politics, and intriguing, but uncorroborated, arguments for the development of the Arabic script at al-Ḥīrah.[1] In all, it is an expansive and detailed record of pre-Islamic Arab civilization,

Greg Fisher is an Associate Professor in the History Department at the Carleton University in Canada. Philip Wood is an Associate Professor in the Aga Khan University—Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations in the United Kingdom.

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which promises a wealth of information, adding to our knowledge of late antique Iraq, in the development of which Michael Morony has played a key role.[2]

The purpose of this article is to focus on a selection of the first group of sources—the pre-Islamic late antique sources, supplemented by a few post-seventh century non-Islamic sources—to investigate their view of the actions and place of the Arabs allied with the Persian Empire. It is not our intention to conduct a new examination of the Muslim sources for the Arabs of al-Ḥīrah, and Rothstein's interpretation of them, although such a project, which might also produce critical editions and commentaries of the various narratives dealing with the genealogies and activities of the "Lakhmids," and address the potential for correspondences between the pre-Islamic and Islamic sources, is well overdue. Indeed, it is to be hoped that within the context of the current resurgence of interest in pre-Islamic Arabia, and the Arabs—itself part of the explosion of scholarship on late antiquity—such re-evaluations will be carried out.[3]

Here, however, we offer a brief discussion on a selection of the non-Muslim material which describes the Arab allies of the Sasanian Persians: classicizing historians such as Procopius and Menander; Syriac authors such as Pseudo-Joshua and Pseudo-Zachariah; epigraphic material; and early medieval material, such as the *Chronicle of Seert*. By doing so, we hope in part to avoid the distorting effect of the very different Muslim historiographical traditions, especially when set next to the late antique Greco-Roman and Syriac material.[4] But more importantly, we wish to show that even this very sparse collection of largely contemporary sources provides a surprisingly complex picture of Sasanian Persia's Arab allies. It illustrates their role in the dominant political events of their time, as well as their political evolution as clients of a powerful empire. Theirs was a changing relationship which is paralleled by that of their far better-known and more intensively studied pro-Roman "Jafnid" counterparts in Syria,[5] and which also fits into the general paradigms of Roman frontier allies elaborated for the late antique west.[6] The context of their elimination in c. 604 by the Sasanian shah Khusrau II (r. 591–628) also closely mirrors the fate of Constantinople's Arab clients in 582, and draws attention to the wider historical themes of the ancient Near East, including interstate political rivalries, the role of the Arabian peninsula in the long competition between Rome and Persia, and the growth of Christian communities.

Lakhmids, Naṣrids, and Persian Arabs

Numerous groups of Arabs ("tribes"[7] or "clans") formed part of the late antique landscape in both contemporary Greco-Roman and Arabian sources (inscriptions from the peninsula) as well as in the later, Muslim literary material. As the war between Rome and Persia in Mesopotamia slowed to a stalemate of sorts in the fifth and sixth centuries, both empires increasingly focused on the Arabian peninsula as a new arena for their competition. As a result, the affairs of the empires and various Arab groups frequently intersected in northern Arabia, Syria, and Iraq. The ways in

which the different groups of Arabs were drawn into the wars and tensions between Rome, Persia, and Ḥimyar is the subject of numerous recent and forthcoming books and articles, and forms the background to our discussion here.[8]

Examining the interactions between the Arabs and the Persian Empire is hampered by problems of source availability and bias. The rarity of any surviving literary material from the Sasanian Empire means that we must largely rely on material produced within the Roman Empire—whose historians tend to treat the Arabs in general as they do other non-Roman peoples, including them only where they form part of the wider concerns of the author, and frequently in a hostile fashion. In Procopius' *History of the Wars*, for example, the Persian ally al-Mundhir is described predominantly for his role in the Roman-Persian conflict, highlighting his savagery and penchant for human sacrifice; for Menander the Guardsman, the Arabs are mostly part of the diplomatic relationship between Rome and Persia; for Theophylact, the Arabs feature tangentially in the border wars taking place at the end of the sixth century and at the beginning of the seventh. For ecclesiastical historians, interest in the Arab allies of Sasanian Persia focuses on questions of conversion and faith. Evagrius, for example, sees the adoption of Christianity by the Persian ally al-Nuʿmān at the end of the sixth century through the filter of a "most abominable and totally polluted heathen" at long last adopting the right course;[9] and in the biography of the bishop Aḥūdemmeh, the Arabs are "tent-dwelling homicidal barbarians."[10]

Source difficulties are further compounded by the lack of archaeological, epigraphic, and numismatic material for Persia's Arab allies. Archaeological investigations of their supposed base at al-Ḥīrah, for example, were carried out in the 1930s by D. Talbot Rice, but very little has been done since then. Given the current political climate and the likelihood of damage done to the site during the ongoing instability in Iraq, it is probable that no further examination of al-Ḥīrah is immediately forthcoming,[11] and we will remain dependent for our ideas of al-Ḥīrah on studies derived from analyses of Muslim histories.[12] Secondly, while the activities of the Arabs allied to Rome are recorded on a small corpus of inscriptions from Roman Syria,[13] and those of the Arabs allied to the kingdom of Ḥimyar on a range of inscriptions in the Arabian peninsula,[14] there is a much smaller clutch of material addressing the history of the Arabs allied to Persia, with none of it produced by the Arabs themselves. Here, as well, modern political problems pose difficulties. A new inscription mentioning the pro-Roman Arab leader Alamoundaras/os (al-Mundhir, r. 569–82) was recently found in a church in Jordan, but even should such a find be uncovered in Iraq, it is unlikely that it would prove straightforward for scholars to access.[15] Finally, there is, at present, no extant numismatic material related to either of these three groups of Arabs, although there is an unusual and rather interesting seal, published by Irfan Shahîd, which might be connected with the Arabs allied to the Roman Empire.[16]

A further challenge is presented by questions of terminology and names. Should the Arab allies of the Persians be called Lakhmids? Naṣrids? Those of the Romans, Ghassānids, or Jafnids? These names are predominantly attached to Persian- and Roman-allied Arabs by later, Muslim sources (although there is one late third-

century exception, from Paikuli; see below). The question of names was first investigated seriously by Christian Robin, and has now been reviewed by Robert Hoyland.[17] While Muslim sources offer a wide variety of information about the tribal history of the Arabian peninsula, no serious historiographical examination of the relevant texts has yet taken place which might enable effective parallels to be drawn between non-Islamic and Islamic sources.

For the historian basing an enquiry on pre-Islamic material, the terminological difficulties and the pitfalls of choosing labels can be summarized as follows.

Tribal names. While ancient authors often used tribal names to refer to western Germanic groups (Alemanni, Quadi, and so on) they only intermittently do so for the Arabs. Indeed, the majority of tribal names are found not in literary texts, but on inscriptions.[18] The literary shift in late antiquity towards all-encompassing terms such as "Saracen" or, in Syriac, *ṭayyāyē*, to refer to the Arabs of the desert[19] further obscures the activities of whichever groups of people made up "Saracens" or "*ṭayyāyē*." Ancient authors leave us with statements such as "Alamoundaras ... [who] ruled alone over all the Saracens in Persia," or "Arethas, the son of Gabalas, who ruled over the Saracens of Arabia."[20] In the rare cases where names of tribes are known from the pre-Islamic period—for example, Ghassān,[21] Lakhm,[22] and Tanūkh[23]—little or no information is available on their sociopolitical or economic structures. These examples also date from the early part of the late antique period—that is, the third or fourth centuries—and afterwards, as Hoyland notes (and as discussed below) we hear only of individuals, without any clear tribal affiliation.[24] It is thus unknown whether a tribe constituted x or y numbers of people, whether it was a homogenous or fractured entity, whether its leaders were always drawn from a single family, and so on, although it has been suggested that the alignment of powerful Arab leaders with the military and political interests of the Roman, Persian, and Ḥimyarite states likely disrupted any tribal homogeneity which might have existed. This might explain why the fifth- and sixth-century sources prefer to talk only of individuals, and not tribes.[25]

These problems mean that to call a group of people "Ghassānids" or "Lakhmids," following the lead of Muslim sources, is unhelpful, because it is not known to what criteria those labels referred at the time. This stands in contrast, for example, to "Athenian," "Roman," or "Persian" labels, which have their own challenges, but for which certain membership criteria (such as legal requirements) existed and can be quantified.

Lineage (leadership) names. The names Jafna and Naṣr, supposed (mythological?) eponymous ancestors of pro-Roman and pro-Persian Arabs, are not used in pre-Islamic sources to refer to family dynasties. A mention of one Jafna exists, from the period after the exile of al-Mundhir (582), but he is noted to be the son of al-Mundhir, not a descendant of Jafna.[26] Derivatives of Jafna and Naṣr have, though, found currency in modern scholarship to describe the two most prominent leadership groups of Arabs in the pre-Islamic sources: the Jafnids, a family dynasty which was prominent between c. 529 and 582, allied with Rome, and the Naṣrids, allied with Persia. (Another important leadership group is the "Ḥujrids," allies of Ḥimyar, and

later of Rome, whose eponymous ancestor is probably attested on an inscription discovered in Saudi Arabia).[27] The pre-Islamic sources generally refer only to individuals, such as al-Mundhir, al-Ḥārith, al-Nuʿmān, occasionally noting their immediate family, as in the excerpt from Procopius above, or in Syriac sources, by referring to their "house" (*beth*).[28] They do not say "Arethas, the Jafnid," "Alamoundaras, descended from Naṣr," or "Arethas, the descendant of Jafna," and in fact the only descent attached to the Roman ally Arethas (al-Ḥārith) in pre-Islamic sources is his father, Jabala, or Gabalas, thought to have been active in Palestine at the end of the fifth century, but about whose career we know virtually nothing.[29] This means that except on the very rare occasion where a specific equivalency is made—e.g. ʿAmr of Lakhm on the Paikuli inscription (below)—we cannot be sure either what tribe or which *named* lineage of a tribe an individual comes from, and even where the name is given, as at Paikuli, because of the problems noted in the previous section, it is not really clear to what that name might refer.

This further means that the common link between Jafnids (lineage) and Ghassān (tribe), and Naṣrids (lineage) and Lakhm (tribe) rests on tenuous foundations in pre-Islamic sources. It is the Muslim sources that make these links in detail, but they never appear in pre-Islamic sources.[30] Calling an individual a "Jafnid" or "Naṣrid" is thus problematic even if, as Christian Robin has suggested, the idea of descent from Naṣr, fictional or otherwise, may have been current in the sixth century, and internalized by leaders of Persia's Arab allies, to be passed on later to Muslim historians.[31]

More useful names? The "Naṣrid family," according to Muslim sources, ruled at al-Ḥīrah for generations. Ibn Ḥabīb, a philologist from Baghdad who died in c. 860, stated that the "clan of Naṣr" produced twenty kings (including stand-ins from the local Christian elites, the ʿIbād, and the Persians) over a period exceeding 520 years.[32]

The pre-Islamic sources do not support this idea.[33] The Paikuli inscription shows that an ʿAmr of Lakhm was allied to Persia at the end of the third century, and other Arab allies of the Persians, perhaps related to ʿAmr, but perhaps not, appear at irregular intervals, as we show below. Only sometimes is it clear that a certain pro-Persian Arab is descended from an individually named predecessor—for example, where Ambros (ʿAmr) is described as the son of the Persian ally Alamoundaras/os (al-Mundhir, not to be confused with the Roman Arab ally of the same name) by John Malalas and Menander.[34] Because Roman sources tend to identify only immediate family, if anyone, it is not always clear if links can be drawn between more than two generations.

In contrast, for the pro-Roman Arabs ("Jafnids"), Greco-Roman and Syriac sources actually mention the family lineage, clearly stating that al-Ḥārith (Arethas) was the son of Gabalas/Jabala,[35] that al-Mundhir was the son of al-Ḥārith,[36] and that al-Nuʿmān was the son of al-Mundhir.[37] Other named sons, such as the Jafna mentioned above, as well as unnamed sons of al-Mundhir and his father al-Ḥārith, are also referred to in pre-Islamic literary sources; a figure identified by Maurice Sartre as the brother of al-Ḥārith, Abū Karib, is also known.[38] All have in common their

relationship with Jabala via al-Ḥārith, and so the "Jafnids" might thus better, and more helpfully, be termed "G(J)abalids," or "the family of Jabala."

The name "Jafnid" has at least the merit that, even if its application is flawed by virtue of having no attested contemporary origin, its meaning is quite narrow: it is used to refer to a single group of people whose relationship is confirmed by contemporary sources. The name Naṣrid, however, cannot be used in the same way, as late antique sources provide no justification for a single dominant pro-Persian family lineage between the end of the third and the beginning of the seventh centuries, with or without the interregna suggested by Ibn Ḥabīb (and others). It is thus not certain whether the al-Nuʿmān deposed in c. 602/4 by Khusrau II, and ʿAmr of Lakhm, from Paikuli, were from the same family group.[39] This does not mean that such a connection did not or could not exist, but there is no clear evidence for it, in contrast to the links between Gabalas/Jabala, al-Ḥārith, al-Mundhir, and al-Nuʿmān, which illustrate a family dynasty allied to the Roman Empire for a defined period of time.

The objections raised here might seem to be overly critical. Indeed, alongside the ongoing discussions over terminology, Jafnid, Naṣrid, and Ḥujrid remain in use in modern scholarship as a convenient shorthand for the "princes" or elites allied to Rome, Persia, and Ḥimyar in the late antique period. The attested family links between the "Jafnids" (and the likely connections between the "Ḥujrids" which appear in Nonnosus and Procopius) suggest that even if we might dispute terminology, it remains sensible and preferable to discuss individuals, and individual kinship groups, in alliance with the Romans, as our ancient sources do. We must though be cautious not to imagine family links where they may not have existed, or to apply uncritically later genealogies to earlier situations, where there is insufficient justification to do so.

Finally, Hoyland notes that "it was often loyalty to a militarily competent and experienced leader that mattered, and so the Greek and Syriac sources may well be right to focus simply on these individuals," and it is possible that any attempts to match the tribal genealogies from the Muslim sources with earlier material might be looking in the wrong direction.[40] It is conceivable that the ancient sources do not name tribes not because they were uninterested or ignorant, but because the alliances between the Arabs and the powerful empires of antiquity distorted whatever traditional tribal structures existed, leaving the individual leaders as dominant players in the state-tribe relationship. Ancient authors saw powerful men, not tribes. As successful leaders such as al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir attracted a diversity of people looking for booty, opportunity, or protection, the "tribe" became less important than loyalty to the leader. This might explain why we find imprecise descriptions, such as the following (with emphasis added):

Procopius, *History of the Wars* (trans. Dewing)

1.17.45: "Alamoundaras, holding the position of king, ruled alone over all the *Saracens in Persia* ... "

John Malalas, *Chronicle* (trans. Jeffreys)

p. 434: "Alamoundaros, *the Persian Saracen* … "

p. 445: "Alamoundaros, *the Persian Saracen*, came with a force of Persians and Saracens and plundered First Syria as far as the borders of Antioch … "

p. 463 (battle of Callinicum): "When the Phrygians saw their exarch fall and his standard captured by the Persians, they turned in flight and *the Roman Saracens* fled with them … "

Menander the Guardsman (trans. Blockley)

fragment 6.1 (from the treaty between Rome and Persia of 561/2): "The *Saracen allies of both states* shall themselves also abide by these agreements and *those of the Persians* shall not attack the Romans, *nor those of the Romans* the Persians"

fragment 9.1 (during reign of Justin II): "There are countless Saracen tribes, for the most part leaderless desert-dwellers, *some of whom are subject to the Romans, other to the Persians* … "

Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* (trans. Trombley and Watt)

57 (*c.* 503): "The *Persian Ṭayyāyē* advanced to the (river) Khabur … "

75 (*c.* 504): "*a Ṭayy under Persian rule*, ʿAdid, went over with his whole army and gave his allegiance to the Romans … "

79 (*c.* 504/5): "The *Roman Ṭayyāyē* also crossed the Tigris … this war was the cause of much enrichment for the *Ṭayyāyē of both sides* … "

Ps.-Zachariah, *HE* (trans. Phenix and Horn)

8.5: "Kavadh, the king of the Persians … would send *his own Ṭayyāyē* into Roman territory from time to time, to plunder and take captives … "

John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*

3.6.3: "The *Ṭayyāyē of the Persians* were in great awe and fear of Harith, *king of the Ṭayyāyē of the Romans*" (trans. Wood)

3.6.4: "king Mondir … full of anger against the *Ṭayyāyē of the Persians*" (trans. Wood)

Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* (trans. Whitby)

6.22 (early 590s: "At that time too Naaman, the tribal leader of *the enemy Scenites* … "[41]

Theophylact Simocatta, *History* (trans. Whitby and Whitby)

> 8.1.1–3 (c. 600): "In these very times Chosroes, the king of the Persians, tried to defile the peace … The barbarian's reason was in fact roughly this: many different nations are native to Arabia, whom the masses are accustomed to call Saracens; *some of these particular nations were Roman allies; a subdivision of these went into Persia during the time of the peace …* "

Nowhere here is there any tribal affiliation or mention of lineage. What we do find, however, is a general statement of political allegiance. The Arab allies are defined not as Ghassānids, Jafnids, Lakhmids, or Naṣrids, but by affiliation: alliance to one of the two states which acted as their patrons. While vague, the imprecision of "Persian" or "Roman" is, perhaps, more accurate than searching for tribal or tribal lineage attachments whose veracity cannot be confirmed.

In this essay, therefore, we consider as "Persian Arabs" those who appear in our sources as allies of the Sasanians—those usually called "Naṣrids"—making no assumption about family connections or the longevity of a single family unit, key features of the later Muslim tradition. "Persian Arabs" might include those from tribes living in the Persian Empire or on its frontiers, or those who, allied to Rome, switched sides at opportune moments. Disassociating our analysis from the need to locate tribal genealogies and lineages, we focus on individual elites, and attempt to place them within the wider historical concerns and debates of the late antique east. We refer occasionally to Muslim sources in order to highlight possible correspondences, and to reflect on what the Islamic tradition may have been attempting later to accomplish, by endowing a single family with a long and prestigious history at al-Ḥīrah. Despite the many problems outlined here to do with the lack of sources, the biases and historiographical outlook of those that have survived, terminological issues, and the unpromising future for further finds, we hope to show here that it is possible to provide a detailed portrait of the activities of the Persian Arabs. In the discussion below, we divide the source material chronologically—examining early material, sources from the fifth century, and finally, material from the sixth century. We also include sections on the relationship between the Arabs at al-Ḥīrah and Christianity, the Arabs in the tenth-century *Chronicle of Seert*, and the circumstances surrounding the end of the alliance between Persians and the leaders of al-Ḥīrah after 602.

The Persian Arabs before the Fifth Century

One of the earliest references to the Persian Arabs in the late antique period comes from the Paikuli inscription from Kurdistan. It is dated to the reign of the Sasanian king Narseh (293–302); the context is the struggle for power between Narseh, the youngest son of Shapur I, and Shapur's grandson, Wahrām III.[42] The Middle Persian and Parthian inscription was first studied by Sir Henry Rawlinson in 1844, and is published with a comprehensive commentary by Humbach and Skjaervø in four volumes.[43] In paragraph 93 of the text, in a list of vassals, *Amrw lhm'dyn mlk* appears: "'Amr king of Lakhm."[44]

On the basis of the genealogies constructed by Rothstein from Muslim Arabic sources, the "Naṣrid" individuals who appear in sixth-century Roman sources are descended from this ʿAmr_i.e. ʿAmr b. ʿAdī b. Naṣr—thus linking together Lakhm and the house of Naṣr.[45] The name ʿAmr is also known from a Manichean text, noting "Amarō, the king of the sons of Lahim."[46] The late third-century chronology of the Paikuli inscription suggests that a man taken by Muslim sources as a son of ʿAmr, Imruʾ al-Qays, appearing in al-Ṭabarī as a king of al-Ḥīrah, might be linked with the individual of the same name who appears on the inscription from al-Namārah in Syria, dated to 328—that is, not long after the Paikuli text was established.[47] However, such an identification must remain hypothetical. Imruʾ al-Qays' epitaph boasted that "no king could match his achievements," which included extending his authority over swathes of the Arabian peninsula, and he had apparently carried out some of these achievements as a client or ally of both Rome and the Persians.[48] Very little is actually known about either ʿAmr or Imruʾ al-Qays, and there is controversy over the meaning of some parts of the al-Namārah inscription. The later traditions about both men provide, for later consumption, an attractive image of a powerful family which could display the ancient support of both Rome and Persia, and ancestors who could boast of great military success.

Procopius provides a clear rationale for the appointment of al-Ḥārith by Justinian in c. 529 (see below), but how a set of Arab clients came to be allies of the Persians is not explained by the inscription from Paikuli, or by pre-Islamic sources more generally. The Muslim tradition connects ʿAmr with Jadhīma al-Abrash, king of Tanūkh, who, Muslim sources assert, was killed by the Palmyrene Queen Zenobia; ʿAmr, his sister's son, apparently avenged him.[49] (These sources also suggest that the Palmyrene revolt was ended by ʿAmr, effacing the contribution of Aurelian).[50] It is though possible that the ʿAmr who appears as a Sasanian vassal at Paikuli might have attained enough prestige (by whatever means) to attract the attention of the Sasanians, and indeed the superpower politics of the late third and early fourth century, particularly the tension between Ḥimyar and the Sasanians,[51] may have underpinned the desirability of establishing a set of Arab clients in Iraq as a buffer. However, there is no indication from the Paikuli inscription that Iraq or al-Ḥīrah should be connected with ʿAmr.

This leads to an important point. For the sake of familiarity and convenience, and to locate some of the evidence about ecclesiastical structures concerning al-Ḥīrah, the name is used in this essay, but with the following caveats. Al-Ḥīrah is clearly linked in the Muslim tradition with the Persian Arabs, but late antique pre-Islamic literary texts say little about the "city."[52] The *Khuzistan Chronicle*, from the mid-seventh century, refers to "the camp (Ḥirtā) of the Ṭayyāyē" where its ruler Nuʿmān is baptized.[53] Arabic sources compiled in the tenth century locate the same events in al-Ḥīrah.[54] However, the geographical "base" of the Persian Arabs is not clear at all in the Syriac sources, and we are not obliged to suppose that the "camp (Ḥirtā) of Nuʿmān" of Pseudo-Zachariah (8.3) or the "Ḥirtā" in Pseudo-Joshua (§58) should be equated with the Muslim understanding of what constituted al-Ḥīrah, whether in terms of its geographical location, the makeup of its population, or the history

of its ancient foundation, ruin, and subsequent renewal (so al-Ṭabarī 1.821–3, for example). The existence of an etymological link between the Syriac term for camp and the Arabic proper name "Al-Ḥīrah" does not imply that all references to a camp of the Persian Arabs are to this site.[55] As we note below, the *Synodicon Orientale* demonstrates that there was an ecclesiastical organization attached to al-Ḥīrah, but our state of knowledge of the site is very poor. This situation recalls the lack of pre-Islamic evidence for the Jafnid "center" of Jābiya, supposedly in Syria, but known predominantly from Muslim sources. The base of the Persian Arabs appears under other various guises in pre-Islamic sources, such as the "camp of the Saracens of the house of Nuʿmān" (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, below), or "the camp of Nuʿmān" (John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.6.4). None of these descriptions furnish an adequate portrait of al-Ḥīrah, and, as noted earlier, it is greatly to be lamented that the future for a thorough archaeological investigation of the site in Iraq, assumed to conceal its remains, is now more bleak than ever.

The Persian Arabs in the Fifth Century

The Persian Arabs are prominent actors in the events of the fifth century in two important sources—the *hagiographies* of Simeon the Stylite, and the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite. Simeon the Stylite was the first pillar saint, a new ascetic phenomenon that started in northern Syria and spread rapidly across the Christian world.[56] His international cult drew pilgrims from across the Mediterranean and beyond. Such travelers included followers of the leader of the Persian Arabs at that time, al-Nuʿmān.[57] This situation proved especially problematic since Christianity, in the fifth century at least, was closely identified with political allegiance to Rome.

In the Syriac *Life* of Simeon, written in the third quarter of the fifth century, a story is placed in the mouth of an important pilgrim to the shrine, the Roman official Antiochus, son of Sabinus,[58] who narrates stories to other pilgrims. The story concerns a certain "Naaman" (al-Nuʿmān), an Arab ally of the Persians who tries to stop other Arabs from going to Simeon, shielding them from Christian Roman influence. Later, while asleep, he has a vision in which he is vigorously beaten, and, on waking, undergoes a total *volte-face*—allowing anyone who wishes to adopt Christianity to do so, and make a pilgrimage to visit Simeon.[59]

Antiochus represents al-Nuʿmān as a tyrannical barbarian who is humiliated by the saint. Simultaneously, the Arab is also characterized as ignorant, since he thinks of Simeon in terms of his own polytheistic beliefs. But neither description should be thought of as realistic: the author's aim is to demonstrate Simeon's power. Al-Nuʿmān's expectation that religious affiliation will correspond to political allegiance also seems to be reasonable: it is a theme of other hagiographies that describe Arab conversion in the fifth century. But the hagiography exaggerates in imagining that the Persian Arabs were insulated from Christianity. "Ḥirtā" had "Nestorian" bishops from before the 410s, and a nearby town, Markabta of the Arabs, was the site of a major synod in 424.[60] Maybe al-Nuʿmān's dislike of Simeon stemmed as

much from his location in Roman Syria (and the threats such inter-provincial ties posed to his authority) as from his Christianity.

The second major source for the fifth-century Persian Arabs, the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, provides a narrative of the wars of Anastasius (r. 491–518) and Kavadh (r. 488–531) written from the perspective of a monk of Edessa, and preserved in the eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*. It is heavily invested in the miraculous stories of Edessa, especially of Christ's promise to Abgar that the city would remain invulnerable, but also contains detailed narratives of military events.

The first references to the Arabs occur when Emperor Anastasius refuses to pay tribute to the Sasanian shah Kavadh and demands the return of the city of Nisibis, lost in the treaty concluded by Jovian in 363.[61] Kavadh seems to have been in a fragile domestic position—he had recently been deposed by his brother Zamasp and recovered his throne with the help of the Hephthalites. This may explain the revolt of a number of peoples on the Persian border, including the Armenians, Kurds (Qadishaye), and Arabs, "who made predatory raids as far as their strength permitted throughout the whole Persian territory."[62] Kavadh's decision to go to war with Rome reversed this situation, and they all joined the Sasanian side in expectation of booty.

We hear of the leaders of the Persian Arabs when Kavadh's siege of Amida stalls in 503, whereupon he sends al-Nuʿmān south to lay waste to Harran:

> Nuʿman also arrived from the south and entered the territory of the Harranites. He ravaged and plundered [it], and took away captive men, cattle, and goods from the whole territory of the Harranites. He even came as far as Edessa, ravaging, plundering, and taking captive all the villages. The number of people whom he led away into captivity was eighteen thousand and five hundred, not counting those who were killed and the cattle, goods, and spoil of all kinds. The reason so many people were in the villages is that it was the vintage season, when not only the villagers, but also many Harranites and Edessenes, had gone out for the vintage and were [thus] taken captive.[63]

However, the Arab allies of the Romans were equally adept at this kind of hit-and-run warfare. In the same year, while the followers of al-Nuʿmān were fighting the Romans at Khabur,

> The Roman Tayyaye, who are called Thaʿlabites,[64] went towards Hirta, (the residence) of Nuʿman, and came across a caravan going up to him and camels taking [?] up to him. They attacked and destroyed them, and seized the camels, but they did not attack Hirta itself, because (its population) had gone into the inner desert.[65]

The fact that the inhabitants of "Hirta" could simply withdraw from the site suggests that it was a camp, as its name implies. The churches referred to in the earlier extract may have been the only permanent buildings.

As in the *Life of Simeon*, a theme of Pseudo-Joshua's depiction of the Persian Arabs is their paganism and their arrogance, and God's ability to defeat those who attack his servants. After the Thaʿlabite raid, al-Nuʿmān urges Kavadh to strike at Edessa, the next Roman military center:

> a tribal chief from Nuʿman's [city of] Hirta who was a Christian said, "Your majesty should not trouble to go to war against Edessa, for over it there is an irrevocable declaration of Christ whom they worship, that no enemy shall ever gain control of it." When Nuʿman heard this, he threatened to do worse evils in Edessa than those done in Amid and spoke blasphemous words. Then indeed Christ exhibited a manifest sign in him, for at the very moment he blasphemed, the injury he had suffered on his head swelled up and his whole skull became inflamed. He retired to his tent, remained in this distress for two days, and died.[66]

In the fifth century, Syriac authors in Edessa had developed a story that Christ had promised an early king of Edessa, Abgar V, that the city would be invincible. In this episode, Edessa's faith in Christ's promise to Abgar is vindicated in al-Nuʿmān's death, where the Arab leader's blasphemy receives a fitting punishment.[67] The role of the Christian Arab magnate from the "city" of al-Nuʿmān is particularly significant here. Pseudo-Joshua uses him to demonstrate al-Nuʿmān's arrogance and Edessa's special position. But we should also note that it was believable that al-Nuʿmān's retinue might include Christians. This further suggests the image of al-Ḥīrah as a place of many religions that is suggested by the *Life of Simeon the Stylite*, except that, in this source, it is true across the social scale.

After al-Nuʿmān's death, the Persian Arabs continue to participate in the war, so it is clear that their leadership structures were not dependent on direction from a king, and that other magnates could take command or that Arab units could participate with other Sasanian forces. Indeed, at the conclusion of the war, Pseudo-Joshua observes that "for the Arabs on both sides, this war was a source of much profit, and they did as they pleased in both kingdoms."[68] Following the peace, the Persians were even forced to execute Arab leaders who sought to continue raiding Roman lands.[69] This seems to imply that Persian-allied Arab leaders at many levels, not just the ones mentioned by name in the literary sources, benefited greatly from the taking of booty and the prestige that accompanied it, as well as the rewards that came from the Persian government, mirroring similar processes taking place in the Roman Empire.

The Persian Arabs in the Sixth Century

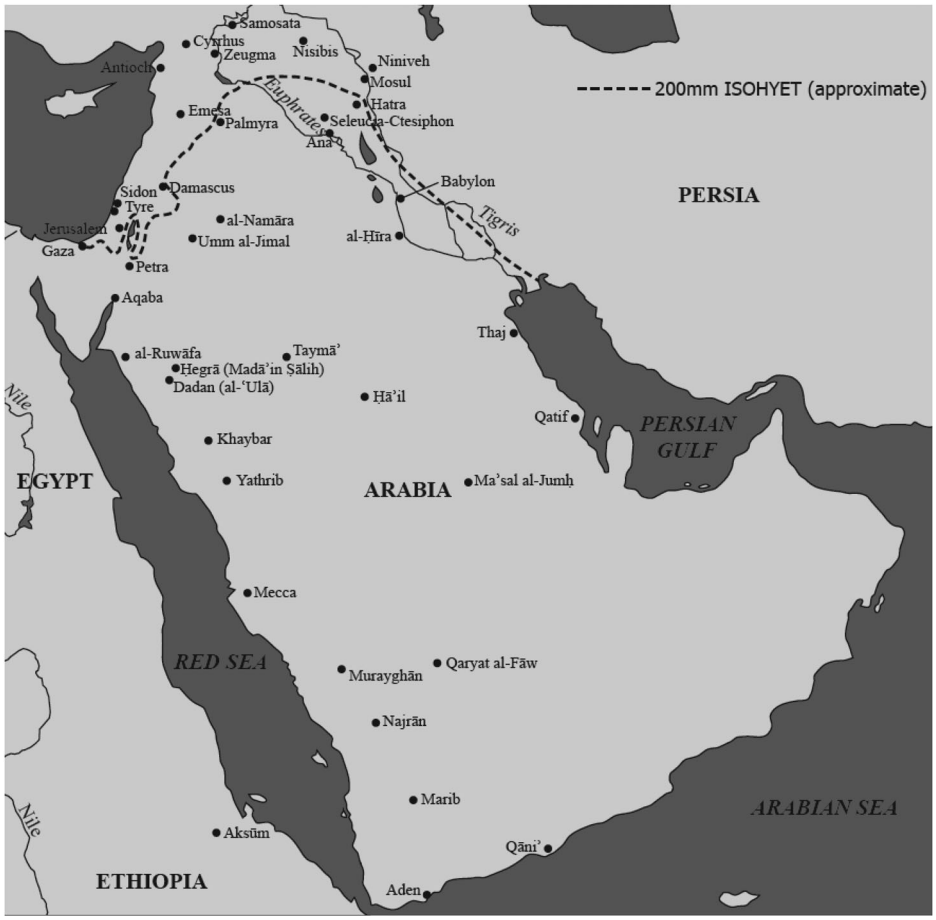
The history of the Persian Arabs in the sixth century is dominated by the figure of al-Mundhir, who was active between 504 and 554. A recurring motif in Roman descriptions of this individual—whom Roman sources refer to as Alamoundaras/os—is his ability to penetrate the defenses of the Roman empire with little difficulty, and to

conduct raids, and seize booty, plunder, and captives. Al-Mundhir's actions were, according to Procopius, the driving force behind the decision of Emperor Justinian to promote al-Ḥārith, the son of Jabala/Gabalas, as a counterweight in 529.[70] Al-Ḥārith, while initially unable to fulfill Justinian's remit, did succeed in killing al-Mundhir in 554, although he lost his own son in the process.[71] The sixth-century sources for the Persian Arabs also include a clutch of inscriptions from the Arabian peninsula, which trace their activities in northern Arabia, as well as attempts by Rome and its allies Axum and Ḥimyar to counteract this extension of their influence. As a collection of material, the sixth-century sources reveal a steady accumulation of power by Persia's Arab allies, best represented by the diplomatic foray to Marib (547/8) and the circumstances surrounding the treaty of 562; both are discussed here. The measurable growth in political confidence and power—to the extent that al-Mundhir's son, ʿAmr (Ambros/us) could brazenly criticize the Sasanian ambassador, the Zikh—is reflected in similar processes amongst the family of Jabala and stands witness to the unintended consequences of imperial client policies in late antiquity, documented in detail for the late Roman west.[72]

Early indications of the involvement of the leaders of the Persian Arabs in the politics of sixth-century Arabia come from inscription Maʾsal 2/Ry 510, found at Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, near Riyadh (see Figure 1 for the location) and dated to June 521. The inscription describes the Axumite-appointed Ḥimyarite king Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur (519–22) campaigning against al-Mundhir in lower Iraq, and states that a coalition of Ḥimyarite forces, tributary auxiliaries from the tribes of Kiddat (Kinda) and Madhḥi[g]^{um} (Maddḥig), as well as allies, Muḍar and their leaders, the banu Thaʿlabat, fought against "Mudhdhir^{um}" (i.e. al-Mundhir).[73] The appearance of the banu Thaʿlabat here, as well as in the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Joshua, and the possible links between Muḍar and Rome,[74] suggest that this operation was conducted with Roman support—perhaps in response to the rather embarrassing loss to captivity of two Roman generals, Timostratus and John, at the hands of al-Mundhir (on which see further below).[75] Indeed, the possible presence of Roman allies on a Ḥimyarite expedition fits very well within the context of Roman enmity towards both al-Mundhir and the Sasanians, Roman attempts to create friendly diplomatic relations with Ḥimyar, as well as the fact that, according to the Syriac tradition, Maʿdīkarib was Christian.[76] The overall picture is thus of a combined effort against Sasanian Persia's Arab allies, within the wider competition between Rome and Persia, as well as Roman efforts to build a serious diplomatic presence in Arabia.

Indeed, further evidence for Roman diplomatic interference in the peninsula along similar lines is furnished by Procopius, describing the mission of Justinian's ambassador Julianus to Ḥimyar. Julianus' brief was to encourage an anti-Sasanian policy in the kingdom, and thus agrees well with the interpretation of Ry 510.[77] But what is also clear from Procopius' narrative is that local clients were also very much part of the overall strategy: the mission of Julianus also included negotiations over Ḥimyar's Arab clients in northern Arabia, who were, by this point, also subject to Roman diplomatic pressure. Procopius also talks of a Roman favorite, Qays, to be installed as leader of the "Maddene Saracens," referring probably to Maʿadd, historically under Ḥimyarite influence.[78] Roman and Ḥimyarite interests appeared to be more closely

Figure 1. The Arabian peninsula in antiquity. Illustration by Aaron Styba.



aligned than ever by the early sixth century. Within the context of this discussion (and specifically within that of Ry 510), it is worth noting the testimony of the Muslim Arabic tradition, which asserts that a Ḥimyarite king (possibly Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur) (re)installed descendants of Ḥujr, under a certain al-Ḥārith, over Maʿadd.[79]

A generation after Ry 510 was inscribed, another inscription, Ry 506, from Murayghān, about 200 km north of Najrān, dated to September AD 552, provides further clues to the ambitions of the leaders of the Persian Arabs in Arabia as well as to the complexity of the political links being forged within the competition between Rome, Ḥimyar, and Persia.[80] The text describes a victory by Abraha, king of Ḥimyar, conducting a fourth expedition against Maʿadd in 552. It seems that an unstable situation and the failure of Ḥimyarite leaders to control Maʿadd had been

exploited by al-Mundhir, who apparently installed his son, ʿAmr (Ambros/us) to control the area.[81] This is particularly interesting in light of later assertions by authors such as al-Ṭabarī and Yāqūt that al-Mundhir was prone to running political interference in northern Arabia for the Sasanians, and that in addition to occasional warfare with the family of Ḥujr of Kinda, they also shared dynastic links with the same.[82] Following the death of a certain al-Ḥārith (possibly the same individual mentioned in the previous paragraph) in 527, the Romans had forged a single alliance with the family of Jabala as a means to combat al-Mundhir, and seem to have paid less attention to northern Arabia—providing a power vacuum of sorts for al-Mundhir to exploit until Abraha became strong enough to re-establish Ḥimyarite control. The inscription can therefore be understood, in one way, as another reflection of interstate competition in northern Arabia.

Al-Mundhir's assertive, energetic personality was probably an important driving force behind any attempts directed from the Persian Empire to detach the control of Maʿadd from Ḥimyar or Rome. A number of Greco-Roman sources talk about al-Mundhir's aggressive actions, particularly his rapid incursions and penchant for raiding. Roman authors delighted in describing the barbarity of al-Mundhir on his raids: on one foray described by Pseudo-Zachariah, al-Mundhir reached as far as Emesa and Apamea, capturing 400 nuns, whom he apparently sacrificed.[83] Procopius records that al-Mundhir also sacrificed a son of al-Ḥārith, son of Jabala, to Aphrodite in 545.[84] Testimony from Theophanes and Malalas for 528/29 describes a pattern of looting, burning, pillage, and then a swift withdrawal, before the Romans could marshal their forces.[85] Malalas further describes the profitability of al-Mundhir's raids, noting that in 529 he was able to obtain a substantial ransom, after the summary beheading of Roman captives prompted an outpouring of fearful generosity by the church congregations in Antioch, for the ransom of the terrified survivors.[86] Al-Mundhir was even able to capture two Roman generals—Timostratus, the *dux Mesopotamiae*, and John, whom he ransomed for a handsome profit (and see the discussion of Ry 510, above, for the possible connection with Ḥimyar).[87] Such raids provided plunder and booty, but also fulfilled the important political and military purpose of harassing and testing Roman defenses. It is noteworthy that the raids of Rome's Arab clients seem to have inspired similar images on the other side of the Euphrates—something which is easy to overlook, given the dominance of Roman-authored material on Arab raiding.[88]

Sacrifice and beheadings were good propaganda. We should not necessarily take all these descriptions at face value, but Procopius cites al-Mundhir's raids as the primary reason for Justinian's support of the Jafnids in 527/28. Procopius writes that al-Mundhir was:

> a man who for a space of fifty years forced the Roman state to bend the knee. For beginning from the boundaries of Aegypt and as far as Mesopotamia he plundered the whole country, pillaging one place after another, burning the buildings in his track and making captives of the population by the tens of thousands on each raid, most of whom he killed without consideration, while he gave up the others for great sums of money … Alamoundaras … ruled alone over all the Saracens in

> Persia, and he was always able to make his inroad with the whole army wherever he wished in the Roman domain; and neither any commander of Roman troops, whom they call "duces," nor any leader of the Saracens allied with the Romans, who are called "phylarchs," was strong enough with his mean to array himself against Alamoundaras; for the troops stationed in the different districts were not a match in battle for the enemy. For this reason the Emperor Justinian put in command of as many clans as possible Arethas [al-Ḥārith] the son of Gabalas.[89]

The support of the Sasanian shahs played a key role in the success of these incursions, and it is unlikely that al-Mundhir would have been as effective without the benefit of his alliance with Ctesiphon. Al-Mundhir seems to have enjoyed a good relationship with Kavadh, in particular, advising him when, as Procopius states, the shah "felt confidence in no-one else" and "while he was completely at a loss at what he should do." Al-Mundhir's advice was felt to be sound, and when Kavadh heard it on one particular occasion, he "could neither oppose nor distrust the plan" offered by the Arab leader.[90] Pseudo-Joshua notes that Kavadh also worked closely with al-Mundhir's predecessor as leader of Persia's Arab allies, al-Nuʿmān, an advisor to the shah while on campaign near Edessa at the beginning of the sixth century.[91] Such expectations ran in both directions, however, for as Kavadh had used al-Mundhir as a proxy, so in the latter part of al-Mundhir's career Khusrau I Anushirvan (r. 531–79) found the Arab leader useful in circumventing treaty requirements, and providing a deniable way to wage war. Procopius describes how, in 537, Khusrau saw that Belisarius was enjoying success in Italy and that Justinian's attention was deeply engaged elsewhere, and sought to grasp the opportunity which this confluence of events presented. The Sasanian shah thus directed al-Mundhir to find a way to break the peace agreement between himself and the Roman Empire.[92] Al-Mundhir was well-versed in provocation, and so he now accused al-Ḥārith (son of Jabala) of straying across an agreed demarcation line—the "strata" (hence the name usually applied to this event, the "strata dispute"). Efforts to instigate a war failed, however, when Justinian dispatched a senior official, Summus, to negotiate a solution.[93] In any event, the "strata" was, according to Procopius, barren and no good for agriculture, and Justinian's advisors persuaded him not to provide Khusrau with the war that he wanted over such a poor prospect. What the "strata dispute" had highlighted, however, was the strength of the Roman and Persian Arabs and the murky legal position that they occupied. Al-Mundhir had perhaps been emboldened by the fact that the Arabs had never been written into the peace agreement between Rome and Persia, so his deeds could not be construed as a Sasanian breach of the peace—something that Procopius openly admits. This problem was to be rectified in 561/62.

Despite the overall failure of al-Mundhir to bring the Romans into the decisive conflict which Khusrau sought, his patron's confidence in him, as well as his own sense of confidence, are neatly reflected by a presence of his envoys on a diplomatic mission to Ḥimyar in 547/48, recorded on a long inscription at the Marib Dam that commemorates the power of Abraha, king of Ḥimyar.[94] Abraha had come to power after the reign of the Axumite-appointed ruler Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ (Esimiphaeus), and reasserted Ḥimyarite power following Axum's dominance after the massacres at Najrān in the 520s (on

which see further below). By 547/48 Abraha had consolidated his position, and received an embassy from the Romans, Sasanians, and both the Roman and Persian Arabs:

> Then came to him the plenipotentiary minister of the Negus and came to him the plenipotentiary minister of the king of the Romans, the ambassador of the king of Persia, the envoy of Mudhdhirān, the envoy of Ḥarith[um] son of Gabalat and the envoy of Abīkarib son of Gabalat.[95]

Mudhdhirān here refers to al-Mundhir, while the last two individuals are al-Ḥārith son of Jabala (Gabalat) and a figure usually taken to be his brother, Abū Karib.[96] The fact that they sent their own envoys rather than having their interests represented by imperial envoys is remarkable. Indeed, an increasing freedom of action away from imperial supervision now characterized the activities of the leaders of both the Roman and Persian Arabs. By the 540s, both al-Mundhir and his counterpart al-Ḥārith freely made war on each other without either Roman or Sasanian permission or assistance,[97] and, on numerous occasions, al-Ḥārith ignored Roman orders while on campaign and acted independently of Roman commanders.[98] Interestingly, Justinian seems to have rated al-Mundhir highly enough to send Summus to detach him from his Persian alliance via promises of large amounts of gold.[99] There is also a tradition, reported second-hand through Theophanes, that al-Mundhir had been tempted to convert to both the Chalcedonian and Miaphysite forms of Christianity early in his career as a way to turn him,[100] and, furthermore, after Khusrau's own allegations of political foul play in this regard, Justinian in turn accused Khusrau (in 539) of using al-Mundhir to attempt again to break the treaty between them.[101] The underlying motif in these stories is the political value of al-Mundhir in the competition between Justinian and Khusrau, and the perception is clear that his role in interstate politics was significant enough to warrant the personal attention of both Roman and Persian rulers. The diplomatic mission recorded on the Marib Dam can thus be interpreted as a mid-century snapshot of the increasing political profile of the Persian and Roman Arabs, and fits well into the broader trend that saw the leaders of both groups grow increasingly more powerful throughout the sixth century.

Further evidence for the change in status of the Arab allies of both empires is found in the treaty of 561/62. Our main source for these details is the history of Menander the Guardsman, whose text only survives in a condensed form in fragments in the tenth-century compilations of the *Excerpta de Sententiis* and the *de Legationibus*. Despite these difficulties, Menander was, like Procopius, a contemporary of the events he describes and was also well-placed to have access to documentation. By the time that negotiations were concluded, the Romans and Sasanians had agreed that:

> The Saracen allies [σύμμαχοι] of both states shall themselves also abide by these agreements and those of the Persians shall not attack the Romans, nor those of the Romans the Persians.[102]

This represented a clear attempt to provide a legal category for the Arabs—still subordinate to their imperial patrons, but of sufficient interest, and with a history of troublesome independent action, to warrant this inclusion.

Of great interest is the language used by Menander; a brief survey of some of the terms used by himself and his contemporaries reveals a contrast between situations where the Romans sought partnerships, and those where they wish to establish their own dominance and authority. Part of this might reflect the shifting fortunes of Roman power in the sixth century, as well as the relative strength of barbarians compared to previous centuries.[103] Menander, for example, describes Avars approaching the empire for an alliance that they attempt, by threat of force, to pressure the Romans into accepting; the Greek verb used to express their wishes is ἑταιρίσασθαι, "to become comrades in arms to one another."[104] The Avars were seeking not submission as *dediticii* or through the unequal arrangement of *foederati*, but something more advantageous. Similar terms evoking partnership and equality appear elsewhere in Menander[105] and in Agathias, where Goths make common cause with the Franks,[106] and Procopius' descriptions of Roman attempts to forge an alliance with Ḥimyar turn around the verb ἑταιρίσασθαι.[107] What all of these instances suggest is that the perception of alliance or partnership could be expressed by a selection of terms, none of which were typically applied to barbarians and certainly not to Arabs: indeed, elsewhere in Menander's text where Arabs are involved, the language of submission dominates—phrases such as οἱ καθ' ὑμᾶς Σαρακηνοί (the Saracens subject to us), and ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίους (under the Romans), to show how the Arabs are *under* state control,[108] while the Roman ambassador Peter scathingly refers to al-Mundhir as a "slave", again indicating submission.[109]

Further support for the importance of the Greek term applied to the Arabs in the treaty text, σύμμαχοι (federate allies), is provided by the testimonies of Procopius and Agathias. Procopius, for example, provides a speech from Lazica, a region long contested by both empires. He describes pro-Sasanian Lazicans arguing for a restoration of their previous alliance with Persia, when they were σύμμαχοι, allies, to the Persians, rather than their current status as κατήκοοι (subjects) to the Romans.[110] Agathias reports similar imagined conversations, where the Lazicans again argue for alliance with Persia, and the support of the Sasanian army, who will fight on their behalf. The term used here is ὑπερμαχόμαι, "fight for or on behalf of"—again, this is not a term that suggests subordination.[111]

The appearance of the term σύμμαχοι in the treaty thus suggests that while the Romans might continue with scathing comments about Arab allies for public consumption, from a legal perspective they were forced to perceive their Arab clients with a greater sense of equality than they had done in the past—categorizing them as σύμμαχοι, allies, not *foederati* or ὑποσπόνδοι. This is not to say that they were necessarily seen as peers or counterparts, but that they *did* possess a certain amount of value. Further parts of the treaty, which describe "Saracens and other barbarians," also suggest that the Arabs had managed to shed a certain amount of the negative perception which surrounded them.[112]

In other parts of Menander's narrative, the question of financial subsidies comes up, and in the various discussions between the Romans and Sasanians some interesting points emerge. In one excerpt, John, the envoy of the Roman Emperor Justin II (r. 565–78), explains the background:

> After the festival [at Nisibis] ... John was received by the authorities in Nisibis and was sent on, with the customary honours, to make his embassy to the Persian palace. There he performed properly everything for which he had been sent. One day Khosro [Khusrau I] spoke to him about the Saracens. There are countless Saracen tribes, for the most part leaderless desert-dwellers, some of whom are subject to the Romans, others to the Persians. The Saracens being divided in this way, Justinian, a very generous and noble Emperor, during time of peace bestowed gifts upon those on the Persian side. But Justin, a man who was concerned with his own dignity and who conceded nothing to the feelings of the barbarians, held in contempt the Saracens who were on the Persian side. They—for they are a very greedy people—regarded this as a stoppage of their income and urged the Persian king not to overlook those who depended upon him. When Peter was on the embassy to him, Khosro had said that the Romans, who had an obligation to the Saracens, should pay them what they owed, and on this occasion he used the same words to John, who had come to him. For the Saracens claimed that they received the money to keep the peace and not attack the Roman Empire, and they insisted that this was the truth of the matter. But John, when he observed that they were making an unfounded claim, said, "If it were someone other than the great Khosro who was supporting the unjust accusations of the Saracens, the matter would be less serious. I am amazed and much perturbed that such a mighty Persian king, who lays such importance upon what confirms to the facts of the situation and who, I shall add, is well-disposed to the Romans, lends his support to those bent on injustice. Since I am a Roman, I cannot remain indifferent to this. Although the king does not need a teacher, yet I shall explain the whole situation, aiming my words at an informed audience. For if one who already knows the version that accords with justice has it rehearsed to him again, the sharing of this knowledge will strengthen his impartiality.
>
> "Peter, our predecessor as envoy, who recently came to you and settled the details of the peace, was able through his eloquence and skill at persuasion to refute the charges which the Saracens are now making, as well as other matters under dispute. Although I am not trained to oratory or persuasion, yet through the justice of my cause I shall prevail over the Saracens and obtain from you that you neither favour them (who are utterly in the wrong in this case) over the Romans nor choose what is detrimental over what is advantageous to both our states.
>
> "The Saracens who are your subjects—and whenever I say "Saracens," think, Medes, upon the uncouthness and unreliability of that people—were accustomed to receive gifts from the Emperor Justinian. The practice was established out of the free wish

> of the giver. Since he loved peace greatly he showed open-handedness even to those to whom it was not necessary. Of his own free will and facing no compulsion, he created a new situation by the excess of his generosity, but he did not act under compulsion (I hesitate to use the word) nor did he create a series of obligations. My clearest proof that the Saracens received this money as a gift and not, as they claim, under agreement, is that they sent gifts in return to our Emperor. No one denies this, I think. And even if we grant that Justinian gave them the money under treaty, the donation ran for the lifetime of the Emperor who gave it and expired at his death. For no state will ever be bound by the practice of one man (I refer to his excess of generosity) or by an agreement that brings no benefit, even if the man who established the practice or made the agreement is a king. We are as unwilling to give anything in future to the Saracens as Justinian was most kindly towards them. The present Emperor wishes to be an object of the greatest fear to all. The Saracens, therefore, should not entertain these dreams, for our Emperor will see fit to do no such thing. Our wish should be that he is willing to keep the peace and that he does not consider that the Romans are the losers under the current terms. For only then will he hold back from war."[113]

The Sasanian envoy, the Zikh, nevertheless felt compelled to ask the Romans for subsidies for ʿAmr (Ambros/us), the son of al-Mundhir, who had died in 554. That the leaders of the Persian Arabs could form part of the *in situ* diplomatic portfolio of the Zikh is interesting, especially in the light of the inscription from Marib, although this might also be interpreted as another means by which the Sasanian shah might obtain further funding, and also a way in which the Sasanians might enjoy the humiliation their enemies would feel offering financial support for "barbarians." Indeed, Menander records at least one occasion where the Romans make attempts to manipulate exactly this sort of prejudice in order to humiliate both ʿAmr and the Sasanian envoy, with some success.[114] Yet whatever the case, the expectation was clear that the Romans would continue to pay what was essentially a form of protection money to the Persian Arabs, which had apparently been disbursed in previous years to al-Mundhir by Justinian. Unsurprisingly, the Romans balked at such a suggestion and also attempted to portray any subsidies as a voluntary gift, freely given, and with expectations of reciprocity. The Romans had taken similar steps to ensure that on the rare occasions when they did provide support for the Sasanian fortifications at the Caspian Gates, their offering was construed as a generous gift, rather than something that had been obtained as an obligation, under treaty or otherwise.[115]

Menander later records that (unsurprisingly) the Roman refusal to pay subsidies to the son of al-Mundhir had been poorly received, and, astonishingly, ʿAmr felt secure enough in his position to criticize the Sasanian ambassador, the Zikh:

> The [Sasanian] king spoke first. "Our subject Ambrus the Saracen is extremely critical of the Zikh and had laid a most serious complaint against the man, that when we made a treaty with you the Zikh obtained no advantage for him." Peter [the Roman

> envoy] replied "Never at any time did the Saracens subject to you receive from the Romans a fixed amount of gold, either as a result of compulsion or agreement. Rather, Alamundar [al-Mundhir], the father of Ambrus, sent gifts to the Roman Emperor, and when the latter received them he sent gifts in return. This was not done every year, and once there was an interval of five years. But, at any rate, this practice was maintained by Alamundar and ourselves for a very long time. And the Almighty knows that Alamundar did this out of no great goodwill towards the Persians. For it was agreed that if you made war upon us, Alamundar's sword would remain sheathed and unused against the Roman state. This remained a situation for some time. But now your brother and my master has adopted a policy that I consider, I King, to be very sensible and he says, 'If the states are steadfast in keeping the peace, what future benefit will I derive from calling upon the subjects and slaves of the Persian king to ignore the interests of their masters and from exchanging gifts with them?'" The king said, "If envoys were exchanged and the parties honoured each other with gifts before the peace, I think these earlier arrangements should be maintained." These were the arguments advanced concerning Ambrus.[116]

ʿAmr made numerous attempts to obtain further financial support from the Romans, this time via Mebod, a different Sasanian envoy, but failed:

> The Emperor [Justin II] ... called a great many more curses upon the Saracen [ʿAmr] saying that he was a turncoat ... "Moreover," Justin said, "he cannot conceal for what purpose he has come to the Emperor. He says that he wishes to receive the usual payment from us, instead of which, I think, the accursed criminal will receive misfortune. It would be laughable if we, the Romans, became tributary to the Saracen race, nomads at that." Mebod said, "So be it, my Lord. But you will let him go, even if empty-handed." The Emperor replied, "As far as I am concerned, I wish he had never come. He can certainly leave." Mebod said, "Dismiss me with him." Thus the embassy was concluded, and the Emperor sent the Persian envoy and the Saracens together back home to their own countries ... but when the Saracens reached their own land and reported to Ambrus the attitude of the Emperor towards the Saracens who were subject to the Medes, then Ambrus ordered his brother Kaboses, who lay opposite Alamundar, the leader of the Saracens subject to the Romans [al-Mundhir, the son of al-Ḥārith, leader of the Roman Arabs 569-82], to ravage Alamundar's territory. This territory was on the borders of Arabia.[117]

Here, again, we find the Persian Arabs with their own diplomatic mission, even when packaged together with the Sasanian envoy's own assignment; but what is really intriguing is once again the ability of ʿAmr to act independently, without fear of sanction, by launching his own campaign against his enemies. This, of course, was something of a violation of the treaty of 561/62.

The Persian Arabs and Christianity in the Sixth Century

The Persian Arabs were in a sensitive position with regard to any overt religious affiliation. Open "conversion" or the public practice of Christianity might have caused political difficulties, given the close relationship of al-Mundhir, in particular, with the Sasanian leadership, yet at the same time, Christian populations in Iraq and apparently at al-Ḥīrah made some kind of gesture desirable. Tension is especially visible in the 520s, following the massacres at Najrān in South Arabia, a culmination of sorts of Roman arm's-length efforts to encourage Christianity in the region. In the late fifth century a Christian priest had been executed for promoting Christianity in Najrān, and in the early sixth, the apparent murder of Roman merchants in southern Arabia prompted Rome's Christian ally, Axum, to depose and kill the king of Ḥimyar.[118] The Axumites now appointed Ḥimyar's kings (Maʿdīkarib had been the second appointee) but the third, Yūsuf, rebelled sometime in 522. The revolt of Yūsuf (also known as Joseph, Dhū Nuwās, or Masrūq) included a massacre of Christians at Najrān in 523/24.[119] This episode prompted another invasion of Ḥimyar, carried out by the Axumite Negus Ella Asbeha, to install Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ, who was (as noted above) later succeeded by Abraha as king of Ḥimyar.[120]

A number of sources report a letter formerly attributed to a Sasanian Miaphysite missionary, Simeon of Bēth Arshām, produced in the immediate aftermath of the persecution of Christian converts in Najrān, and written to the abbot of Gabbula, in Syria.[121] The version of the letter reported by Pseudo-Zachariah—Letter C, considered to be the most reliable of its different appearances[122]—details the presence of a messenger from Yūsuf, who invited the leader of the Persian Arabs, al-Mundhir, to help stoke the anti-Christian sentiment sweeping through parts of Arabia. Al-Mundhir mocked the Christians present, in this extract from Letter C in Pseudo-Zachariah:

> The messenger related how the Christians were killed and were persecuted in the land of the Himyarites. Mundhir said to the Christians of his army, "You have heard what happened. Deny Christ, for I am no better than the other kings who have persecuted the Christians." A certain man who was a commander in his army and a Christian was moved with zeal. With courage he said to the king, "We did not become Christians in your time so that we should deny him." Mundhir became angry and said, "Do you dare to speak in my presence?" He said, "Because of the fear of God I speak without fear, and no one will stop me, because my sword is no shorter than that of others, and I will not shrink from fighting to the death." On account of his family and because he was an important and renowned man and was courageous in battle, Mundhir was silent. (Pseudo-Zachariah 8.3d, trans. Phenix and Horn, p. 289)[123]

The report emphasizes the self-sufficiency and deep-rootedness of Christianity amongst the Arab clients of al-Mundhir, but we do not need to take at face value

the suggestion that Yūsuf encouraged al-Mundhir to join his persecution: elsewhere the author of the letter accuses Yūsuf of corresponding with the Jews of Tiberias, so he may be producing an image of a widespread conspiracy against (Miaphysite) Christianity for propagandistic purposes.[124]

Another of the sources relating the massacre at Najrān, Letter 2, is more problematic. Shahîd, who translated and published Letter 2 in 1971, thought that it was written in the "Jafnid" base of Jābiya, although this, and many other suppositions connected to Letter 2, have been called into doubt by the recent discussions of both David Taylor and Fergus Millar.[125] Letter 2 describes the sufferings of the Najrānites as an encouragement to other Christians to live good lives:

> If the barbarians have become inmates of Christ and abandoned gold and silver and all they possessed, and if women have persevered heroically in their contests for Christ's sake, how much more should we abandon our wretched hovels and opulent residences and be with Christ in the fair mansions prepared for us in our father's house.[126]

The various versions of the letter seem to emphasize the events in Najrān as signs of the international nature of Christianity, and of the Miaphysite movement in particular.[127] Not only does this martyrdom occur outside the Roman world, it encompasses people from all around the (Miaphysite) world: not just Najrānites, but also Persians, Ethiopians, Romans, and even men of al-Ḥīrah, represented by a deacon named Eliyas. Eliyas' presence suggests the likely development of Miaphysite Christianity within al-Ḥīrah by this date, and the subsequent role of Ḥīrans in missionary activity to the south, where the possible trading links between al-Ḥīrah and the Yemen may have facilitated religious contacts as well.[128]

Simeon of Bēth Arshām features elsewhere in the history of the Persian Arabs through his biography, written by the Miaphysite bishop John of Ephesus in the 570s in the hagiographic collection known as *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. In this text, John probably embellishes earlier material devoted to Simeon. John wrote at a time of considerable disruption for the Miaphysite church, when several schismatic groups had broken away from its main hierarchy.[129] One of the functions of such hagiographies was to appeal to great figures of the past to rally support for contemporary unity, and Simeon was a particularly good contender because of his role as a missionary in lands that were traditionally "Nestorian," an end that all Miaphysites might approve of.[130]

The *Life* opens with a characterization of Persia and its heresies. "Persia," we are told, is the land where "the school of Theodore and Nestorius is most widespread," and also that "the teachings of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan are much disseminated there," and that "it is the place where Mani travelled and where he was flayed alive."[131] At one level this is a polemical comparison between the Dyophysite beliefs of the Church of the East and the much older "heresies" of the Syriac-speaking world: "Nestorianism" is a religion of a heretical, barbarian world beyond the Roman frontier. But

there is also an element of truth in John's assessment, and one of Mani's disciples may even have been sponsored by an earlier leader of the Persian Arabs.[132] Simeon and other Miaphysite missionaries may indeed have encountered Manichees and Marcionites as well as members of the Church of the East.[133]

"The camp of the Saracens of the house of Numan," probably al-Ḥīrah, is included as part of "Persia" for the purposes of Simeon's itinerary:

> [Simeon] was sedulous in going about the countries, as far as the camp of the Saracens of the house of Numan [i.e. al-Ḥīrah], which he often visited, so he gained a large number of Saracens there [as converts]. The magnates (*rawrbane*) that became his disciples at his words built a church of the Christians in this place. And again he used to depart [from there] and go to the gate of the kingdom [Ctesiphon] and turn many of both the heretics and the Magians to God.[134]

We are not told precisely who Simeon's converts are, but some of them are said to be wealthy magnates, capable of building new Miaphysite churches. Though the *Life* does not mention them, it is probable (if the "camp" is to be equated with al-Ḥīrah) that these churches co-existed with those that had already been built there, one of which had become the burial place for several Nestorian *catholicoi* by the mid-sixth century.[135] Simeon seems to have used the "camp of the Saracens" as a base for his later missionary activities: later in the *Life* his Dyophysite opponents at Ctesiphon assume he is there and will be unable to debate against them.

There are no further explicit references to al-Ḥīrah in the *Life*, but the account of Simeon's missionary method may also describe his endeavors among the Arabs: Simeon is said to have composed lists of "belief" on linen rolls, which would not fragment in the way that papyrus would:

> he wrote the faith of every people in their own language [that had been sent] from the archbishops, and above the belief he fixed the seal of the king of that people and the bishops and magnates on that cloth and confirmed it. This is how he acted among all believing people and tongues.[136]

Simeon's missions targeted Christians as well as non-Christians, as he attempted to confirm his followers as members of a Miaphysite movement. In the aftermath of the Christological controversies, groups may have been able to change allegiance between different confessions relatively swiftly, possibly even blaming the destruction of documents that proclaimed their faith in specific terms. Simeon's linen documents, reproducing official creeds from the archbishops and sealed by local leaders, may have been an attempt to render a Miaphysite affiliation more permanent after an initial conversion.

The writings of John of Ephesus also include a long, but incomplete ecclesiastical history. Though much less polemical than his hagiography, it accords an unusually prominent position to the leader of the Roman Arabs, al-Mundhir, son of al-Ḥārith, whom he presents as an important sponsor of the Miaphysite churches,

and who was unjustly treated by the Roman emperors.[137] We should remember that ecclesiastical history was a genre where an orthodox Roman emperor traditionally sat at the center of the narrative. The prominence accorded to the Jafnids in the fourth book of the history may represent a pointed decision to displace the Chalcedonian emperors. In the fifth and sixth book of his history he offers more secular material, describing the wars between Rome and Sasanian Persia, and this may serve as part of his general indication of the period as a time of chaos, a sign of divine displeasure at the success of the Chalcedonians.

One scene in book six describes the victory of al-Mundhir over his Persian Arab opponent Qabus, offering a favorable depiction of the Jafnids as kings of the Roman Arabs:

> The Ṭayyāyē of the Persians were in great awe and fear of Harith, king of the Ṭayyāyē of the Romans. When they saw that he had died they held his sons and magnates and army in low esteem and mocked them. And they hoped that all his camp (*ḥirtā*) would now be delivered into their hands.
>
> They gathered and went and made camp in the land of the house of Harith, along with all their flocks. They also led in all their herds of camels. And when Mundhir found out about this he was very angry. He seethed with great rage and led all his brothers and sons and magnates and all of his camp and fell upon them suddenly, when they were quite unaware that they would be bold enough to stand against them. Then they ravaged and destroyed them … Qabus their king mounted and fled with a small body of men, and they escaped without their possessions [lit. naked].
>
> Mundhir entered [Qabus'] tent and sat in it. And he took all his baggage and tents, as well as his herds. He imprisoned the sons of his clan who were nobles, but he destroyed and annihilated the rest. And he went and pitched his tent in the land of Qabus, which is more than three days' travel away, which is where all of the flocks and wealth of the Persian Ṭayyāyē were. He encamped there for a long time, so that when Qabus' raiders came they saw that his tent had been pitched in the land of Qabus and thought that their king Qabus was in it. Trustingly, they entered and dug in in the camp of Mundhir, but they [the Roman Ṭayyāyē] caught them and killed them and imprisoned the notables who were with them.
>
> After they [the Roman Ṭayyāyē] had remained there as long as they wanted, they returned with much booty that they had seized: many horses, herds of camels, armour and other things.
>
> After this time, Qabus came and gathered a great force to himself. He sent a message to Mundhir [saying]: "Prepare for battle. For, behold, we are coming to you. Although you fell on us like a band of robbers you thought you had defeated us. But now we come against you openly for battle." Then Mundhir sent a message to them: "Why do you trouble yourselves? I am coming." He was persuaded, and accepted [the challenge] and put his money where his mouth was [lit. did the

> deed with a word]. He [Mundhir] came upon them suddenly in the desert unawares. He threw them into confusion and killed most of them, and again they fled before him.[138]

In this confrontation, Qabus was prepared to withdraw from his camp entirely to rally his forces and only seems to have lost movable wealth. Much of this consists of war equipment, of mounts and armor, which might also be used to attract and equip a larger following. As before, the gathering of spoils seems a major objective in this kind of desert warfare, which continued at least until the exile of al-Mundhir in the reign of Maurice.

Later Perspectives on the Persian Arabs: the Chronicle of Seert, al-Ṭabarī, and the Day of Dhū Qār

The Chronicle of Seert. We conclude our examination of the sources for the Persian Arabs by considering some non-Islamic material produced after the Muslim conquests. The *Chronicle of Seert* is a tenth- or eleventh-century compilation of earlier east Syrian historical accounts and hagiography. Written in Arabic, it relies on earlier Syriac accounts, which have been juxtaposed to produce a universal history. The core of this account is the history of the *catholicoi* of the Church of the East, centered in Ctesiphon, but to it has been added histories of the Sasanian shahs, of monastic foundations, and of events in the western church. These extra strands of material were added at the end of the sixth century: the different kinds of material that are set after c. 590, such as the scenes examined here, are much more fully integrated. These sections are capable of examining the relationship between different institutions and *dramatis personae*. The *Chronicle* affords us a different, non-Islamic, but much later view of the material under discussion in this essay.

The material on the leaders of the Persian Arabs was probably produced by several different historians within the Church of the East, some of them writing very close in time to the events described. In spite of their late redaction, these scenes provide an important corrective to the Miaphysite sources on the Christianity at al-Ḥīrah. Indeed, Miaphysites may have had more shallow roots there than their "Nestorian" rivals.

One interesting passage in the *Chronicle of Seert* describes the adoption of Christianity by the final Naṣrid leader, al-Nuʿmān.

> Just as Paul adhered to Judaism and Aba [the *catholicos*] to Magianism, this man [al-Nuʿmān, r. c. 583–602/4] was addicted to paganism. He adored the star named Zohra and offered sacrifices to idols. This demon possessed him, and he vainly asked the priests of the idols for help. He met Simeon bin Jabir, bishop of Hira; Sabrishoʿ, bishop of Lashom, who would become *catholicos*; and the monk Ishoʿzkha and asked for help. God cured him and the demon left him.
>
> Nuʿman received the faith and was baptised in the fourth year of Khusrau. He was attached to the true faith and chased the Jacobites away in his zeal for orthodoxy. He reigned over all the Arabs found in the empires of the Persians and Romans. If

> either of the kings, who were then at peace, requested his help, he came to their aid. His son did likewise.
>
> His sons Hasan and Mundhir, after seeing the graceful state of their father, also received baptism and baptised all their households. Hasan told his slaves not to prevent the poor approaching him when he entered church. And when Vistahm revolted against Khusrau, Hasan fought him and freed Khusrau from his hands … He was most attached to the Christian religion, may God have mercy upon him.[139]

This extract deploys a common theme of hagiography, in which a king can only be healed from his sickness through conversion to Christianity. It is a trope that unites the healing of physical sickness with the healing of the spiritual sickness that is false belief.[140] The section also compares al-Nuʿmān to Mar Aba, the great *catholicos* of the previous generation who had presided over a major expansion in Christian influence within the Sasanian world. This reference, placed at the start of the story, situates al-Nuʿmān's decision within this wider trend.[141]

This particular story of al-Nuʿmān's conversion was likely composed early in the reign of Khusrau II Parvez (591–628). The celebration of Ḥasan as an ally of the shah seems to anticipate his succession to his father and the continuation of a close relationship between the shahs and the Naṣrid dynasty. This was not to be, since Khusrau had al-Nuʿmān executed in about 602/4 and replaced by a Persian *marzban*.[142] The Sasanian dynasty itself was removed from power by the Arab invasions that followed shortly afterwards.

There is also a second version of al-Nuʿmān's conversion embedded in the *Chronicle of Seert*.[143] It is part of a saint's life devoted to the holy man and *catholicos* Sabrīshōʿ, who was an appointee of Khusrau. This text is considerably more complex than the first and shows the attempts of various clergymen to claim responsibility for al-Nuʿmān's adoption of Christianity.

This second narrative begins with Simeon ibn Jābir, the bishop of al-Ḥīrah, praying to God for al-Nuʿmān's conversion.[144] Al-Nuʿmān receives a vision in which an angel promises him that his kingdom will increase and he will gain eternal life if he converts. However, he refuses to abandon his paganism and a demon, in the form of an Ethiopian, leaps on him.[145] There is a parallel here to the vision described in the Syriac *Life of Simeon the Stylite* (see above), except the result here is al-Nuʿmān's conversion. Al-Nuʿmān asks Simeon to baptize him and writes to Khusrau asking for his permission, which he grants.

The narrative, however, does not ultimately endorse Simeon's position. Al-Nuʿmān is baptized, but is soon lured away by "heretics" (almost certainly Miaphysites, who also had a presence in al-Ḥīrah). Following this relapse al-Nuʿmān is possessed for a second time and he asks the *catholicos* Īshōʿyābh I to send the holy man Sabrīshōʿ to cure him. Īshōʿyābh asks Khusrau for help, and it is the shah who persuades the holy man to cure al-Nuʿmān. Sabrīshōʿ arrives and expels al-Nuʿmān's demon with the help of another holy man, Ishoʿzkha (about whom little else is known).

The presence of this narrative as part of the *Life of Sabrīshōʿ* means that we should also date the text very close to the events that it describes. The *Life of Sabrīshōʿ* celebrates the close connection between the shah and the *catholicos*, and the political stance it adopted was clearly uncomfortable for Christians after Khusrau had turned against the Church of the East in the 610s.[146] But there are two important differences between the first and second versions of al-Nuʿmān's conversion. Firstly, the second version admits the presence of Miaphysites in al-Ḥīrah: they are responsible for al-Nuʿmān's lapse and the reoccurrence of his possession. The subtext here is a wider debate about the efficacy of "heretical" sacraments.[147] There is a clear sense that Miaphysites were beyond the pale and not true Christians, which reflects the bitter competition between the Church of the East and their rivals in the sixth and seventh centuries.[148]

Secondly, the alternate version clearly subordinates Simeon ibn Jābir to an ineffectual, initial role: it acknowledges his baptism of al-Nuʿmān, but places the emphasis on the role of the *catholicos*, the shah, and the holy man. Simeon ibn Jābir was a member of an important Christian family of al-Ḥīrah, and the initial baptism of al-Nuʿmān by the bishop of Hira endows the Naṣrid leader with a position of a "first among equals," a king of al-Ḥīrah who has now adopted the religion of the aristocracy of the city.[149] But the continuation of the narrative situates the conversion in wider trends in the Church of the East and the Persian Empire as a whole. The exorcism by Sabrīshōʿ emphasizes al-Ḥīrah's ties to the wider Sasanian world, and to a man who would become Khusrau's approved *catholicos*. The image of al-Nuʿmān being baptized by all three men in the first narrative looks like a compromise, where the tensions in the second narrative have been written out. The second narrative's impression of al-Nuʿmān's oscillating religious and political stance is likely to be closer to the truth.

Finally, we should note that neither narrative imagines a split between al-Nuʿmān and Khusrau on religious grounds. We should not look for explanations for al-Nuʿmān's removal here.[150] In the first narrative Khusrau accepts al-Nuʿmān's conversion, but here Khusrau becomes a facilitator of the event itself, by using his influence to persuade Sabrīshōʿ to attend to al-Nuʿmān, and consequently giving Sabrīshōʿ his most famous miracle before his election as *catholicos*. We should note here that Khusrau employed increasing numbers of Christians of both confessions at this time, and the imagination of the shah as the enemy of the Christians lies mainly in Roman black propaganda.[151] It is also worth noting that there were reports that Khusrau may have been meeting with Domitian of Melitene and Gregory of Antioch, suggesting further that we should not take at face value the deceptively simple political line between pro-Roman (Christian) and pro-Sasanian (Zoroastrian/ pagan).[152]

The Persian Arabs at the end of the sixth century. Like the Roman-allied Arabs, whose powerful leader al-Mundhir was eliminated by the Romans in 582, and, on the basis of the available evidence, never fully reconstituted (although the Romans continued to use Arab allies),[153] the leaders of the Persian Arabs did not survive their rapid growth in political confidence and power. At first glance, an attractive explanation for the elimination of their leader al-Nuʿmān might be his Christianization in the

late sixth century, but for the reasons explained above, this is not entirely satisfying. Indeed, there are other, more intriguing possibilities.

While we have focused on non-Muslim material in this article, it is worth here briefly discussing the version of al-Nuʿmān's demise as reported by al-Ṭabarī, who implies that court politics and personal hatred lay behind the demise of al-Nuʿmān. Al-Ṭabarī writes that Khusrau II had "perceived an ugly and ill-favoured person" when he first met al-Nuʿmān, but set aside his misgivings and allowed him to take over from his father.[154] Al-Nuʿmān, however, quickly became embroiled in a feud with the famous poet ʿAdī b. Zayd, who was also, apparently, a favorite of the Sasanian shah. When Khusrau asked for ʿAdī b. Zayd to be released from the prison into which al-Nuʿmān had thrown him, his envoy found out that al-Nuʿmān had secretly ordered the poet's death, which now, naturally, placed him in an exceptionally dangerous position. Later, Zayd, the son of the poet ʿAdī, courted Khusrau's favor and successfully turned him against the Naṣrid leader—a task easily achieved, thanks to some choice remarks by al-Nuʿmān about Khusrau's (literally) bovine taste in women, which were inevitably quickly repeated to the shah. Al-Ṭabarī says that once al-Nuʿmān realized that he could no longer avoid his fate, he met with Zayd near Ctesiphon, where the son of the poet ridiculed him. Not long afterwards, he was thrown into prison until, according to al-Ṭabarī, he died of the plague.[155]

What is rather interesting is that beneath the particular slant of the story, the main theme underpinning the long description of al-Nuʿmān's feud with Khusrau is precisely that which we find for al-Mundhir, leader of the Roman Arabs—and, indeed, other clients of the Roman empire. This is the precarious political position which clients as diverse as the descendants of Herod, the kings of Commagene, the Roman Arabs, and indeed al-Nuʿmān found themselves in when their own position depended to an exceptional degree on the goodwill of their imperial ally, which acted both as patron and executioner. The Roman Arabs had discovered this to their cost, as their final leader, al-Mundhir (r. 569–82) had fallen out with Maurice on campaign in the 580s.[156] The feud was not forgotten when Maurice assumed the imperial throne and immediately removed al-Mundhir and his family from their privileged position.[157] The explanation for the demise of al-Nuʿmān given by al-Ṭabarī suggests that a similar situation had developed between al-Nuʿmān and Khusrau, and this idea is also strengthened by the Syriac tradition, which asserts that al-Nuʿmān had picked the wrong side during the rebellion of Bahrām, which had brought Khusrau to power, with Maurice's help. Khusrau did not forget the betrayal, and removed al-Nuʿmān when the opportunity presented itself.[158] (We might also imagine that the repeated requests for funding from the Romans, made by ʿAmr, which were reported by Menander, may have sowed suspicion amongst the Sasanian leadership, although the long time-lag makes this perhaps a less attractive possibility.)

Other possibilities for the elimination of the leaders of the Persian Arabs are suggested by the wider context of al-Nuʿmān's removal after 602, and reflect similar strategic concerns which had taken place in Roman Syria around seventy-three years earlier. The decision of Justinian to provide al-Ḥārith, son of Jabala, with a significant increase in authority in c. 529, at exactly the same time as the Romans appear

to have terminated their agreement with the descendants of Ḥujr of Kinda following the death of the Ḥujrid al-Ḥārith, suggests a decision to focus on the east, not the south, through one unified system rather than a series of smaller alliances. So it may have been for Khusrau in 602. The coup of Phocas, which toppled Khusrau's patron Maurice in Constantinople, and the large-scale invasion of the Roman Empire which followed, meant that the arrangement which had run throughout the sixth century, and which had proved effective under al-Mundhir, especially, was simply no longer required. A simmering memory of broken promises—just as Maurice had not forgotten his complaints against al-Mundhir—provided a convenient excuse. In conjunction with the Sasanian invasion of parts of the Arabian peninsula, it is possible that the Persian Arabs were simply no longer a good fit.[159]

Numerous sources report Arab auxiliaries fighting for Rome and Persia in the war of the early seventh century, but nowhere is there any indication of a continued client system of the sort used in the sixth.[160] In hindsight, the Roman and Sasanian decisions to terminate their client agreements look like poor judgment. This seems especially true for the Sasanians, who lost control of the desert fringes after 602. By 604, their armies seem to have been comprehensively defeated in a battle which was to become famous in Muslim narratives—the so-called "day of Dhū Qār."[161] Al-Ṭabarī states, explicitly, "that al-Nuʿmān's fate was the cause of the battle of Dhū Qār," by which he implies that had Khusrau retained the alliance with the Persian Arabs, the Sasanians may have resisted their enemies more effectively.[162] However, there is no indication that this is true, or that either the Roman or Persian Arabs would have been able to fight any more effectively than the Romans or Sasanians against the Muslim armies which emerged out of northern Arabia—the nexus of much of the relationship between the different groups discussed here—to defeat both states, and their remaining clients, in the seventh century.

Conclusion

In this article we have presented a discussion of some of the most prominent pre-Islamic sources for the history of the Persian Arabs, focusing on their leaders. Even with the poverty of sources, in contrast to the relatively rich selection of material for the leaders of the Roman Arabs, for whom there are mosaics, inscriptions, and archaeological evidence in addition to literary material, it is possible with the largely contemporary evidence to situate the Persian Arabs within the wider historical themes of late antiquity. These are: the spread of Christianity, and its political expression in the conflicts between the Romans and the Sasanians; interstate rivalries involving Rome, Sasanian Persia, and Ḥimyar; and the relations between empires and their subject allies. Indeed, as Persian allies, the leaders of the Persian Arabs very much fit the mold of other client peoples, particularly within the Roman Empire, dependent on imperial support, and intensely vulnerable when that support evaporated. What is also interesting is the growth in political strength that the Arab leaders, particularly al-Mundhir, exhibited, which witnessed diplomatic missions, unsanctioned warfare, messengers from Ḥimyar, and their use as

political gambits in the competition between Rome and Persia. As allies, the Persian Arabs were never equal partners, but the rapid change between the end of the fifth and the end of the sixth century in their political profile is remarkable. This change fits well into the paradigm of western barbarians, elaborated in studies of late Roman Europe, who acquired power from their alliances (and battles) with the Romans, and around whose leaders—people like Alaric, Theoderic, and Mallobaudes—significant political power, prestige, and authority crystallized. While the endpoint of centuries of contact between empire and barbarian in the west was the formation of the early medieval kingdoms of Europe, the elimination of the leaders of Persian and Roman Arabs in the Near East, quickly followed by the Muslim invasions, ensured a different outcome, but this is not the end of the story. Throughout the late antique world, peripheral peoples, "barbarians," profited from exploiting what was available from their imperial neighbors: political support; opportunities for plunder and booty; religious and cultural interactions; and material culture. Leaders of Vandals, Franks, Burgundians, Goths, and others successfully metamorphosed these ephemeral prospects into more permanent political expressions as the state which had originally provided them, the Roman Empire, surrendered its hegemony over western Europe. One well-known feature of the afterlife of the empire was an attempt by its barbarian inheritors to create idealized portraits of the past, replete with fictional genealogies and an exaggeration of links to the memory of empire: Cassiodorus' Amal genealogy, for example, or the remarkable ninth-century attempt by the British monk Nennius to place the British at Troy with Aeneas.[163] The long relationship between Romans and the Germanic peoples had helped to promote this historiographical development, and similarly, the links between the Persian Arabs and Ctesiphon may have underwritten a similar outcome as the Sasanian and Roman empires surrendered their hegemony over the Near East. The remarkable afterlife of the "Naṣrids" in Muslim sources, where even in the twelfth-century "[Hiran] children were taught the history of the Lakhmid kings at school"[164]—all this provided a similarly idealized portrait of earlier times. It was perhaps this which, like the efforts of Cassiodorus or Nennius, gave both meaning and continuity to the past in the Middle Ages.

Notes

1. Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 70–125. For recent studies on the development of the Arabic script, see Macdonald, *Development of Arabic*. Nöldeke, *Ghassānischen Fürsten*.
2. Foundationally: Morony, *Iraq*, and Morony, "Religious Communities."
3. The list of recent publications is extensive, for example: Dmitriev and Toral-Niehoff, *Religious Culture*; Dijkstra and Fisher, *Inside and Out*; Genequand and Robin, *Les Jafnides*; Fisher, *Arabs and Empires*; Fisher, *Between Empires*; Lenski, "Captivity and Slavery"; Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra"; Millar, "Rome's Arab Allies"; Millar, "A Syriac Codex"; Millar, "Christian Monasticism"; Hoyland, "Arab Kings"; Hoyland, "Late Roman Provincia Arabia"; Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar"; Robin, "Le royaume Ḥujride"; Bosworth, "Iran and the Arabs"; Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs*.

4. For an overview of the main issues, see Humphreys, *Islamic History*; Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*; Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*.
5. See in detail Fisher, *Between Empires*, 72–124, 194–212, and Genequand and Robin, *Les Jafnides*.
6. See for example: *Empires and Barbarians*; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*; Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz, *Transformation of Frontiers*; Pohl and Reimitz, *Strategies of Distinction*.
7. For the most recent discussion of this problematic term, see essays in Szuchman, *Nomads, Tribes, and the State*. In this essay the term "tribe" is used neutrally to describe a form of social organization connected by numerous mechanisms, including (but not limited too) family lineages, or as an organization connected by common political purpose. See for further discussion Lindner, "What was a Nomadic Tribe?"; Meeker, "Magritte on the Bedouins"; Fisher, "State and Tribe."
8. For the Arabs between the two empires see references in n. 3; for broader context of the Roman–Persian conflict in its different stages, see for example: Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*; Canepa, *Two Eyes of the Earth*; Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia*; Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*; Greatrex, "Byzantium and the East"; Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*.
9. Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.22.
10. *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (*PO* 3, 21), trans. P. Wood.
11. The site was investigated in the 1930s and again in the 1990s. For an updated and detailed discussion see Genequand, "Archaeological Evidence," 207–12.
12. E.g. Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra", 325–8; see also Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra*.
13. E.g. at Reṣāfa: *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*, 7.188, and at al-Burj, near Damascus, Le Bas and Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines*, 2562c. See also *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, 2553 from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, and mosaics from Nitl, on which see Piccirillo, "Church of Saint Sergius."
14. See for example Robin, "Inventaire des documents épigraphiques"; and Robin, "Les inscriptions."
15. Bevan, Fisher, and Genequand, "The Late Antique Church," for the most recent examination.
16. Shahîd, "Sigillography."
17. Robin, "Royaume Ḥujride", and "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar"; see now Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources."
18. See for example Macdonald, "'Romans Go Home?'."
19. Fisher, *Between Empires*, 76–7; Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 235.
20. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.17.47, trans. Dewing.
21. Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 184; see discussion in Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources."
22. On the Paikuli inscription; see below.
23. See Greek and Latin inscriptions in Littmann, *Publications*, no. 238: Ἡ στήλη αὕτη Φερου Σαλλεου τρόφευς Γαδιμαθου Βασιλεὺς Θανουηνῶν. "This is

the tomb of Fihr, son of Shullai, the tutor of Gadhimat, the king of Tanūkh" (trans. Littmann).

24. Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources."
25. Fisher, *Between Empires*, 72–127; Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources"; Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 193.
26. *Chron. 1234*, p. 215: Abū Jafna Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir.
27. See Robin, "Royaume Ḥujride"; Gajda, "Ḥuǧr b. ʿAmr."
28. E.g. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.4.22; see Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources."
29. The unusual lineage applied to the Persian ally al-Mundhir, active between 504 and 554, as "son of Zekike," Robin suggests, reflects a paternal grandmother. See Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 184–5. On Jabala/Gabalas, see Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 141.
30. Millar, "Rome's 'Arab' Allies," 200. On the family of Jafna and links to Ghassān see for example al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1: 234–6.
31. Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 185.
32. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, 361, discussed by Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources."
33. See Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 185.
34. Malalas, *Chronicle*, 496; Menander, *History*, fragment 6.1.
35. E.g. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.17.46.
36. E.g. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.20, 4.22, and 6.3, stated to be the "eldest son" of al-Ḥārith.
37. E.g. ibid., 3.4.41, with al-Nuʿmān the eldest of four sons of al-Mundhir; cf. Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.2.
38. Sons: see nn. 36–7; unnamed sons of al-Ḥārith: see Procopius, *History of the Wars* 2.28.12-14; on Abū Kārib, see Sartre, "Deux phylarques arabes," 151, and see most recently Millar, "A Syriac Codex."
39. Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 185.
40. Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources," 271.
41. The term Scenite is used by Ammianus Marcellinus (*History*, 22.15.1–2) to refer to "tent-dwelling Saracens" and appears as a term of generic usage, similar to Saracen and Ṭayyāyē, to denote the Arabs of the desert.
42. See Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*, 10–13.
43. Humbach and Skjaervø, *The Sassanian Inscription*.
44. Ibid., § 91 = 3/1, 71.
45. Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 70–125.
46. Tardieu, "L'arrivée des Manichéens," discussed by Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 182.
47. Al-Ṭabarī 1.834.
48. The inscription at al-Namārah was discovered by R. Dussaud and F. Macler in 1901, and is now in the Louvre (#205). The short excerpt quoted here is from the most recent critical edition by M. C. A. Macdonald in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," 405–9.

49. Al-Ṭabarī 1.621; see discussion in Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 189–91, and Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 133–5; Morony, "Arabisation of the Gulf," 13.
50. Al-Ṭabarī 1.625–7.
51. See now on this Robin, "Peoples Beyond the Arabian Frontier."
52. For links between pre-Islamic and Islamic al-Ḥīrah, see Talib, "Topoi and Topography"; and Wood, "Hira and its Histories."
53. *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 16/17, discussed by Hoyland, "Insider and Outsider Sources."
54. E.g. *Chronicle of Seert* (=*PO* 13, LXV, 478–81). For more on the text, see now Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert*.
55. An early discussion of the etymology of the words is given in Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 12–13.
56. On the development of stylitism and its archaeology see Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les stylites syriens*. Another account of Simeon is that of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, found in the *Historia Religiosa* (=*Histoire des moines de Syrie*) and with an English translation in *The Lives of Symeon Stylites*. Theodoret emphasizes the international appeal of Symeon, who drew in Britons, Gauls, Iberians, Persians, and Persarmenians, as well as Arabs.
57. The names of many of the Arab elites are frequently re-used and repeated: there are multiple examples of al-Nuʿmān, or al-Ḥārith, or al-Mundhir.
58. On this figure see Jones, *Prosopography*, II.
59. Syriac *Life* of Simeon §67
60. Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*, 285, 676; see as well Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs*, 156–7. Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra," 334–6, suggests an early and rich matrix of Christian culture from the viewpoint of both the scarce archaeological material and the literary sources.
61. See Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, 24–30.
62. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §21-22, translated by Trombley and Watt, 19-20.
63. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §52, translated by Trombley and Watt, 57–8.
64. See the discussion on Ry 510, below.
65. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §57, translated by Trombley and Watt, 68–9.
66. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §58, translated by Trombley and Watt, 71–2.
67. On the promise of Abgar see Drijvers, "The Abgar Legend"; Mirkovic, *Prelude to Constantine*; Brock, "Transformation of the Edessa Portrait"; Wood, *We Have No King But Christ*, especially chapter 4.
68. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §79, translated by Trombley and Watt, 97.
69. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §88, translated by Trombley and Watt, 108.
70. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.17.40–3.
71. Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, §81.
72. See on this Fisher, *Between Empires*, 72–127, with regard to the Arabs.

73. See for a recent discussion and new English translation of the text, see Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta*," 156–8; see also Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 174.
74. See Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 177.
75. Robin, "The Peoples beyond the Arabian Frontier," 59–62.
76. Inferred from *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, and discussed by Robin, "Nagrān," 73.
77. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1. 20.9–10.
78. For the nature of Maʿadd, see Zwettler, "Maʿadd."
79. Gajda, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, 78–9, discussing both Ry 510 and al-Ṭabarī 1.881. For the career and death of the Ḥujrid al-Ḥārith: Malalas, *Chronicle*, 434–5; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 144.
80. See now Robin, "Abraha"; Zwettler, "Maʿadd," 246–57; Gajda, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, 138–41; and Robin, "Les Arabes de Ḥimyar," 173.
81. This ʿAmr was the future leader of the family who gained notoriety in negotiations with Justin II under the name Ambrus, discussed below.
82. Al-Ṭabarī 1.880-82; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, 2.542. See too on Naṣrid interference in northern Arabia, Kister, "Al-Hīra," 145–52.
83. Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chronicle* 8.5a. The story also appears in Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography* §78.
84. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 2.28.12.
85. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 177-9; Malalas, *Chronicle*, 445.
86. Malalas, *Chronicle*, 460–61.
87. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.17.42; cf. Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.12.
88. Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 48.
89. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.17.40–3. Reprinted from Procopius, *History of the Wars, Books I-II.* Loeb Classical Library 48, translated by H. B. Dewing, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, © 2001 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Loeb Classical Library ® is a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.
90. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.17.30, translated by Dewing, 153-5.
91. Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, §58.
92. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 2.1.1–11.
93. Summus was an army commander and brother of the imperial diplomat Julianus, the same man whom Justinian had sent on the diplomatic mission to Ḥimyar.
94. Smith, "Events in Arabia," 437–41.
95. Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta*," 166. *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* 541, Face C, lines 86–92, trans. Robin.
96. Sartre, "Deux phylarques arabes," 151.
97. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 2.28.12–14.
98. Ibid., 2.19.26–30.
99. Ibid., 2.1.12–15.
100. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 157–8.
101. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 2.4.16–26.

102. Excerpts from *The History of Menander the Guardsman* are reprinted by kind permission of Francis Cairns (Publications) Ltd. Menander, *History*, fragment 6.1, translated by Blockley, 71.
103. Heather, "*Foedera* and *foederati*," 59, who considers sixth-century *foederati* to have been on a more equal footing than their fourth-century counterparts.
104. Menander, *History*, fragment 5.1.
105. Ibid., 5.2.
106. Agathias, *History*, 1.1.7.
107. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.19.1.
108. Menander, *History*, fragments 9.1, 9.3.
109. Ibid., 6.1.
110. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 2.15.15–17.
111. Agathias, *History*, 3.10.11.
112. Menander, *History*, fragment 6.1.
113. Menander, *History*, fragment 9.1, translated by Blockley, 99–103.
114. Ibid., 9.3.
115. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, 50–58.
116. Menander, *History*, fragment 6.1, translated by Blockley, 83–5.
117. Menander, *History*, fragment 9.3, translated by Blockley, 107–109.
118. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Chronicle*, §54-6.
119. For a clear explanation of events, see Robin, "Peoples Beyond the Arabian Frontier," 35–6; Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*, 82–9; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 51–5. For the most recent comprehensive work, see now essays in Beaucamp, Briquel-Chatonnet, and Robin, *Juifs et Chrétiens*.
120. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.20.
121. We use here the labels assigned to the different letters by Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison," 145–9.
122. Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison," 166, and supported by Millar, "A Syriac Codex," 29–30.
123. Excerpts from Pseudo-Zachariah. *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor. Church and War in Late Antiquity*are reprinted by kind permission of Liverpool University Press. Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chronicle*, 8.3d, translated by Phenix and Horn, 289.
124. Pseudo-Zachariah, *Chronicle*, 8.3g.
125. Millar, "A Syriac Codex," 29–31; Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison," 166–71.
126. *Letter* 2 = Shahîd, *Martyrs*, 63.
127. Some of the Najranites, however, may have been Julianists rather than Severans: *Chronicle of Seert* (*PO* 7, 22). Julianists were sometimes referred to as "Najranites." See Robin, "Peoples Beyond the Arabian Frontier," 75–7. On the confessional allegiance of Najran and its episcopal status see Fiey, *L'Assyrie chrétienne*, 3: 227–30; Tardy, *Najran*.
128. Letter 2 = Shahîd, *Martyrs*, 64. A letter by the patriarch Severus of Antioch (*PO* 12, 214) is also addressed to Miaphysites in al-Ḥīrah and Anbar.
129. Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, 171–5.

130. Ibid., 212–13 and 224–6; Saint-Laurent, *Apostolic Memories*, chapter 4.
131. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (*PO* 17, 139, trans. Brooks, adapted).
132. Seston, "Le roi Narses," 230–38.
133. See further, Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites"; Fiey, "Les Marcionites"; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*. On the problematic use of Nestorian as a label to describe the Church of the East (hence its use in inverted commas here) see now Walker, "From Nisibis to Xi'an."
134. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (*PO* 17, 140), translated by Brooks, adapted.
135. Fiey, "Résidences et sépultures." The medieval histories imagine that *catholicoi* were buried at al-Ḥīrah from the middle of the fifth century, but this seems unlikely. Given that the presence of a *catholicos*' body gave a monastery autocephalous status, there would have been a strong motivation for invention.
136. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (*PO* 17, 140), translated by Brooks, adapted.
137. On this text see the study of von Ginkel, "John of Ephesus."
138. See Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, §86–7. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.6.3, pp. 280–1, translated by Wood.
139. Compare, for instance, the conversion of the Arabs of the Jazīrah after the healing of a chief's daughter by the Miaphysite bishop Aḥūdemmeh: *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (*PO* 3, 25). For comparison of this scene to the conversions of Constantine and Clovis see Toral-Niehoff, "Constantine's Baptism Legend." There is also a highly stereotyped account of the conversion in Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.22.
140. *Chronicle of Séert* (*PO* 13, LX, 468–9), translated by Wood, after Griveau.
141. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire Perse*, 192–217; Gyselen, "Les témoignages sigillographiques"; Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire"; Fiey, "Les laïcs" (especially his discussion of the prominent Christian courtier Yazdin).
142. See further below for the background to al-Nuʿmān's elimination.
143. *Chronicle of Seert* (*PO* 13, LXV, 478–81). On this *catholicos*, note Tamcke, *Der Katholicos-Patriarch Sabrīšō' I*; and Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert*, 189–95.
144. For Simeon, and the Arab sources relating to him see Nöldeke's notes in al-Ṭabarī, *Geschichte der Araber und Perser*, 315, note 3.
145. The "Ethiopian" is a classic form taken by the Devil in monastic hagiographies. Note Mayerson, "Anti-Black Sentiment."
146. Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert*, 199–220.
147. Discussion in Wood, "Christians in Umayyad Iraq," commenting on *Life of Rabban Hormizd*, 69–70/102–3.
148. Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert*, 130, 161–2.
149. Further discussion in Wood, "Hira and its Histories."
150. Hoyland, *God's Path*, 35 and Hunter, "The Christian Matrix," 50, take Khusrau to be anti-Christian, and therefore suspicious of al-Nuʿmān's conversion.

151. Conybeare, "Antiochus Strategos' Account."
152. See the discussion in Whitby, "The Successors of Justinian," 103.
153. Fisher, *Between Empires*, 173–93.
154. al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 1.1018, 343.
155. al-Ṭabarī 1.1027–9.
156. Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.20; John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.6.16–17 (pp. 312–3); *Chronicle of 1234*, 213.
157. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, 373–4; John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.3.41 (pp. 176–7).
158. *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 18–20.
159. Howard-Johnston, "Al-Tabari," 20–21. See Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra," 333, for further discussion, and also 340, for a different perspective on the religious angle of al-Nuʿmān's conversion.
160. Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, 2.2.5 and 2.10.6–7; *Chronicle of 1234*, 215 (pro-Roman Arabs); Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 303–6, for pro-Sasanian Arabs.
161. al-Ṭabarī 1.1016, 1032. On the sources that may underlie the accounts of this battle see Donner, "The Bakr bin Wa'il."
162. al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 1.1029, 358.
163. See for context Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy*; and Fisher, "Crisis, Provincial Historiography and Identity."
164. Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra," 324–5.

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